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ISLAMIC EDUCATION AND THE MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY: DESCRIPTION OF EDUCATION FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN TWO ISLAMIC SCHOOLS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract. Generally, educational practices in two Islamic schools, contained teachings of religious and cultural diversity. The two schools are located in two different urban areas – Yogyakarta and Palangkaraya– each of which has interesting characteristics as multicultural cities. Considering that Islamic schools can contribute to the creation of multicultural society in Indonesia, in contrast on an assumption that Islamic schools are religious schools, which in theories contribute to the segregation of society by imposing students to the truth claim belief and behaviours. Students of religious schools nurture in themselves a belief that only their religion is true and others are false. Consequently, as this assumption goes on, students act to show their religion’s superiority to others. Even if they can demonstrate tolerance to other religious followers and practices, the social segregation is established, and becomes potential frictions among different religious people. In addition, Islamic schools are often described as backward and monolithic religious schools, which cannot accept different religions and interpretations to the Islamic teachings.

Keywords: *Islamic school, cultural diversity, Islamic teachings*

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Islamic education in Indonesia

We can say that Islamic education developed following the development of Islam. Once the Islamic preachers from the Indian and Arabian sub-continent arrived in what is currently known as Indonesia in the 7th century, they established mosques or prayer places for them to worship and spread the Islamic teachings. Halaqahs (circles of religious learning) were established in the mosques following the great tradition of the knowledge transmission from the Prophet Saw, companions, and the followers. This practice of teaching continued and when the number of students from areas far from the mosques increased, some *pondoks* (boarding accommodation) surrounding the mosque were erected and this system in the Javanese context was called "*pesantren*". *Pesantren* was then considered as one of the first Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, which has continued to exist until now.

Madrasah is another Islamic educational institution, which in Indonesia was established following certain requirements and regulations by particularly the Ministry of Religion (MoR). This institution is described as more modern in terms of its structure and teaching approach than *pesantren*. Currently, however, there are *madrasah* established in the compound of *pesantren* to cater the needs of students for modern education and government curricula. In this context, it is sometimes hard to distinguish *madrasah* and *pesantren* particularly in terms of management and location.

Education in Indonesia is characterised by a structural dichotomy, in which two schooling systems exist concurrently. The first system consists of general schools, which are administered by Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), while the second is comprised of *pesantren*, *madrasah* and other religious schools, which are under the administration of Ministry of Religion (MoR). There had been efforts to

structurally integrate *madrasah* to the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), yet till now *madrasah* remains under the MoR. The integration was successful only in terms of the curricular integration into that of the national education particularly after the issue of the Education Law 2003. Many experts view this curriculum integration as an important means to modernise the Islamic education sector (Azra, 1999; Hasbullah, 1995; Steenbrink, 1994; [Zuhdi, 2005](#)), even though, as Jackson and Parker (2008) view, this integration implies several consequences, including competing sources of authority and knowledge between Islamic and secular knowledge. Consequently, as can be seen in the most recent curriculum document published by the MoEC (Kementrian Pendidikan Nasional, 2003), the curriculum used in both types of schools is the same. The Islamic religion class is designed for both of these schools with no difference at all, while previously, in the post-1975 decree curriculum, the Islamic religion subject for *madrasah* had exclusively consisted of four different subjects: *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *Akidah Akhlak* (Islamic Faiths and Morality), *Quran/Hadits* (al-Quran and the Prophet's Traditions), and *Sejarah Islam* (Islamic History). In practice, however, as I observed in several *madrasah*, these divided subjects are still used, and the integrated Islamic studies subject imparted in general schools has been ignored in *madrasah*.

Multicultural education

According to [Parekh \(2006\)](#), multicultural education was initially a response to the Euro-centrism in the field of education in Europe both in terms of the content and ethos of education. Parekh identifies several limitations of this Euro-monocultural education. This education does not arouse students' curiosity about other cultures. It also stifles the growth of the critical faculty of students. Students of

monocultural education tend to develop judgmental ability of other cultures from their own cultural perspective. Besides, monocultural education has the potential to breed arrogance, insensitivity and racism in students. Parekh concludes that monocultural education is simply not a good education because a good education is one that “exposes pupils to different conceptions of a good life, systems of belief and modes of conceptualising familiar experiences, gets them to enter into the spirit of other cultures” (p.227).

