

EMPOWERING INDONESIAN MUSLIM WOMEN WITH ISLAMIC LITERACY: A PERSPECTIVE ON ADULT EDUCATION THEORIES

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Abstract: *The issue of women empowerment in Indonesia has gotten a lot of attention since women are thought to be very prone to social disadvantages. This paper discusses women empowerment for Indonesian Muslim with Islamic literacy and education for social change analyzed by adult education theories. After studying some literatures, the writer is able to elaborate the concept of adult education, how adult education with Islamic literacy could empower Muslim women, the dilemma emerging from the concept of empowerment in Islamic education in the study case. In addition, the paper also investigates the possibilities of women empowerment through Islamic education for social change. After the issues are discoursed, this paper concludes that adult education with Islamic literacy contributes to their self-development and self-actualisation which empower Muslim women intellectually and professionally which give Muslim women comprehensive knowledge as an individual and as a part of society. Besides, the adult education with Islamic literacy also works in social transformation through dissemination of Islamic knowledge within the society. Since Muslim women have the biggest number in Indonesia, it is very important to propose the professional Islamic education for Muslim women as the ultimate solution to overcome Muslim women's problems in Indonesia.*

Keywords: *Muslim women empowerment, Islamic literacy, adult education*

Abstrak: Isu pemberdayaan perempuan di Indonesia banyak mendapat perhatian karena perempuan dianggap sangat rentan terhadap ketidakadilan sosial. Penelitian ini membahas tentang pemberdayaan perempuan muslim Indonesia dengan pendidikan dan literasi Islam untuk perubahan sosial yang dianalisis dengan teori pendidikan orang dewasa (*adult education theory*). Setelah meriviu beberapa tinjauan pustaka, penulis dapat mengelaborasi konsep pendidikan orang dewasa, bagaimana pendidikan orang dewasa dikombinasikan dengan literasi Islam dapat memberdayakan perempuan muslim, dan dilema yang muncul dari konsep pemberdayaan dalam pendidikan Islam dalam studi kasus. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga mengkaji potensi pemberdayaan perempuan melalui pendidikan Islam dapat membawa perubahan sosial. Setelah dianalisis, penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pendidikan orang dewasa dengan literasi Islam berkontribusi pada pengembangan diri dan aktualisasi diri perempuan muslim yang memberdayakan mereka secara intelektual dan profesional dan memberi perempuan pengetahuan yang komprehensif sebagai individu dan sebagai bagian dari masyarakat. Selain itu, pendidikan orang dewasa dengan literasi Islam juga berperan dalam transformasi sosial melalui penyebaran ilmu pengetahuan Islam di masyarakat. Mengingat perempuan muslim memiliki jumlah terbesar di Indonesia, maka sangat penting untuk mengusulkan pendidikan Islam profesional bagi perempuan muslim sebagai solusi utama untuk mengatasi permasalahan perempuan muslim di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Pemberdayaan Perempuan Muslim, Literasi Islam, Pendidikan Orang Dewasa

INTRODUCTION

Issue of women empowerment in Indonesia has gotten a lot of attention particularly from government since women are seems very prone to social disadvantages. Some problems that are always associated with women in Indonesia are violation, raping, human trafficking, backwardness, divorce, and poverty. Thus, to liberate them from such issues, the idea of women empowerment is

encouraged. According to Parvanova (2012), women's empowerment depends largely on their political, social and economic independence and self-determination as well as on their active participation in the political and public spheres. Parvanova's argument might be different from how Islamic principle view women's empowerment. This paper will draw the concept of adult education theories and how it influences the practice of Islamic education and literacy in wider society described in the given study case (Islamic study group). Moreover, it will also explore how adult education through Islamic study group could empower Muslim women for social change.

Description of the Case

I began studying basic Islamic knowledge when I joined Islamic study group in a university level. After graduated, I joined the study group in the community. This Islamic study group was an informal adult education where Islamic education and literacy were applied in the teaching and learning process. There were teachers who acted as mentors and provided sequential curriculum of Islamic knowledge and taught them to students. Furthermore, the students were clustered into 4-5 participants in one group. The participants were coming from different background. There were university students, working women, stay-home mother etc. The level of education background also varied. Members of each group were determined by their similarity. Normally, in one group, students were gathered based on the level of education considering the students' capability of knowledge acquisition. Universities students, working women and stay-home mother could be put together in the same group if they have similar capabilities to absorb the materials. Less educated women were also accommodated and would be conjoined together.

