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Culturally Responsive Community Service in Islamic Higher Education Institutions: A Survey of Borneo Communities in West Kalimantan, Indonesia

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Abstract

Community service (*pengabdian kepada masyarakat*, PKM) is one of the three pillars (*Tri Dharma*) of Indonesian higher education and is obligatory for Islamic higher education institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam*, PTKI). In West Kalimantan, community service is delivered among Borneo communities that are ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse, which makes cultural sensitivity a prerequisite for programme success. This study describes (1) the development of culturally responsive community service programmes, (2) the steps taken to implement them, (3) their perceived effectiveness, and (4) the obstacles faced by PTKI in West Kalimantan. A descriptive quantitative survey of 70 respondents from three PTKI was conducted and complemented by interviews, observation, and document analysis. Responses were analysed using descriptive statistics with three score categories (high, moderate, low). All respondents (100%) rated programme development, implementation steps, and effectiveness as high. Five strategic steps were identified: a culture-integrated service curriculum, partnerships with external stakeholders, multicultural training, empowerment-oriented mentoring, and the use of technology and media. However, 69 respondents (98.57%) rated the obstacles as high, mainly geographic and infrastructural constraints, educational disparities among villagers, and villagers' limited free time. The findings suggest that community service that respects local customs and religious practices can proceed harmoniously, but that dedicated strategies are needed to overcome structural barriers in remote areas.

Keywords: community service; culturally responsive; multiculturalism; Islamic higher education; Borneo communities

Introduction

Indonesia is an archipelagic nation with exceptional ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity. Furnivall (1948) described such a condition as a *plural society*, one in which distinct groups live side by side within a single political unit. In Indonesia, this diversity is managed through values of unity, mutual respect, and mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), and the country is often regarded as an example of how a multicultural society can be governed (Wakano & Saidah, 2019). Banks (2008) argues that diverse democracies must recognise cultural differences while nurturing a

shared national identity, a balance that resonates with Indonesia's long-standing ideal of unity in diversity.

West Kalimantan is a province on the island of Kalimantan (Borneo) with Pontianak as its capital. In 2020 its population was 5,414,390, with a density of about 37 people per km² (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021). The province comprises 14 regencies and cities, many of them separated by rivers, which earned it the nickname "Land of a Thousand Rivers"; large rivers remain the main transport route to inland areas even though the road network now reaches most sub-districts. This geography and cultural diversity make Borneo communities distinct from those in Java or Sumatra and call for a specific approach in any programme that touches their social life.

Community service is part of the *Tri Dharma* of higher education and one of the components of the national standards of higher education (Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 3 of 2020; Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 4 of 2020). It involves the academic community, namely lecturers and students, in applying science and technology to advance welfare, empower communities, and encourage social transformation. The standards for community service cover outcome standards (helping to solve community problems by using prior research findings and providing learning in the form of mentoring), content standards (improving living standards and recommending policies that benefit the community), and process standards (planning, implementation, and reporting that are directed, measurable, and programmed). This mandate echoes Boyer's (1996) call for a "scholarship of engagement," in which universities connect their intellectual resources to society's most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems.

IAIN Pontianak and other PTKI in West Kalimantan require lecturers and students to carry out community service, including the Field Study Programme (*Kuliah Kerja Lapangan*, KKL), in villages that are often located in disadvantaged areas. According to students who took part in KKL, the most frequent difficulty is communicating with residents about local cultural values. Insensitivity to residents' customs and beliefs may provoke rejection, low participation, and even conflict. Community service therefore needs to be designed and carried out in a culturally responsive manner, that is, by treating the knowledge, values, and practices of the community as the basis of the approach (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Research on multicultural education in Indonesia has grown, but it mostly concerns teaching in schools and universities, while empirical studies of multicultural-oriented community service by PTKI in the Borneo region remain limited. This study addresses that gap by answering four questions: (1) How are culturally responsive community service programmes developed in PTKI in West Kalimantan? (2) What steps are taken to implement them? (3) How effective is the implementation of culturally responsive, multicultural-oriented community service? (4) What obstacles are encountered? The results are expected to inform community service policy for PTKI and for IAIN Pontianak, the only state Islamic higher education institution in West Kalimantan, and to serve as a model for other universities working in religiously and culturally diverse communities.