Reviewing the works on multicultural education in the context of the US, Christine Bennet (Bennet, 2001, pp.173-4) provides the underpinning principles of this education, i.e. cultural pluralism, social equity for racial and ethnic minorities, the importance of culture in teaching and learning, and high expectation for student learning. Firstly, cultural pluralism is the ideal vision of society based on core values of equity and social justice, respect for human dignity and rights, and freedom to maintain one’s language and culture. Secondly, on this principle, social equity and justice for ethnic minorities are guaranteed, and the culture of school children from these minorities is affirmed and respected. Opportunities are provided equally for all of them to reach their fullest potential. Thirdly, culture is important in the process of teaching and learning. As human beings cannot be separated from culture, children bring their own culture to classroom. Teachers should take this into account in designing learning experiences for their students appropriated to cultural diversity of students. Finally, multicultural education puts high expectation of student learning and outcomes. All students are provided an equal process even though at the end their outcomes may be different one from another due to intrinsic talents and characteristics. High expectations trigger the creativity of teachers to deal appropriately with relevant differences in students.

There are two dimensions of the concept of multicultural education. First, multicultural education is focused on the development of understanding of cultural diversity in order to develop corresponding attitudes of students. This dimension falls in Gibson's (1984) second approach to multicultural education, i.e. education about cultural differences to promote better cross-cultural understanding. In this dimension, the process of multicultural education is highly concentrated on the curriculum as a centrum of knowledge development. In line with this, Parekh (2006, pp.227-30) argues that the most important strategy for multicultural education is working on developing curriculum which teaches cultural diversity and understanding to students. Multicultural curriculum has to meet two conditions. One is that it should not be unduly narrow for it should familiarize students with the representative forms of different cultures so that they can follow up the rest on their own. The other is that the process of imparting the curriculum should trigger a fruitful dialog in that students are able to develop their own critical judgments on what are being taught. Parekh's recommendation seems to be focused on the development of cognitive domain of students to have proper understanding of different cultures, religions, ways of life, societies, and so forth, which in turn lead them to make critical reviews and judgments. These are capital for them to develop positive attitudes toward multiculturalism. From the critical multiculturalism perspective, however, school curriculum should raise the critical awareness in students of racial, gender, and class representations and engage them in discussions of the discursive construction and socio-political images of these images (Kubota, 2010). The curriculum does not only contain critical description of minorities but pushes students of the majority to think about their status as the majority.

The second dimension is that multicultural education is also focused on the creation of school and its environment as a place of students from various backgrounds to experience equally good quality education. In this dimension, every student regardless of race, culture, religion, gender and class is provided an equal opportunity to develop his or her potentials. This dimension of multicultural education works on various school aspects to transform schools into multicultural grounds for all students. This dimension is supported by Banks in his definition of multicultural education, i.e., “an inclusive concept used to describe a wide variety of school practices, programs and materials designed to help children from diverse groups to experience educational quality” (Banks, 1986a, 222). Relating this second dimension with the first one, Banks (1986b, p.16) argues:

Strategies that are effective in reducing racism in the curriculum and the school must be comprehensive in scope and focus on all aspects of the school environment, including the hidden curriculum, institutional norms, school policy, the counselling program, assessment and testing procedures, the formalised course of study, teaching methods and materials, and the attitudes and expectations of the school staff.

This second dimension accommodates the critical multiculturalism argument against structural racism and social injustice in schools through the reform of such various aspects of education (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; May, 1998). It is concerned with not only formal and non-formal programs of school education, but also with school structures and cultures.

The above two dimensions of multicultural education suggest that multicultural education is beyond a particular program of school, but rather it is systematically comprehensive strategies. It involves a whole-school approach in the process of

development and implementation. This whole-school approach include the ethos of the school including school culture and values, its curriculum and instruction, its assessment and evaluation procedures, its language policy, and its approach to cultural diversity. According to [Lynch \(1986\)](#), this approach will enable students from minority groups to maintain their unique identities and at the same time achieve socialization with others. Also, this approach will encourage the majority students to rethink of their status and develop appropriate attitudes towards cultural diversity that exist around them. Cooper *et al.* (1998) suggest the involvement of such elements as school's policy, teachers, management, parents, students, and school councils in various activities and processes to approach effective multicultural education. This is to possibly guarantee the consistency in the development of implementation of multicultural education programs. Regular discussion amongst staff and teachers as well as other community members regarding the planning and implementation of multicultural education is one of the suggested activities.