The study group was commonly held once a week and there was also a big group gathering held once in a month. The materials were about Islamic literacy and were given to participants such as knowledge of how to live as Muslim individually and socially. The study group not only conducted a small circle group, but also carried on seminars, workshop and women forum to upgrade the participants' life skills and sometime voice women issues. Besides, the study group also held voluntary activities within society such as doing charity.

In addition, the Islamic study group is growing bigger now in online platform. Some professional Muslim women and mothers established informal online school which aims to empower women with Islamic understanding in order to have fulfilled lives. They provide curriculum combined with Islamic teaching that are arranged in different classes and level. Some examples of the online study groups are *Sekolah Ibu Profesional* (Profesional Mother School) founded by Septi Peni Wulandani and *Bengkel Diri* founded by Ummu Balqis.

Understanding Adult Education

After engaging with several resources regarding adult learning, I come to know that adult education has special term to address the teaching and learning method. If we are used to pedagogy,

adult education is called andragogy. It is discussed in Knowles (1984) asserting that andragogical principle uses self-directed learning when teaching adult learners. He views self-directed learning is for self-development (Knowles, 1984). Knowles's opinion about self-directed learning is more practical and individual. He theorizes andragogical principle when explaining how adults learn or acquire knowledge. In addition, he clearly elaborated how adult could maximize their potentiality as independent learners, what adults should apply to be able to learn effectively. The idea is about practice of learning and teaching for adult learners.

It is interesting to know that self-directed learning in adult education is not only applied for human professional development such as to gain information and knowledge for their professional practice. Another theorist view self-directed learning as a method for social and political change (Brookfield, 1993). Brookfield thinks self-directed learning in a more complicated way, not just practical in pedagogy but more critical outside the classroom. He assumes that adult education (self-directedness) can contribute to social political change. The adults' voices and intellects are the important strategic in building a critical practice of education whose effects touch the massive society.

My Adult Education Tradition and My View of Adult Education

After reflecting to my experiences and some theories, I am finally able to map my own tradition in terms of adult education and acknowledge the purpose of this learning. Adult education is very important for me because it opens my insight that as an adult learner, we do not only grow individually for personal achievement but we do also take part in social transformation. These are actually my basic reasons of why adult education matters to me.

When it comes to self-development or actualization, I want to highlight six principles of andragogy by Knowles (1984) which are the need to know, learner's self-concept, role of experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation. Answering these principles helps me to discover my aims when I want to learn something new. It also give me some views how to improve myself either in workplace or community as Knowles said that the purpose adult education is for self-development/actualization. Adult education develops me to be better human being who have personal dreams, fulfillment, even happiness.

Secondly, it also gives me understanding that we are social creatures who live in social structure that contribute to social change like Brookfield and Freire argued that is adult education is for social change and transformation. Therefore, it is very selfish if we just grow bigger alone without looking out of our comfort zone. There are still many people who live in marginalized society that need to help. As an adult learner, I realize that I should contribute to social transformation for the betterment of both my personal life and social life.

After discovering my tradition in adult education, my view about adult education is getting complicated because it is closely related to social change. The famous theorists who often explore this

issue are Brookfield within his self-directed learning, Mezirow with his transformative learning and Paulo Freire with his critical pedagogy. Brookfield's self-directed learning as I discussed above thinks adult's self-directed learning as a power or political idea which can alter the social life massively through some practical and critical education agenda (Brookfield, 1993), while Mezirow theorize transformative learning as the beginning of social change. He asserting transformative learning which is the process of effecting change in a *frame of reference*; the structures of assumptions such as concepts, values, beliefs, judgments (Mezirow, 1997). A transformative learner will reject ideas that do not fit to their frame of reference and vice versa. Transformative learning emerges from one's personal experience and critical reflection who sees there was a rapid social change in society which weaken old traditional authority hence individuals are supposed to prepare their own decision (Mezirow, 1994).

In critical pedagogy, Freire apply praxis when interacting with the oppressed as his students. Freire's praxis is mentioned in Jarvis (1987) claiming that praxis is the combination between reflection and action, to help the participants to put knowledge into practice. To be clearer, praxis is a way to acknowledge and reflect on our personal concerns and publicize them as social issues which is then called action. In this reflection and action happens critical analysis toward our social reality and it is an ongoing process leading to a social change. Freire also address banking concept in education. In this concept, the teachers dominate the learning process with showing one-way interaction. There is no room for students to reflect to themselves regarding what is happening in their social reality now. There is no room where everyone can analyse the subjects and matters around them in a critical way hence they might not aware of the social realities occurring now. Moreover, this banking approach might not solve every problem because the teachers seemingly do not allow and encourage students to critically analyse the problem or develop their own thinking process.

