Designing a spirituality-based Islamic education framework for young muslim generations: a case study from two Indonesian universities

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ABSTRACT
This paper reports on a qualitative study into developing a spirituality-based Islamic education framework for university students. In Indonesia, developing a spirituality-based Islamic education framework in the schooling sector has been extensively carried out. However, such a notion seems sparse in the Indonesian higher education levels. This has prompted the university to start focusing on developing students’ spirituality and their roles. This framework’s development was derived from interviews with Islamic education lecturers about learning patterns at the universities. It also includes observations of core and supporting learning activities. Data were garnered through a qualitative approach to enable substantial descriptive data collection to the foundation for the framework’s design. The findings are reported based on the designed framework. Recommendations for holistic religious education for the young generation at the Indonesian university level are discussed.

Introduction
Education is a process of developing and perfecting a student’s potential to become a human being in balance (Sistem Pendidikan Nasional (National Education Act No. 20 Year, 2003), Sistem Pendidikan Nasional (National Education Act No. 20 Year, 2003); (Watson, 1992). From the primary purpose of this education, education’s essence is about transferring knowledge and forming character and habits (Carr, 2003; Saekan, 2017; Zuhdi, 2018). In Indonesia’s university curriculum, character building is outlined in the Islamic education course (Mas’ud, Fuad, & Zaini, 2019; Zuhdi, 2018).

Recently, there has been a broad sense of dissatisfaction with the practice of this education. There are several criticisms, including regarding the course framework, which tends to be normative and theoretical (Raihani, 2020), a minimal portion of learning (Zuhdi, 2018), and considered not touching affection (Huda, 2015; Utaminingsih, Utomo, & Zamroni, 2017). Defining Islamic education is said to be less systematic and lacks conceptual depth (Sahin, 2018).

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On the other hand, there have been many significant changes in the young generation’s life with the growth of life habits ranging from hedonism and consumerism to terrorism. Many studies discuss youth, radicalism, and Islamic education (Afrianty, 2012; Nilan, 2017), but these studies do not involve Islamic faith and spirituality (Sahin, 2018). Meanwhile, spirituality in teaching and learning is related to ethics and morals (Lantieri, 2001). This phenomenon is a challenge for Islamic education at universities in fostering students’ spirituality (Alias & Abdul Majid, 2015).

Hussain defines it as a whole personal development, including spiritual (Husain, 1979) about Islamic education. The same explanation was given by Baba and Zayed (2015). As Islam’s inner spiritual dimension, spirituality can only be experienced directly and transcends mental categories, but it is not anti-intellectual (Nasel & Haynes, 2005). In this context, the integration of spirituality into Islamic education will bring many benefits. Besides being able to revive the integrated nature of Islamic education, such an integration can improve the teaching approach that seems rigid and aggressive and can even explain the moral and ethical dimensions that are increasingly missing from the younger generation’s lives (Machouche, Bensaid, and Ahmed, 2019). For Islam, spirituality is integrated with scientific and constructive thinking in Islamic pedagogy (Machouche, Bensaid, and Ahmed, 2019). From these explanations, we can construe that Islam and spirituality must complement each other, and Islamic education is based on spirituality.

However, efforts to reintegrate spirituality into Islamic education encounter significant challenges, especially in developing the appropriate curriculum and learning in the university context. Anchored by this phenomenon, there is an urgency to study a spirituality-based Islamic education framework in higher education contexts. This paper reports on the processes and products of developing a spirituality-based Islamic education framework in an Indonesian university context. Also, it is expected to contribute empirical findings in developing evidence-based policies in Islamic education (Sahin, 2018).

**Review of literature on spirituality and university**

Spirituality is one’s life experience defined as a conscious relationship in integrating one’s life at the final value through self-transcendence (Schneiders, 1986). In line with this opinion, Steiner and Bamford (2004) state that spirituality is a self-transcendence process against everything selfish. The goal of spiritual life is to get the highest value can take various forms of belief to bring happiness. These interpretations contain essential elements that require great attention that spirituality is not a specific set of thoughts or beliefs but is an ongoing process or experience. The main point is that spirituality has a fundamental role in life that guides humans to find happiness (Kasim & Yusoff, 2014). Spirituality is part of a religion that must be integrated into all aspects of human life. Spirituality is the basis of religion. In another sense, spirituality is rejected without religion because religion contains spirituality (Smith, 1991).

