

THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF INDONESIAN ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN THE POST-1998 REFORM PERIOD

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Abstract: In the Indonesian Islamic Education discourse, the state of political atmosphere influences several policies of Islamic Education. In the post-1998 reform period, the role and institutional development of politics affected the way Indonesian Islamic Education were going through in a positive way. The institutional improvement had shifted Islamic Education from the second-cast of education into a higher level. However, Islamic Education has not been at the centre of both elite and popular attention in Indonesia. Therefore, this paper examines policies in Indonesian Islamic Education which reflects upon the substance of its growing political dynamics. Cultural analysis is used in this paper to examine the root of Islamic Education identity.

Keywords: Policy reform, Politics, Islamic Education, Emancipation in Education.

Introduction

The Indonesian governmental and bureaucratic reform in 1998 gave rise to the restructuring process in both formal and informal power structure. The government as the formal power structure promotes more open governmental system, particularly regarding socio-political regulation and law. New social and governmental arrangements were established. This resulted in restructuring process within governmental departments and their policies.

One of the most striking governmental characteristics after 1998 is the idea of decentralization. In the development of the new governmental system, decentralization turned many national level mechanisms, such as election and policy-making process, into a more regionalized way. This circumstance brought new emerging ideas from

local level to be accommodated into policy practices. For instance, in educational area, the revised National Education Act involves cultural and religious education. The revised version also recognizes both formal and informal education.¹

The revision of National Education Act above partly illustrates a new pattern of political communication in the post-1998 reform Indonesia which is in some ways different from that of before that time. First of all, the language of policy in post-1998 reform period embeds more local contents compared to that in the earlier period, which was more nationally contextualized. Second, in the context of education, “Indonesian people” is defined not merely from human capital sense but more from the perspective of the integration between human capital and cultural capital. Last but not least, the issue of national unity in education is shifted from uniformity into acknowledgement of difference. In short, the Indonesian government policies in the post1998 demonstrate a distinguished social structure.

Society as a more fluid component of a nation reacts dynamically towards such a new atmosphere in Indonesian government policies. Societal responses towards policies of Islamic education development can be seen through the following issues. First, the debate whether or not religious education must be included in the national curriculum. Second, the deliberation on specific but high controversial contents of the curriculum, including sex education. Last, the discussion regarding the purpose of national education and the role of Islamic education. This illustrates the dynamics of communication at both governmental and societal level in response to policy-making.

This paper investigates major transforms in Indonesian Islamic Education and how the shifts in the purpose of education itself in particular social contexts. It further examines the political dimension in the new age of Indonesia following reforms in 1998. Practically, this paper discusses several key issues in Islamic educational policy and its implication at both governmental and societal level. The dynamics of policy-making process reflects upon the politics of education from two different sides, the government and the citizens. Central to the discussion are the framework of school reforms and the purpose of Islamic education itself.

¹ See and compare National Education Act Number 20 Year 2003 and National Education Act Number 2 Year 1989.

The discussion in this paper includes four major parts. First, the comparison between Indonesian National Act in 1989 and 2003. Second, Islamic school reforms between platform and practices. Third, contextualization of Indonesian Islamic education into a geopolitical situation in Southeast Asia. Four, the political dimension embedded in the development of Indonesian Islamic Education.

The Position of Islamic Education within the Transformation of Indonesian National Education Act in 1989 into that in 2003

Despite the fact that Islamic schools are managed under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, while general schools are under the Ministry of National Education and Culture, there is no specific national act regarding Islamic education in place. Therefore, the position of Islamic education is always embedded implicitly and/or explicitly in the national act of education.

The National Education Act of 1989 defines education in article number 1 subsection number 1 as an intentional effort to prepare students in coming to terms with their future through guidance, teaching, and or training activities.² In the subsection number 2, national education is defined as an education which is firmly rooted in Indonesian culture, national ideology of Pancasila, and the Indonesian Constitution of 1945.³ This definition of education puts an emphasis on building students capability to take part in the national development. In addition, the characteristics of national education, basically, have a nationally-based foundation which emphasizes national, universal characteristics as the basis of education.

