



CONTEMPLATIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING FOR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: Islamic higher education is supposed to develop Indonesians' characters due to its focus on teaching Islam. Moreover, the number of Islamic higher education institutions is vast, reaching 777. Indeed, their contribution to the character development of Indonesians may be significant. However, occurring religious-based prejudices and conflicts, as well as a high index of corruption, show the paradoxes and challenges of Islamic higher education. Although there has been no research demonstrating a statistically significant correlation between Islamic teaching and crime rate or moral issues, educators in Islamic higher education institutions should reflect on what should be done to enhance their leverage on character education. In this paper, two concepts of contemplative learning and transformative learning are discussed to find feasible ways of teaching Islam in the challenging contemporary world. Contemplative and transformative learning in character development requires educators to implement mindfulness and connectedness through integrating all entities of learners' cognition, emotion, intuition, and body, interrelating multi-disciplines, and connecting learning to the real world.

Keywords: contemplative learning, transformative learning, character development, Islamic higher education

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v24i1.384>

Introduction

IN THIS CONTEMPORARY and rapidly changing society characterized by increasing globalization and advancing knowledge and technologies in contrast to issues of psychological well-being, economic, political, social, cultural, and environmental

unsustainability, contemplative and transformative learning is crucial in character education. Contemplative and transformative learning aims to create changes in students' perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors that may lead to not only personal well-being but also changes for justice and sustainability. Learning is supposed to have the power to transform people because the overall teaching and learning deal with humans. However, the high-stake testing system and education standardization challenge such power of learning. Students are preoccupied with objectives of passing the minimum grade of examination, achieving high marks, and holding credentials for finding employment or pursuing further studies. Learning aims to succeed in assessment and make a living. As a result, education might have created technical and mechanical citizens who may lack emotion and spirit embodied in their experiences of distress, unsustainable consumption, cultural marginalization, natural exploitation, and endless conflicts, albeit their advanced achievement in sciences and technologies.

In the Indonesian curriculum, character education has been embedded in at least two compulsory subjects of civic education and religious education, which have been taught from elementary grades to higher education. However, doubts have often been raised about the role of civic education and religious education. The increasing rate of crime, corruption, and religious-based conflicts and violence poses a question about the impact of civic education and religious education on character development. The rising crime rate was evident in the increasing number of crimes, for example, from 332,490 in 2010 to 347,605 in 2011.¹ The iceberg phenomenon of corruption frequently shown in media also indicates the increasing moral degradation in Indonesia. The remarkable Transparency International's survey on perceptions about corruption in 2018 estimated that Indonesia came 89 out of 180 ranks with a score of 38, reflecting a very high corruption rate

¹ Indonesian Statistics, "Jumlah Tindak Pidana Menurut Kepolisian Daerah, 2010-2011," last modified 2012, accessed March 30, 2019, http://www.bps.go.id/tab_sub/view.php?tabel=1&daftar=1&id_subyek=34¬ab=1.

in the public sector.² Moreover, in the last two decades, religious-based conflicts and violence have occurred in many regions in Indonesia. The disputes have ruined social harmony, claimed many lives, destabilized national security, and potentially broken up the unity of the country.³ Another intricate issue is gender bias driving violence against women. The National Commission on Violence against Women reported that the number of violence against women increased by 14% from 348,466 cases in 2018 to 406,178 cases in 2019.⁴ The real number of violence against women is higher because many of them are not reported. Many people consider domestic violence against women a private issue. Gender-biased interpretation of religious texts such as the Qur'an and Hadits is often used to justify domestic violence against women.

Even though the increasing rate of crimes, corruption, and religious-based conflicts and violence in Indonesia is a complex issue associated not only with education but also many other factors, the Indonesian government has been concerned about the role of compulsory civic education and religious education in character development. Such concern about civic education and religious education has been exacerbated. The 2018 survey in 34 provinces that involved 426 teachers in Islamic schools showed that 61.74% of the respondents demonstrated intolerant perceptions against the followers of other religions, and 65.75% of them demonstrated prejudiced attitudes against internal differences in Islam.⁵ Indeed, some argues that Indonesian

² Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2018," [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org/cpi2018), accessed March 30, 2019, <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018>.