In Islam, the usual translation for spirituality is *ruhaniyyah*, a term derived from *al-rūḥ*, which means spirit, at least the Qur’an mentions this word 21 times. Muslim spirituality is reflected in a relationship with Allah and others (Mahfud et al., 2021; Nasel & Haynes, 2005). Spirituality shows their obedience and submission to Allah through certain worship practices (rituals) and social relationships. In this context, Islamic spirituality has two main elements: the relationship between humans and their creators and their relationships with fellow humans (Machouche, Bensaid, and Ahmed, 2019). The centrality of the relationship between
a Muslim and Allah and others is the main focus of spirituality and a theme most described in the literature (Dyson, Cobb, and Forman, 1998). These two key elements are also indicators of spirituality in Islam.

In universities, spiritual education is essential because self-development, which is formed from spiritual potential, is a basic human need. Furthermore, it can encourage humans to behave better (Hamzah, Md Isa, & Mohd, 2012) and recognise and realise God’s unique purpose in his life (Adams, 2008). Previous research carried out by Grey Matter Research, & Consulting (2010) pointed out that the young generation rejects ordinary religious activities during junior high schools rather than at universities. Based on these findings, spiritual formation in universities could be the right step. Spiritual education also explains that the dimension of religion or spirituality is essential for students (Flanagan, Nelson, & Mullally, 2012). Spirituality affects goals in life and has a bearing on academic success at university (Greenway, 2006). A survey conducted by Wilkins and Birch (2011) showed that almost all students realise that they must accept the university’s spirituality as the foundation that guides their lives. Similar research also states that students consider spirituality essential and reflect religious values (Nasel & Haynes, 2005). Thus, the university’s Islamic education system must be based on a mission aligned with the Al-Qur’an to create a holistic balance for the individual, including physical, emotional, rational, and spiritual (Sahin, 2018).

Teaching spirituality in universities is rare and still early, so there is no complete concept of teaching. Different perspectives on spirituality among academics make it more challenging and confusing to teach (Groen, 2008). Thus, to include spirituality in universities requires a common perception of the meaning of spirituality teaching by all academics (Gunnlaugson and Vokey, 2014).

One thing that can be done is articulating the meaning of spirituality in students’ daily implicit and explicit experiences (Rego and Pina e Cunha, 2008). This means that teaching spirituality at universities can be taught as an ‘applied science’ that allows students to apply their learning practically in their lives (Flanagan, 2011). This pedagogical approach needs to optimise students’ personal experiences, which they believe to be spiritual (Flanagan, 2011). In addition to directing them to the practice of worship, students need to be oriented to a program of daily personal and social activities; for example, students are asked to visit social institutions or observe underprivileged people’s lives. After that, they discussed what they experienced; students were expected to reflect on and record their experiences and discuss the success or failure of applying spirituality (Flanagan, 2011).

Since teaching is conducted in a group setting, potential can be harnessed in a classroom where spirituality is taught. Students from various backgrounds encourage mutual trust and respect between them, which can train them to build good relationships with others. It also allows students to learn from other students who have experience in spirituality (Lindholm and Astin 2008). However, university teachers must also avoid disputes; teaching spirituality must carefully consider student diversity (Lindholm and Astin, 2008).

To fill the gap in the absence of a complete concept of how spirituality teaching can be carried out in universities, research was conducted to assist universities in redesigning their curricula and having an open discourse around the concept of spirituality (Natsis, 2016). This can be done by discussing with academics and students how to connect students, curriculum, and society (Groen, 2008).

Based on the literature above, this study directly responds to the lack of spiritual teaching in the Islamic education sector in general and universities in particular. This
study’s general objective is to describe the efforts to develop a spirituality-based Islamic education framework for students. Besides, the specific purpose is to investigate the efforts and practice patterns of teaching spirituality carried out by university teachers. To enact such purposes, two research questions guide this study:

1. What pedagogical approaches are used to help students achieve experiences of spirituality?
2. How do students experience spirituality through the application of this pedagogical approach?

