TRADITION OF ISLAMIC SCHOOL EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

An Islamic cultivate that subscribes to endorse an educative custom is basically single that perceives sympathy between the inculcation of religious values and the acquisition of 'modern' awareness and characters This clause disputes that near Islamic educational institution in Indonesia occupy in an educative custom as evident in three chief distance Kickoff near Islamic educational institution in Indonesia are corkscrew to get awareness from both spiritual subject-matters and modern 'secular' subject-matters Second an increasing act of Islamic educational institution birth integrated student-centered pedagogies so that their pupils do not but acquire by rote or memorization. Third severals Islamic educational institution allow a variety of student actions to break the students' animation talents and leading aptitudes so as to encourage their pupils to internalize and put into praxis the principles and values they birth lettered Still its publicity of an educative custom severals Islamic educational institution in Indonesia look a perennial dispute in infusing Islamic standards and values into the teaching of modern 'secular' subject-matters

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A. Introduction

Indonesia is the most populous Muslim country in the world with over 200 million Muslims. With more than 50,000 Islamic schools in the country, the religious teachings in these schools have a direct and long-lasting impact on the Islamic orientation and lives of Muslims in the country and elsewhere. It is therefore instructive to critically examine the educational philosophy, curriculum and pedagogy of Islamic schools in Indonesia. This article surveys the Islamic schools in Indonesia using the conceptual tool of an educative tradition. Given the vast number and diversity of Islamic schools in Indonesia, it is impossible for this article to give a detailed discussion of all the Islamic schools in the country. Instead, this article aims to provide a broad overview of the Islamic schools, identify some common trends and highlight some examples. The research data on Indonesia are obtained from literature review, document analysis, and fieldwork conducted in May 2010 with 12 Islamic schools in Indonesia. For a start, it is helpful to introduce the concept of an educative tradition.

B. An Educative Tradition

An educative tradition is essentially one that fosters the development of pluralism, rationality and autonomy in its students. An Islamic school that adheres to an educative tradition is one that offers a broad-based curriculum, is willing to learn from various traditions and sources, and is adaptable to changing times and places. Its students not only master the facts but also are equipped with the capacity and willingness to provide the evidential justification for these facts in an age-appropriate manner. The corresponding pedagogy should promote engaged learning: this entails the construction of knowledge (not only transmission of knowledge), understanding (not only rote memorizations), social constructivism (not only individual study), self-directed learning (not only teacher-directed), and learning about learning (not only learning about subjects) (Tan, 2009: 78-82).

The students should ideally be exposed to a variety of learning methods such as lectures, group discussions, experiments and independent research. The school's programmers, activities and learning environment should also nurture the students' freedom of thought and action. The students should be encouraged to accept, be motivated by and order their lives based on a Muslim tradition that they have chosen for themselves.

An educative tradition is one that sees compatibility between religious teachings and 'modern' knowledge. Fazlur Rahman (1982: 46-7) outlines two basic Muslim approaches to 'modern' knowledge, albeit with variations in between:

> (1) that the acquisition of modern knowledge be limited to the practical technological sphere, since at the level of pure thought Muslims need not need Western intellectual products—indeed, that these should be avoided, since they might create doubt and disruption in the Muslim mind, for which the traditional Islamic system of belief already provides satisfactory answers to ultimate questions of world view; and (2) that Muslims without fear can and ought to acquire not only Western technology but also its intellectualism, since no type of knowledge can be harmful, and that in any case science and pure thought were assiduously cultivated by Muslims in the early medieval centuries, whence they were taken over by Europeans themselves.

Adopting the first option, some Muslims believe that non-Islamic cultural knowledge, beliefs, values and practices, especially originating from 'the West', must be avoided and rejected at all cost. Only then, they argue, could Muslims continue to preserve and protect their treasured Islamic traditions. As long as the adoption of practical technological knowledge from the West is kept to its utilitarian purpose to equip the students to meet the challenges of a knowledge-based economy, it is 'safe' for Muslims to learn from the West. Otherwise, Muslims would be in danger of being 'Westernized', which is perceived to be un-Islamic and robbing the *ummah* (Muslim community) of its religious and cultural heritage (Moten, 2005: 246).

