A New Model for Islamic Education Financing: the Significance of Transnational Islamic Educational Movement in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Funding mechanism has long been a crucial issue for Indonesian Islamic educational institutions. Muslims in these institutions bear costs ranging from very little, such as in homegrown Qur'anic memorization schools, to very much, such as in private 'international' Islamic schools. Through active involvement, literature review, and in-depth interviews, this paper investigates the phenomenon of Islamic dormitories run by the transnational, Turkish-headquartered, Islamic movement United Islamic Cultural Centres of Indonesia (UICCI). It was found that UICCI provides 'luxurious' facilities, generous treatment of students and staff, and mutually symbiotic relationship with the people of the region in which its dormitories reside. This paper concludes that UICCI has managed to provide a new model for Islamic educational financing, one that balances institutional survival and excellence with implementation of social, national, and global responsibility, involving all stakeholders responsible for educational financing: state, students, parents, and philanthropists.

Keywords: Islamic education, education economics, transnational Islamic movement.
Funding mechanism has long been a crucial issue for Indonesian Islamic educational institutions.507 Dilemma exists throughout the varied institutions from primary to tertiary levels in terms of balancing individual institutional survival and excellence to implementing social, national, and global responsibility.508 Muslims in these institutions bear costs ranging from very little, such as the cases of ‘transnational’ Islamic boarding houses509 recently mushrooming in Indonesia, to very much, such as the cases of private ‘international’ Islamic primary to secondary schools.510 Purely homegrown phenomenons such as pesantrens, madrasahs, and universities have also expressed these different financing trends. Some homegrown Qur’anic memorization schools charged no fees511 while most international classes at State Islamic Universities charged fees out of reach of most Indonesian Muslims.512

508 See Abdul Mun‘im DZ, Peryegaran Pemikiran Islam: Dari Monoteisme ke Moneuteisme, Nahdatul Ulama website, [www.nu.or.id] (3 October 2012). See also Harum Akhmad Zuhdi, who enrolled his child to several different Islamic primary schools when he moved due to work throughout Indonesia, Pendidikan Islam ‘Mabah’ di Indonesia, [har03m.blogspot.com] (3 October 2012).
509 These ‘transnational Islamic boarding houses’ are the focus of this paper and would be elaborated at a greater detail later.
510 See a useful coverage of this phenomenon by the popular Muslim magazine Hidayatullah, Mahalnya Sebuah Bangku Sekolah, [majalah.hidayatullah.com] (5 October 2012). Hidayatullah noted that entrance into these international Islamic schools cost at least Rp 5 million, greater than the monthly per capita income of an average Indonesian (around Rp 31.8 million annually – Rp 2.65 million monthly). For Indonesian per capita income in 2012 see Republic of Indonesia Coordinating Ministry for Economics, Pemerintah Targetkan Pendapatan Per Kapita Capai US$ 16 Ribu di 2025, [www.ekon.go.id] (14 October 2012).
511 Free-of-charge Qur’anic memorization schools could be found in almost every regency or city in Indonesia. This provides some legitimacy to the claim that Indonesia has the most number of Qur’anic memorizers in the world (30 thousand people compared to Saudi Arabia’s 6 thousand). See Republika, Jumlah Penghafal Alquran Indonesia Terbanyak di Dunia, [www.republika.co.id], (5 October 2012). As with most Muslims in other parts of the world, Indonesians deem support of Qur’anic memorizers as an easy ‘stairway to heaven’, hence the willingness to contribute the funding of these schools to make it free-of-charge.
512 An example would be the change of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah) student composition, from students of
Even though the ideal financing of ‘public good’ such as education through endowment (waqf) has slowly shown a promising trend\(^{513}\), this paper looks toward another promising quick solution to the financing of Islamic education applicable to most ranges of educational institutions mentioned previously. Research has shown that purely free-of-charge state education could actually manifest undesirable results such as student underperformance\(^{514}\) and unfair class competition to enter prestigious universities\(^{515}\), while expensive education mostly because of costs purely borne by students and their parents would be out of reach to the majority of Indonesian Muslims.\(^{516}\) A balanced approach, in which students (through low-income and village-based families to students of middle-class and urban-based families. See Dina Afrianty, *Indonesia’s Islamic Educational Institutions and Radicalism among Muslim Youth*, ARC Federation Fellowship Islam Syari’ah and Governance Background Paper, (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Centre for Islamic Law and Society, 2011), p. 9.