Article number 10 conveys who are responsible for religious education. The government divided education into two kinds: school-based and non-school-based. The school-based education is characterized by the idea of structured and continued education. On the contrary, non-school based education does not have to be structured and continued. Family education is categorized into the non-school-based education which is responsible for religious, cultural, moral, and skill matters.⁴ This means that school, from old perspective,

² Government of the Republic of Indonesia, *Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 2 Tahun 1989 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional* (Jakarta: 1989).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

had less responsibility to cultivate local contents such as religious and cultural matters. School was responsible only for building up national identity and for improving students' ability to take part in the national development. Specific characterized content belongs to societal responsibility.

2003, just five years after the starting point of reform period, witnessed the renewal action in educational act. The National Education Act of 2003 comes up with new understanding of education, national education, and the role of religious education. Therein, education is defined as an intentional and planned effort to create a teaching and learning process under conducive atmosphere so that the students are able to develop their potential to have spiritual-religious strength, self-control, personality, intellectual, highest endeavor, and useful skills for students themselves, society, the nation, and the country.⁵ The notion of education in the 2003 National Education Act obviously presents a holistic view of what is included in educational purposes. Education has shifted from merely a vehicle of Manpower planning into a medium of building up a type of Indonesian personality along with its capacity to face the future challenges in the personal, societal, and national context.

In addition, the national education is defined as a kind of education based upon the national ideology of Pancasila and the National Constitution of 1945 which is firmly rooted on religious values and Indonesian national culture.⁶ This legal development clearly recognizes the specific components of Indonesian constitution and ideology. The component of religion and culture are added into this 2003 National Education Act as a more definite identity of what constitutes an Indonesian.

To be sure, politics of education goes along with the national politics. The major change in Indonesian educational philosophy is an impact of national movement to respond to several key issues at national level, such as corruption eradication, emancipation, and decentralization. Ministry of National Education and Culture in 2012 started working together with the National Commission for

⁵ Government of the Republic of Indonesia, *Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional* (Jakarta: 2003).

⁶ Ibid.

Corruption Eradication to design anticorruption as the hidden curriculum in national education system.⁷

The so-called anti-corruption education in the national curriculum has to be inserted through “morality-content subjects” such as religious education and civic education. These two subjects tend to be very important due to the fact that morality –in an Indonesian context– is not taught through ethics or morality as school subjects. Indonesian people learn ethics and morality through religion. Religious education in the New Order period was strongly concerned about religion in practice. The notion of religion as a value was rarely found in –for instance– the Islamic education textbook published by Ministry of Religious Affairs. The placement of *iman* (faith) as the topic in the first chapter of the book in every school grades is one of the key indicators. The next chapters of the book were always about religion in practice and or the interpretation of holy texts. The confirmation between religious messages and social phenomena was hardly ever found.

Civic education gives students more opportunities in learning about how to be a good citizen. This is a very fundamental strength of civic education in the post-reform period. For sure, however, civic education in the post-reform period is pretty much different from that of in the New Order period. In the latter, the contents of civic education failed in creating a good citizen for four reasons.⁸ First of all, the content of civic education was not confirming universal values. For instance, students just learned what Pancasila Democracy is without learning about Democracy outside an Indonesia context. As a result, students could not criticize the implementation of democracy in their home country. Second, the content was uniformed and did not accommodate cultural and social differences within Indonesian society. As a result, the idea of Indonesia did not match with a different set of situations in a local context. Third, the material was not integrated with other disciplines. For instance, the concept of *musyawarah* (deliberation) was very philosophical and was not connected to the idea of decision-making in the parliament. Therefore, again, students could not criticize the policy-making and policy execution in the national context. Last,

⁷ General Directorate of Higher Education, Pendidikan Anti Korupsi, June 5th, 2012. Retrieved at <http://dikti.go.id/id/2012/06/05/pendidikan-anti-korupsi/>

⁸ Azwar Ananda, “Esensi Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan: Sebuah Kilas Balik Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan di Indonesia”, *Demokrasi*, vol. IV, no. 1: pp. 38-39.

the key messages were delivered repeatedly in every single grade. Teacher had no an autonomous role to contextualize the materials with the real situation. The fact that the New Order regime was very repressive in terms of ideological movement in order to guarantee its political hegemony was one the causing factors of such tendencies.

In short, the enactment of National Education Act of 2003 is a political expression in education to reconstruct the identity of Indonesian people. The political direction in both religious education and civic education in the New Order period separated, and marginalized, the role of religion and citizen.

