CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN AN ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY IN INDONESIA: ADDRESSING GOVERNMENT POLICY (UUPA) AND GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Flinders University

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March 2014

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ABSTRACT

The endorsement of UUPA (*Undang-Undang Pemerintah Aceh*) on August 1st, 2006 in Aceh province, Indonesia has enabled local government throughout the province to develop and manage its own governmental policies and systems, including re-considering its educational and school curricula conceptions. The enactment of this legislation has inspired the researcher to examine how Islamic higher education curricula could be designed and developed systematically.

The overarching objective of this study is to contribute to the understanding of developing the English Education Department's curriculum at UIN Ar-Raniry, previously IAIN Ar-Raniry (an Islamic higher education institution in Aceh, Indonesia), by considering Islamic values, local context, and graduate employment prospects. As such, to attain this goal, three groups of research participants (consisting of 112 people)—the government policymaking authority, institutional academic community, and community graduate employers—were approached to seek their perspectives regarding an ideal curriculum for the Department. Data collection was conducted over five months from February–June 2011.

A set of interview, focus group discussion, and survey questions was prepared to answer the main research question: "What is required to comprehensively develop the English Education Department's existing curriculum attending to UUPA, local context, and concerns for graduate employability"? The following questions were also asked to explore this main question:

1. What are the values and expectations underpinning the existing curricula?
2. What are the stakeholders' curriculum outcome expectations? (Leaders, lecturers, students, teachers)
3. What graduate attributes should be accommodated in developing curricula to prepare English language teachers and English language professionals as well as good Islamic citizens?

This study employed an interpretive qualitative research approach to answer the questions. Twenty-six participants were interviewed, 86 students were surveyed, and

seven important government policies/regulations were analysed. The objective of applying this interpretive research approach was to capture the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the English Education Department's curriculum.

In a social context, the implementation of interpretive research can be an appropriate approach for locating numerous assumptions that a variety of interested parties believes (Denzin, 2001). In this context, the diverse interested parties are the three above-mentioned research participant groups. Thematic data analysis using the open coding method was applied because the research employed a qualitative approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Monette et al., 2005; Richards, 2005). A basic statistics software program (SPSS) (Field, 2013) was used to analyse the survey results.

The research findings reveal the need to provide a space in the curriculum to address students' diverse learning objectives and to introduce subjects that prepare them to engage in more than classroom teaching. Students need to be prepared to become technologically literate as befits a modern world leader and scholar. Ultimately, the findings reveal that the English Education Department's curriculum needs to be designed and developed to meet specific professional requirements as well as general graduate capabilities to assist students to transfer their experiences and skills into wide employment arenas, not limited to teaching sectors. This means that the achievement of students' educational objectives must have the potential to assist them to attain their goals in work and life.

GLOSSARY

Akhlak : An Islamic term which is used in Indonesian and Acehnese language to refer to ethical morals

Amanah : An Islamic term which is used in Indonesian and Acehnese language that means fulfilling and upholding trust

D1 : Diploma Satu, a one-year non-degree program

D2 : Diploma Dua, a two-year non-degree program

D3 : Diploma Tiga, a three-year non-degree program

D4 : Diploma Empat, a four-year non-degree program

Fardhu kifayah : A religious obligation charged to a group of the Islamic community. If this Islamic community performs the obligation, all the community will be free of religious indictment

GAM : Gerakan Aceh Merdeka. Free Aceh movement. A group of Acehnese people who fought with the Indonesian National Army to free Aceh from Indonesia to have an independent nation

Guru : Teachers who teach at school

Hadits : The Prophet Muhammad's sayings, activities, and decisions

IAIN Ar-Raniry: Institut Agama Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry. State Islamic Institute Ar-Raniry. An Islamic higher education institution in Banda Aceh

Iman : Religious faith that designates the Muslim's faith in the supernatural aspects of Islam

Taqwa : The state of god-consciousness; to fear God in terms of protecting oneself from displeasing God

Jahiliyah : An Islamic term that refers to the concept of "ignorance of divine

guidance" or "the state of ignorance of guidance from God”