Method

As mentioned earlier, Islamic education systems at universities throughout Indonesia do not provide sustainable experiences or spirituality for many students. Meanwhile, spirituality is viewed as a part of a religious dimension that is very important for the young generation. As a result, lecturers and universities began to consider whether this assumption was correct. This study focused on to what extent did lecturers and universities cultivate spirituality through Islamic education.

Two higher education institutions were selected as sample sites, namely Universitas Brawijaya (UB) and Universitas Negeri Malang (UM). The observational data from these two universities were integrated as additional or confirmatory research (Gray, 2009). The reason for choosing the two-sample universities is that they represent the characteristics of various universities in Indonesia, namely UB as a public university (superior in business) and UM as an educational campus. At the same time, this university has a religious ethos, which is an activist for religious activities and Musabraqah Tilawatil Qur’an (MTQ) for students in Indonesia. These two universities are among the two best in terms of Islamic religious achievement at the national level. Thus, our selected sample reflects state universities with strong Islamic characteristics, such as Islamic universities in Indonesia. In line with previous research’s rationalisation, education and business significantly influence life, and spirituality can uplift people’s ethics and morals (Siddiqi, 2018). Therefore it is necessary to ascertain how the efforts of university teachers in integrating spirituality into teaching. Focusing only on these two universities within one region in the province of East Java will provide insight into the framework of spirituality-based Islamic education. Due to insufficient time and resources, choosing more universities is outside the scope of this study.

We used an interpretive paradigm to understand participants’ experiences and actions (Kaplan, 2015). In this regard, some efforts in developing Islamic education were investigated. Data in this study were garnered through interviews and observations (Jamshed, 2014). By utilising the emic perspective, combined with the researchers’ position, or the ethical point of view, this qualitative research is expected to facilitate understanding phenomena by focusing more on a complete and holistic picture (Cooper & White, 2012). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the head of religious affairs, lecturers of Islamic education, and students at this university. We interviewed lecturers and students in an unmoderated focus group of five participants at each university, which lasted around 90 minutes. Thus, there are four groups, namely two groups of lecturers and two groups of students. Itua, Coffey, Merryweather, Norton, and Foxcroft (2014) explained that unmoderated focus groups could facilitate a deeper exploration of participants’ views and opinions,
which may not have been expressed in the interview session. Participants in this study were determined using a purposive sampling technique.

The following are some examples of questions used as the interview guide. The discussion was started by asking general questions about spirituality, for example, ‘What do you think about spirituality?’ ‘How does spirituality relate to religion, morals, and ethics in the daily life of individuals and society?’ For lecturers, the follow-up questions asked focused on the first research question, such as, ‘In what ways did you manifest this aspect of spirituality?’ and ‘How did the aspect of spirituality influence your choice of pedagogical approach to teaching?’ ‘How will you build a curriculum and Islamic teaching that will incorporate aspects of spirituality, and how will you teach it in university?’

Meanwhile, student follow-up questions were focused on answering the second research question, for example, ‘How can the learning experience in Islamic education affect your spiritual experience?’. These questions allow the lecturers to reflect on whether they have embodied spirituality in their teaching and identify ways and patterns in incorporating spirituality. For students, these questions help them discuss the role of teaching spirituality given by their lecturers.

All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. Interview data were analysed using the manifest analysis method (Bengtsson, 2016). In the first step, the interview recording was played back to listen to the voice modulation and the emphasis of the speaker’s words. Then, the final transcript was read in its entirety over and over again. This was done to familiarise themselves with the data that allowed researchers to have a deeper understanding. In the second step, the answers to each interview question were analysed to identify and categorise the concept. Researchers provided a different text colour for each code. This allowed researchers to label raw data, analyse, and group them thematically into one category. Furthermore, together with the lead researcher, we used an iterative inductive process to consolidate concepts into important themes – core teaching, supportive teaching, learning experiences – related to two main topics reflecting the research question: teaching spirituality and positively impacting students. Finally, conclusions were drawn and conducting member checks by confirming the data with informants to ensure internal validity.

Also, to maximise the research’s validity, observations were made during the supporting learning process. The syllabus, lesson plans, textbooks, and learning materials on Islamic education courses used by universities were also reviewed to provide other data sources that allow data triangulation.