In short, the curricular approach to multicultural education is not sufficient to respond to the complexity of the diverse reality of society. Therefore, in my opinion, in order not to miss the focal point of multicultural education, which is the development of knowledge and values in multiculturalism in students, a comprehensive school approach is necessary.

Researching the schools

The two Islamic schools where this research was conducted are: 1. al-Huda, a private senior secondary Islamic school or Madrasah Aliyah in the compound of a *pesantren* in Yogyakarta; and, 2. al-Uswah, a state senior secondary Islamic school or Madrasah Aliyah Negeri in Palangkaraya. These two were purposively selected to meet the criteria of the research design in which I included both general and Islamic schools as

cases of the study. Both cities have multicultural characteristics, each with its own uniqueness. Although it is a centre of Javanese cultures, with its status as the city of education Yogyakarta has been exposed to different people of different religions and cultures. Palangkaraya is a post-ethnic conflict area with diverse population from different cultures. In this city, particularly in this decentralisation era, religion does seem to come second after ethnicity in terms of politics. Dayak is the indigenous ethnic group in this area, and dominating the politics.

I conducted qualitative research in 2009 at al-Huda and in 2010 at al-Uswah. I used participant observations to learn firsthand about the life and school processes in both *madrasah*. I regularly visited the *madrasah* early in the morning and left in the afternoon. At al-Huda, I often stayed till night when students finished their activities. I interviewed more than 30 students in both schools, dozens of teachers, and the *madrasah* management figures. The interviews occurred in various places in the school complex, and went conversational and informal. Besides, I used focus group discussions as a technique to gather data from students and teachers. I transcribed all the interviews and FGDs in the original languages in order for me to have fuller understanding of what was being spoken and its context. I used N-Vivo to help me generate codes and categorisations based on the themes emerging from the transcribed data. This is a huge process of learning from the data before meaningful interpretations can be made. During this process, I conducted regular checks, clarifications and confirmations with data collected through other major collection methods such as participant observation fieldnotes, student diaries collection, student writing tasks, curriculum documents, textbooks, and news from both online and conventional national and local media. I used discourse analysis in this process which allowed

me to go beyond the merely written and spoken language to the social and cultural contexts for comprehensive understanding of the data (Paltridge, 2006).

It is important to understand that both Islamic schools used Kurikulum 2006 at the time of this research. Al-Huda had more Islamic teachings due to its *pesantren* vision and characteristics.

Nurturing multicultural beliefs and attitudes

For the purpose of this paper, I categorised the findings into two dimensions of education in order to explore potentials of both al-Huda and al-Uswah to facilitate their students to develop multicultural belief, understanding and attitudes. The first category is inside classroom instructions, and the second is outside classroom processes.

Curricular approach to education for diversity

The Education Law 2003 encourages the development of education that accommodates and promotes cultural diversity and democracy. It can be said that this law provides sufficient basis for developing multicultural education. Yet, this basis needs to be interpreted further into more operational policies, which are covered in the graduates' standard competences. The standard competences across the education levels similarly contain at least one multicultural competency, which is "menghargai keberagaman agama, budaya, suku, ras, dan golongan sosial ekonomi" (to respect the diversity of religion, culture, ethnicity, race, and social and economic groups/classes). What differentiates between each schooling level is the context in which such competency is bounded. For example, for primary graduates, such ability to respect the mentioned various diversity is bounded in the small environment context ("lingkungan sekitarnya" or their neighbourhood) appropriating their age level, while for junior

secondary graduates, that competency of respect should be demonstrated to the diversity in the context of national level. From observing this regulation, it is clear that multicultural understanding, values and attitudes are one of the targeted competences students to possess. The structure of students' competences developed in the regulation indicates a curricular approach to this education that is the infusion into several subjects and/or the infusion of several topics in one or more subjects.

