

**Developing Interculturality in Islamic Education; the Case Study of  
Deakin University “In-country Program” in UIN Malang**

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**Abstract:** Deakin University “In Country Program” is a program that provides a 'total immersion' experience for Deakin university students in studying and experiencing Indonesian language and culture in UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia. The 6 weeks program enables the Australian students to build interaction and communication with Indonesian people in a daily activities. In understanding the students' cultural experience built from the program, this paper will discuss the question of interculturality that is experienced among the Australian students attending the “In-Country Program.” By observing and interviewing the students, the study shows that interculturality is an important aspect to be built in Islamic education. Interculturality is a perspective to understand different culture, different identities and able to build his/her own identities through the interaction and communication in different cultural context. Through the intercultural competence shaped, the students are able to build a more positive, emphatic understanding towards other culture that is different from their own and that is often misunderstood such as Islamic religion and Muslim people.

**Keywords:** Developing Interculturality, Islamic Education

**A. Introduction**

Deakin University “In Country Program “ in UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang is a program that provides a 'total immersion' experience for Deakin university students in studying and experiencing Indonesian language and culture in Indonesia. This program is held biannually under the cooperation between Deakin University (Faculty of Humanities and Arts) and UIN Malang (Faculty of Humanities). The program was firstly held in 2008-2009 with 27 students attended the program, followed by the year 2010-2011 (38 students), in 2013 (48 students), and the latest 2014-2015 (23 students).

For UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, this program strengthens its dimension as the world class university. This program is also aimed at promoting Indonesian culture especially Indonesian moderate Islam for international students, because during the program the students are involved in the learning process in Islamic educational institution, and with Muslim students of UIN Malang. Deakin University who attended the “Indonesia in-Country Program” especially looking into the interculturality competence built among the students.

**B. Interculturality through “Indonesia in- Country Program”**

Intercultural understanding is a term that is popular in Australian education and the concept has been widely used, yet its meaning remains elusive. Its use is problematic if its use is limited to knowledge of cultural other. The limitation of the definition risks initializing the other as a set of static cultural attributes that can be objectified as something to be learned (Welsh in Missbach and Purdey, 2015:168). Indonesia in-country program has the aims, one of which is to build intercultural understanding between the Australian and Indonesian students. The program is arranged in six week, mainly divided into two

parts, the intensive Indonesian language class in 5 days a week and 4 hours a day. And the other part is attending one of the cultural courses offered, such as batik course, traditional dance, and karawitan (traditional music instrument). The other activity that is not less interesting is excursion, visiting some cultural and historical sites surrounding Malang and East Java that is scheduled at the weekend.

The intercultural encounter that enables to build the intercultural understanding is influenced by the scope of social interaction in which meaningfully engagement experienced. The six week in-country program gives intercultural understanding for the students better than the attendants of shorter program or merely tourists. The program enables students to study Bahasa Indonesia in classroom intensively and build dialogue and communication with Indonesian natives and students. In Indonesia in-Country program, the intercultural encounters is built through the students activities in scheduled agenda and in the informal daily interaction between the Australian students and the Indonesian students and people. These encounter enables the young Australians to experience a lot of things such as intensive Bahasa Indonesia and daily Indonesian or Javanese culture like language, food, fashion, custom and tradition.

The immersion enables the students encounter much more meaningful experience in their life. Not only their perception or understanding shift but also they are able to construct transformative identity through the understanding of the Indonesian culture in their daily observation and interactions. The students build perceptions on what they call positive and negative traits of the cultural aspects. The daily positive traits of Indonesian people that they observe, for example, patience, more relaxed life, care to the others that they identify as good characteristics that are different from their own culture. They perceive them as positive traits that to some extent they try to apply in their life

However, the students also observed some negative trait of Indonesian people such as "kepo," a popular informal word meaning asking too many questions, especially to the other people whom they do not know well. Many people consider that "kepo" make other people uneasy because the questions raised are too personal. The questions like, "do you have girl friend?" "Have you married?", "do you have any children yet?" "What is your religion?" are considered by many Australian young people as weird questions because they are personal questions that in their culture are taboo to be asked, moreover when the questions are raised at the first time they encountered with the people. For the Indonesian who asks those questions, that means they want to know the other people closely. However, after some time, the young people get to understand that such question is just the way they get to know each other, or the way they build cohesiveness, not a question of having bad intention. Such personal questions are influenced much by the culture of the speaker. Javanese people, for example, are used to be closed and know as much as possible their friend or the people surrounding them, so that such questions are not considered as personal in Indonesian culture. Responding the different ways of communication, the Australian students are firstly shocked or surprised, but mostly they would just answer in short statement. But then they feel relaxed when they realize that the questions do not do any harm for them. In this point, they got a new understanding of common people's way of communication.