The other option, as highlighted by Rahman, is to accept not just Western technology but also its intellectualism. But the question here is whether Western intellectualism is perceived to be 'Islamic'. On the one hand, there are Muslims who argue that globalization, which is closely associated with modern Western knowledge, is an insidious and un-Islamic. For example, Muḥammad ʿAbid al-Jābirī associates globalization with cultural hegemony; and Muṭāʿ Ṣafadī views globalization as "a single cultural project that controls the whole world, stamping it with its own personality, within a global strategy whose project of 'totalitarian technology' devours spatial and historical distances as well as national characteristics in order to establish 'the New World Order' in a grand global *(kawniyyah)* drama" (All cited in Shboul, 2004: 53-57).

Other Muslims, however, do not share the same view, and aver instead that all knowledge, whether 'Western' or otherwise, comes from God. Both "religious" and "secular" knowledge are integrated in Islamic thought under two main types: rational sciences *(al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyyah)* or intellectual sciences, and the traditional sciences *(al-ʿulūm al-naqliyyah)* or revealed knowledge. The first type of knowledge, according to Syed Farid Alatas (2006: 169), is knowledge that arises from man's capacity for reason, sense perception, and observation while traditional sciences refer to knowledge that is devolved to man via Revelation. Traditional sciences, he adds, includes disciplines termed as "modern" today: logic, physics, metaphysics, geometry, arithmetic, medicine, geography, chemistry, biology, music, astronomy, and science of civilization.

It is important to note that the acceptance of 'secular' knowledge or 'modern' subject is not foreign to the Islamic heritage. It has been noted that the Islamic educational institutions during the Ottoman Empire incorporated "specific sciences" *(al-ʿulūm al-juzʾiyyah)* which were mathematics *(ḥisāb)*, geometry *(handasah)*, astronomy *(hayʾah)* and practical philosophy *(ḥikmah)*. Far from mere memorisation, the madrasahs also included "instrumental sciences" *(al-ʿulūm al-ʾāliyyah)* where students learnt, among other things, the art of rhetoric in terms of eloquent elocution, literary style and artful composition (Idriz & al-Attas, 2007: 7-8). It should also be pointed out that 'modern'/'Western' student-centred pedagogies are not new to the Islamic traditions. Student-centred pedagogies such as problem solving, dialogue, discussion, disputation and application have been propagated by Muslim scholars and practiced in the Islamic context since the medieval times (For more details, see Tan & Abbas, 2009: 25-39).

C. An Overview of Islamic Schools in Indonesia

Islamic teaching started in Indonesia as early as around the 13th century in the form of Qur'anic study in village mosques, prayer houses and the private homes of community religious teachers for young children of six to eleven years (Hefner, 2007: 59). Over time, different types of Islamic schools came into existence in different parts of Indonesia, such as *Pesantren* and *Pondok* (both mostly in Java and Kalimantan), *Surau* (in West Sumatra), *Dayah* (in Aceh), *Madrasah* and *Sekolah Islam* (Islamic schools), with *Pesantren*,

Pondok, *Surau*, and *Dayah* generally regarded as 'traditional' Islamic educational institutions that have a long history dating from the early introduction of Islam in Indonesia (Azra, 2014: 59-75). The Islamic teaching, as taught in the *traditional pesantrens*, are based on "the *Ashʿari* doctrine (as mediated especially by Sanusi's works), the *Shafiʿi madhhab* (with nominal acceptance of the other three *Sunni madhhab*), and the ethical and pietistic mysticism of Ghazali and related writers".[2] Of the 50,000 Islamic schools in Indonesia, 16015 of them are *pesantrens* (Islamic boarding schools) and 37,000 of them are *madrasahs* (Islamic day schools).[3] The enrolments in Islamic schools have been increasing since the late 1980s. Currently about 5.7 million or 13 percent of the 44 million students are enrolled in the formal educational system are enrolled in *madrasahs*.[4]

Islamic schools in Indonesia can be divided into three main types: *pesantrens*, *madrasahs* and *Sekolah Islams*. There is no significant city/country divide or regional diversity in terms of the types of Islamic schools found in Indonesia. In general, most *pesantrens* are located in the countryside whereas more madrasahs and Sekolah *Islams* are found in urban areas in cities such as Jakarta (Hasan, 2008: 247). Of the three types of Islamic schools, *Sekolah Islam* is particularly oriented towards modern city life where many middle-class Muslim professionals are keen to send their children to such schools. However, the main differences among the Islamic schools are not so much city/countryside or regional, but rather their educational philosophy and curriculum.