³ Suprapto, *Ethno-Religious Segregation & the Dynamics of Hindu-Muslim Relation in Lombok Indonesia* (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2014), 1.

⁴ Komnas Perempuan, "Korban Bersuara, Data Bicara: Sahkan RUU Penghapusan Kekerasan Seksual Sebagai Wujud Komitmen Negara," last modified May 12, 2019, accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.komnasperempuan.go.id/read-news-catatan-tahunan-kekerasan-terhadap-perempuan-2019>.

⁵ PPIM UIN Jakarta, *Sikap Keberagamaan Guru Madrasah: Pentingnya Memperkuat Moderasi Islam*, Policy Brief Series 1, no. 2, 2019, accessed June 14, 2019, <https://conveyindonesia.com/publication/convey-report/>.

educational practices have been ineffective in nurturing students' character that results in social problems.⁶

Indoctrination and rote learning have been significantly applied in Islamic higher education. On the other hand, critical approaches regarding critical reading and rational discussion between text and context have been overlooked. This dogmatic approach seems to have a small impact on students' character development. Therefore, the Ministry of National Education previously termed the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, two national government bodies that centrally govern 4,696 higher education institutions in Indonesia, have emphasized the integration of character education in all courses in addition to compulsory classes of civic education and religious education. However, although the discourse about the inclusion of character education in all classes has been conducted in ample seminars, conferences, and training, Indonesian lecturers have been still trying to find pedagogical strategies to do the integration. For instance, lecturers teaching STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) related courses find it challenging to integrate character education into their teaching content.

Contemplative learning and transformative learning have been robustly studied in Western education contexts.⁷ However,

⁶ Eka, "Revisiting Character Education from Islamic Perspective: A Quest for Character-Based Education in Indonesia," *Ullumuna* 21, no. 1 (October 27, 2017): 1–33, accessed January 8, 2020, <https://ulumuna.or.id/index.php/ujis/article/view/2>.

⁷ See Olen Gunnlaugson et al., *Contemplative Learning and Inquiry Across Disciplines* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014); Lea Waters et al., "Contemplative Education: A Systematic, Evidence-Based Review of The Effect of Meditation Interventions in Schools," *Educational Psychology Review* 27 (2015): 103–134, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.libproxy.albany.edu/>; John P. Miller, "Contemplation: The Soul's Way of Knowing," in *Contemplative Learning and Inquiry Across Disciplines*, ed. Olen Gunnlaugson et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 69–80; David Kahane, "Learning about Obligation, Compassion, and Global Justice: The Place of Contemplative Pedagogy," in *Contemplative Learning and Inquiry Across Disciplines*, ed. Olen Gunnlaugson et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 119–132; Kelly Denton-Borhaug and Daniel Jasper, "Memoir as Contemplative Practice for Peace and Justice," *International Journal of Critical*

studies of contemplative learning and transformative learning in Indonesian Islamic higher education have been rare although their practices exist. Besides, contemplative learning and transformative learning are two different learning methods, and thus they have been studied separately. Through a philosophical-reflective approach to existing literature and practices, contemplative and transformative learning is proposed in this paper as one integrated learning method for character development in Islamic higher education.

Contemplative Learning

Contemplative studies are a new academic discipline. Scholar-practitioners have investigated contemplation from the world wisdom traditions such as Sufi, Buddhist, Vedantic, Taoist, Quaker, Christian, and ancient Greek as well as from perspectives in neurophenomenology, cognitive science, positive psychology, perennial philosophy, art studies, environmental studies, ethics, and moral education.⁸

There are several definitions of contemplative learning. According to Roeser and Pack, contemplative learning is "a set of practices that may foster a particular form of awareness in students, forms conducive to the conscious motivation and regulation of learning, and also to freedom and transcendence in life more generally."⁹ Contemplative learning can also be defined as ways of knowing that "help focus the mind, offer the dispassionately reflective capacities of mindfulness, reduce stress, create and uncover meaning, insight, and wisdom, as well as facilitate awareness of both inner and outer worlds and our

Pedagogy 5, no. 2 (2014): 144–130, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.libproxy.albany.edu/>; Michael Newman, "Calling Transformative Learning Into Question: Some Mutinous Thoughts," *Adult Education Quarterly* (December 20, 2010), accessed March 30, 2019, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0741713610392768>.