**Structure, content, and timetabling of Islamic education courses in university**

It is essential to understand the context of Islamic education in Indonesian universities. Islamic education is a compulsory subject and is included in personality development courses (Mas’ud et al., 2019; Zuhdi, 2018). Islamic education at universities is a continuation of students’ teaching while taking primary and secondary education. Formulated in a religious science consortium on 14–16 November 1998 in Jakarta, the goal of Islamic education at universities is to provide a foundation for personality development for students to become intellectuals who believe in and have devotion to God Almighty, noble character, philosophical thinking, rational attitude and dynamic, broad-minded, participating in inter-religious cooperation in the framework of developing and utilising science and technology as well as art for the national interest.

Starting from this, the subject study’s substance includes God, humans, morals, science and technology, harmony between religions, society, culture, politics, and law
(Rambu-Rambu Kelompok Mata Kuliah Pengembangan Kepribadian Signs of Implementation of Personality Development Courses in Higher Education No.43, 2006). Islamic education learning more generally uses a student approach as an educational subject in activities in the form of lectures and dialogues or teacher-centred (Hanafi, Murtadho, Hassan, Ikhsan, & Diyana, 2020; Hanafi, Murtadho, Ikhsan, & Diyana, 2020; Hanafi, Murtadho, Ikhsan, & Sulton, 2019). All universities have 2-hour slots per week for core class-based learning (Zuhdi, 2018).

Results

Broadly speaking, the efforts made by lecturers and universities in building a spirituality-based Islamic education framework were by developing an integrated learning pattern between core and supporting learning and using a direct experience approach. Meanwhile, from the point of view and assessment of students, the efforts made by their Islamic education lecturers have had a considerable impact on the development of spirituality through various forms of activities inside and outside the classroom.

Islamic education in Universitas Brawijaya

The lecturers were asked what strategies they applied in developing students’ spirituality in core learning. Most of the answers use problem-based learning and contextual learning. It is depicted in the interview:

We use problem-based learning strategies in core learning. The methods applied are problem-solving, case studies, and discussions. To provide stimulus to students, we provide several cases or problems in the surrounding environment. Armed with the knowledge that students already have, they try to find solutions to these problems. Thus, students’ reasoning power, analysis, and creativity will continue to develop. This is so that students can be responsive to the problems of daily life in society.

Another interviewee contended that:

The learning strategy that we apply is contextual learning. In this case, the method used is direct observation. We assign assignments to students to observe the surrounding environment and certain institutions related to class material. For example, to study religious harmony, students were assigned to make observations in villages with heterogeneous communities. They understand and analyse how heterogeneous society lives, what problems arise, and how the solutions are to maintain religious harmony. The method that orientates direct experience makes students aware of the importance of maintaining religious harmony and the dangers of division and conflict.

Meanwhile, when asked about the efforts made in supporting learning. The lecturer explained that they had the university’s full support to organise several activities oriented towards direct student experience through cooperation with several centres at the University, namely the centre for spiritual development, the centre for personality development courses, student activity units, and takmir of the university mosque. It is evident from the interview:

We cooperate with the university’s religious development centre in prayer training and funeral care training. The implementation, this training is held once every semester. Technically, we invited a team from the prayer centre to be the resource person. In this activity, the teams taught how to reach the khusyuk prayer by touching students’ hearts so that many students burst into tears, realising their mistakes so far in carrying out prayers.
This activity is one way to improve the quality of student prayers to affect student daily behaviour positively. As for the funeral care training and providing practical skills, this activity is intended to raise awareness in students of their life’s nature in a temporary world to not waste their lives just for momentary enjoyment.

Another participant shared that:

Collaboration with religious development centres also takes the form of tutorial activities in Islam and scientific disciplines. This activity is carried out in stages according to the student’s scientific discipline background. This activity is intended to deepen students’ understanding of Islam so that students’ knowledge is not partial but comprehensive. With this in-depth knowledge, students will be wiser in responding to religious problems that arise in society.

Meanwhile, the lecturer in charge of collaborating with the personality development course commented that:

Our collaboration with the personality development course is manifested in moral camp activities to provide multicultural education to students. This activity is carried out once every semester. Students will be sent to a pluralistic village in the implementation, such as in the village of Sukodadi Wagir, Malang Regency, where the people are Muslim, Christian, and Hindu. All places of worship are also available in the village. Students stay in the village for several days to learn tolerance directly from the people of Sukodadi village. They are also involved in several village activities to have direct experience of living with tolerance.