\(^{513}\) The emergence of *waqf* (more appropriately ‘re-emergence’ as *waqf* used to be the dominant means of financing ‘public good’ in the Muslim world) and other Islamic forms of charity have been significant enough to garner a series of regulations from the Indonesian Government and/or House of Representatives (DPR), including Law Number 41 Year 2004 on Endowment (*Undang-undang Number 41 Tahun 2004 tentang Wakaf*).

\(^{514}\) May the reader indulge the author for offering personal experience as evidence. 10 years being a Government of Singapore scholarship recipient, from junior high school to university, actually decreased the author’s academic performance, especially towards the end of the 10 years. A complex set of factors caused this underperformance, not least the author’s ‘epiphany’ of Singapore-Indonesia’s hate-love relationship and awareness of Singapore’s ‘neoliberal governmentality.’ (See the paper by the late Soek-Fang Sim, *Social Engineering the World’s Freest Economy: Neo-liberal capitalism and Neo-liberal Governmentality in Singapore*, Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge, Issue 10, Spring 2005, [http:/ /www.rhizomes.net](http://www.rhizomes.net) (7 October 2012). Despite the complex set of factors, the free-of-charge education did not help the author’s academic performance.


\(^{516}\) There is an intense hullabaloo regarding ‘the rise of Indonesia’s middle class’ in mainstream Indonesian newspapers. Two examples would be from the Roy Morgan Debnath Guharoy piece ‘Analysis: How big is Indonesia’s middle-class today?’
parents and/or state) pay for tuition expenses while a variety of philanthrophists pay for living expenses and on a case-to-case basis pay also for tuition fees, would seem satisfactory, especially in manifesting social solidarity recommended throughout many passages in the Qur'an.  

This balanced approach is currently practiced by a transnational Islamic movement operating in Indonesia, the United Islamic Cultural Centres of Indonesia (UICCI). Headquartered in Turkey, UICCI have established 8 dormitories throughout Indonesia. These dormitories take care of the living cost of students who then need only to worry about paying the tuition cost of their respective institutions of learning. What is most interesting about the dormitories is they provide in its housing facilities what most people in


517 Verses of Qur'an repeated ad nauseam by Ahmad Dahlan when founding Muhammadiyah, now the second largest mass-organization in Indonesia, are worth repeating. The Indonesian translation is given here as the author found it more forceful: Tahukah kamu (orang) yang mendustakan agama? Itulah orang yang menghardik anak yatim. Dan tidak menganjurkan makan orang miskin. Maka keesokanannya bagi orang-orang yang shalat (yaitu) orang-orang yang mulai dari shalatnya. Orang-orang yang berbuat riyah. Dan enggan (menolong dengan) barang berguna. In today’s context, what good is more useful than a sound education?

518 According to Omer Kucukgokce (interview, 4 October 2012), the current Medan UICCI manager, which the author verified through the UICCI website, UICCI now has 8 dormitories throughout Indonesia, 4 in Jakarta, 1 in Jogjakarta, 1 in Kalimantan, and 2 in Aceh. See UICCI website at [www.uicci.org] (13 October 2012).

519 The 'unit cost' approach to education funding has showed that education cost is not only limited to direct cost such as tuition fee, but also includes living cost such as housing fee and transportation fee. The existence of UICCI dormitories allows philanthrophists to help needy students, while ensuring students and parents be responsible for their academic progress as there is motivation to make their money used to pay for tuition fee worth it. The state has also contributed as education in any state learning institutions is heavily subsidized.

520 A list of noteworthy 'facilities' found in UICCI dormitories as listed in its brochure: study room, dining room, prayer room, computer room, shower room,
Indonesia will consider as luxuries\textsuperscript{521} including air-conditionings and swimming pools with the intention of making students comfortable so they could achieve their academic best.\textsuperscript{522} UICCI staff are also well treated, at least evidenced from the case of the current manager of Medan dormitory who is provided with a house and a car.\textsuperscript{523} The current funding of all the facilities enjoyed by the student and staff is provided by the generous UICCI Turkish supporters.\textsuperscript{524}

The addition of more dormitories in Indonesia, including the one in Medan, shows that UICCI seems to have some measure of success in its current financing model. What attracts the author is that after lengthy examination of available evidence (such as by Pscharopoulos above), and intense reflection on what should be done regarding financing of Islamic education in Indonesia in light of available evidence, UICCI model of education financing shows a way forward as it involves all stakeholders responsible for educational financing: state, students, parents, and philanthropists, in the quest for individual institutional survival and excellence as well as implementation social, national, and global responsibility. All

three meals a day, study excursion. The author obtained the brochure from Bulent Disbudak, a former Sumatra UICCI manager, when he requested the author to translate the Indonesian-language brochure into English. See also UICCI website.