⁸ Gunnlaugson et al., *Contemplative Learning*, 4.

⁹ Robert W. Roeser and Stephen C. Peck, "An Education in Awareness: Self, Motivation, and Self-Regulated Learning in Contemplative," *Educational Psychologist* 44, no. 2 (2009): 119, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.libproxy.albany.edu/>

fruitful engagements in them.¹⁰ Zajonc defines contemplative learning as a broad range of educational methods that support the development of student attention, emotional balance, empathetic connection, compassion, altruistic behavior, creativity, and the learning of course content.¹¹

The most widespread practice of contemplative learning is mindfulness. The term mindfulness has connotations of awareness, retention, and discernment. According to Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness meditation is a process of paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.¹² In practice, meditation may not necessarily mean maintaining the focus of the mind during the whole time of meditation because, indeed, the mind sometimes wanders, mindfulness meditation means returning to the center whenever the mind wanders.

Integrating mindfulness in education requires teachers to practice it consistently in their life. Kabat-Zin argues that mindfulness meditation is not merely a method that one learns for a short time at a professional seminar and then passes on to others for use as needed when they find themselves tense or stressed.¹³ Mindfulness requires ongoing effort to develop and refine. It is both the work of a lifetime and, paradoxically, the work of no time at all—because its field is always this present moment in its fullness.

Meditation practices in different traditions vary. Meditation may involve maintaining a mental focus on a particular sensation or physical process such as breath or upon a visual object, visual image, sound, or auditory image.¹⁴ Meditation may also involve

¹⁰ Gunnlaugson et al., *Contemplative Learning*, 2.

¹¹ Arthur Zajonc, "Contemplative Pedagogy: A Quiet Revolution in Higher Education," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 134 (Summer 2013): 83–94, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.libproxy.albany.edu/>.

¹² Jon Kabat-Zinn, "Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context: Past, Present, and Future," *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 10, no. 2 (2019): 145, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.libproxy.albany.edu/>.

¹³ Ibid., 149.

¹⁴ Alfred W. Kaszniak, "Contemplative Pedagogy: Perspective from Cognitive and Affective Science," in *Contemplative Learning and Inquiry Across Disciplines*, ed. Olen Gunnlaugson et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 200.

the broader field of attention without an exclusive selection of any focus. In short, Kaszniak considers meditation a different approach to the voluntary regulation of attention. Kaszniak refers meditation to calm, nonreactive, and nonjudgmental awareness includes all sensations, images, thoughts, and feelings, as well as automatic cognitive-emotional interpretation or associations that arise in the stream of consciousness.

In their literature review, Waters et al. summarized meditative practices as follows:

1. Acem: Thoughts, memories, emotions, and sensations emerge and pass through the objective awareness of the practitioner, without any voluntary attempt to control the content
2. Centering prayer: A method of silent prayer that prepares the practitioner to receive the gift of contemplative prayer, prayer in which the recipient experiences God's presence within them
3. Loving-kindness meditation: Deliberately focusing attention on positive feelings such as compassion, warmth, and care for self and others
4. Mindfulness: Deliberately focusing attention in the present moment, without judgment, to the experience that unfolds; attentional faculty comprising of continuous attention to an object without forgetfulness or distraction
5. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Programme (MBSR): An 8-week group program utilizing various forms of mindfulness meditation including breath awareness, body scan exercises, walking and eating meditations and hatha yoga
6. Shamatha: Placing attention on a mental image or visual object to attain attentional stability, vividness, and introspection
7. Transcendental meditation: Silently repeating a word or mantra to achieve a meditative state. When distracting thoughts arise, attention is repeatedly redirected back to the mantra.
8. Vipassana: Non-attached observation of bodily sensations and thoughts. Awareness is frequently redirected to the breath in the face of mental distractions.
9. Yoga Nidra: Attention is withdrawn from wishing to act and deployed towards sensory stimulation or imagination while maintaining neutral observation of experience.