The Islamic education lecturer in Al-Qur’an’s field explained that learning to read the Al-Quran is included in supporting learning and collaborating with university mosques and student activity units. It is depicted in the interview:

Supporting lessons that are not always important is guidance on reading and writing the Qur’an and weekly studies. We organise in collaboration with the university mosque and a team from the student activity unit as tutors. At the beginning of the Islamic education lecture, students will be tested for their Qur’an reading quality. A tutor will guide students who are still at the beginner level according to their reading ability. To make it easier for students to participate in these activities, the takmir divides the schedule of activities into several shifts each day to adjust to their class schedules. For the study, the mosque takmir held it every Monday and Thursday afternoon before sunset. This activity is also intended to deepen the students’ understanding of Islam to gain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of contemporary problems in society. Thus, these activities can make students more responsive to current religious issues.

The students were also asked about the impact of the lecturers’ learning experiences in encouraging their spirituality. Almost all students agree that the learning experience in Islamic education courses, both inside and outside the classroom, has considerably affected the importance of relationships with God and fellow humans. One of the participating students shared that:

In short, learning Islam in universities emphasises the importance of ethics and morals, which, in my opinion, are part of the primary dimension of Islamic spirituality. In class, I usually learn using a discussion method about environmental problems. It makes me try to exercise self-sensitivity to ecological issues and encourages me to think analytically and systematically, how to solve them and benefit the people around me.

Another participant shared that:

Outside the classroom, we are usually given the lecturer’s assignment to observe directly in the village community with various religious backgrounds. We were there to learn about
extraordinary tolerance from society firsthand. This is a unique task while simultaneously teaching real-life examples. From this activity, I feel that religion is about symbols and how Muslims show their identity (wise, tolerant, religious, honest, peaceful). If this is manifested in all campus activities, it can encourage students’ spiritual spirit and religious culture to be realised. Of course, this has made me more aware and excited to apply religious tolerance and daily life. Right now, I can work with anyone who has a diverse social background, religion, and belief.

When asked about the supporting learning, the participant contended that:

We understand that learning Islam is very time-limited, only two hours per week, minimal compared to other courses. Fortunately, our University pays great attention. Lecturers have designed a relatively good Islamic education curriculum. They have collaborated with several religious institutions both on and off-campus to learn Qur’an and other spiritual practice activities that cannot be taught in class; we can do outside the classroom, for example, at the university mosque every weekend. This effort helped us deepen the knowledge of religion, especially the practice of worship (ritual), which was still lacking. Religious education has empowered my faith, and I fully believe that the holy book is the guide for my life.

**Islamic education in Universitas Negeri Malang**

When asked the same question, namely, what efforts the lecturer made to foster student spirituality in core learning, most lecturers answered that they applied participatory observation and social analysis methods. The participant shared that:

Students are assigned to observe how they understand a diverse community’s real-life or the participatory observation method to develop spirituality. They are asked to find and find learning partners in the community, such as scavengers, newspaper deliverers, and farm labourers. Students are assigned to study with these learning partners in its implementation by doing their daily tasks or work. When students do partner learning activities, they are required to replace the learning partner’s position. They will become newspaper deliverers if they learn from newspaper delivery partners and become scavengers when they learn from waste pickers.

Another participant also commented:

In core learning, we also apply social analysis. Students are assigned to analyse the student’s environmental conditions, such as boarding houses, dormitories, or Islamic boarding schools. Also, they were asked to conduct interviews with the head of the neighbourhood unit or community unit regarding problems in their place. Then students are asked to analyse these problems’ emergence and how the solutions are resolved from the issues found. This activity stimulates students to be more sensitive to the surrounding environment and positively contribute to the problems.