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[2] For more details on the religious curriculum in pesantrens, see Van Bruinessen (1994: 121-145

[3] There is some controversy over the exact number of Islamic schools in Indonesia. Azyumardi Azra, Dina Afrianty and Robert W. Hefner, in an essay published in 2007, state that there are 10,000 pesantrens and 37,000 madrasahs, adding to a total of 50,000. See Azra/ Afrianty/ Hefner, 2007: 173; Hefner, 2007: 59. However, the total figure is likely to be over 50000 based on a higher number of pesantrens. Rather than 10,000 pesantrens, H. Imron Arifin and Muhammad Slamet note that there are 16,015 pesantrens based on the statistics obtained from the Department of Religious Affairs in 2006, as cited in Arifin & Slamet, 2010: 38.

[4] Azra/ Afrianty/ Hefner, 2007: 173. I should clarify that enrolment statistics do not reflect the actual number of Islamic schools due to the problem of double counting. According to Azra/ Afrianty/ Hefner, many pesantrens have madrasahs or public schools (known as general schools in Indonesia) in their compound but these institutions are counted as separate entities. The same applies to the number of students; students who attend a public school in the morning and an Islamic school after school hours are counted twice. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that there are about 50,000 Islamic schools in Indonesia.

D. Educative Tradition and Islamic Schools in Indonesia

It is arguable that most Islamic schools in Indonesia reflect an educative tradition: the inclusion of modern 'secular' (non-religious) subjects, the adoption of student-centred pedagogies, and the provision of a variety of student activities. First, many Islamic schools are keen to obtain knowledge from both religious subjects and modern 'secular' or non religious subjects (known as "general subjects" in Indonesia). By being open to new ideas and latest inventions from a variety of traditions and sources, including from the United States and other Western countries, the Islamic schools remain adaptable to changing times and places. Unsurprisingly, the Islamic educational system in Indonesia has been described as "among the most open and innovative in the world" for the willingness of Indonesian Muslim educators to go beyond religious studies to offer marketable skills and general education (Azra/ Afrianty/ Hefner, 2007: 173-4).

Secondly, an increasing number of Islamic schools have incorporated student-centred pedagogies so that their students do not simply learn by rote or memorization (Burhanudin & Jamhari, 2006: 404). While the traditional didactic teaching methods of teaching *(bandongan* and *sorogan)* are still widely used in the *pesantrens*, many *pesantrens* have expanded and diversified their teaching repertoires. Since the general subjects are based on the national curriculum, the teaching methods for these subjects are similar to those used in public schools. Through activities such as laboratory experiments for science subjects, the students acquire not just facts but the scientific inquiry and evidential justification for the facts. It is also common for Islamic schools to capitalize on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and multimedia resources in promoting engaged learning.

Finally, many Islamic schools provide a variety of student activities to develop the students' life skills and leadership abilities. This goes towards helping students to internalized and put into practice the principles and values they have learnt. Students are encouraged to be involved in a cornucopia of activities both during and outside the official school hours.

To further illustrate the educative tradition of Islamic schools in Indonesia, the next section focuses on three Islamic schools in Indonesia that reflect an educative tradition. The first example is a *pesantren* that was

established in 1999 as a boarding school for over 550 secondary and high school students. A high-achieving school, its students have consistently performed well in the national examinations and won many science Olympiad competitions at the national level. The *pesantren* envisions itself as "a school that is effective, modern and of high quality so as to develop a generation of leaders for the nation". By providing an "effective and conducive learning" surrounded by Islamic ethos, it aims to nurture students who "have the critical, logical, systematic and creative thinking, knowledgeable with content mastery, and careful and clever to overcome any problems encountered".

The *pesantren* promotes an educative tradition in three ways. First, it aspires to help students obtain knowledge from both religious subjects and modern 'secular' subjects. Part of being 'leaders of the community' is to be law-abiding citizens; the school leader maintained that "the graduates will be citizens and they should be law-abiding citizens, we hope that they will not turn out to be terrorists, radicals". Secondly, the *pesantren* has incorporated student-centred pedagogies so that their students do not simply learn passively. Eschewing a didactic pedagogy, they are believed that we must have variations in teaching. Examples of student-centred methods adopted in the *pesantren* are getting students to complete project work, give presentation, and create their own blogs.

