

**MULTICULTURALISM AND TRANSDISCIPLINARITY: AN
EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROPOSAL FOR IAIN MANADO'S
MULTICULTURALISM**

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ABSTRACT

Since 2017, IAIN Manado has embraced multiculturalism as a core value for its vision to become an excellent Islamic higher education institution in Southeast Asia in 2035. This policy has however been taken without prior wide scholarly discussions. Consequently, the internalization and translation of this value into IAIN's processes of education are facing some difficulties. This paper proposes a conceptual framework around multiculturalism and transdisciplinarity for IAIN Manado in its attempt to develop competitiveness. It argues that the notion of multiculturalism is always political so that IAIN Manado may develop its own concepts and practices of multiculturalism. It also argues that in order for IAIN Manado to accomplish the implementation of its multiculturalism as a culturally epistemological vision, it should consider the espousal of transdisciplinarity as an academically epistemological vision.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Transdisciplinarity, Vision, IAIN Manado

ABSTRAK

Sejak 2017, IAIN Manado telah memilih multikulturalisme sebagai nilai utama dari visinya untuk menjadi perguruan tinggi Islam unggul di Asia Tenggara pada tahun 2035. Namun demikian, kebijakan ini telah diambil tanpa didahului diskusi-diskusi luas yang melibatkan para ahli. Akibatnya, internalisasi dan realisasi nilai ini ke dalam proses pendidikan di IAIN Manado mengalami berbagai kesulitan. Artikel ini mengajukan kerangka konseptual tentang multikulturalisme dan transdisiplinarity untuk IAIN Manado dalam usahanya mengembangkan daya saing. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa konsep multikulturalisme selalu bersifat politis sehingga IAIN Manado dapat mengembangkan konsep dan praktik multikulturalnya sendiri. Selain itu, untuk menyempurnakan implementasi visi multikulturalnya sebagai sebuah visi epistemologis secara budaya, IAIN Manado sebaiknya mempertimbangkan untuk mengadopsi transdisiplinarity sebagai sebuah visi epistemologis secara akademik.

Kata Kunci: Multikulturalisme, Transdisiplinarity, Visi, IAIN Manado

INTRODUCTION

IAIN Manado seeks to become an excellent Islamic higher education based on multiculturalism in Southeast Asia region in 2035. One of its main missions is to produce the knowledgeable people who love peace and respect differences (Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs No. 37 Year 2017). It, therefore, places multiculturalism as a core value of its education. It also intends to integrate international and global dimensions into the function of its education (Knight, 2004). Following the espousal of this value in its vision in 2017, IAIN Manado has, for example, introduced a new course so-called Multicultural Studies or Multicultural Education as an effort to translate its vision into practices. However, this value has been adopted without prior rigorous academic or discursive discussions among the academia from within and outside IAIN Manado. Consequently, it lacks a conceptual framework both at epistemological and practical level. The leadership team has not so far demonstrated a clear shared understanding of how multiculturalism are defined in policy documents, taught in classrooms, communicated to stakeholders, and operationalized in work plans. This leads to some serious difficulties in its implementation.

IAIN's work plans have not shown strategic measures engaging all members of the organization in defining the vision. When leaders' speeches mention multiculturalism as a vision, it has never been clear what it means and how it relates to the IAIN's business plans. This paper aims at proposing a conceptual framework of multiculturalism that is argued to be likely more congruent with IAIN Manado as an Islamic faith-based higher education institution. Prior to discussing the framework of multiculturalism and transdisciplinarity, I will address the notion of New Public Management or New Managerialism as a context to signify the importance of having a clear and grounded vision for a higher education institution nowadays. Moreover, in order to lay a ground for the concept advanced, I will present some findings showing how IAIN's multiculturalism is understood by students and lecturers. It should be born in mind, nevertheless, that having a clear concept of a vision will not help the organization so much to overcome its poor performance, unless its leadership team success to engage employees at all level in defining and translating its shared vision.

NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT IN STATE ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION

In the last three decades, the government of Indonesia has been reforming bureaucracy to become more responsive and sensitive to the need of people. This reform started through an unprecedented scale of decentralization by which a large number of authority transferred to the lower government.