10. Zen: Focusing attention on a word puzzle or breath awareness to exclude mental distractions and reach a heightened state of consciousness.¹⁵

Miller introduced seven different types of meditation. These include: observing the breath, counting the breath, reading the mantra repeatedly and silently, visualization, mindful walking, contemplative reading of poetry or inspirational text, and loving-kindness.¹⁶ Kahane applied different techniques of contemplative learning in his philosophy class that include meditation, free writing, and *lectio divina* (contemplative reading).¹⁷

Research and practice demonstrate positive outcomes of mindfulness in the development of students' cognitive, attitudes, and behaviors. In the school context, Waters et al. found evidence of 15 peer-reviewed studies of meditation programs on three student outcomes: well-being, social competence, and academic achievement. Water et al. explained that 67% of the results had small effects on student outcomes, 24% of the results had medium effect strength, and 9% showed a substantial impact of meditation on student outcomes. Transcendental meditation (repeating mantra) programs had a higher percentage of significant effects than mindfulness-based and other types of meditation programs. Nonetheless, Water et al. argue that such a transcendental effect may result from the settings and program delivery rather than the technique itself.¹⁸

In the higher education context, Kahane places contemplative pedagogy in the learning about obligation, compassion, and global justice. He argues that contemplative and meditative techniques support teaching and learning about a critical issue in contemporary ethics and political theory in raising moral obligation to global strangers. Based on his teaching experience, he claims that the pedagogy of reason about a moral obligation rarely changes the motivation of students living in the first world

¹⁵ Waters et al., "Contemplative Education," 105.

¹⁶ Miller, "Contemplation," 75.

¹⁷ Kahane, "Learning about Obligation," 127.

¹⁸ Waters et al., "Contemplative Education," 105.

countries. On the other hand, meditative practices applied in his class resulted in several outcomes.¹⁹ First, students thought reflectively and rigorously about questions of meaning, morality, and spirituality. Second, a deepened interest in issues of global justice and their global injustice emerged. Third, the learning process was less anxious, more curious, and delighted. Fourth, teachers' genuine curiosity and joy appeared.

Similarly, Miller's implementation of meditation in his class resulted in several outcomes that included nurturing awareness and holistic experience. Miller argues that higher education is dominated by a critical pedagogy that often induces anger alienation and hopelessness instead of wisdom and practical action. Miller said that contemplative learning is also needed in the curriculum in addition to critical pedagogy.²⁰

The concept of contemplative learning was introduced in the United States of America. Contemplative learning has been also robustly studied. Nevertheless, contemplative learning might not have been widely accepted and applied. Contemplative learning practices such as meditation, yoga, and prayer in classrooms may be considered religious rituals, which may be less expected in secular education. Although contemplative learning was developed partly from religious traditions such as Buddhism and Sufism, its practices are not necessarily religious. Educators should address such misconception and convince their students before applying contemplative learning.

Turning to Indonesian higher education institutions, particularly those 1,199 institutions under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which are rooted deeply in religious tradition, reading prayers either loudly or silently is a common practice in starting class—referring to the summary of meditative practices by Waters et al. and seven types of Miller's meditation practices above, reading prayers at the beginning, the mid, or the end of learning similar to the reading mantra or poetry or inspirational texts, transcendental meditation, and centering prayer. However, in Islamic higher education institutions, for

¹⁹ Kahane, "Learning about Obligation," 119–127.

²⁰ Miller, "Contemplation," 75.

instance, the problem occurs when students do not understand the meaning of their prayers. Most Islamic prayers are in Arabic. Reading prayers will be more beneficial when students know what they read. Therefore, reciting prayers in both languages of Arabic and Indonesian can be applied.