Following the previous statement, other lecturers provided information about social visits such as to an orphanage:

Students are also assigned to make visits to orphanages. They learn about how they should thank God because they still have parents, learn to love, cherish, and be generous. Not only visits the orphanage, but students are also invited to the mosque for remembrance and reflection to realise their mistakes. The hope is that they will apologise to God, regret it, and never do it again. With these activities, students can understand something real and meaningful, which is essential for them to be better prepared to face life experiences.
Meanwhile, the observations show that the Universitas Negeri Malang’s supporting activities have similarities with the supportive activities of Universitas Brawijaya, especially cooperation with mosque takmirs and student activity units. When asked about supporting activities, the lecturer answered that spiritual development was carried out by mosque-based learning with two main focuses, namely deepening religion and fostering the Qur’an. The participant contended that:

Religious deepening is implemented in Tafaqquh fi Din al-Islam activities, which are activities for new students who take Islam education courses every Saturday and Sunday. The material presented in these activities is thematic and has been scheduled for one semester. This activity is intended to deepen students’ religious understanding, considering that learning Islamic education in core learning is only given two hours a week. Much material has not been conveyed in class.

Another participant contended that:

Other supporting activities are Al-Qur’an Reading Guidance. This activity is carried out by collaborating with Islam education lecturers with a student activity unit called the Al-Qur’an Studi Club (ASC). In practice, students will be given a diagnostic test to determine the level or the quality of reading the Qur’an. The quality of student reading is mapped into three levels, namely beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Students who are at the advanced level will help guide students who are still at the beginner level. The system implemented to control this activity is better than that in Universitas Brawijaya because ASC has made a unique application called e-BBQ to manage and evaluate BBQ activities.

Reinforcing this statement, other lecturers also gave almost the same comments about the activity of reading the Al-Qur’an:

Students’ spiritual development activities are also implemented in the form of khatmil Qur’an in each class being taught. This activity is intended to increase students’ closeness to the Qur’an so that the quantity and quality of their reading are getting better. The hope is that this closeness can have a positive impact on student behaviour.

Meanwhile, when students were asked how learning in Islamic education subjects impacted their Islamic spirituality. The participating student shared that:

I am learning to use participatory observation methods with a learning partner, as a scavenger provides many lessons and meaning in life. This method has taught me how to be grateful for all the countless gifts of God, learn to love and cherish one another, and the importance of having a generous attitude. I also learned to understand something real and meaningful, which is essential for me to be better prepared for society’s next life. Religion makes us optimistic in facing the challenges of the world.

Another participant contended that:

Apart from studying directly with our study partners, we were also assigned to analyse our surroundings’ conditions, for example, an interview with the head of the neighbourhood unit at my boarding house. This activity has stimulated me to develop sensitivity to facts that occur in society and learn how to deal with these problems wisely and correctly. Besides, we are also required to visit the orphanage. It was a valuable experience and made me more grateful, understand the importance of respecting parents, and not quickly disappointing parents.

For questions about supporting activities outside the classroom, for example, at the university mosque, the participant shared that:
There are additional class hours on weekends on our campus, which are compulsory for students taking Islamic religious education subjects. Every weekend we go to the university mosque, where we learn how to practice worship (rituals) from ablution, prayer procedures, and various other fiqh sciences. Apart from that, we are also obliged to learn to read Al-Qur’an according to our abilities. Even though it is like returning to the school level, there is nothing wrong with it because I feel that this additional learning has improved my worship quality, especially prayer. I also admit that I ended up reading the Qur’an more fluently according to the reading system rules. I got three important things from supporting student activities at the mosque: reading the holy book as a guide for life, praying before doing activities, and performing worship in an orderly manner.

Based on observations of the learning process and analysis of lesson plans and course materials, both universities have the same learning patterns and approaches. The difference is that Islamic education at Universitas Brawijayais more developed in supporting learning activities, namely activities that are not listed in the regulations but are regulated by lecturers or universities to support mosque-based core learning such as guidance on reading and writing the Qur’an, tutorial lectures, training for special prayers, and mortuary training. Meanwhile, the Universitas Negeri Malang has developed core learning activities, namely learning activities carried out based on Dirjen Dikti (2006) issued decision, which contains guidelines for carrying out religious learning such as participatory observation methods, social analysis, and visits to orphanages. Some activities are programmed regularly each semester, and some are flexible.