Although the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA), under which the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education (DIHE) belongs to, was excluded from the decentralization program, it could not be insulated from its effects. Through

decentralization, the government introduced a new form of management and managerialism. This, so-called New Managerialism and New Public Management (Deem, Hillyard, & Reed, 2007), has been promoted through international organizations, such as the World Bank and OECD, to help governments resolve their problems of meeting people's needs with limited resources.

During the New Order (1966-1998) era, professionals and bureaucrats had been playing a leading role in achieving stability and resolutions for any conflicts occurring among organizations. They collaborated to propose programs and policies that they consider best for people from the top to the bottom. Since the Reformation era (1998-present), the government has been moving away from this mode of administrative control towards a combination of managerial and market based control. Through this neoliberal mechanism of control, competition rather than collaboration has been emphasized more. Recently, the government has been paying attention to the importance of asking for details as a control mechanism. This neo-technocratic control uses technologies of audit, performance, and accountability in the form of a distance control. If the former, neoliberal mode of control, has introduced forms of general and more flexible control in which the government become facilitator to ease the market, the latter, neo-technocratic mode of control, has been more intrusive at micro-level work (Deem et al., 2007).

Against this backdrop of development, Islamic Higher Education under MORA has been trying to manage administrative and managerial changes according to a market principal of flexibility, combined with centralized distance control. Under market pressure and competition, student admission and tuition fees have been diversified into various schemes (i.e. subsidized admission by invitation, smart-poor student scholarship, and local or national admission test) and categories (i.e. category one to three for College, one to four for Institute, and one to five for University). In tandem with this, teaching staff hiring has also been diversified into different categories: temporary, permanent non-civil servant, and permanent civil servant teaching staff. The first two groups are paid much less than those of civil servant teaching staff. As of 2019, around seventy eight percent of the Islamic Higher Education teaching staff are temporary and permanent non-civil servants. Only thirteen percent of them has been professionally certified; sixty two percent less compared to those of civil servant teaching staff; seventy five percent of them are certified lecturers (RI, 2019). The certified lecturers are paid twice as much as the non-certified.

Along with this increasing flexibility, a new regime of audit and control system has been established. Inside each Islamic higher education institution, it is mandatory to have a body to internally monitor financial affairs so-called internal control system (SPI) and academic affairs so-called quality assurance body (LPM). Externally, MORA has a body so-called General Inspectorate (Itjen). Initially, Itjen focused on monitoring fiscal affairs and work programs for each unit under MORA. Recently, it has introduced a control system so-called performance audit. It has expanded its duties beyond the fiscal control. Itjen is an internal collaborator for the audit board of Indonesia (BPK). For

external academic control, a body so-called the national body of accreditation for higher education (BAN-PT), following the national standards of education, conducts a four yearly mandatory accreditation for each study program and institution as a whole.

Industrial revolution 4.0 that relies much on digital technology has become a buzz word of high echelon in MORA. As a consequence, some IT based managerial innovation, such as e-EMS Diktis (Electronic Strategic Management System for Islamic Higher Education), has been initiated within the Islamic higher education system, adding to the old EMIS PTKI (Electronic Management Information System for Islamic Higher Education). I once had a small conversation with one of its operator. He claimed that this e-EMS would be a powerful distance control for all Islamic higher education institutions, about 817 institutions, under the administration of DIHE. With this system, the high officials in Jakarta would not need to travel away to have accurate information about the performance of each institution all over the country. They would be able to identify easily campuses that did not perform well and followed it up with an appropriate treatment. He boasted that this system would be more powerful than PDDikti, a centralized data center for all Indonesia's higher education institutions, administrated by the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education at that time (Mappiasse, 2018).

Accurate data and information under the new public management system has increasingly become important for the Islamic higher education. Each institution is expected to be publicly monitored and assessed based on their ability to perform according to their vision and mission. Therefore, having a clear and strong vision has become more crucial for an Islamic higher education institution than before. Each institution is held accountable to its educational activities and processes based on their achievement in articulating and implementing what the leadership has envisioned.