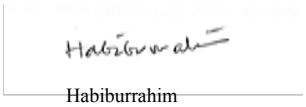
Khutbah	: Commonly refers to *khutbat al-jum'a* that means the preaching or sermon normally delivered in a mosque at weekly Friday prayers
MA	: Madrasah Aliyah, Islamic senior high school
MI	: Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Islamic elementary school
MKDK	: Mata Kuliah Dasar Keahlian, basic skills course/topic juxtaposition
MKK	: Mata Kuliah Keahlian, specialised skills course/topic juxtaposition
MKU	: Mata Kuliah Umum, general course/topic juxtaposition
MoNE	: Ministry of National Education
MoRA	: Ministry of Religious Affairs
MTs	: Madrasah Tsanawiyah, Islamic junior high school
Musalla	: A small mosque for regular prayer
Pesantren	: Islamic boarding school
Qanun	: An Islamic term used in Aceh to refer to a locally endorsed regulation (Act)
Quran	: Islamic holy book or central religious text in Islam
Ramadhan	: The ninth month of the Islamic calendar, in which Muslims perform fasting from morning twilight (Fajr Prayer) to evening twilight (Maghreb Prayer)
Riba	: An Islamic term that means usury or money interest
RPJM	: Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah, Medium-term development plan
Sekolah Tinggi	: Higher education

SPMB	: Seleksi Penerimaan Mahasiswa Baru, State university admission exam
Syaria law	: Islamic law
UIN Ar-Raniry	: Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry. State Islamic University Ar-Raniry, an Islamic higher education Institution in Banda Aceh, previously IAIN Ar-Raniry
UUPA	: Undang Undang Pemerintah Aceh, Law on the Governance of Aceh
Zakat	: Islamic term that refers to the obligation that an individual has to donate a certain proportion of wealth each year to charitable causes

DECLARATION OF CANDIDATE

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed,



Habiburrahim
30th May 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pursuing a PhD is not an easy task, especially when it is done in a foreign language. The entire PhD journey can easily be insurmountable if it does not have decent support from various entities. Luckily, in my case, I have remarkably generous people who always understand and support me to get through this tough and daunting sojourn. I have had admirable supervisors who know the way that I can work best, providing me guidance when I was getting stuck, and knowing when to stay away from this when necessary. I have witnessed that not all my Doctorate colleagues were so fortunate to have supervisors who could work collegially to assist them in completing their study on time.

It is to this end, I wish to express my deepest and sincere gratitude to Professor Janice Orrell and Professor Robert Conway for their tireless efforts in supervising me in shaping this thesis and making this dream come true. Honestly, I have been blessed to have Jan and Bob as my thesis supervisors, and without their guidance and support, this thesis would have never been completed. My deepest love and thanks also go to Susi, my beautiful and sincere wife who accompanied me for almost the entire time during this study journey and had sacrificed her profession as a Medical Doctor whose health assistance is badly in need back home in Aceh, Indonesia.

My loving thanks to my parents, brothers and sisters who have always provided love and emotional support throughout my lifespan. My greatest appreciation also goes to the Aceh government that provided financial support to undertake this study, to Flinders University and all the ISSU team members who have assisted me during my study and stay here in Adelaide.

I also wish to thank all people who were involved in this study process, including lecturers, Department Head, staff members, students of the English Education Department, Vice Rector, and the Dean of the Education Faculty of UIN Ar-Raniry Darussalam-Banda Aceh, senior high school teachers, and leaders from government institutions in Aceh who have kindly assisted me in collecting the required data for this thesis. Special thanks also go to Margaret Bowden for her advice. Last but not least, I would also like to thank all Doctorate colleagues at the Education Faculty of Flinders University with whom I have shared ideas, happiness, sadness, and many other memorable events.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

> "The very notion of curriculum development is fundamentally embedded in a modernist commitment to progress and reform: development implies change, and in modern times, education implies development" (Ladwig, 2010, p. 374).