Literature Review

Multicultural-oriented community service

Community service is an activity of the academic community that uses science and technology to advance welfare, empower, and facilitate communities in social transformation towards social justice (Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 4 of 2020). Multicultural-oriented community service adds a dimension of recognition of cultural difference: services and mentoring are adapted to the cultural background of the target community, and communities are given room to determine their own needs and the forms of service that suit their culture. This approach is in line with the shift from a needs-based paradigm to a rights-based and empowerment paradigm. It also resembles the asset-based approach of Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), which starts from the capacities and resources already present in a community rather than from its deficits. In higher education, the closest established model is service-learning, defined by Bringle and Hatcher (1996) as a credit-bearing educational experience in which students take part in organised service that meets community needs and reflect on that experience; KKL and similar programmes in PTKI can be understood in these terms.

The conceptual foundation comes from multicultural education. Banks (2010) emphasises that multicultural education aims to create equal educational opportunities for diverse groups through recognition of their cultures, while Gay (2018) and Ladson-Billings (1995) developed the idea of culturally responsive teaching, which uses participants' cultural knowledge and experience as a vehicle for learning. In Indonesia, multicultural education is considered important because it fosters empathy, self-confidence, and openness to diversity (Khairuddin, 2018; Islam & Maskuri, 2020). Saryono (2017) states that culturally responsive education models must rest on cultural options that are open, just, and non-discriminatory. Multicultural emphasis in academia is also expressed through four values: plurality, equality, humanity, and justice (Wakano & Saidah, 2019).

Borneo communities and the role of PTKI

Traditions among Borneo communities are passed down through generations and form the basis of social life, including the relationship between custom (*adat*) and religious practice. The arrival of Islam in the archipelago did not automatically erase local traditions; *da'wah* that pays attention to cultural values and courteous communication tends to be more readily accepted. Evidence from West Kalimantan supports this. Atmaja and Kurnanto (2018) show that harmony between Chinese and Malay communities has been sustained through local wisdom, including the restraint and humility modelled by a respected Muslim figure, while Ruslan et al. (2024) report that disputes over places of worship, religious conversion, and interfaith marriage in Sanggau were resolved through ethnic-based and educational approaches built on shared identity, local values, and joint activities. Irwan Abdullah (2010) views Islamic universities as institutions that construct and reproduce culture and that have the authority to formulate multiculturalism in harmony with Islamic and Indonesian values. In West Kalimantan, PTKI include IAIN Pontianak (state) and a number of private institutions in Sambas, Ketapang, Sintang, Mempawah, Singkawang, and Putussibau. Through village mentoring, KKL, and community service managed by their research and community service institutes (LP2M), PTKI are expected to help

residents manage nature and the environment creatively and to foster economic self-reliance.

Previous studies

Several culture-oriented service activities have been reported. First, a community service programme in two integrated Islamic schools in Banten applied Culturally Responsive Transformative Teaching (Nieto, 2016), enabling teachers to integrate Banten culture into various subjects, with improved critical thinking, cooperation, and curiosity among participants. Second, Akhya (2021) introduced the concept of multiculturalism to Nahdlatul Ulama congregations in Tamantirto Village, Bantul, Yogyakarta, which improved understanding of tolerance, *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood), and awareness of living in a plural society. Third, Wakano and Saidah (2019) noted that Indonesia has around 350 languages and 600 ethnic groups, so managing diversity through academia is important to prevent diversity from developing into destructive potential.

These studies generally focus on a single community or institution and have not surveyed how PTKI in a province develop, implement, and evaluate culturally responsive community service in Borneo communities. The novelty of this study lies in mapping these four aspects (development, steps, effectiveness, and obstacles) across three PTKI in West Kalimantan.

Research Method

This study used a descriptive quantitative approach with a survey method (Sugiyono, 2018) to capture respondents' perceptions of community service that has been or is being carried out in PTKI. The survey was complemented by interviews, observation, and document analysis to enrich interpretation, especially in identifying strategic steps and obstacles. The study is descriptive and therefore does not test causal relationships or hypotheses.

Location, population, and sample

The study was conducted at three PTKI in West Kalimantan: IAIS Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas, STIT Syarif Abdurrahman Singkawang, and STIT Iqra' Putussibau (Kapuas Hulu). The population consisted of students taking part in community service at these institutions. Sample size was determined with Slovin's formula (Umar, 2008):

$$n = N / (1 + N \cdot e^2)$$

where n is the sample size, N is the population size, and e is the margin of error (10%). With a population of 70, the sample comprised 70 respondents selected by random sampling.: with N = 70 and e = 10%, Slovin's formula gives n ≈ 41, not 70. Either state that all 70 students were surveyed (total sampling) or report the actual population size. Note also that Slovin's formula is valid only for estimating a proportion at 95% confidence and is optimal when the true proportion is near 0.5 (Tejada & Punzalan, 2012).