VISION AS A GUIDING BEACON AND SENSE MAKING

In fact, it is a vision that “gives life to an organization”. Exemplary “leaders do not just impose their vision on others”. They invite others to imagine and share exciting, attractive, and focused future for their organizations because “leadership is a partnership, not a sinecure” (Kouzes, M., & Posner, 2017). “Having a vision and being able to sell it” to others “is an essential task of leadership” (Bennis & Thomas, 2002). “Leaders are dreamers. Leaders are idealists. Leaders are possibility thinkers. ... It's this belief that ... sustains leaders and their constituents through the difficult times” (Kouzes et al., 2017).

Vision is about bringing cultural change in an organization. Successful leaders show commitment to their vision by generating and sustaining new culture that builds trust among organization members, allows their employees to improve, makes work enjoyable and valuable, and develops strong sense of community. In order for them to be able to translate their vision, they should make everyone in

the organization to have sustainable commitment to participating in creating and defining what they want to do and achieve with the vision. Such a commitment starts from a leadership team that has a clear vision and a strong commitment to acting according to values manifested in their shared vision. Sound understanding of the vision should be common among all organization members, including casual and temporary staff, security personnel, and custodial workers. It must be strong and solid enough. If they do not support the leader's refined and outstanding plans, the vision "would have sunk without a trace" (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005).

Indeed, what differentiates leaders from mere managers in an organization is their ability to have a shared personal vision with all organization members. Such a vision becomes a guiding light for all (Mariasse, 2009).

If a vision gives a general guide of the dreamed future of an organization, a mission is a number of concrete goals that clearly define its position from stakeholders and other competitors. Mission backs up the vision. Both are a "guiding force" for the whole organization in moving up and away from its old location and values. Vision and mission value is not in statement, but in the power to mobilize all organization members to realize what they want to achieve in a distinctive way (Jones, 2010).

IAIN MANADO'S UNDERSTANDING OF MULTICULTURALISM

In order that we can grasp how multiculturalism is understood by IAIN Manado's community, interviews involving around forty eight interviewees had been conducted. They included thirty students, seventeen lecturers, and one administrative staff. Ninety four percent of the interviewees know verbally IAIN Manado's vision; which is to become an excellent Islamic higher education based on a multiculturalism in ASEAN region in 2035.

When they were asked to mention types of programs that can be implemented to realize such a vision; interestingly, more than half of the interviewees came up with examples that are related to cultural dimensions of the organization. The rest referred to better facilities and teaching programs.

When they were asked a question of what IAIN Manado would look like when various programs had been taken to translate its vision; fifty eight percent of the interviewees associated the future look of IAIN Manado with cultural development, such as IAIN Manado would become a multi-religious and ethnic campus that would be open to everyone regardless of their religious and ethnic backgrounds. The rest imagined IAIN Manado to become a modern and well-equipped institution after a comprehensive implementation of its vision.

I can conclude that students and staff in IAIN Manado mostly relate multiculturalism with a typical multicultural sphere where people from different religion, belief and ethnicity can participate in its education processes. Others link

it to an outstanding institutional quality. They visualize that when it succeeds to implement multicultural vision, IAIN Manado will have a comparative competitive advantage.

Even though their perspectives provide us with a clue of how multiculturalism is understood by IAIN Manado community, they have not helped us to critically understand how multiculturalism should be defined and implemented in relation to the unique characteristics or distinguished identity that is historically and conditionally attached to IAIN Manado as a public Islamic educational institution. The following sections discuss this issue.

MULTICULTURALISM AS A CULTURALLY EPISTEMOLOGICAL VISION: INTEGRATING IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY

Multiculturalism is a term that has increasingly become popular in social and political science literature following the changing structure of race and ethnicity in various areas in the world. Parekh exclaims, “Almost all societies today are multicultural and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future; this is our historical predicament. Obviously we need to come to terms with it” (Parekh, 2000). During the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s to the 1960s in North America, the notion of multiculturalism had been promoted and used to solve the problem of admitting and integrating the Black minority into the mainstream American society and politics. Transnational immigration of workers into developed countries that has occurred over the past several decades has shifted the structure of citizenship in America, Europe, Australia, and Asia. In the last four decades, democratization and new patterns of people mobility in several Asian countries led various governments to suggest the inclusion of multicultural education in the national curriculum, including Indonesia. Multicultural education is viewed as an effective measure to prepare young citizens that have knowledge and competence to live harmoniously in increasingly diverse society.