1. Focus of this study

This thesis begins with a commitment to progress and curriculum reform, and following that, educational quality in Aceh in general and at the English Education Department of UIN Ar-Raniry in particular. Of particular important is that the curriculum reform meets the required provision of Islamic values. This is the challenge of this thesis. The thesis will examine the concept of, and practice surrounding, curriculum and curriculum development in an Islamic university (UIN Ar-Raniry) in Aceh, Indonesia. It will do this through a case study, namely that of an English-teacher education program, and will examine its stakeholders' perceptions and needs, and the capacity of current practices to address government intentions, market forces and needs, and espoused educational outcomes.

2. Background to the study

Long-term armed conflict between the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* - GAM) and the government of Indonesia (GoI), and the unspeakable impact of the tsunami have impoverished all sectors in Aceh, a region at the very northern tip of Sumatra Island. During the early rounds of the conflict from 1986 to early 1998, violence against civilians was very high; public facilities were burned out, people were kidnapped and killed, and most schooling activities in the sub-districts were non-existent (Amnesty International, 1993; Aspinal, 2008; Kingsbury, 2005; Sinitchkina, 2005). These two tragedies took lives and ruined much needed public and private facilities and institutions, including schools, houses, health centres, shopping centres, and government offices (Anderson, 2007). During this period, the education sector of Aceh experienced an era of headlong downturn.

The conflict officially ended when the GAM and the GoI signed a peace accord in August 2005 in Helsinki, known as the 'Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding' (Helsinki MoU) (Aspinal, 2008; Liesinen & Lahdensuo, 2008; The World Bank, 2005). GAM's acceptance of expanded autonomy for Aceh within Indonesia was at the heart of this agreement (Aspinal, 2008). The MoU gave Aceh a mandate for self-government at the local level to develop and manage its own policies. The MoU includes provisions concerning political issues, human rights, rule of law, education systems, and economic matters (Aspinal, 2005). These provisions were officially verified in 'National Regulation No. 11, 2006', literally known as 'UUPA' (*Undang-undang Pemerintah Aceh – Law on the Governance of Aceh*).

The peace process in Aceh has been lauded as a great success. Considerable reconstruction and rehabilitation have been accomplished. Educational development, as one of the first priorities, had educational curriculum development as a central focus to define formal and informal education (Jeffs & Smith, 1996). As a result, there is an ongoing agenda for comprehensive educational curriculum reform in Aceh. This reform is occurring in a post-conflict and disaster context, with development guided by UUPA. Higher education institutions (HEi) in Aceh are required to refer to UUPA and the Ministry of National Education Decrees number 232/U/2000 and 045/U/2002 regarding curriculum development policy and core curriculum content nationwide (Furchan, Muhaimin, & Maimun, 2005). These regulations and decrees were significantly influential in the construction of this study.

Referring to curriculum development approaches, Barnett (2000) and Clark (1983) assert that to comprehensively develop curricula, curriculum developers should incorporate three key elements: government policy; graduate users' orientation; and academic provision. These three elements guided the exploration of curriculum development at the English Education Department of UIN Ar-Raniry, which meets the requirements of UUPA and its department mission as follows:

> The mission of the English Education Department is to train and educate the senior high school graduates to be qualified English education scholars who have the following qualifications: (1) true belief in Allah, committed in worshipping Allah and helping others, and having good *akhlak* (ethical morals); (2) skills in implementing obtained knowledge into practical aspects; (3) independent, able to compete, and able to actualize themselves to pursue further study and work, and able

> to contribute to national development based on the skills and expertise they have obtained (Nurdin, Aswar, Yahya, Zain, & Nur, 2010, p. 66).

Schramm (2002) also provides this study with a further construct of curriculum development. Schramm claims that successful curriculum development should involve all stakeholders, including students because they are central to the teaching and learning process. The value of comprehensive curriculum development involving diverse stakeholders has been reported widely (Barnett, 2000; Clark, 1983; Coate, 2009; Drake & Burns, 2004; Elisha-Primo, Sandler, Goldfrad, Ferenz, & Perpignan, 2010; Schramm, 2002).

The following chart developed by the researcher illustrates the English Education Department's current curriculum management model, in which curriculum is developed through the involvement of three influential groups of people: the government policymaking authority; the institutional academic community; and community graduate employers (graduate users). It is expected that the involvement of these three key stakeholder groups may enable the Department to produce a curriculum that meets various stakeholders' needs.