Discussion

This study was conducted to reveal lecturers’ efforts in developing spirituality-based Islamic education and how it impacts students’ spiritual experiences. First, we will describe spirituality and Islamic teaching in higher education, the first essential themes identified in the data. This theme was identified after the interview data were further analysed to answer the first research question. While all the lecturers discussed incorporating spirituality in their respective teachings, they also voiced their views on how universities and curriculum documents handled spirituality. Figure 1 shows a spirituality-based Islamic education framework that is trying to reconstruct based on interviews with lecturers. Our research findings found similarities in the two sample universities, namely applying the core and supporting learning integration pattern using a direct experience approach.

In this framework, lecturers’ learning strategies include direct observation, simulations with participatory observation, social learning through social analysis, and strengthening task performance through several activities in supporting learning. All lecturers at these two universities agreed to implement this learning pattern and approach because they believed they could improve Islamic education quality. They explained that there was great potential from applying the direct experience approach, that Islamic education would be oriented towards cognitive aspects and affective and psychomotor aspects to foster students’ religious awareness. Educators and the environment must continue to instruct students to appreciate the life around them (Helton & Helton, 2007).

Meanwhile, the use of the direct experience approach has also been documented in some western literature. Dewey (1997) states that all kinds of actual educational activities are created through experience, but not all experiences are connected with education. At this point, the teacher’s job is to organise all kinds and superior experiences relevant to the student’s present
and future life. Dewey’s continuation between present experiences as a provision for future experiences is called the ‘experiential continuum,’ or a series of continuous experiences. This can explain some learning strategies chosen by Islamic education lecturers in providing continuous student experiences, such as participatory observation and direct observation. Learning by experience is also known as learning by doing or learning by observation. The main principle is to develop cognitive aspects and their impact on affective (Mowrer & Klein, 2000). When students learn, there is a relationship between themselves and the subject they are studying. There are things or experiences that students have to discover for themselves through observation. Learning through observation can reduce the time and effort required to understand complex actions and behaviours (Foti et al., 2018).

The main concern of lecturers’ core learning is students’ emotional aspects and growth through involvement in a reasonably specific environment (Badyal and Singh, 2017). Spirituality itself is emotional (Fisher, 2011). By placing oneself within a particular environment, one can bring a behavioural perspective and understand the nature of that environment (Krapfl, 2016). Dewey (1997) also states that successful education is the experience of individuals who can react with care to their environment’s problems and challenges. This research can explain how the lecturer chooses direct experience, for example, social analysis learning strategies and orphanage visits. From this research, it can be concluded that another important thing is the availability of experience in preparing the environment (Katz-Buonincontro & Anderson, 2018). Lecturers must be able to ensure environmental involvement both inside and outside the university. The environment, especially society,
must be the media and determinants of how students can gain meaningful experiences, namely positive experiences that lead to growth. This experience can lead someone to think so that they can act wisely and correctly, which will affect students’ spirituality.

Concerning learning theory in Islam, especially Al-Ghazali’s perspective, the experience is considered an essential learning element (Noval 1993). In addition, learning must be taught by adding relevant real-life examples and experiences to be meaningful and effective (Nakosteen 1964). From experience, students are asked to do self-reflection to take lessons from these activities and grow their awareness, as admitted by students in interviews. The expertise of lecturers also shows the same notion. The evaluations conducted show that the model applied can shape and develop positive behaviour and student spirituality.

About students’ perceptions of whether teaching Islamic education using a direct experience approach can influence their spirituality, the answer to this question discusses how students experience the experiences of spirituality after attending the teaching. Overall, students felt that adding spirituality to teaching could have a positive impact on them. They explained that spirituality-based teaching helped them achieve identity as spiritual beings by carrying out ritual practices (worship) and finding a place in society by building good relationships with others.

In line with these findings, empirical evidence has revealed a positive impact of teaching spirituality in universities (Lindholm and Astin, 2008; Palmer, 2003), for example, increasing interpersonal skills (Lindholm and Astin 2008) and helping to shape individual personalities (Palmer, 2003). Furthermore, Lindholm and Astin (2008) explained that including spirituality in teaching will help students learn about moral and ethical principles, enabling them to live harmoniously with other people and their environment.

McLaughlin (2005) explains that students can realise their spirituality by practising rituals (worship) in the context of this research, such as prayer rituals and reading the Al-Qur’an. In another study, Cecero and Prout (2014) revealed that students could manifest their spirituality if given student-centred teaching and invite to discuss values and ethics. The spiritual teacher’s role is more as a facilitator than as a knowledge provider (Hodge and Derezotes, 2008). It seems that all students claim to be able to manifest their spirituality through teaching methods like this.