Along with the global change in democratic practices, there has been a substantive change in the state approaches to the minority groups. It was previously understood that in order for the minority to be accepted as citizens, they should sacrifice their particular identities and assimilate themselves into the mainstream national cultural group. Currently, most modern nations provide a special status and freedom for the minority groups (Kymlicka, 2002).

Against this backdrop, multiculturalism as an approach and perspective to understand and manage social and political changes has been gaining increased support. It has been increasingly accepted that the best way to maintain the minority group loyalty to the unity of a nation is by allowing diverse groups to preserve their cultural identities within the nation (Ho, 2009).

Multiculturalism, according to the Western multiculturalist, denotes diversity and “cultural fairness” by which “no one cultural group dominates over others.” This notion of multiculturalism receives criticism as it “promotes

diversity at the expense of national unity” (Ho, 2009). Therefore, in order to dismantle this dichotomous relation, education, according to Parker and Gaudelli, should teach students to have knowledge and competence to sustain political oneness and preserve cultural diversity, and to live in a global community with a full understanding that unity and diversity are not contradictory; they are mutually inclusive (Parker, 2003 and Gaudelli, 2002).

IAIN Manado most likely encounters a similar problem when it has taken a measure to adopt multiculturalism in its functions and processes of education. IAIN Manado is an Islamic faith-based learning institution that has a particular normative agenda to serve the interests of Muslim community, particularly in Indonesia. One of its priority is to maintain Islamic cultural identities. In order to realize this agenda, for instance, a variety of Islamic subjects are taught to students, such as Islamic Theology (*‘Ilm Kalam*), Islamic Philosophy, Quran Exegesis (*Tafsir*), Quranic Sciences (*‘Ulumul-Qur’an*), the Prophetic Traditions (*Hadith*) and Hadith Sciences (*‘Ulumul-Hadith*).

Culturally, all staff, professors, and almost all students at IAIN Manado are Muslims. They are expected to abide by Islamic ethics and rules of conducts in their daily activities, such as dress codes and required Islamic practices and rituals.

It means that IAIN Manado basically allows one culture to dominate other cultures, and it is almost impossible for it to create a cultural fairness in a Western multicultural sense in its educational functions and processes. It goes without saying that IAIN Manado is mostly normative and biased in its educational agendas.

How then to implement multiculturalism in such an educational institution? Is it possible to develop a particular type of multiculturalism that is more relevant to it?

Bearing in mind that knowledge and science, especially social sciences, are inevitably political in nature, IAIN Manado, of course, should be able to develop a new imagination of multiculturalism that can respond properly to its functions of education as an Islamic institution.

I argue that for IAIN Manado to be able to translate multiculturalism into its educational functions and processes, it should be able to teach students a sound understanding of Islamic identities and cultures. It at the same time should prepare students to have awareness, knowledge, and skills to live in integrated and open global cultures.

The question, then, is how to transform the normative knowledge and culture of Islam to become historical, contextual, inclusive, and enabling for staff, professors, and students to express the vision of multiculturalism in IAIN’s educational functions and processes?

Currently, IAIN Manado is teaching a course for students so-called Multicultural Studies or Multicultural Education. Unfortunately, this course is not, on the one hand, constructed in participatory manner and is completely detached from other normative courses offered. Consequently, it fails to represent the multicultural vision of IAIN Manado as a whole. On the other hand, it is not developed synergistically with the philosophical foundational courses taught at IAIN Manado, such as Islamic Theology and Philosophy.

I argue that IAIN's vision of multiculturalism would be better translated through this subject of Multicultural Studies, if, firstly, its contents are taught to students in a package of an integrated program along with other philosophical foundational courses; secondly, normative Islamic courses are taught at the advanced level using problem solving approaches; and lastly, contextual understanding of knowledge and sciences, especially normative sciences is developed through real experiences and lived experiments accompanied with serious and honest intention to serve humanity. Such intention will generate a new understanding of the ultimate goal of knowledge and education.