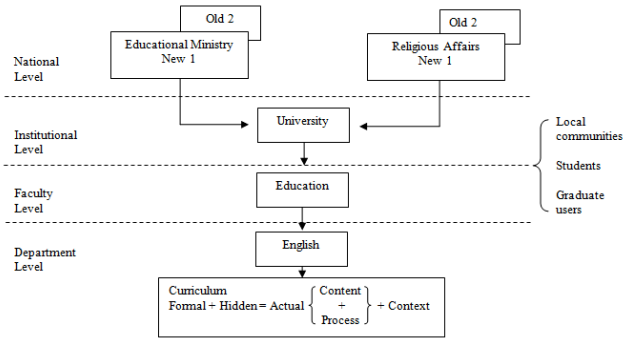


Figure 1: Curriculum model developed by the researcher

3. The aim of the study

The primary aim of this study is to analyse what is needed to improve the curriculum at the English Education Department of UIN Ar-Raniry, an Islamic higher education

institution in Aceh province in Indonesia, so that it will comply with new government directions and meet the perceived needs of the key stakeholders. The research focuses on UUPA and some other principal government regulations and policies regarding educational development, particularly at the Aceh province level.

The research also seeks to analyse the perceptions and descriptions of the three pivotal stakeholder groups about an ideal curriculum for the English Education Department. The analysis of UUPA, particular government regulations and policies about educational development, and perceptions and descriptions of the above-mentioned three stakeholder groups about an ideal curriculum serve as the primary foundation for generating a new curriculum in the Department.

4. Significance of the study

This study is designed to contribute towards the empowerment of education at UIN Ar-Raniry in general, and in the English Education Department in particular. It will contribute to the Department by conceptualising an ideal approach for developing an appropriate curriculum in line with the UUPA concept, and one that meets current educational development and stakeholder expectations. Hopefully, the findings will offer a new approach for the Acehnese Education Department to improve educational quality in this province through aligning curricula with stakeholder needs. The outcomes of this study will encourage the English Education Department to look at new and diverse dimensions when developing a curriculum to meet the current educational development needs and paradigm.

To the best of this researcher's knowledge, the English Education Department of UIN Ar-Raniry has never involved its stakeholders, particularly community graduate employers and students, in developing the Department's curriculum. Furthermore, there has been a paucity of studies that address what Islamic values and educational expectations should be accommodated in new educational curricula, particularly for higher education institutions in this region. This paucity of research about higher education curriculum development pertaining to stakeholders' needs in this region presented a unique opportunity to conduct this research. Seeking academics', students', government policymakers', and community graduate employers' opinions has provided a first-time opportunity to ensure that stakeholders' needs and values

are taken into account.

In addition, this study makes a significant contribution to Islamic education and national education departments at the provincial level in terms of forming curriculum development policy. The results of this study could serve as the research evidences for the provincial government and UIN Ar-Raniry in designing curriculum. The fact that this research is the first study conducted on curriculum development at a higher education institution in Aceh, particularly post-conflict Aceh and UUPA implementation, gives it the potential to make a great contribution to all education faculties of higher education institutions in Aceh province. Its contribution lies in its potential to assist them to adjust and redevelop their curricula to meet the UUPA, address their various local contexts, and enhance graduate employability. Finally, the findings may lead to recommendations for the way in which the Education Department in Aceh prepares new regulations regarding the implementation of curriculum development policy, particularly at the English Education Department of UIN Ar-Raniry.

5. Research questions

In general, this study aims to identify what is needed to develop the English Education Department's curriculum at UIN Ar-Raniry in light of the UUPA, local context, and concerns for graduate employability. As such, the study is designed to answer the following primary research question: "What is required to comprehensively develop the existing English Education Department's curriculum attending to UUPA, local context, and concerns for graduate employability"? The following questions were also asked to explore this question:

1. What are the values and expectations underpinning the existing curricula?
2. What are the curriculum outcome expectations of the stakeholders? (Leaders, lecturers, students, teachers)
3. What graduate attributes should be accommodated in developing curricula to prepare English language teachers and English language professionals as well as good Islamic citizens?