In both *madrasah*, the infusion of multicultural education was done in various subjects, but within the limited space of this paper, I will only describe two subjects, i.e. Religion and Citizenship Education. Religion is a compulsory subject for students to learn in schools. As mandated in the Education Law of 2003, both state and private schools are obliged to provide the subject corresponding to the students' religion. As mentioned earlier, the Islamic Religion subject in both *madrasah* was divided into four different subjects including *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *Akidah Akhlak* (Islamic Faiths and Morality), *Quran/Hadits* (al-Quran and the Prophet's Traditions), and *Sejarah Islam* (Islamic History). There was a variety of approach in teaching these subjects depending on the teachers' personal Islamic ideology and their understanding of multicultural education. I found that many teachers of both al-Huda and al-Uswah were open to discuss the importance of respecting religious and cultural diversity as part of the Islamic teachings. The discussion was usually part of the topic of ethics towards neighbourhood in the Akidah Akhlak subject. Ahmad, a teacher of this subject at al-Uswah, said that although respecting neighbours is an essential part of the Islamic faith (iman) as commanded in many Prophet's traditions, he consistently reminded students to be cautious of friend selection. He went on to say:

We live in this city with many different religions, and [therefore] our students can be badly influenced by their friends. Do you know that many Muslims here got married with others from different religions.

The concern of mix-marriage as a result of ‘free’ friendship can be understood from the perspective of school’s and also parents’ function of cultural transmission to youths. However, I did not hear this concern from teachers at al-Huda. They were very confident that al-Huda’s students were educated with strong faith and knowledge in Islam. Their concern was much more related to the graduates’ ability in surviving the encounters of cultural diversity after they completed education at al-Huda. Therefore, there was a program initiated to assist students to bridge the transition from the *pesantren* life to more real and diverse one. This program will be explained more later in this paper.

In the Citizenship Education subject, al-Huda seemed to suffer from lack of quality teachers and therefore could not demonstrate teaching practices that support education for cultural diversity as shown in the following observation fieldnote.

On a typical hot day at 11am, Mr Nurdin, a PKn teacher, and I went to his classroom of male Grade XI students. The classroom is located just opposite to the dormitory. It is a ground level classroom. Student chairs and tables are set up in five rows and three columns facing the whiteboard and the teacher’s desk—a traditional classroom setting. Each column has two chairs with tables, so the classroom accommodates 30 students, but three chairs were not occupied. I was sitting in the back of the right corner of the classroom. Mr Nurdin began with *salam* (Islamic greeting) which was replied by allstudents. He then checked the attendance list, and looked satisfied

that all students present. He said: “Last week, we discussed the *Pancasila* democracy. The *Pancasila* democracy is rooted in Indonesian indigenous culture. What does Indonesian culture look like? We can give examples. Indonesian people have good hearts, like to save money, and are not conceited...” Mr Nurdin explained further about Indonesian culture, and moved to another topic, the democratic political system that now characterizes Indonesia. There is no question and answer. One student directly in front of me put his face on his right hand on the table, looking sleepy and bored. Several others looked the same, but many of them took notes.

This monotonous method of teaching lasted 40 minutes, fortunately punctuated by several jokes made by Mr Nurdin to keep students awake. The content was actually interesting and up-to-date, discussing the current situation of Indonesian politics. Several current stories were brought to the classroom, but I doubted the students’ ability to relate such stories to the existing knowledge they had since information about “the world” outside the *pesantren* was limited (only available through one shared wall newspaper at the library). Mr Nurdin completed the class by leaving the students without giving them any tasks or assignment.

Outside classroom education for diversity

There are several aspects in this second dimension of education in both *madrasah* in that we can learn how they nurture multicultural belief, knowledge and attitudes in students. I will discuss aspects of student interaction at *madrasah*, extra-curricular activities, and *madrasah* leadership as examples to showcase how both *madrasah* were concerned with the creation of multicultural citizens or otherwise.

At al-Huda, student relationship was generally strongly established in that they live and learn together in the *pesantren*.