In such a way, staff, professors, and students would have a refined understanding of their Islamic identities to fill in the inner space of IAIN's multiculturalism. But then, they are continuously prepared to generate a new understanding of knowledge and sciences to fill the outer space. The inner space of IAIN's multiculturalism is represented in normative sciences that are directly derivatives of Quran and Hadith in the forms of theological doctrines, cultural and ritual practices. These sciences are leaning to have exclusive meanings and expressions. In contrast, the outer space represents knowledge and sciences that are developed to objectify (Abdullah, 2013) and universalize the former to become property of all humanity.

How is then this inner space transformed to become a common property of humanity? In other words, what mechanism is possible to be applied to transform the former exclusive knowledge and sciences to become ones that are inclusive and produced for all humanity? For examples, how are the Quran and Hadith to be codified into branches of knowledge and sciences that are accessible, readable and workable by all people, regardless of their religions, colors, and ethnicity? Amin Abdullah advanced a notion of objectification of Islamic sciences to do so (UNESCO, n.d.). But, how may this objectification transform Islamic sciences that represent peculiar Muslim identities to become knowledge and sciences for all humanity?

I think, to do so, we need bridging values that encompass and go beyond Islam as an institutionalized religion. Islam as a formalized religion has been forming to build a system of social enclosure that prevents it from becoming a property for all humanity. These bridging values between peculiar and universally objectified knowledge and sciences are a set of ultimate values, such as humanity, equity, and justice; that should be a guiding light in interpreting revealed resources and producing body of knowledge and sciences. When such

fundamental values are located in the core belt of knowledge and science innovation, Islamic normative sciences that are mutually exclusive to others are more likely to be transformed to become mutually inclusive.

TRANSDISCIPLINARITY AS AN ACADEMICALLY EPISTEMOLOGICAL VISION: FROM INTEGRATION TO SYNERGY

Amin Abdullah is one of the Indonesian Muslim scholars who has developed a vision of integrated and interconnected knowledge and sciences from within Islamic higher education system based on his firsthand experience managing changes of Islamic higher education. He reinvented various analytical concepts to help people understand the nature of knowledge and sciences, especially from an Islamic perspective. Of his important concepts are “normativity”, “historicity”, “objectification”, and metaphorical “spider web”. His main argument is that knowledge is both normative and historical, divine and humane, sacred and mundane. It is not dichotomous. It is horizontally and vertically integrated and interconnected like a spider web. Knowledge, through objectification, becomes universal and belongs to all humanity; to all people, regardless of their different cultural backgrounds (Abdullah, 2013).

The question is how to integrate knowledge and sciences if we as scientists do not have a transcendental or meta-languages (UNESCO, n.d.) that can connect our minds and feelings? How to do so if our knowledge production processes are compartmentalized and disciplinary? How to do so if our physical and administrative vision of management is gating and segregating? How can we produce and provide objectified knowledge for all, if our minds and feelings are detached.

We often talk about integration and interconnection while our minds and feelings are disintegrated and disconnected. We, as learning human beings, should learn and teach together. In other words, integration and interconnection are problematic if we do not think beyond.

The big challenge for almost all higher education now is their failure to transform universities to become a real gathering of learners and teachers (Mappiasse, 2018). We are segmented by our disciplinary fields so that we fail to develop a reference language that can transcend our disciplinary boundaries.

UNESCO, the first body that I found, had been talking seriously about a need to the vision of transdisciplinarity that goes beyond interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity. If the latter two focus only on the juxtaposition and integration of different knowledge sectors, transdisciplinarity goes beyond to integrate minds and feelings so that they can produce a joint solution to common problems, not only in methods and results, but also in the processes of finding ways to a new method. UNESCO views transdisciplinarity as “a theoretical attempt to transcend disciplines”, and at the same time “maintaining the advantages of creativity and initiative peculiar” to each discipline (UNESCO, n.d.).