6. Structure of the study

This thesis is presented in nine chapters as following:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This introductory chapter begins by providing a brief description of the study's focus. It has outlined the study's background, aims, significance, and research questions.

Chapter 2: General background of the Aceh setting

This chapter presents an analysis of background information regarding the study context. The chapter initially discusses the geographic and demographic aspects of Aceh province, the education system and its characteristics, including the Islamic education genre, commonly-used languages, and government bureaucracy. In order to capture a clear picture of the research site, significant information is provided about UIN Ar-Raniry and its institutional vision and mission, as well as a brief overview of the English Education Department. This chapter is followed by a short discussion about the study context in relation to the research questions. The chapter concludes by outlining the curriculum development challenge.

Chapter 3: Literature review part one

Chapter Three reviews literature of relevance to this thesis. It synthesises significant theories and research that inform conceptions of curriculum development. As such, it reviews information on curriculum theory, curriculum development processes, and factors driving curriculum reform. In addition, as the focus of this research is on the Islamic higher education context, the literature review seeks to scrutinise the interplay of education and religion in the Islamic context, including Islam and education, the significance of education in Islam, and the objectives of Islamic education. The chapter also reviews current curriculum approaches, encompassing disciplinary, multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary curricula.

Chapter 4: Literature review part two: Achieving specific curriculum objectives

The main aim of Chapter Four is to provide a brief overview of the curriculum in the English Education Department context, demonstrating that the Department's mandate is to train students to be English teachers who may teach at both Islamic and general schools. Curriculum approaches such as language learning, teaching English as a foreign language, professional and general learning, and Islamic learning values are reviewed. This chapter also reviews the issues of curriculum change and its challenges.

Chapter 5: Research design and methods

This chapter describes the theoretical approach to the research, sources of data, information about significant research matters (including the research participants and data collection methods), information about data analysis and validity, ethical issues, and research limitations and their implications for the study.

Chapter 6: Results part one: Document analysis

This chapter analyses significant regulations and government policies regarding the development of education in Aceh province. The regulations and government policies are comprised of UUPA, Qanun No. 23, 2002, Qanun No. 5, 2008, National Regulation No. 20, 2003, the Decree of Ministry of Religious Affairs No. 353, 2004, and National Regulation No. 55, 2007. In the last section, the chapter discusses the English Education Department's objectives.

Chapter 7: Results part two: The views of stakeholders about the English Education Department's curriculum

This chapter reports the research findings from the stakeholder survey and interviews. It presents significant information on how the stakeholders view the Department's current curriculum, what aspects of the curriculum they think should be improved, and what the majority of students say about the current curriculum and their recommendations for future development.

Chapter 8: Discussion

This chapter presents a discussion of the research findings, encompassing the challenge of designing and developing the Department's curriculum to address students' diverse study needs and meet specific professional requirements, including generic capabilities and technological mastery. The challenges of improving quality instruction to improve learning outcomes and of integrating Islamic education with general discipline education are also discussed.

Chapter 9: Conclusion and recommendations

This last chapter concludes the thesis with discussion and reflection about the research outcomes in relation to the issues discussed in the previous chapter. Recommendations are suggested for further curriculum development at the English Education Department, for future research at UIN Ar-Raniry, especially in relation to

new approaches to curriculum design and development at the English Education Department.

7. Concluding remarks

This chapter has given an introductory overview of the study, describing its background, aims, significance, research questions, and thesis structure. Two significant factors have driven the idea of conducting this research: the social status of Aceh province as a post-conflict and disaster region; and the implementation of UUPA in Aceh. These two factors have profoundly changed the educational direction and approach in Aceh, including curriculum conception throughout this region. As such, this study attempts to analyse the concept and practice of a curriculum that could be implemented at the English Education Department of UIN Ar-Raniry in particular, and at Islamic higher education institutions throughout Aceh province in general.

The next chapter provides more information on the general background of the study setting, including descriptions of Aceh's geographic and demographic characteristics, overall education system, higher education system, educational characteristics, language, government bureaucracy, and education in the Islamic context, in particular at UIN Ar-Raniry.