Islamic School Reforms in Platforms and in Practice

The alteration in philosophical foundation of education affects the platforms and implementation of Islamic education in Indonesia. Before further discussing the implementation of Islamic education in this country, first of all, Islamic education must be clearly defined in order to examine the policy implementation. In this paper, Islamic education is defined as: (1) Islamic religious education as a school subject at schools which is managed under the Ministry of National Education and Culture; (2) Islamic Schools in the form of Madrasah and Islamic higher Education which are managed under the Ministry of Religious Affairs; and (3) Traditional Islamic Schools in the form of *Pesantren* which is under the Ministry of Religious Affairs' coordination.

To show that Islamic education has a significant role in the new National Education Act in 2003, character-education based curriculum appears clearly in the middle of national geopolitical situation in which the identity of Indonesia is claimed by many people to have shifted from their cultural roots. The national education system is then oriented to cultivating a so-called "Indonesian cultural capital" along with preparing students' human capital aspects. Religious values become a "must" component in the cultural capital as Indonesia recognizes deity in the first principle of Pancasila Ideology. The position of religious education in article 12 of the new educational act in 2003 clearly states students' rights to receive religious education in every educational institution according to their religion and beliefs.

In addition, the subjects must be delivered by educators who have a similar religious background to the students.⁹ From my perspective,

⁹ Government of the Republic of Indonesia, *Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional* (Jakarta: 2003).

there are two main political purposes beyond article 12 of the new educational act in 2003: (1) conveying a practical statement that Indonesian educational institutions are responsible for cultivating religious values; and (2) developing a conflict prevention program between religious communities. The first political purpose is contrast to the fact that family education takes major responsibility in religious education according to the National Education Act in 1989. The second purpose is to prevent communal conflict because in several cases during the New Order period students must attend religious education conducted by those who had different beliefs.¹⁰

Despite the fact that Indonesia is very diverse regarding the religion, Islam is the largest one in quantity. Therefore, the National Education Act implicates more significantly and visibly in the Islamic education area. Apart from that of in other religious educations, the restructuring in Islamic education is more easily to recognize, particularly, in terms of its curriculum development and school standards.

The New Educational Act in 2003 proposes the idea of cultivating the identity of Indonesia by putting in detail root components in the educational system. In the context of Islamic education as a subject in *sekolah umum* (public schools),¹¹ the quantity increases from 3 credit hours per week into 4. Quantitatively, the increase of credit hours is not significant. However, this symbolizes the need of religious education as a resource of moral education at schools. Qualitatively, the implementation of materials in Islamic Education subject goes together with several materials with identical messages in other subjects. In other words, the core moral dimension of Islamic Education subject is supported and is repeated in other school

¹⁰ Although this case did not happen in every school, several cases were found in both public and private schools within the New Order period. This happened due to unavailability of religious teachers in an area or other factors. Learning from this case, the new educational act protects students' rights to receive religious education from those who are from the same religious background.

¹¹ The term *Sekolah* and *Madrasah* literally has the same meaning, school. However, in Indonesian context, *sekolah* refers to schools managed under the Ministry of National Education and Culture, while *Madrasah* is under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Despite the fact that both types of schools adopt the national curriculum, *Sekolah* has very little proportion of Islamic Education compared to *Madrasah*. *Sekolah* just has one general Islamic Education Subject, while *Madrasah* has five specific subjects in Islamic Education.

subjects. This thematic approach works in the national curriculum of 2013.

Madrasah curriculum has been developed by considering what is needed at local level. The proportion between Islamic and non-Islamic subjects has been established since the New Order period. Therefore, in the post-reform period, the contents are acculturated between religious and secular subjects according to the thematic-based curriculum. Surprisingly, since 2003, the Ministry of Religious Affairs launched its 100% madrasah curriculum which is different from the curriculum supervised by the Ministry of National Education.¹²

Apart from that, not every single policy on Islamic education adopts the idea of decentralization. In terms of financial affair, for example, despite the budget increases in every period, Madrasah is in an anomaly position in the middle of decentralization due to the fact that its coordination is still centered around and under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, not local government.¹³ This policy can be understood in two ways. First, the local government is not ready yet to take over the mandate of Islamic education management due to its complexity in the format and structure of the institutions. Second, to hand down Islamic educational institutions to the local government means to transfer the authority of Islamic education from the Ministry of Religious Affairs into the Ministry of National Education institutions at local level. In short, the Ministry of Religious Affairs is now in a dilemmatic position between releasing one of its authorities and maintaining it under the high wave of decentralization.