### **C. Students' Experience in Building Interculturality**

#### **1. Understanding the language in formal and informal context**

The students of Deakin University joining the "Indonesia in-Country Program" are usually enthusiastic coming to Malang for learning Indonesian language and culture. For many of them it is the first time visit to Indonesia. They learn Bahasa Indonesia intensively in the classroom 4 hours a day, five days a week with Indonesian native teachers. Besides, they also have greater chance to practice their ability to speak Bahasa Indonesia with Indonesian native speaker anytime, so that their Bahasa Indonesia will improve significantly.

Many of them are eager to know not only Bahasa Indonesia they learn in the classroom, that is mostly formal language use, but also interested in learning the language that is daily used by Indonesian people in daily conversation. They can identify the language used by people surrounding them such as at "warung" where they want to buy some food and drink, or the language used when they go to campus from hotel by getting on "angkot" (public transportation). Some of the students have experienced the encounter with the local family, especially when their counterpart Indonesian students (pendamping) invite them to their homes, in which they get to know the parents and neighbours. The students are able to differ the formal language used in the classroom and the informal language they can use in their daily conversation. A few of them are able to use the "slang" terms that are often used in the daily conversation in many context, such as "martabak terang bulan itu mak nyuus..." to say that the food is very delicious. They said "keren" to say that something or someone is "cool". They also say in some modified terms such as creating new word like "mungks" to say "mungkin".

The understanding and ability in practicing Bahasa Indonesia used in daily conversation is a good experience and knowledge. Some of them are able to differ the formal and informal one. The understanding of daily language is the achievement that shows their involvement and observation on the people's daily communication. The informal language is not learnt in the classroom, instead, it is practiced by the native speaker of the language in the social context. Ability to understand this informal language will benefit them in daily communication and build better comprehension on many cultural aspects of people's life.

#### **2. Understanding Muslim in Daily Life**

Most of the students joining the in-country program were not familiar with Muslim at the first time they arrived in Indonesia, except those who was born in (Pakistani or Indonesian) Muslim family. Most of them did not have any Muslim relatives or friends. Mostly the Australian students knew Muslim and Islam from the media such as television and newspaper as well as from the new media such as internet and social media, especially in the context of the terrorism discourse. According to the students, most of the older generation in Australia perceive Muslim as what is presented by news from television and newspaper. They also realized that this brings consequence that the powerful media will influence much on the people's perception on many social and political matters in the daily life, including their perception on Islam. The perception on Islam that is built by media, is that the religion is almost always associated with terrorism and violence issues. This assumption is strongly believed by

the media audience in Australia, especially when some violence cases broke in Muslim Middle East states or terrorism case, such as the war and conflict in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Taliban, ISIS, WTC bombing, and the latest Paris bombing.

During the intercultural encounters between the Australian students and Indonesian students and people, they did build much communication and interaction. All of UIN students are Muslim and many of them live in the campus dormitory with the daily routine that can be observed by the Australian and on the other side, the UIN students are also able to observe their western counterparts. This interaction give a greater chance for the Australian to know and learn Muslim in a real context. They got to know how their Muslim friends think, behave, and do their daily religious activities, without a formal subject learning Islamic theology. This learning by doing give a greater chance for the students to make dialogue and build understanding on Muslim and Islam in its social and cultural practice. Through this they build their perception on Indonesian Muslim and Islam.

The cultural encounter with Indonesian Muslim in this program also built the students' feeling of secure to be in Indonesia, especially when there was a violence case that was associated with Muslim terrorism. In December 2014 there was a terrorist bombing Sydney while at the same time the Deakin students stay in Malang for this program. Some of their parents were worried with their son and daughter knowing that they lived in Muslim communities and Muslim is presumably associated with terrorism. The parents who are worried are mostly those who believe much in media on the terrorism discourse. In responding to such an uncertainty on the violence or bombing issues, the students are usually able to cope with more responsible answer to their parents. They responded in much better and relaxed ways to the parents. They called the parents and explained that they were just fine and Muslim in Malang is just fine, good, friendly and not terrorist. Many of the students said to their parents and family that Muslim in Malang and in Java they meet are just common people that they had no reason to be feared with.

