

Christoph Behrens (Ed.)

Diversity Concepts – Diversity Politics



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2. 'Diversified Ways of Living and Loving' 33

3. 'Moving towards Recognition of Sexual Diversity in Germany' 47

4. 'Gender Troubles' – Gender Discrimination 57

5. Gender Equality 63

6. The Skill Training 'Education in Diversity' at CAU 69

7. ... 75

8. ... 81

9. ... 87

10. ... 93

11. ... 99

12. ... 105

13. ... 111

14. ... 117

15. ... 123

16. ... 129

17. ... 135

18. ... 141

19. ... 147

20. ... 153

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Content

Preface

1. Ideas and Stories of Otherness and Diversity 11
Christoph Behrens

German Perspectives

2. Diversity, Heterogeneity, Identity – a German Perspective 25
Uwe Sielert

**3. Pluralised Ways of Living and Loving:
Moving towards Recognition of Sexual Diversity in Germany** 31
Anja Henningsen

**4. ‘Gender Troubles’ – Gender Discourses and the Politics
for Gender Equality** 47
Britta Thege

5. The Skill Training ‘Education in Diversity’ at CAU 63
Uwe Sielert

Indonesian perspectives

**6. Towards Anomie?
The Problem of Political Identity in Indonesia Today** 81
Ade M. Wirasenjaya

7. Democracy, Plural Society and Social Inclusion – The Example Yogyakarta	87
Sugito	
<hr/>	
8. Individualization and LGBTI – A new Topic for Political and Religious Discourse in Indonesia	99
Takdir Ali Mukti	
<hr/>	
9. The Gender Discourse in Indonesia	117
Nur Azizah	
<hr/>	
10. Learning about Diversity: Experiences from the IPIREL Program at UMY	133
Dian Azmawati, Ratih Herningtyas, Grace Lestariana Wonoadi	
<hr/>	
<i>Prospects</i>	
<hr/>	
11. Rethinking Bhineka Tunggal Ika: Perspectives for a Culture of Diversity in Indonesia	143
Anwar Kholid, Wulan Widayarsi	
<hr/>	
12. At the Very Beginning	157
Christoph Behrens, Hans-Peter Ehmke	

Authors	171
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Dian Azmawati, Ratih Herningtyas, Grace Lestariana Wonoadi

Learning about Diversity: Experiences from the IPIREL Program at UMY

I. Introduction

The value of a peaceful living together in harmony in a diverse society must be transferred from one generation to the next. Muhammadiyah as one of the big Islamic social organisations in Indonesia with a modern understanding of Islam has the responsibility to create harmony with its programs and institutions, particularly in the field of education⁶⁰.

Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY) stands for the awareness that we do not only live as Indonesian Moslems, but also as Indonesian citizens and in an international context. Students within the International Program of International Relations (IPIREL) need education to become professionals in their fields, and they must be prepared as well to face international and global challenges. Therefore it is essential to meet people from other cultural context and to understand different cul-

⁶⁰ Muhammadiyah was founded by Muhammad Darwis, later known as KH Ahmad Dahlan, on 18 November 1912 in the *kampung* (village) Kauman in Yogyakarta. As a *Khatib* (Islamic preacher in a mosque) for the *Kraton* (Royal Court) of Yogyakarta, Darwis aimed at bringing people back to live a 'pure' Islam, as taught in Quran and hadits. As one of the big Islamic organizations in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah until today follows his vision to build a 'trully Islamic society'; people are encouraged to use Quran and hadits as guidance for their life. This includes, as stated in Muhammadiyah's mission, to enforce *tauhid* (the belief in one god), and to actively spread Islamic belief.

tures and values as a prerequisite to build up social relations beyond the own or regional community.

II. IPIREL Program

To meet these objectives, IPIREL program provides the framework. It has established 2004 as the first international program at Muhammadiyah University Yogyakarta.

Learning and understanding diversity at IPIREL can be seen from two different perspectives. From an inside perspective, IPIREL provides excellent opportunity to learn about diversity through its courses, the atmosphere on the campus, research projects, as well as the management of the program. From an outside perspective IPIREL is part of a strategy to face global challenges and to qualify graduates in an optimal way, for example through student mobility programs, mobility programs, social integration and community engagement.

IPIREL has reached some notable experiences in developing international courses that contribute to learning and understanding diversity. The IPIREL curriculum is competency based and basically follows the UMY curriculum for International Relations; it is in line with the national curriculum of Indonesia and comprises general courses, basic courses, competences courses, elective courses, and language elective courses. As an international program, IPIREL aims to provide international standards for the enrolled students. The curriculum is therefore also adjusted to international curricula, especially of associated international universities, so that UMY students can participate in exchange programs.