Emancipation and decentralization in the higher education area emerge after the mutual coordination between Ministry of Religious Affairs and Ministry of National Education and Culture regarding the development of State Islamic University.¹⁴ This establishment reflects the non-dichotomy consideration towards religious and secular disciplines. Furthermore, it bridges the mutual understanding between genres of sciences which results in the new interdisciplinary academic

¹² Yudhi Fachrudin, Working Paper: *Corak Pendidikan Agama Islam pada Madrasah dan Sekolah* (Jakarta: UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2014).

¹³ Masykur Mansyur, "Kebijakan Pemerintah Tentang Pendidikan Islam", *Solusi*, vol. 10, no. 22 (March 2012).

¹⁴ M. Shabir, "Kebijakan Pemerintah dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia", *Lentera Pendidikan*, vol. 16, no. 2 (December 2013), p. 175.

genres. Therefore, the university has a wider mandate to develop philosophical foundations and interdisciplinary disciplines.¹⁵

Pesantren as the traditional institution is recognized according to the national act of education of 2003 as a non-formal education. It is clear in article 30 of the National Education Act in 2003 that Islamic education can be conducted in either a formal, non-formal, or informal format. Furthermore, since pesantren is mentioned in the article, the existence of pesantren and its contribution are protected by the constitution.¹⁶ At least this is the beginning for non-formal religious education to formally recognize in national education.

Islamic School Reforms in the Cultural Context

After discussing constitutional decision and its implication towards the restructuring of the body of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Islamic education itself, examining the political atmosphere in a wider perspective appears to be important for several reasons. First, this discussion gives a better sense of politics of Islamic education in Indonesia whether it has national cultural roots. Second, this investigates what drives educational policy change from cultural perspectives. Last, this tries to find correlative idea about the Islamic education reforms in national context and ideological context within the agencies. The discussion in this section basically contents the comparison between Muslim society social condition in Indonesia in the past and in the contemporary period. It strongly suggests that the political transformation happens due to social change in the society.

Before discussing the contemporary Muslim societies, understanding their culture is important in order to examine their established character. The culture of Muslim societies in traditional Islamic education, such as Pesantren, is representative in this discussion since it put foundation of what constitutes Islamic and education in the societal context.

Religion and education in the Pesantren context are like two sides of the same coin which coexist in the cultural transformation within Indonesian societies. The term Pesantren is well known in Java, while

¹⁵ Muh Idris, "Pembaruan Pendidikan Islam dalam Konteks Pendidikan Nasional", *Lentera Pendidikan*, vol.12, no. 1 (June 2009).

¹⁶ Government of the Republic of Indonesia, *Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003*.

in other areas such as Aceh, such an institution is called Dayah. The fact that Islamic education has existed for centuries indicates the close emotional ties between the institutions and the society. This inherited Indonesian identity has been transformed in various ways along with the societal change. Geertz' metaphor "a new wine in a very old bottle" reflects the dynamics of Islamic essence within a new format and a societal structure.¹⁷ This character can be seen in the idea of leadership in Pesantren. Beyond the wall of the institutions, they have an autonomous legal system which is different from the state legal system. The leadership idea existed from the Hindu-Buddhist, long period before Islam came as a new content. From this example, this can be concluded that Pesantren has the spirit of cultural preservation of the institutional structure.

The spirit of preserving cultural structure is also indicated by the preservation of Kitab Kuning (or the so-called "the Yellow Scripture"). The rigid interpretation in the scripture causes a limited interpretation and a restricted authority to work on it.¹⁸ Despite raising criticism from academic sides to it, it can be understood that the effort is a form of preservation in the Pesantren body. Again, the culture of preservation regarding values and structures is a core cultural characteristic of Islamic Institutions in general.

In an Indonesian context, there are at least three national societal issues to concern about: first, the issue of radicalization within Muslim communities; second, the challenge of building up an Indonesian generation's identity with morality and piety; last, the challenge to reform Islamic education in several aspects. These three issues call for Islamic education to respond quickly without leaving behind the core identity of Indonesian Islamic education itself.