\textsuperscript{521} Omer Kucukgokce, the current Medan UICCI manager, showed a similar conscientiousness of UICCI desire to provide ‘luxurious’ dormitory facilities for students when he rejected many houses that the author and several friends helped him find as candidates for the new Medan dormitory. An instance of ‘luxury’ preference would be the refusal to accept any house which does not have ‘sitting’ toilets. Upon further reflection by the author, UICCI does not prefer luxury. It merely tries to provide European style dormitory, which when compared to Indonesian style dormitory, could be rightly perceived as ‘luxury’.

\textsuperscript{522} A colleague, Yumasdaleni, helped the author to interview students (August 2012) in UICCI headquarter in Jakarta. She found that the students are very content living in UICCI dormitory, and their routines help them to perform well in their respective institutions of learning. Omer corroborates this finding in numerous encounters with the author. However, the author has not managed to conduct a detailed examination of increase in student academic achievement such as increase in grade before and after living in UICCI dormitory.

\textsuperscript{523} The house is located in Royal Sumatra, one of the most luxurious housing complexes in Medan. The car provided is Toyota Avanza.

\textsuperscript{524} Numerous discussions with Omer.
too often educational scholars and activists surrender to the either/or model, either really expensive Islamic education as a cost of being ‘modern’\textsuperscript{525}, or free-of-charge Islamic education as a cost of being ‘traditional’\textsuperscript{526}. UICCI seems to escape the embrace of neoliberalism\textsuperscript{527} and anachronism\textsuperscript{528} by providing students with real choice\textsuperscript{529} of what to do with their education. UICCI financing model is worthy of emulation by anyone or any institution concerned with proper financing of Islamic education\textsuperscript{530}.

The author would also make the following important remarks: as the facilities in UICCI to a large extent is free-of-charge due to the generosity of its Turkish Muslims supporters through zakat (alms) or infaq (gifts), while students (through parents and/or state) pay for tuition, this paper found that: (1) Qur’anic teaching of global solidarity, especially among Muslims, are validated in light of UICCI transnational educational effort\textsuperscript{531}; (2) Muslims could indeed contribute much more to the modern world if they are provided with the appropriate facilities\textsuperscript{532}; (3) Current nation-state system, through

\textsuperscript{525} For example, modern as in teaching general and religious science in an integrated curriculum which requires expensive laboratory along with capable and accordingly well-paid teachers. Without state subsidy, the cost for these facilities would only be able to be borne by well-off families.

\textsuperscript{526} Traditional here often means limiting the curriculum to religious curriculum such as Qur’an and Hadith memorization.

\textsuperscript{527} Neoliberalism, as in the Pscharopoulos approach, seems to suggest that education should be fully privatized, which is unsuitable for the poor majority of Indonesian Muslims.

\textsuperscript{528} Anachronism here refers to the current tendency among lay Muslims of dichotomizing religious and general sciences.

\textsuperscript{529} Real choice here means that students are free every step of the way in a real sense. ... two most important: free of charge, free to engage/disengage...

\textsuperscript{530} That is student should pay tuition fee, but have their living cost subsidised by philanthropists in a ‘luxurious’ academic setting.

\textsuperscript{531} Hence any ‘doom and gloom’ vision of Islam and Muslims should be taken with a grain of salt. Two hadiths which state that ‘Islam will always win’ and ‘Muslims are the best community’ can be offered not only as normative statement but a descriptive one. Islam and Muslim success should be measured by Islam and Muslim standard, global solidarity being key to this standard, not any resemblance of ‘Western modernity’.

\textsuperscript{532} For example the many scattered Indonesian scientists abroad who flourished under appropriate setting. The example of Habibie, the third Indonesian
limiting, does offer opportunities for creative Muslim philanthrophists and social workers to help needy Muslims; 

(4) Transnational Muslim movements are not limited to those ‘terroristic’ in nature, but include peaceful, peace loving, and peace spreading movement such as UICCI.

533 In Indonesia there is a near-consensus among Muslims scholars, such as those from the largest and second largest Muslim organization NU and Muhammadiyah, that reformers should work within the framework of nation-state.

534 Many other peaceful movements abound such as the Jamaat Tabligh, whose documentation by Barbara Metcalfe refutes any assertion otherwise. See Barbara Metcalf, Piety, Persuasion, and Politics: Deoband’s Model of Islamic Activism, [http://essays.ssrc.org] (15 October 2012).
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