As has been described, one of the sources of contemplative practices is religious tradition such as Sufism and Buddhism. In Islamic education context, meditative practices are not new. Nevertheless, mindfulness referring to focusing mind and awareness on the moment is rarely known. Raising understanding and awareness of mindfulness can enhance religious-based practices of contemplation in Islamic higher education institutions. In fact, in Islamic tradition, mindfulness has close meaning to *khayru* (the Arabic term for focusing the mind and experiencing God's presence), which is suggested while doing or reading the prayers. Religious-based contemplative practices should also be strengthened by raising awareness of universal moral values such as compassion, gratitude, and kindness. Mindfulness should be applied to reflect on and eliminate gender-biased interpretation of religious texts, hatred against others from different religious and ethnic backgrounds, greediness, social injustice, and natural degradation. By doing so, Islam aimed to be a blessing for all could be achieved.

Unlike higher education in the Western context that emphasizes critical pedagogy, the Indonesian lecturers generally do not facilitate students' critical thinking. University students typically learn through rote learning and teacher-centered learning although active learning has been promoted for a long time. In this case, the theory of transformative learning is proposed and discussed to nurture not only students' mindfulness but also critical thinking, which eventually leads to empathy and action regarding social problems and issues of justice.

Transformative Learning

Having influenced by Freire and Habermas, the theory of transformative learning was introduced by Mezirow in 1978.²¹ Although it is not restricted to adult education, transformative learning practices in children, educational settings are not widely reported.

Transformative learning is defined as "the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives) – sets of assumptions and expectation – to make them more inclusive, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change".²² The definition implies that transformation takes place in humans' cognitive and affective domains. Geber proposes a different definition of transformative learning as an individual and societal evolution process toward selflessness and communion.²³ Transformative learning is defined here as learning methods that lead to substantial changes in thoughts, emotions, and behaviors at individual and social levels.

A favorable learning environment for learners' active participation, connectedness, making meaning, and critical reflection characterize transformative learning. It only occurs when students are deeply involved in learning because changes require willingness. The will to explore meaning, seek understanding, and receive differences is the first requirement for a transformative discourse. To engage students in learning, the establishment of a cordial and dialogical relationship between teachers and learners is essential. Indeed, significant learning does not rely upon teaching skills or knowledge mastery, but on the personal relationship between educators and learners and educators' integrity and identity. A cordial relationship empowers learners to think and express their opinions. Freire argues that a dialogical encounter enables every person, including those from the "culture of silence," to think critically and participate actively

²¹ Jack Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on A Theory in Progress* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 91.

²² Ibid., 92.

²³ John P. Miller, *Education for Wisdom and Compassion* (Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press, 2006), 8.

in discussions. Such empowering communication between teachers and students develops in love, care, respect, and humility.²⁴ Nonetheless, a liberating relationship does not necessarily neglect rules and responsibility. Standards are essential to overcome persistent tendencies,²⁵ set a border between personal freedom and responsibility for creativity, and allow learners to plan their learning.

An emancipating relationship required in transformative learning motivates students to participate actively and voluntarily in independent and collaborative learning. Adult students have the potentials to make decisions and regulate themselves, whereas the teachers' dominant direct instruction diminishes such capacities. Knowles explains that adult learners are capable of thinking about what they need to know and how to know, finding resources, gathering materials, and assessing their learning.²⁶ It is contended that not all learners, such as Indonesian students who typically value the "culture of silence" and a hierarchical relationship between educators and students, dare to take part in discussions and express critical views against other people's opinions. Nevertheless, empowering communication between teachers and students can develop in love, care, respect, and humility from both students and lecturers without necessarily neglecting rules and responsibility.

Connectedness is also central to transformative learning. Changes in learners' thoughts, feelings, and attitudes are likely to happen when students learn in a holistic way to acquire an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of their existing assumptions as well as new and different perspectives. Connectedness requires the integration between all self-dimensions of cognition, emotion, intuition, and body in learning processes, the interrelation of various disciplines of knowledge,

²⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 70–73.