Students and lecturers are obligated to use English in their daily activities. Students are also required to extend their language capacity in English or to learn other foreign languages they are interested in. Goal is to get them accustomed to the communication standards of international organizations. As the result, the English proficiency of IPIREL students is above the level of other students at UMY due to the fact that English Proficiency is the main requirement to participate in exchange program, the number of IPIREL students who can join exchange

grams is significantly higher compared to students from other programs. The English capacity of lecturers is monitored through TOEFL or IELTS tests to ensure that the learning and teaching process is in line with international standards. Nevertheless, it remains our biggest challenge to further increase foreign language proficiency of lecturers.

To provide an academic atmosphere, IPIREL encourages occasions for lecturers and students to mutually discuss interesting topics in seminars, talk shows, research projects, competitions, and others. As lecturers and students come from different ethnic, cultural and social background, such events enhance sensibility diversity issues.

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, diversity means the state of having people in a group or organization, who belong to different races or cultures. This definition reflects quite well the understanding of diversity within IPIREL and UMY. An often used, related term in Muhammadiyah is multiculturalism. It is indeed a multicultural setting that can be found in IPIREL. Students come from all over Indonesia. The diversity of the country with its hundreds of ethnics, languages and local cultures can be found among the 450 active students in the program and the more than 22.000 students at UMY. In terms of ethnics, languages and cultures, diversity is thus part of the daily life. Important aspects in experiencing this diversity are the management of interaction and cooperation across cultural borders, and possibilities to solve conflicts. In the future, research and development should be fostered to allow still broader experiences and learning on diversity issues.

The university has established a policy dealing with learning and understanding diversity. UMY is an Islamic university, but open also for non-Muslim students; in the same way Muhammadiyah's social institutions are not exclusively set up for Muslims, but for the general public. But: at UMY the number of non-Muslim students is still low. The dominating public perception sees it as a university for Muslims and is thus often considered as exclusive. Non-Muslim students have to follow the academic curriculum including Islamic courses and values. This is often misunderstood. The university has clarified that non-Muslim students will learn about Islamic values from an academic perspective and that this does not mean that they would be forced to believe. In addition, Islam as a religion is in public perception

currently often associated with backwardness, violence, and terrorism. To overcome these prejudices, UMY has to strengthen efforts to clarify and to demonstrate in its activities that Islam teaches brotherhood and peace, and aims at creating harmonious relationship among the all mankind. The experience of studying at UMY will foster a proper understanding of Islam as *rahmattanlil'alam*, a blessing to the whole world and all mankind.

IPIREL has undertaken strong efforts to strengthen international student mobility, staff mobility, as well as programs for social integration and community engagement. Indonesian students are encouraged and supported to join an exchange program at least once during their studies. Student exchange encompasses among others excursions, international internships, summer courses, credit transfer and double degree programs with overseas partner universities. The activities are expected to provide international experience that will sharpen the view on global challenges, and support cross cultural understanding. Students joining student mobility programs have grown more confident, open-minded, flexible, adaptive and tolerant. They also show a remarkable psychological flexibility. In the same way, international students who join an exchange program at UMY need to adjust to the local culture in Yogyakarta. Experiences from foreign students show that this needs some adaptation, particularly for those who are not muslims. But in discussions and daily interaction on the campus, foreign students experience a stay at UMY as interesting and fruitful and the university – often in contrast to their expectations – as modern, open minded and progressive.

Lecturers enjoy opportunities to work for a time overseas, with organizational support by IPIREL and funding by the university⁶¹. These are important according to Altbach's and Knight's concept on internationalization of higher education (Altbach and Knight: 2007), aiming at adjusting education with global challenges, which is a growing trend in today's 'shrinking world' (Nye and Bell: 1990). Despite objections based among others on US foreign policy since the Cold War (Campbell: 2005) or a possible strong orientation of universities on generating

⁶¹ Within its internationalization programs, UMY has invested more than 12 billion rupiah every year annually to support staff mobility. The programs cover among others Sabbatical Leave, Research Collaboration, to work as Visiting Lecturer, participation in International Conferences and membership in International Associations.

additional profit, from our point of view internationalization of higher education has clear benefits: it leads to direct encounters with different cultures, supports mutual understanding, and tempers chauvinism and ultranationalism. Also a better international image and broader competence in solving problems and conflict can be achieved (Webb: 1999; Turpin/Iredale/Crinnion: 2002; Trilokekar: 2010; Horie: 2002).