The students who have encountered with Muslim in Malang will build their perception on Islam and Muslim based on their daily observation and interaction with Muslim fellows. They got better understanding that Muslim are not as scary as the media (in Australia) say about them. Some of them even said that they also gave empathy to the Muslim because Muslim around the world are demonized by the international media as the bombing and violence cases happened anywhere in the world. They realized that this Islam phobia give bad impact for the Muslim especially those living in Western and European countries, including Australia. Understanding Muslim by their first-hand experience, made the students do believe that Muslim in Indonesia is not the same with the Muslim in Middle East, and even different from the description of Muslim terrorist as portrayed by medias, instead, they are able to criticize them. They are able to share their opinion on Muslim and Islam to their family and friends based on their experience living in Muslim society in Malang.

In Islamic State University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, the Deakin university students did not learn Islam specifically as a subject, instead they saw the Muslim students in their daily life, they observed on how the Muslims do prayers five times a day in the mosque that is located in the campus complex. Many of them think

that it is very wonderful to find out how 'diligent' are the Muslim students, especially when they compare that most of young people in Australia do not care much on their religious practice as Christian, or in Lala's term "the young in Australia just want to be relax" in their religious life. Sometimes they discussed Muslim religious practices and thoughts with UIN students. They also observed how people do their daily activities based on their understanding and interpretation on the religion. Lala, for example is interested in how Muslim people are different each other in practicing their religion. For example, she observed that some of Muslim women wear "jilbab" (head cover) and some others do not. She observed that for Muslim, body contact for different sex is mostly avoided so there is no shaking hand, no hugging and no kissing. This is not easy for her and her friends whose culture has more body contact like hugs anytime they meet and welcome friends. However, she was impressed that her Muslim friends in Malang understand this difference so that she was not embarrassed when she unintentionally did mistake. Her observation on Muslim life is that Muslim are very diligent and diverse in their daily social practice. All of this cultural encounter gives her knowledge and understanding on Muslim so that she respects the Muslim more and she is able to share her positive opinion and impression on her Muslim fellows to her families and other people when she is back in Australia.

### 3. Understanding local people and culture

As young Australian who firstly visited and lived in Javanese community, most of them have greater opportunity to experience people's "cultural other" in daily interaction. The students get to know many cultural aspects of Indonesian people's daily life. They can taste many kind of food provided in local "warung" or in local restaurant, all of which is different from their daily food at home. One student had to be sent to hospital because of eating too spicy food or too much *sambal*, but she remembered this experience with a laughter. She remembered that when hospitalized in pale and sickness, the nurses and staffs in the hospital unpredictably wanted to make photograph together with her. That is a funny experience, she recalled it. Many of them went to warung makan, instead restaurant, to get many kinds of food everyday. They said they were getting fatter when they were in Malang, because they ate *nasi*, *martabak terang bulan*, and others that they enjoyed very much.

Local food and dishes for the daily consumption is mainly with rice and other "lauk" such as fish, chicken, *tempe*, and vegetables. Many of them are in love with rice "nasi" (they used to eat bread instead of *nasi*), that they eat everyday. They like eating rice with *soto ayam*, *sate ayam*, *gado-gado*, *tempe*, *tahu*, and others. Many of them get their first experience of eating Javanese food, and this first encounter make them in love with the flavor so that some of them continue to consume rice and 'Indonesian' dishes, after they were back to Australia. In the follow up interview in Australia on November this year, it is found out that they still wanted to experience the Indonesian taste by cooking rice and eat the food that they ate in Indonesia. They continue their Indonesian food culture for daily consumption. Many of them get used to eat Indonesian food and Indonesian flavors, such as *sambal*, *nasi goreng*, *mie goreng*, and they continue this food culture when they are back in Australia.

Some of them even continue their bond with their Australian mate after they are back home. Before they go to Indonesia for this program, most of them do not know

each other and everybody was just very busy with their own routine. However, the interaction and closeness among them were built when they were in Indonesia, staying at the same place and activities for six week. This is meaningful for most of them, building their cohesiveness. They know each other much better when they were in Indonesia instead of in Australia. Some of them build a very good relationship and continue this after the program when they are back in Australia. Nia and Fe moved to a new rented house in their home town together after the program. They said that they built the same feeling of “love to be Indonesian Australian”. By being in the same house, they can share the experience of being “Indonesian” in the sense that they build good understanding and care each other, an experience that they cannot find and share with other Australian friends.

One of important things they have in common is that they agree that Indonesian people are genuinely friendly, want to care others, not as selfish as Australian people according to some of them. Australian people tend to be very busy in their daily life and have no time to care the other people. One of them said that Indonesian people are also busy but they tend to be generous in sparing the time for others. For this reason, although at first some of them felt awkward with the private questions raised by strangers as mentioned above, they soon realized that people did that genuinely, because of care or want to know, not for doing any harm for them. This understanding then even made them feel closed to the Indonesia students personally, and made them wanted to go back visiting their Indonesian fellow after the program. Meaningful relationship as the outcomes of the interaction between Australian and Indonesian students give a richer nuances of the inter-individual relationship. This personal relationship often endures much longer, years after.