²⁵ Tobin Hart, *From Information to Transformation: Education for The Evolution of Consciousness* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 89.

²⁶ Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adult* (San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 3.

and the connection between learners and the society with all its problems and opportunities as well as nature.²⁷

Transformative learning addresses real complicated characteristics of learning and life, which are disregarded in traditional education, through connectedness. Educators' efforts to connect all entities of students' minds, emotions, intuition, and body enhance their engagement in learning. Besides, the connectedness that requires teachers to interrelate disciplines of knowledge and link students to the real world prevents reductionist understandings and false assumptions. Problematic perceptions such as ethnocentrism causing negative feelings and behaviors toward other ethnic groups result from a lack of knowledge about different cultures. Connectedness, however, is assumed as complicated due to limited teaching and learning resources supporting interrelation between disciplines of knowledge as well as between education and the real world. The Ministry of Religious Affairs has developed interdisciplinary approaches in Islamic higher education. In several Islamic universities, Islamic teachings are actualized and integrated into medicine, psychology, sociology, social work, economy, and so on.²⁸ By doing so, it is expected that Islamic higher education does not only teach students knowledge and skills but also educate their characters based on universal Islamic values. Universal Islamic values refer to Islamic teachings that conform to universal ethics such as love, compassion, and kindness. The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs promotes and highlights the significance of universal Islamic values and interdisciplinary approaches in Islamic higher education institutions because of the diverse and contradictory Islamic schools in the world. Although a multidisciplinary approach requires lecturers to work harder than before because they have to think critically and creatively beyond mainstream disintegrated disciplines, it is essential because the

²⁷ John Dewey, *The School and The Society* (Chicago: The University Press of Chicago, 1969); Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

²⁸ Khamami Zada, "Orientasi Studi Islam di Indonesia," *UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta Official Website*, last modified May 24, 2008, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/section-blog/28-artikel/64-orientasi-studi-islam-di-indonesia.html>.

real world is complex. An interdisciplinary and comprehensive understanding should address that.

Another fundamental concept of transformative learning is making meaning because learners can transform their beliefs and viewpoints if they understand both the prior and new knowledge. Understanding is unlikely to be imported from outside of the learners. Lecturers may transmit information to students, but making meaning takes place in the inner self of the learners. Understanding arises from deep learning integrated with the participatory mind, personal, historical, and cultural contexts, internal experiences, and interpretations.²⁹ Hart explains that understanding goes beyond senses and rationality; it involves emotion and intuition.³⁰ Comprehensive understanding can be developed through deep learning. It is, however, argued that deep learning is complicated, time-consuming, and hence tedious. According to Egan,³¹ deep learning suggests lecturers design challenging intellectual activities that activate student's motivation and provide an education plan and resources to assist students in exploring knowledge. Moreover, fast learning such as explanatory learning and rote learning wastes the whole time spent because without understanding, learners are not able to perpetuate their knowledge that eventually causes the inability to apply it in real life. Learning without understanding it's meaning is useless. The ignorant younger generation who only know modern cultures broadcasted by media and the wastes of education in which students cannot apply their knowledge in the real world are results of meaningless learning.³² To achieve transformation, instead of depositing new knowledge in students' minds, Freire suggests that problem-posing education requires educators together with students in a dialogical interaction to reflect and act upon reality.³³

²⁹ Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation*, 91.

³⁰ Hart, *From Information to Transformation*, 91.

³¹ Kieran Egan, *Learning in Depth: A Simple Innovation That Can Transform Schooling* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 70–73.

The most prominent characteristic of transformative learning is critical reflection. It goes beyond the thought that occurs in the previous step of making meaning.³⁴ Critical reflection means challenging ideas underlying a particular dominant ideology, questioning assumptions, and examining understandings. Several strategies to foster critical reflection are confronting learners to different perspectives, challenging their premises, and discussing essential incidents or experiences.³⁵ Critical thought arouses students' crucial consciousness for transforming problematic perceptions and attitudes into the ones that support social justice and sustainability. Eventually, critical awareness may encourage students to take social actions for social changes.