An increasing number of UMY lecturers thus experiences cross cultural encounters. They are able to enhance their knowledge, language skills, to develop psychological flexibility and tolerance in interaction with foreigners. The lecturers gain knowledge about international academic standards in teaching and research that can be used as benchmarks for further development of UMY after their return.

However, the running programs still provide a too small capacity. Still less than 50% of IPIREL students get an opportunity for international experience abroad. Problems are to find partner universities with matching academic programs, either due to the restricting national regulations of Indonesia, or because partner universities can provide a limited capacity only (also because they have reached a high level of internationalization and cooperate with various partner universities already). Taking a course abroad or joining mobility programs also requires funds from students – given their economic situation, some would need support by scholarships to take part in an international program. A solution could be here to follow examples from other countries, where support for international academic exchange has priority due to the importance for a country's human resource development and future economic competitiveness in a globalized world. The government, but also the business sector as sponsor, based on a commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR) can play here an active role (Yang: 2013). For Indonesia as emerging economy, such a strategy would be even more important.

A new idea in context of internationalization activities is the project of an International Summer School. We expect to accommodate with such a format needs of students from abroad to get the opportunity to join short term complementary courses. More international students and lecturers thus could be given opportunity to directly interact with Indonesian students and lecturers beyond fixed schemes of regular academic formats. We also expect further references and experiences for

UMY and for IPIREL for teaching and learning on issues of diversity. A pilot project involved 10 students from the IPIREL program and 13 students from Austria, Russia and Germany. Topics were cultural, traditional, and religious values in development, the concept of learning organization and management of diversity. Experiences were positive as 85% participants expressed their high satisfaction with the program. Based on this experience, IPIREL is planning further Summer Programs on Peace and Intercultural Understanding in a Changing Society as an opportunity for young people to learn about diversity. The participants shall learn and discuss facts on diversity in our different societies, and reflect it based on theoretical framework⁶². An interesting focus for future Summer Schools could be language as tool for communication that also represents socio-cultural values of its users⁶³.

III. Outlook

IPIREL will need in the future more support by the university to develop academic quality. Extension of capacity to learn foreign languages should become a priority in order to close step by step ranks with international standards. This will be crucial as well to attract more students from abroad to come to UMY. More opportunities for lecturers to gain international experiences and to develop their language proficiency in overseas programs must be provided through opportunities to take leave or to diminish teaching obligations.

⁶² Despite the notion of the 'end of history' after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist block, world has not become more peaceful, democratic or liberal, but saw new conflicts, wars and terrorism arising. Western civilization finds itself increasingly challenged by others, especially by Islam and China (Huntington, 1996). A big problem in this context is the assumption of a single consistent "West" and a single consistent "Islam" – it masks the diversity within both 'worlds' that are myriad (Chausovsky, 2016). Radicals on both sides exaggerate difference towards a "fight for survival" and use it for political agenda, perpetuating the *clash regime*, that Behrens has outlined in chapter 1.

⁶³ On the issue of language see Sugito in chapter 7.

Teaching staff at UMY must become more international. The university needs to invite more foreign lecturers - under internationally competitive conditions. Cooperation for lecturer exchange must be extended and administrative processes simplified. A presence of international lecturers will be a strong tool to foster internationalization at IPIREL, as it leads to new possibilities to offer international experiences, already by learning on our campus. We expect new impulses as well for sharing teaching experiences, research and international cooperation. The first experiences of IPIREL with inviting foreign lecturers to teach in Yogyakarta so far were notably positive. The guest lecturers provided for IPIREL students exciting teaching and learning experiences and contributed to increasing confidence and an improvement of English skills of the students through the direct interaction.

Learning and understanding diversity within the framework of the IPIREL program at UMY in cooperation with partners abroad has the potential to become a field of studying with broad strategic value for the entire university, following the credo of UMY to create a link between academic excellence and Islamic values (*'unggul-danislami'*). IPIREL combines the preparation to master most recent scientific and technological progress with guidance in character building towards an open-minded, flexible, adaptive and tolerant individual. Graduates will value integrity, motivation, and a moral foundation for their future paths in life. This combination reflects our understanding of a modern Islamic University: it is a place for growth of a personality (a) that lives in a modern world in awareness of the own responsibility towards God and fellow humans, (b) that acts under such an ethical consciousness and contributes actively to a positive development of humanity, and (c) that faces diversity in a productive way by emphasizing commonalities instead of differences such as religion, ethnic or cultural background, and by solving conflicts in a peaceful way.

Under this perspective, learning within the IPIREL program is attractive and unique and offers an appealing way to get prepared for the chances and the challenges of globalization.

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