Data collection

Data were collected with a closed-ended questionnaire that captured respondents' assessments of four aspects: the development of culturally responsive community service programmes, implementation steps, effectiveness, and obstacles. Interviews, observation, and document study were used to explore strategic steps and obstacles qualitatively.

Data analysis

Questionnaire data were analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency and percentage distributions. Respondents' scores were grouped into three categories (high, moderate, low) based on score limits set for each aspect (Table 1). Interview, observation, and document data were analysed thematically and presented in tables and narrative.

Results

Programme development, implementation steps, and effectiveness of culturally responsive community service

Table 1 summarises the distribution of 70 respondents' assessments across the four aspects. On programme development, implementation steps, and effectiveness, all respondents (100%) were in the high category and none were in the moderate or low categories. By contrast, on obstacles, 69 respondents (98.57%) were in the high category and one respondent (1.43%) was in the moderate category.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents' assessment categories (n = 70)

Aspect	Score limits (high / moderate / low)	High f (%)	Moderate f (%)	Low f (%)	Total
Development of community service programmes	X > 7.5 / 4.5 < X ≤ 7.5 / X ≤ 4.5	70 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	70 (100)
Implementation steps	X > 5.63 / 3.38 < X ≤ 5.63 / X ≤ 3.38	70 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	70 (100)
Effectiveness of implementation	X > 5.63 / 3.38 < X ≤ 5.63 / X ≤ 3.38	70 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	70 (100)
Obstacles to programme development	X > 9.38 / 5.63 < X ≤ 9.38 / X ≤ 5.63	69 (98.57)	1 (1.43)	0 (0)	70 (100)

Source: survey data (processed). X = respondent's total score on the aspect concerned.

The high ratings on programme development indicate that, according to respondents, community service programmes have taken local cultural aspects into account. This agrees with observation and document analysis showing that PTKI try to combine religious educational values with respect for the traditions of each ethnic group and community. On effectiveness, KKL was judged to contribute to instilling religious values and understanding of the cultural values at the service location. Most respondents stated that, when working with the community, students always follow local customs, and that programmes were organised by accommodating residents' creativity as an expression of local wisdom. This practice also introduces students to cultural diversity and to local skills and potential that deserve to be preserved.

Implementation steps of culturally responsive community service

Based on observation and document analysis, PTKI in West Kalimantan take five strategic steps (Table 2).

Table 2. Strategic steps in implementing culturally responsive community service in PTKI, West Kalimantan

Strategic step	Activity	Output
Developing a culture-integrated community service curriculum	Preparing culturally inclusive teaching materials	Teaching materials relevant to local wisdom
Cooperation with external parties	Building networks with community leaders and policymakers	Community service programmes that match community needs
Multicultural training	Holding training sessions and workshops	Students and lecturers who are sensitive to cultural diversity
Empowerment-oriented mentoring	Applying mentoring that focuses on empowerment	More independent and empowered communities
Use of technology and media	Using digital platforms for education and service	Wider reach and effectiveness of community service

Source: observation and document analysis (processed).

Obstacles to developing culturally responsive community service

Obstacles were rated high by almost all respondents (Table 1). Analysis against the outcome standards of community service shows two main forms of obstacle (Table 3). First, community participation in mentoring activities is low when students are perceived as insufficiently responsive to local culture. Second, residents' wish to join mentoring activities is often limited by the demands of earning a living as farmers, labourers, or traders, who tend to have no free time.

Table 3. Community service development and obstacles by outcome standard

No.	Outcome standard	Community service development	Obstacles
1	Helping to solve community problems by using prior research or studies	Community service is carried out to address problems in the community In education, students mentor pupils who have learning difficulties at school	The community participates little in mentoring activities because students are perceived as insufficiently responsive to the local culture
2	Providing learning activities in the form of mentoring	In religion, students mentor residents who have a limited understanding of performing prayer, reading the Qur'an, and Islamic law Students mentor residents in overcoming difficulties in education, economy, religion, and social matters	Residents' participation is often hindered by the demands of earning a living as farmers, labourers, or traders, who tend to have no free time

Source: interviews, observation, and document analysis (processed).