Thirdly, the *pesantren* provides a variety of student activities so as to promote active the application of knowledge and values learnt. Its objective is to "support the personal growth of students who have the spirit of entrepreneurship and life skills so as to prepare them to enter the workforce". Activities include school debate, robot programming and scientific experiments, as well as sports such as basketball, swimming and football.

The next example is a *madrasah* that offers schooling from elementary to high school levels. Started in the 1970s, it has over 2,000 students with students mostly from middle income households with educated parents living in the city. The *madrasah* aspires to be "more than just an Islamic school" in the sense that it aims to integrate Islamic guidance with science and technology. Cautioning against the effect of 'moral destruction' brought about by globalization, the *madrasah* maintains the need for *madrasahs* as "an alternative that has an

important role in the formation of character, personality, and the quality of the nation in the future". The *madrasah* offers both religious subjects (as expected of a religious school) and modern 'secular' subjects (known as 'general subjects') to students that are similar to those in public schools.

E. Discussion

Two observations about Islamic schools in Indonesia can be made. First, we see from our discussion of Indonesian Islamic schools that they generally reside in an educative tradition. They are pluralist in the sense that they embrace non-religious subjects and promote rationality and autonomy through their student-centred pedagogies and student activities. With the teaching and learning of general subject such as English, Mathematics, Sciences, epistemological pluralism is introduced to the students.[5] Students of Indonesian Islamic schools are exposed to knowledge from various disciplines and sources. They no longer learn purely Islamic subjects (as in *pesantrens* of old) but the history and geography of countries outside Indonesia, and the English language and culture of English -speaking countries. A pluralist attitude opens the students' vistas to the rest of the world, and keeps them abreast of modern knowledge and skills integral for success in globalizes and digital world.

A focus on modern knowledge and skills through the learning of general subjects also broadens the students' aspirations and goals in life. Whereas students simply stopped school early for work or became a religious teacher (a noble aspiration in itself) in the past, they are now more likely to aspire to seek higher education locally or overseas and become professionals in secular fields such law, medicine or business. This new aspiration is reflected and highlighted in the visions and missions of many Islamic schools who are aware of the demands of

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[5] We have not discussed political pluralism as this is less relevant than epistemological pluralism in the schooling context. But it should be noted that political pluralism has a strong presence in Indonesia, as seen in the strong participation of political parties, the populace's positive attitude towards democracy, and general rejection the establishment of an Islamic state through violent means. It is beyond the scope of this article to study the political developments of Islam and its relationship with the state in Indonesia. Interested readers may refer to Hefner: 2000, Assyaukanie: 2009, Platzdasch: 2009 and Hefner: 2007.

parents and students for marketable and twenty-first century skills. This orientation is especially evident in the *Sekolah Islams* as they are elite and high achieving schools with parents who are themselves high-flying working professionals.

Student-centred and self-directed activities such as conducting scientific experiments and writing research papers activities also motivate the students to go beyond rote learning and memorization to explore and construct the evidential justification for the facts learnt. In the process of working with their teachers and peers on group discussions and projects, the students also develop the confidence to speak up, draw their own conclusions and support their arguments with evidence. With their teachers serving not purely as content experts but facilitators, the students also learn to relate to them within more egalitarian and consultative environment. This scenario is a far cry from a teacher-centered environment of a traditional *pesantren* where the *kyais* and religious teachers focus on textual transmission and expect unquestioned obedience from their students. Furthermore, the provision of a wide range of student activities contributes to the students' development of autonomy. Besides giving them choices to participate in an array of programmers and events, these activities also cultivate their leadership qualities, an independent spirit and other life skills such as working with others and resolving group conflicts. Of course, the extent to which a student is given the opportunity to do the above varies from school to school. A big and modern *pesantren* such as Gontor is more successful in enhancing its students' autonomy than a small traditional *pesantren* that is cash-strapped with limited resources for the students.