DISCUSSION

A. Adult Education with Islamic Literacy for Muslim Women Empowerment

There are some views of women's issues and empowerment in Indonesia. Parvanova (2012) assumed women's empowerment is closely linked to ways and strategies of women activists to deconstruct common gender relations and to revise existing gender hierarchies inside the Indonesian state. Parvanova's idea seems to voicing gender inequality. However, I want to present another point of view of what the real causes of women's backwardness faced by Indonesian Muslim women by unpacking my voluntary project when dealing with Muslim women from various backgrounds in West Sulawesi. I personally argue that women's backwardness in Indonesia are caused by the ignorance of Islamic principles. Hence, the idea of women empowerment is closely related to Islamic principles.

The goal of adult education is to help the individual become a more autonomous thinking by

learning to negotiate his or her own values, meaning, and purpose rather than uncritically acting on those of others (Mezirow, 1997). Adult education shapes us to be a thinker rather than a follower. The Islamic study group teaches the students to be an individual thinker who applies Islamic principles as filter when facing problems in life. This women study group uses Islamic literacy analysis when viewing social problems.

Theorists view literacy is what people do with reading, writing, and texts in real world contexts and why they do it (Perry, 2012). Barton and Hamilton (2000) cited in Perry (2012) argued that literacy with practices involve more than actions with texts; practices connect to, and are shaped by, values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships. Barton and Hamilton (2000) cited in Perry (2012) outlined the nature of literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices, also frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making. Connecting this theory with Islamic study give us understanding that Islamic literacy can be defined as the activity where people reading, writing, discussing, exploring Islamic knowledge for taking it into action. There are social goals and cultural practices in the process of learning acquired by the groups to form individual and social change within society. Muslim women empowerment through Islamic literacy is thought to be able to solve the main issues faced by Indonesian Muslim women. They will be empowered individually and as a group for social transformation in Islamic way.

Adult Education with Islamic Literacy for Self-Development and Actualisation

One of the characteristics of adult education formulated by Knowles (1984) is the need to know. In this Islamic study group, each participant has known what they are learning and what the purpose of the learning is. The main aim of the study group is to change students to be more pious with applying Islamic personalities in their daily lives. The students are hoped to transform to be better human being such as more knowledgeable in both Islamic, general, and their disciplinary knowledge. If they study in a university, they should be excellent in their academic performance. If they are working, they should be professional in their work. If they are just stay at home, they should be responsible with their role as a wife and mother. Being professional or doing the best in every action reflects the Islamic teaching. In brief, the purpose of this study group is for self-development either as a person who more devotes to the God or as person is more capable in his/her activities.

Furthermore, this Islamic study group sometimes provides professional training session for members who want to do business especially the members who need a job. We teach how to do business in Islamic way rooted from Islamic economy principles. Besides, we also hold professional counselling work for enhancing members' capabilities as a mother, wife, or professional worker. This is done to empower the members in economic aspect to prevent them from being a burden of society. However, this is not to make every woman leave their homes and ignore their responsibilities as

caretaker and manager of household which is divined by Islamic principles. The aim of the activity is to ensure each member has financial support and better life as proposed by Knowles (1984) one of the purposes of adult education is the adults have learning orientation such as getting involved in organisation to shape their ability, to enhance their quality of life, and to increase competence.

Adult Education with Islamic Literacy for Social Transformation

When talking about adult education for social transformation, Freire's praxis represents the idea. Freire in Jarvis (1987) addressed praxis, the combination between reflection and action where people act on social reality surrounding it with a view to transform it. In this Islamic study group, the students are not only taught for self-development, but they should contribute to change the society. It starts from students' personal problems. The praxis activity is teaching members to think critically. The aim is to liberate women from stupidity and backwardness due to the lack of Islamic knowledge and ability to capture social reality. Hence students are sometimes asked to reflect on their daily life or facts they see in the media showing that there are many unideal conditions that need to change. The study group grows larger and becomes Islamic activism especially for voicing women issues.

One of the effects of this Islamic knowledge acquisition, is the knowledge should be spread to humankind. This Islamic knowledge dissemination literally called *da'wa* (invitation), the term is used to invite or call people to return to Islam and be more devout and pious (Jouili and Amir-Moazami, 2006). However, ideally, the gained Islamic knowledge should be practiced individually first, before spread it to other people as defined by Vella (2002), praxis is simply action with reflection or learning by doing. Learners begin with analysing the existing knowledge and ideas and ask them to practice in their daily life.