IAIN Manado, if serious to implement the vision of multiculturalism, should think to adopt a transdisciplinary perspective in its educational functions and processes. Transdisciplinarity has a potential to facilitate the generation of an inclusive, and contextual space for multiculturalism. Furthermore, it has a potential to complement the integration and interconnection project that has become the mainstream vision of Islamic higher education development in Indonesia over the last decades.

Transdisciplinarity is a powerful concept to translate IAIN's multiculturalism when its adoption is built upon a strong conviction that knowledge is mostly a collection of human experiences to serve the betterment of humanity. It means that vision of transdisciplinarity is an epistemological mechanism that would enable the contextualization of the normative side of IAIN's vision of multiculturalism.

For example, IAIN Manado offers students normative courses, such as Islamic Theology and Philosophy, Islamic Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), and Prophetic Traditions (*Hadith*). So far, when professors teach such normative courses, they ask students to memorize various verses from Quran or sayings from the Prophet Muhammad (May Allah be Pleased upon Him) or His companions. Further, they ask them to find out several arguments from classical scholars. They almost do all that in a classroom. They almost never consult other experts from within or outside the institution.

With a vision of multiculturalism and transdisciplinarity, IAIN Manado should think to transform its learning styles and directions. It should plan and prepare its students to master all basic normative courses at a certain stage before it involves them in a transdisciplinary model of learning.

One of the ways to warrant the quality of student learning at IAIN Manado is by the standardization of all normative course materials catered to their initial ability.

Currently, IAIN's students have a serious problem in mastering Islamic normative courses, firstly, because most of them have irrelevant education backgrounds to the Islamic studies so that they are not prepared to catch up with the difficulty level of courses offered. Secondly, the absence of a strategic policy measure to assure that most lecturers are knowledgeable in courses that they teach. Thirdly, there is no any rigorous curriculum assessment to ensure the fitness of subject contents to the student ability; and more importantly the quality of contents.

Considering this situation, there is a high demand for an immediate strategic action to translate IAIN's vision of multiculturalism. For the purpose of warranting that IAIN's junior students have enough understanding of their Islamic identities, IAIN needs to select the best materials in Islamic studies for beginners. Then, it needs to regulate what quality materials can be used for those beginner

learners. Lecturers should not be allowed to select their own teaching materials as they wish. This is to ensure that IAIN's students have systematic basic Islamic normative knowledge. Otherwise, students and lecturers will not be able to translate the contextual side of IAIN's multicultural vision at the later stage.

Only after ensuring the good quality of student's knowledge of basic normative Islamic courses, would transdisciplinarity vision be feasible to be implemented. Transdisciplinarity demands a high level of sharing and openness as well as a high order thinking skill. It is the stage where students and lecturers are ready to contribute to the production of objectified knowledge and sciences.

Within the inner space of multiculturalism, students and professors of IAIN Manado need to sustain communications and interactions with other scholars and students of Islamic studies to generate a body of meta language that will enable them to transcend their Islamic disciplinary boundaries. Then again, within the outer space of it, they need to do so with non-Islamic studies scholars and learners to enable them to transcend their normative boundaries. This will enable them to produce an objectified knowledge and sciences that will serve all humanity.

CONCLUSIONS

Vision is a shared value that should become the main guidance for all organization members on their work. The latest development of public management shows that having a clear vision and mission should not be overlooked by Islamic higher education leadership, unless it may fail to engender quality and comparative competitiveness. Therefore, IAIN Manado should espouse rigorous studies on how to develop a theoretical framework of multiculturalism involving scholars from various disciplines. I have shown that IAIN Manado can develop a particular notion of multiculturalism that gives a balance between particularity and universality, between unity and diversity through a bridging set of ultimate values of humanity. This mechanism can be accomplished by moving the epistemological paradigm from disciplinary to transdisciplinary, emphasizing more on synergy of minds and feelings rather than just integrating ideas. Having established a clear definition of multiculturalism, IAIN Manado should strive to develop a micro level concept of multiculturalism by which it will be able to integrate multiculturalism in human resource management, financial provision, teaching, research and publication. By then, multiculturalism becomes a living value and experience for all that can accordingly foster quality and competitiveness.

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