The boarding system provided students with an ample opportunity for them to establish cohesive relationship with their peers. This does not necessarily mean that there were no frictions and conflicts between students. Different personalities, various cultural backgrounds, and diverse expectations were challenges for them and the *pesantren* management to manage relationships. For example, for new students, it was not easy at all to adapt to this kind of “total institution” (Goffman, 1961) environment at the beginning of their life in the *pesantren*. Parents whose children were going to the school described it as a difficult phase for both their children and themselves in adapting to this situation. Complaints about the rules, friends, meals, and facilities were commonly heard from these newcomers. One male student said:

If we are not sociable here in ways such as being selfish, arrogant, unhelpful, and so forth, we will be boycotted by our mates. But for new students, they are allowed to be individualist such as having their own plates. But later, I am sure they will be like us being forged to this *pesantren* culture.

One striking issue in relation with student interaction was the provision of privileges for students who were sons or daughters of *kyai* (any *kyai*). These students were called Gus for son and Ning for daughter. In al-Huda and, perhaps, in other *pesantren*, students who came from such a background were honoured and privileged in such a way. Although al-Huda’s policy in fact strongly discouraged the use of these titles and urged equal treatment of all students, certain teachers and students remained keen to use these titles and acknowledge the embedded privileges. Ayesha, a student in the female complex, explained:

Some teachers still applied rules differently. When a “regular” student breached the rules, she could receive physical punishment such as cleaning the toilet. However, if a Ning did the same, she would be given a very light punishment like producing a piece of writing or memorising [parts of the Quran].

Some teachers and students argued that the respect given to Gus and Ning was part of the deeply rooted culture in *pesantren*, which cannot be easily changed. Even people outside the *pesantren* community, particularly in Java, acknowledged and used such particular titles to address these individuals. In other areas of Indonesia like in Kalimantan (Raihani, 2009), however, the use of specific titles for sons and daughters of a *kyai* is non-existent, but they still received a relatively similar level of respect from the community.

At al-Uswah, student interaction was built on the basis of segregation between the rich smart and poor students as a result of a pragmatic wealth-ability grouping. Al-Uswah consisted of seven groups for Grades 10 and 11 respectively, and six for Grade 12. Al-Uswah implemented a strategy to group students with the stronger academic performance and who were wealthier together and were segregated from the “regular” students. These groups were called “*kelas model*” (model groups), serving the school’s ambition to produce small groups of talented individuals. Al-Uswah set two criteria for students to be eligible for entry to this exclusive group, namely: intelligence shown in academic performance, particularly in maths and natural sciences, and the ability to pay more than regular students did. Grade 10 students of this kind were projected to choose the Natural Science Stream later in Grade 11. The school allocated two groups in each grade, to become this kind of “privileged student community”. These privileged groups enjoyed more complete and ‘luxurious’ multimedia learning

facilities and smaller class size – 25 compared to 35-40 – whilst others did not. When this issue was raised in student interviews and FGDs, almost all the regular kind of students interviewed expressed critical perspectives.

Raihani: What if a student is smart but does not have money to afford the model class?

Arif: This can't be. He can't be included in the model group. There are some students in Grade X who had to give up in the second semester because they couldn't pay [the model group tuition fees].

Raihani: What do you think about this grouping (asking to other students)?

Nita: I feel like we are being segregated. For example, in various competitions, model group students are always invited to join, while we are not. I don't know what the reason is.

Laili: I think this kind of grouping must be stopped. It is difficult to socialise when we are segregated. For instance, this is rich, and that is not. This limits our relationships.

What has been presented above in both al-Huda and al-Uswah reflects the failure of the school to create social justice that provides and enforces equal opportunity to students from different backgrounds. Students could barely find consistent practices of social justice as an integral part of multicultural education.

Extracurricular activities

Both al-Huda and al-Uswah developed various extracurricular activities that students must choose one depending on their interest. The activities ranged from sports, personality building, and academic development such as martial arts, volleyball club, Pramuka (scout), Red Cross, drum band, and creative writing club. Also, there were religious activities to

nurture more intensive Islamic teachings and internalise its values into students. Some of these activities could serve as glue for cohesive relationship among students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. However, a promising scene interestingly emerged from the Pramuka activities in al-Uswah, which demonstrated a serious effort to teach students about religious diversity in Palangkaraya and nurture attitudes of respecting religious others.