Transformative learning encourages learners to think about their given assumptions and knowledge critically, be open to different perspectives and values, develop their critical consciousness, form their new understanding, and create changes. It is argued that critical awareness supposed to lead to social actions may cause anarchism, such as Freire's literacy program in Brazil in the 1960s that pushed peasants to conduct a revolution against the Brazilian government. However, social actions are not always demonstrated through anarchy against social or political systems. Social movements can be actualized in community empowerment projects. In the Indonesian context, university students have to do compulsory community learning for several months that is increasingly encouraged to contribute to social transformation. Community learning refers to an educational program in which university students live in a community, particularly in poor villages and remote areas, and study from them for one to three months. Gajah Mada University students, for example, were successful in implementing a community empowerment project. In that social project, the students trained poor traditional makers of cassava-made-foods to create various modern foods so that they can penetrate supermarkets and gain more profit than if they sell the foods only at traditional local

³⁴ Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation*, 4.

³⁵ Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 155–156.

markets.³⁶ Another example of social actions is a movement of green schools and universities in which students conduct friendly environment campaigns and programs such as planting trees and recycling.

The idea that transformative learning motivates learners to take part in social actions and social changes remains in contention. Mezirow confines transformation in cognitive and affective aspects and distinguishes transformative learning from critical pedagogy, a pedagogy that challenges lecturers and learners to become a principal-agent of social changes. However, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects, as well as individual and social realms, are indivisible that transformation at one point may lead to another. No system can be changed without any change at the personal level. Hart maintains that person and society are interdependent that personal transformation may influence a change in social and cultural levels.³⁷ The scope of transformation is developed further into social action against the dominant and oppressive structure of the society, and cultural and societal changes.³⁸ McWhinney and Markos argue that reducing the impact of transformative learning only on an individual level is a trivialization of transformative learning to be irrelevant to the status quo.³⁹ Transformative learning intends to create changes in both personal and social levels because education is an integral part of life and society.

Actualizing Contemplative and Transformative Learning

Traditional education systems enforce high-stake testing and hence stress on rote learning and teacher-centered learning. They also perpetuate an unequal power distribution between lecturers as active knowledge depositors and students as passive knowledge depository, disconnectedness between disciplines of

³⁶ Gemari, *UGM Lakukan KKN Tematik Sudah 5 Tahun*, 2009, accessed March 30, 2019, www.gemari.or.id/file/edisi102/gemari10214.pdf.

³⁷ Hart, *From Information to Transformation*, 13.

³⁸ Hart, *From Information to Transformation*; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

³⁹ W. McWhinney and L. Markos, "Transformative Education: Across The Threshold," *Journal of Transformative Education* 1, no. 1 (2003): 20, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.libproxy.albany.edu/>.

knowledge and aspects of human life, fast learning for encompassing pre-specified learning materials in a predetermined time, and status quo of culture and social practices. However, rapid and ever-changing society, high technologies, more complex life, and issues of injustice and unsustainability challenge mainstream traditional education systems. This contemporary context requires learners to achieve deep and holistic understanding as well as critical consciousness about knowledge and social phenomena that can be facilitated through active participation in learning, connectedness, learning in-depth, and critical reflection. Therefore, the implementation of contemplative and transformative learning is necessary, particularly in Islamic higher education.

Contemplative and transformative learning can be implemented by integrating meditative practices and transformative strategies. Kahane applied meditation, free writing, and contemplative reading in the learning about obligation, compassion, and global justice to raise moral obligation to the global strangers.⁴⁰

Denton-Borhaug and Jasper also examined the relationship between mindfulness, memoir, and critical pedagogy. They coupled critical pedagogy with contemplative practices to build mindfulness. The program was rooted in an analysis of three years' worth of memoirs prepared by students in a Peace and Justice Studies course. Their study shows that mindfulness, journal, and critical pedagogy increase students' self-awareness as well as insight regarding their inter-connectedness with other living beings. Both the study and contemplative practice of memoir root this awareness in particular places, relationships, and situations that form students' lives. Students are thus situated for deeper reflection regarding the ways their lives are linked with the destiny of much larger world reality, and specifically, with questions of peace and justice. This helps students develop the skills necessary to explore their hearts and thus explore the

⁴⁰ Kahane, "Learning about Obligation," 127.

meaning, purpose, and values that they hold.⁴¹ The memoir is a contemplative practice that encourages in-depth exploration and reflection upon one's self.