Australian sees that Indonesian people are very flexible. To some extent the flexibility tends to be negative such as the habit of not being on time or popularly known as “jam karet”. They found many times of this “jam karet” in their activities during the program, except the tightly-scheduled program such as Bahasa Indonesia class. Such ‘jam karet’ would never happen in Australia. Australian people never have such flexibility in schedule. “It is a shame if we are late for an appointment. That is very bad,” many of the Australian students share their opinion. However, many Australian students were able to realize that after observing some time in Indonesia, some of them conclude that there is the good side of this flexible habit of “jam karet”, that is the culture of relax, not in a rush, and less stressful. This psychosocial condition is on the contrary to the Australian people who are always in a rush, highly competitive and do not have time to care others so that they are easily getting stressed, depressed and feeling lonely, especially when they are old and retired. The community responds this problem by building an institution or house for caring the old people, in which the old peoples with all their physical and psychological problems can live and be cared together. To enjoy this facilities they have to pay much money for being cared in this house.

Some of the students said that Australian people are more materialistic in defining the success, such as the possession of good home, good car, good job giving much money so that they can are forced to be very competitive. Australian young people are also more independent from their parents in early age. Almost all of the

students in Australia have a job for the first time when they are in 15 years old, when they are still in high school. Usually the students get more than one part-time jobs such as a waitress in restaurant, staff in supermarket or stores. They are paid around 17-20 Australian Dollars per hour, and this is a good money for them, so that they get freedom financially and take care of their own. On the other hand, according to the Australian student observation, Indonesian people put success in building happiness by valuing family life more than the other, and more respect to the elder people.

The students' opinion above shows that there is Australian students' self-awareness and the ability to look oneself from the other point of view. They are aware how the young Australian look like with its positive and negative sides and at the same time they are able to look their own value by comparing to the other Javanese people's value. Their ability to look into their own values and other values, also encourages them to engage with other different culture. One of the students attending batik course in Batu, while she learnt how to make drawing on the white cloth, she also made a good conversation with the women labor working daily in the batik workshop. As the result, the Australian student knew not only how to make batik, but she also knew the real people, the women labors behind the batik crafts. She asked about labors' job, salary, their neighbor's migrant workers and the social economic problems they encounter. This talk built her empathy on the women labor social condition, something that she did not find in Australian labor system, in which she is able to get one or more than one jobs since 15 years old with per-hour salary that is more than enough for her own. She listened with empathy to the workers talking about migrant workers from around the village, about their problems and challenges.

The dialogue between the young Australian with local people has a significant impact on the Australian's ability to see the world. They found out there were so many problems people encountered in the world or neighbors countries. In other word, they are able to see the world from the women workers' eyes. They are able to draw the sameness and otherness especially on the economic and social access, in a detailed portrait, not in general portrait of data from census bureau. We can say that the activities such as batik class became a meaningful engagement, so that they are able to understand the complexities nature of the culture. They are not only to build skills of knowing many kinds of batik motifs, and drawing batik with 'wax' and 'canting' on a piece of white clothes, but the most important is their engagement with the real local people, recognizing the individuals of other culture, in daily context as a way to understand and appreciate the cultural other.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Interculturality covers an understanding of wide aspects of culture, while intercultural competence encompasses all the strategies and approaches that any given person might use to shift from a monoculture to a more multicultural view of any subject (Crozet and Liddicoat, 1999: 113 – 125). The Deakin university "Indonesian in-country program" that is arranged in six week immersion activities of language and cultural learning in Indonesia, is expected to build students' intercultural competence. The strategies of delivering 'cultural courses' such as *karawitan*, batik and traditional dance enable students to learn many aspects of culture as well as building social interaction with

local people. The intercultural encounters between young Australian students and local people also give a rich and meaningful result in the form of understanding many aspect of daily cultural and social activities of Indonesian or Javanese people. The daily interaction also leads to more important aspect of appreciating the complexities of the other culture. Dialogues with local students and people also builds better perception on Indonesian Islam and Muslim, much better than their Australian fellows who do not have the chance to build such communication with cultural other. For Islamic educational institution, the interculturality is important to be developed for many reasons, one of which is building an emphatic image of Muslim people among the misleading and discredited image of Muslim in international media. The interculturality aspect in Islamic education also strengthen the paradigm of Islam as a “rahmah” for the universe.

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