In November 2010, I had the opportunity to observe a *Pramuka* camping held by al-Uswah. The principal explained that the event was initiated by the school and held every two years, involving many secondary schools in the city of Palangkaraya. He also conveyed that although the host school was Islamic and its students were all Muslims, participation in the event was never restricted to Islamic schools only. I checked the list of the participants, and general schools and even Christian schools joined this event. It was held from 16 to 21 November 2010. As I observed, during these six days many activities and competitions were held, including marching platoon, first aid, dance and speech competitions. Participants camped during the six days in the school backyard. I quoted some of the fieldnotes about this event below.

I arrived at the school before 7am today (Sunday, 21 November 2010) to witness *Pramuka* activities from early morning. I missed “*ceramah agama Islam*” (Islamic speech) they held in the morning after dawn prayer for Muslim students. But, one of the committee members said Christian students would hold a congregation in the school main auditorium. I went there. I saw some of the committee busy preparing the place – arranging chairs, testing microphone, etc. It seems to me that they are confused over how to make the hall appropriate for a Christian congregation. They then consulted with some Christian students who were already there. One of the committee asked: “Will you use a table for the leader?”

One of the Christians said no. Assisted by some Christian students, the committee members (female Muslims wearing *jilbab*) continued with the preparation.

At 7:20 the congregation begins. There were around 25 students attending. They chose one as a leader who then asked students to volunteer to lead singing some songs. They play guitars. They finish this congregation at 7:40 (al-Uswah, 21 November 2010).

Although al-Uswah was an Islamic school, the above fieldnotes clearly indicate its students' (at least those involved as the committee members of the event) understanding of other people with religious needs, in addition to leadership skills and social competences. They understood that Christians performed congregational prayer on Sundays, and they wanted to learn how to arrange and manage a proper congregation for their fellow Christians. They communicated with each other well. The provision of the temporary place for Christian worship at this school was exceptional, and hard to imagine in other Islamic schools in other contexts. Mr Doyo, the vice principal of the curriculum, explained that the school had no problem with the provision. "If Muslims can have a congregation, other people should be able to do that as well. This is a *Pramuka* event, which teaches togetherness and equality".

School leadership

The above descriptions of both inside-classroom and outside-classroom processes of education for cultural diversity cannot be divorced from the leadership of both *madrasah*. Al-Uswah principal, Mr Suryo, was appointed to take the principalship position in 2005, after completing his Master of Education at an education university in Sumatra in 2003. He had worked as a teacher of the school previously, since 1987, and had been involved in its development from what he

described as a “poor” school to become the only model Islamic secondary school in the province. Mr Suryo seemed to enjoy the privileges of being Javanese and working in the Islamic sector in the province. Since its inception in 1960s, this sector, represented in the office of Ministry of Religion (MoR), has been dominated by Javanese and Banjarese officials because local Dayak people were not qualified enough to fill the positions. This preference for Javanese and Banjarese officials was also because the majority of Dayak are not Muslims. The Javanese domination does not seem to have changed, according to some teachers. Besides the principal, all the vice-principals were Javanese. The predominance of Javanese officials has created some issues of social injustice such as with regards to the selection of program coordinators among teachers in al-Uswah. Some teachers felt that the principal discriminated in giving assignments on the basis of ethnic backgrounds. However, Mr Suryo denied this suspicion that assignments were given to those who were considered having ability and competences to accomplish.

In terms of cultural diversity he has been faced with, he said: “Our students are mature enough to understand this [diversity]. They learnt through experience. What we are concerned about now is how to improve their performance”. To him, multicultural education can operate naturally without deliberate intervention on the part of school. There was no particular concept of multicultural education or an indication that anything of its kind was being implemented. This does not mean, however, that multicultural education was completely absent from the school program. Mr Doyo, the vice-principal of curriculum, conveyed:

So far, there have been no plans to teach cultural diversity in the school. But teachers have the liberty to touch on this issue if it is relevant to a particular subject, as would be the case for a teacher of Sociology.

Actually, al-Uswah principal's vision to "to improve their performance" is one of the characteristics of multicultural education, i.e. the main focus of education is student performance (Bennet, 1990). However, his leadership failed to demonstrate an equality-based approach to student improvement particularly in terms of grouping students as explained previously, which subsequently led to the widening gap between poor and rich students in both learning processes and outcomes.