In addition, document analysis and field findings identified three groups of structural obstacles. First, geographic obstacles: West Kalimantan consists of 14 regencies and cities separated by rivers, land routes are inadequate, and internet and mobile coverage is very limited, so that online communication and the reach of community service are less effective. Second, educational obstacles: the low level of education among residents of disadvantaged, remote, and isolated villages creates participation gaps; many children do not attend formal school or are illiterate, and difficult transport to school lowers motivation. Third, cultural factors: Borneo communities highly value their culture and prefer activities that involve cultural elements such as the rice harvest ritual, *turun tanah*, *naik ayun*, and *buang-buang* at sea before fishing. Students are expected to join these events as a sign of respect so that residents support and take part in the programme.

Discussion

Cultural responsiveness as a prerequisite for participation. The high ratings on all programme aspects, together with the finding that obstacles arise precisely when students are less responsive to local culture, confirm that cultural sensitivity determines how far communities accept community service. This is consistent with culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995), which treats participants' culture as a resource rather than a barrier. The practice of students following local customs and accommodating residents' creativity also goes beyond relevance towards what Paris (2012) calls culturally sustaining pedagogy, which aims to sustain, not merely acknowledge, the cultural and linguistic practices of communities; Ladson-Billings (2014) herself endorses this "remix" of her earlier work. Respect for tradition thus functions as an entry point for trust, just as *da'wah* that attends to cultural values is more readily accepted. The West Kalimantan evidence on harmony through local wisdom (Atmaja & Kurnanto, 2018; Ruslan et al., 2024) suggests that PTKI are working with, rather than against, existing mechanisms of social cohesion.

Five strategic steps as a framework. The steps in Table 2 form a complementary chain: curriculum and training prepare the academic community, external cooperation opens access and local legitimacy, empowerment-oriented mentoring directs programmes towards community self-reliance, and technology extends reach. This pattern is consistent with the rights-based and empowerment paradigm and with the asset-based logic of Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), and with earlier multicultural service work showing that understanding of tolerance and diversity can be built through training and mentoring (Akhya, 2021). Framing KKL as service-learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996) also suggests that structured reflection on cultural encounters should be added so that students learn from, and not only deliver, service.

High effectiveness alongside high obstacles. Almost all respondents rated programme effectiveness as high but, at the same time, rated obstacles as high. These findings are not contradictory: effectiveness describes the acceptability of the programme and the cultural approach used, whereas obstacles come mainly from structural factors such as distance, rivers, infrastructure, communication networks, education levels, and residents' livelihoods, which lie outside the programme's control. Strengthening cultural sensitivity therefore needs to be complemented by

logistical and pedagogical strategies, including scheduling activities around residents' work rhythms, offline mentoring that does not depend on network coverage, and priority for the most hard-to-reach villages. The results support several recommendations for PTKI and LP2M: (1) make multicultural and local-culture etiquette briefings compulsory before KKL and community service; (2) involve customary and religious leaders from the planning stage; (3) prepare mentoring materials and schedules that fit residents' circumstances; and (4) use lecturers' and students' research as the basis of programmes, in line with the outcome standards of community service.

Limitations. First, all respondents gave ratings in the same category on three aspects, so the data show a ceiling effect and possible social desirability bias (Nederhof, 1985), especially because the respondents are students who implement community service and rate their own programmes. Second, the survey did not include direct assessments from the community members who benefit from the service, so the effectiveness reported is effectiveness as perceived by implementers. Third, the study was conducted at three PTKI, so generalisation to all PTKI in West Kalimantan should be made with caution. Further research is recommended to involve residents and customary leaders as respondents, use instruments with better discriminating power, and compare across regions.

Conclusion

This study draws five conclusions. First, community service in PTKI in West Kalimantan is developed with attention to the local wisdom of Borneo communities, and all respondents rated its development as high. Second, it is implemented through five strategic steps, namely a culture-integrated community service curriculum, cooperation with external parties, multicultural training, empowerment-oriented mentoring, and the use of technology and media, with priority given to areas of cultural and religious diversity. Third, all respondents rated the effectiveness of culturally responsive community service as high, shown by students' respect for local customs and religious rituals. Fourth, the main obstacles are structural and social, namely geography and infrastructure, low education among residents in remote areas, residents' limited time, and occasionally students' lack of cultural responsiveness; 98.57% of respondents rated these obstacles as high. Fifth, good communication and maintaining relationships (*silaturahim*) with residents are needed to keep harmony amid cultural and religious differences.

In practical terms, PTKI need to strengthen cultural briefing, involve customary and religious leaders, and design dedicated strategies for remote areas so that community service remains culturally responsive while reaching those who need it most.

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