This reflection is a process of acknowledging or being conscious with both our personal matters and social realities. *Da'wa* activity is described as self-awareness where an individual realizes both personal and social problems then lead them to act. Freire (1972) in Jarvis (1987) called it "conscientization" referring to the process in which men achieve deepening awareness both socio-cultural reality occurring in their lives and of their capacity to alter that reality. The members of the Islamic study group are taught to have that "conscientization" hence they become used to problematize their personal concerns and social realities. They speak out of the problem and demand a change.

B. The Dilemma Emerging Within the Case

Inviting people to learn Islamic knowledge also meets impediment. Some of them are very busy and especially if they are very attached to their old traditional thinking. Instilling Islamic knowledge is not easy after all. It becomes a dilemma when talking about self-transformation. They do not ready to accept the values and leaving their old habits for example wearing proper hijab to cover their body. Mezirow (1997) portrayed this as the process of transformative learning which is the

process of effecting change in a *frame of reference*; the structures of assumptions such as concepts, values, beliefs, judgments. Some members decided to stop because they reject the ideas that do not fit to their frame of reference even though they are Muslim. The members who choose to continue in the study group have experienced perspective transformation as Mezirow (1994) defined a paradigm or world-view shift since they gradually accept Islam as a way of life.

Transformative learning emerges from one's personal experience and critical reflection who sees there was a rapid social change in society which weaken old traditional authority hence individuals are supposed to prepare their own decision (Mezirow, 1994). However, the dilemma still clouds my mind. I am not confident if they will easily accept the materials. Some of them rationally believe the truth of Islamic teaching but they just want to accept Islamic values which are fit to an individual's condition based on the reason that Islamic laws are also interpreted differently by many Muslim Scholars. This leads to the idea confrontation which happening in our thinking and reflection process. People critically examine whether their beliefs, assumptions, judgements are correct and working well in their lives (Mezirow, 1994).

The society stigma also influences the dilemma. Society thinks committed Muslim women as a sign of backwardness and irrationality and the view of radical Islam which frighten the learners. The adult learners sometimes do not use their critical judgments and reflections toward every experience they face. We occasionally act on others' values, beliefs, judgments which avoid us from being an independent thinker. This might reflect what Mezirow (1994) thought as disorienting dilemma of which learners frequently critique the gained assumptions and are confused to determine whether the new beliefs will be functional in our live.

C. The Possibilities of Muslim Women Empowerment through Adult Education with Islamic Literacy for Social Change

Since this study group has presented the image of intellectual Muslim women movement, they want to detach Muslim women from the image of backwardness and irrationality. Brookfield (2003) addressed that the most valuable adult education work within social movement is the need for adult educator to behave as organic intellectual which is a person who stay attuned to the best of what mainstream has to offer such as paradigm, viewpoint, and methods should be criticized. Brookfield's view is a living proof how this adult education has empowered Muslim women intellectually thus they can disassociate the stereotype by showing counter-image of educated, devout, and professional Muslim women. This informal adult education has revived Muslim women from backwardness. With Islamic literacy, they apply self-directed learning as Brookfield (1993) once stated that this concept is technically enhancing critical practice of adult education that take role in awakening critical spirit of adults.

It has been discussed how Islamic literacy could empower Muslim women intellectually and

professionally. This informal adult education using Islamic literacy gives two functions as for self-development and actualization introduced by Knowles (1984) and for social change and transformation proposed by Freire and Brookfield. However, there are always positive and negative impacts of the implementation. Positively, it is applicable to transform Muslim women especially who live in West Sulawesi, a backward province. This informal women education can be an affordable way for those who are limited by resources. They can have Islamic knowledge to be more educated and pious person and get professional development help. The group activism also contributes to enlighten the society who lives in the backwardness. Meanwhile, the negative side shows the pressures and challenges this movement gotten from general society who still stigmatizes Islam as the idea of backwardness and some people who still associate Islam with gender inequality. Nevertheless, this adult education via Islamic literacy is still possible to empower Muslim women and could contribute to social change through Islamic *da'wa* (dissemination of Islamic knowledge) within large society.

CONCLUSION

Getting involved in informal adult education with Islamic literacy gives me a comprehensive understanding that Muslim women's backwardness can be solved by implementing Islamic principles in our daily lives. The adult education with Islamic literacy contributes to their self-development and actualisation which empower Muslim women intellectually and professionally. Besides, the adult education with Islamic literacy also works in social transformation through dissemination of Islamic knowledge within the society. Since Muslim women have the biggest number in Indonesia, it is very important to propose the professional Islamic education for Muslim women as the ultimate solution to overcome Muslim women's backwardness in Indonesia.

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