In terms of the question of how Islamic schools deal with dogma that contradicts the findings of modern science, it is noteworthy that an overwhelming majority of the Islamic schools in Indonesia do not face this problem. The reason is because the educational philosophy adhered to by the Islamic school leaders and other educational stakeholder in Indonesia is one that sees compatibility between Islamic teachings and modern science. Returning to the two approaches outlined by Rahman, it is evident that the leaders and stakeholders of the Islamic educational institutions hold to the view that Muslims without fear can and ought to acquire not only Western

technology but also its intellectualism, since no type of knowledge can be harmful, and that in any case science and pure thought were assiduously cultivated by Muslims in the early medieval centuries, whence they were taken over by Europeans themselves (Rahman, 1982: 47).

For the Muslim educators, in Indonesia, they do not see modern knowledge as 'Western'; rather, they see 'religious' and 'Western'/'secular' knowledge as integrated in Islamic thought under two main types mentioned earlier, namely, rational/intellectual sciences *(al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyyah)* and the traditional sciences *(al-ʿulūm al-naqliyyah)* or revealed knowledge. Rejecting the view that 'modern' subjects are 'Western' subjects, the school sees all knowledge as proceeding from God. The integration of religious and general subjects is achieved in the Islamic schools by the teacher alerts the students to their educational duty of knowing Allah and linking all lessons to relevant Islamic sources, principles and values. For example that, biology teacher when teaching about fruits or creation of man will bring in the *Quran* and *hadiths* on these matters.

The infusion of religious values is also achieved through the hidden curriculum such displaying religious teachings in the school compound. The second observation about Islamic schools in Indonesia is that notwithstanding the potential and endeavors at integrating religious and modern 'secular'/general studies, many Islamic schools face an uphill task in doing so. A consequence of insufficient integration between general subjects with religious subjects within a coherent conceptual framework is 'educational dualism'. This refers to "the existence of an Islamic educational system with little if any general educational content alongside a secular educational system with little if any Islamic content" (Azra/ Afrianty/ Hefner, 2007: 173-4).

Highlighting the "knowledge dichotomy" between Islamic schools and General or public schools, Rusydy Zakaria (2008: 9, 82) asserts that the Islamic educational system produces graduates who have a strong religious knowledge base and moral attitudes but lack a methodological approach while general education produces graduates who are strong in methodological approaches but lack a religious knowledge base.

Actually, in practice, educational dualism is still happening, a dichotomy between knowledge and religion, which leads to the proportion given to general studies vis-à-vis religious studies.

F. Conclusion

It is interesting to note that most Islamic schools in Indonesia focus on its educational mission and do not have an overt political agenda. An overwhelming majority of the Islamic schools are more concerned with religious inculcation and community involvement rather than trying to influence politics. Their 'political role', if any, is more in the form of the contributing towards a democratic civil society through peace building, conflict resolution, interfaith dialogue and the empowerment of women.[6] Hefner (2007: 73) rightly asserts that "insomuch as they have been concerned with the political issues at all, Indonesia's Muslim educators have tended to be nationalist and system-reforming rather than radical Islamist and system-upending". Consequently, the relation between the Islamic schools and the state has generally been smooth. Historically, Islamic schools stayed away from political involvement during then President Soeharto's rule (1967-98) as he was highly suspicious of 'political Islam' (Mutalib, 2008: 16).

His fall resulted in a flourishing of Muslim-based organizations, particularly Nahdatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah which established many Islamic schools; however, these schools are not anti-government or anti-nationalism. Rather than seeing the Islamic schools as a threat, the government has generally been supportive of their existence and continual survival. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) is in charge of the *pesantrens* and *madrasahs* while the Ministry of National Education (MONE) is in charge of the *Sekolah Islam* as this type of school largely adopts the system and curriculum of general schools. Besides recognising the certificates issued by the Islamic schools, MONE has also provided financial resources and facilities such as computer laboratories for some *madrasahs* and *pesantrens* (Azra, 2014: 61). Notwithstanding the peaceful and apolitical nature of most Islamic schools, there exist Islamic schools, albeit in very small numbers, that promote anti-government ideology and activities that resulted in conflicts and clashes with the authority.

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[6] For an interesting case study of a pesantren that engages in promotion of a democratic civil society, see Pohl (2007: 83-103).

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