In Islamic higher education, existing contemplative practices regarding reading and repeating prayers should be continued and enhanced with other methods of mindfulness, such as meditation focusing on breathing with a nonjudgmental attitude and universal moral ethics of compassion, love, and kindness. Besides, transformative learning strategies involving a hospitable learning environment, connectedness, making meaning, and critical reflection should be widely applied. The implementation of contemplative and transformative learning supports the integration of character education in all subjects or courses aimed by the national government.

It might be argued that in a high-stakes testing system, contemplative and transformative learning will not create changes in teaching practices. Although the Indonesian government encourages educators to design and implement active learning, for instance, many educators have emphasized teacher-centered and rote learning as effective methods to reach success in the examination. However, transformative learning that highlights the importance of challenging ideas underlying a particular dominant ideology, questioning assumptions, and examining understandings leads educators to open their perspectives about various active learning strategies that can be implemented to assist their students in the examination. Indeed, research has shown that transformative learning changes learners' perceptions.⁴² Cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects are indivisible that transformation at one point may lead to another.

Regarding the evaluation of the transformative learning process, formative and summative assessment is significant to improve students' learning and develop their expertise. Formative assessment integrates two goals of 1) assessment for learning to monitor a learner's progress toward the expected goals as well as

⁴¹ Denton-Borhaug and Jasper, "Memoir as Contemplative Practice," 114–115.

⁴² Newman, "Calling Transformative Learning Into Question," 36.

to seek efforts to reach the desired outcomes from a learner's status and 2) assessment as learning to reflect learning evidence.⁴³ Effective questioning, observation, self-evaluation, peer assessment, reflection, and feedback are critical. These formative assessment strategies guide students' independent and collaborative learning, assess understanding, refine misunderstanding, and scaffold further learning. In addition to that, summative assessment, which does not repeat the formative one but extends students' cognitive development, should be aligned with formative assessment. Research has shown that summative assessment motivates students to learn more.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Contemplative and transformative learning requires changes in educators. They should practice mindfulness in their life before introducing it to students. A dialogical encounter that improves students' participation in learning challenges lecturers, particularly those who emphasize a hierarchical relationship in classrooms to distribute their power to students. Lecturers also may not be able to integrate students' mind, intuition, emotion, and body if they do not incorporate them first inside themselves. A multidisciplinary approach requires lecturers to interpret, evaluate, and sometimes change curriculum and textbooks. Also, deep learning for making meaning encourages lecturers to design various challenging learning activities. More importantly, critical reflection on knowledge bias, problematic assumptions, and unjust social practices may not happen if lecturers desire the status quo.

Contemplative and transformative learning also leads students to increase their awareness about their inner and outside world and eventually transforms them at a personal level and leads them to take action for social changes. Friendly learning atmospheres, as well as integrated and challenging intellectual

⁴³ Ian Clark, "Formative Assessment: Assessment Is for Self-Regulated Learning," *Educational Psychology Review* 24, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 205–249, accessed April 21, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-011-9191-6>.

⁴⁴ Lorrie Shepard et al., "Assessment," in *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers Should Learn and Be Able to Do*, ed. Linda Darling-Hammond and John Bransford (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 275–326.

activities, push students to engage their whole self in deep learning that results in meaning construction and a holistic understanding. Students then move further to question their assumptions and understand critically. Such critical reflection drives students to be conscious and change their problematic convictions and attitudes that eventually they can take social actions for social changes. As education is an inherent part of life and society, learning should be contemplative and transformative to contribute to the betterment of life and society in this contemporary and rapidly changing world.

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