Hefner's interviews in 2005-2006 confirm the wish of Pesantren people to put the Pesantren graduates equally at the same level of quality to those are from secular education. This will put a new position of the people in the labor market. Therefore, the Islamic

¹⁷ See Clifford Geertz, "The Javanese Kijaji: The Changing Role of a Cultural Broker", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 231.

¹⁸ M. V. Bruinessen, "Pesantren and Kitab Kuning: Continuity and Change in a Tradition of Religious Learning", in Wolfgang Marschall (ed.), *Texts from the Islands: Oral and Written Traditions of Indonesia and the Malay World* (Berne: The University of Berne Institute of Ethnology: 1994), pp. 121-146.

educational institution not only creates pious personality and expertise in religion, but also takes part in the processes of national development.¹⁹ This suggests the making of modern Muslims in an Indonesian context is nuanced by political and societal struggle of emancipation at national level.

Conclusion: Whither Indonesian Islamic Education?

Every single political decision is based upon the determination being made democratically in a country. The idea of democracy brings about a social consequence in which a political interest is not always executed due to the failure in promoting it in the democratic system. For instance, in American context, policy determination is depending on expenditure budget and the shortcomings of the spending.²⁰ Therefore, there are always political interest competitions in the congress whether –for example– education should have more priority than the others. The consequence of the decision is basically the winning in promoting one thing and less concerning about another.

This political phenomenon also applies in an Indonesian context of educational policy. The winning of 20% national budget for education is not coming instantly. After the period of human capital approach ends with incapability of “governmental people” to bring the nation into prosperity, a new approach in education became a testified hypothesis to test. The combination between cultural capital approach and human capital approach in human development is basically not a result of debates on national spending, but of the social demands to promote clean and good governance.

The most important factor in political change in education emerges when an authority loses its power or legitimacy.²¹ The tedious New Order period had been criticized for its “iron hand” and what is defined as the development. The power of the regime ended with the data expose on corrupt public figures and the “illness” in the government body. The undemocratic educational system worked at this period. The public demand in post-1998 period on the rebuilding

¹⁹ See Robert W. Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), p. 66.

²⁰ Michael W. Kirst, “An EEPa Interview with Michael W. Kirst”, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Jan. - Feb., 1980), p. 77.

²¹ J. Zajda – M. A. Geo-Jaja. *The Politics of Education Reforms* (New York, NY: Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg London New York: 2010), p. 84.

of national identity brought the fresh air to Islamic education as the previously “neglected” institution. It is the fact that religion is *wertrational*, value-oriented rational, but it doesn’t mean to have no contribution to the society. The demand of Islamic Education in contemporary Indonesia seems to indicate the rise of post-modern views within the people.

As a consequence, Islamic education as a societal element promotes equality in national development roles. The idea of equality in education rests in the philosophical thought about what constitutes to be fair in a competition.²² At a practical level, the graduates from Islamic educational institutions receive diplomas which are legally recognized and equal to other public educational institutions. In terms of the merit of education, having religious characters and such a cultural capital is no longer the final goal of Islamic education. The structure of society has changed into a more industrialized kind with a deep concern about rewards.²³ It is unfair if the graduates from Islamic educational institutions could not compete in the labor markets with others. Therefore, beyond the idea of emancipation in education, the industrialized rewards are awaiting.

Political-economic variables take part in globalization which influences the nature of learning transmission.²⁴ In other words, despite the preservation of Islamic identity in the educational institutions, the message of Islam becomes the color in the human capital approach in education. Geertz’ metaphor once again applies in this specific case. The fact that national curriculum supplies a moral dimension in secular subjects indicates that Islamic education as the contents fills up the secular subjects as the container. The Islamic higher education also does the same thing by amalgamating religious foundations with non-religious disciplines.

In short, critical theories on dominance and resistance are perhaps better satisfying to examine the direction of the progress of Islamic education. In the educational policy area, Giroux’s critical pedagogy

²² H. Brighouse, J. Tooley, and K. R. Howe, *Educational Equality*. 2nd Ed. (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), p. 27.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Geoff Whitty, *Making Sense of Education Policy* (London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd, 2002), p. 95.

examines what schools claim they do and what they actually do.²⁵ The case of Islamic Education revival in post-reformation period can be seen as the manifestation of resistance to the New Order education's claims.[]

²⁵ H. A. Giroux, *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*, 2nd Ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), p. 125.

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