So, the leadership of al-Uswah did not consistently show practices that support for the implementation of education for cultural diversity, even though his personal belief as he explained indicated his support for such education. Perhaps, this inconsistency was caused by lack of more conceptual knowledge about what multicultural education is and how it should be developed and implemented.

At al-Huda, the principal was the kyai's female nephew who graduated from a master program at a reputable education university in Yogyakarta. Her leadership, however, did not seem to be effectively visible particularly in terms of the reinforcement of multicultural education in the *madrasah*. The kyai demonstrated stronger leadership in that he urged the *madrasah* management to develop programs supporting the nurture of multicultural belief, knowledge, and attitudes. Two notable programs the kyai initiated for developing the awareness of, particularly, religious diversity in students include the live-in program of non-Muslims in the *pesantren* and the year-three orientation. The former was designed to build understanding among students and to see first hand and communicate with religious others. The latter was to equip students who were graduating with knowledge and understanding about life outside the *pesantren* including the needs for maintaining commitment to the Islamic religion and

religious and cultural differences they would be faced with. However, as described earlier, the kyai and the principal could not entirely control the provision of privileges bestowed to the “royal” (kyai) children over regular students.

Concluding Remarks

Education at both al-Huda and al-Uswah demonstrates promising practices of creating citizens for the Indonesian multicultural society, contradicting the assumption of that religious schools contribute to the widened social segregation. Although there needs more explicit government policies and holistic approach to education that enables students to develop beliefs, values, knowledge and attitudes to respect and live along with religious and cultural differences, many aspects and activities of both Islamic schools are remarkable. Some classroom instructions provided an opportunity for students to explore further the diverse reality of Indonesian society and flourish in themselves corresponding beliefs and attitudes. Yet, teaching practices that do not encourage critical thinking in general and of social reality in Indonesia need to improve to really place students as autonomous individuals who possess capacity to reach their potentials. Outside classroom practices as displayed by both *madrasah* suggest a common understanding of the importance of education for religious and cultural diversity. The pramuka event at al-Uswah, which provides a designed intensive interaction of interreligious students and the live-in program at al-Huda can be regarded as breakthroughs in the creation of multi-culturally-aware students. These cannot be separated from the visionary leadership practiced by both school leaders with the supports from their stakeholders. I see, however, that their lack of understanding of the holistic concept of multicultural education led to uneven and inconsistent policies of both *madrasah* with the principles of this

education. The student grouping policy at al-Uswah remains 'troublesome' to the implementation of education for social justice as one of the multicultural education principles.

One should understand, however, the obvious limitation of this study, as always as to any qualitative studies, which is lack of generalizability. Two *madrasah* are 'nothing' to represent more than 35,000 *madrasah* all over Indonesia, but these two cases shed light upon promising practices of multicultural education. There is a lot to learn from these cases including the importance of leadership and contextual understanding of the surrounding community, which has influence on the school program development.

While the above description of education for cultural diversity in both *madrasah* is generally positive, we cannot ignore the facts that some other *madrasahs* and even general Islamic schools (popularly termed as Sekolah Islam Terpadu: Integrated Islamic Schools affiliated to MoEC) demonstrated conservative interpretation of Islamic teachings, which often contradict the national interests. Some schools, as anecdotal evidence suggest, prohibit the mandated weekly school assembly and the flag raising and saluting. This is an indication of seemingly negative acceptance to the concept of Indonesia as a nation-state. The question to pose here is how these schools teach the concept of Indonesian nation-state, the place of Pancasila as the country's ideology, and the religious diversity that has existed for long in Indonesian society. The number of schools of this kind might be small in number among the whole school populations in the country, but their influence in society needs to be anticipated. In my community I live now, segregation of the community because of the different religious sects is obvious – from religious practices, social gatherings, to housing complex. This segregation would in future be worse, if the conservative teachings were effectively transmitted in school education, and

no necessary assessment was taken by government to ensure that all education in the country is in the light of the national interests in building harmony among people of different religious and cultural backgrounds.

All in all, Islamic schools are potentially strong agents to contribute to the creation of Indonesian multicultural society.

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