Most of the students also agreed with participatory observation and case studies, and they recommended using this method for spirituality-based Islamic education. They claim to be able to identify daily life problems for analysis and practice making correct and wise decisions involving aspects of spirituality. Students feel that exploring the side of life in their environment can create a ‘spiritual awareness’ within them. It is in line with the findings of this study that case studies are very suitable for teaching spirituality in universities (Trott, 2013; Manz et al., 2006). This method is more effective than other forms of spiritual teaching in the classroom (Mezirow, 1997).

As already mentioned, this research also seems to indicate an effort to develop a balanced spirituality between building a meaningful relationship with God (hablum min Allah) and fellow humans (hablum min an-nas). Based on the designed framework, the learning schemes and resources provided allow lecturers to guide students to reach an excellent spiritual level and reach the essential essence of spirituality. In line with this study’s findings, it was explained that mentoring-based programs and linking them to professional development in spiritual coaching are initiatives that universities should consider to cultivate a mature spirituality in students (Horan, 2017). This framework can also refute the notion
that spirituality is different from religiosity (Hay, Reich, & Utsch, 2006). At the same time, it supports the psychological idea, which states that spirituality is the basis of religion that can be acculturated through education and community (Fahlberg & Fahlberg, 1991).

In summary, this finding strengthens the Islamic learning theory, which states that real insights and knowledge need to be provided (social understanding in core learning) before being invited to believe in God (religious understanding in supporting learning) (Alavi, 2008). In more detail, the core learning emphasises that Islam prefers to learn through insight with conditioning and reasoning. Insights and knowledge are also related to the world and people (Baqeri, 1991). One of the learning theories in the Islamic perspective emphasises that one must think before imitating or doing something (Malkavi, 2001). The Qur’an repeatedly asks believers to use observation, senses, and reason in understanding and contemplating all creation and the greatness of Allah in order to gain true zeal in religion and avoid blind acceptance (Q.S. Al-Ghasyiah: 17–20, Q.S. Qaf: 6–10, Q.S. Al-An’am: 95, and Q.S. Al-Anbiya: 66–67). Since reason also has limitations, it cannot properly deal with such things as the oneness and attributes of God. Supporting learning reinforces by providing learning related to religious rituals so that the learning outcomes obtained by the thinking process can be straightened and perfected.

**Implications and limitation**

While many studies have been conducted, little attention has been directed at identifying student spirituality learning as a higher education concept (Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 2011; Fisher, 2009). Thus, this empirical study through the spiritual-based educational framework offered can fill such a gap. In this study, it can be revealed that the spiritual dimension related to relationships with fellow humans can be carried out by the direct experience of students involving the campus environment, orphanages, and the surrounding community. These activities can stimulate students to develop skills to be sensitive to the facts that occur and learn how to deal with them. Meanwhile, the spirituality dimension related to understanding Islamic values and relations with God focuses on training *khusyuk* prayer and correctly reading the Al-Qur’an as required by Islam. Through modelling and coaching like this (Erlacher, 2014), spiritual development, where mentors support a collaborative process, is the right way for the millennial generation (Kopp, 2010).

This study also shows that integrating core and supportive learning, balancing the spiritual dimension of relationships with God and others through direct experience, will help students achieve desired and relevant characters. When this was suggested, all stakeholders expressed a desire for such a spirituality-based Islamic education framework that would somehow integrate core and supporting learning. Who then makes decisions about how to apply the spirituality-based educational framework this research offers? This matter needs to be discussed further by university stakeholders. As we have observed, due to time constraints for Islamic education in universities, the stakeholders have to determine their focus, whether on core learning or supporting learning.

Although this framework is developed for Islamic education, we believe that there is much to be learned from the education of other religions, particularly in the effort to develop students’ spirituality. Most significantly, this study’s results indicate the importance of providing a spiritually oriented student direct experience. However, another consideration also needs to be given about the placement of the *hablum min Allah*
orientation, including training in special prayers’ and reading the Al-Qur’an on supporting learning, as suggested in the framework. If applied, this framework also has the potential for a fundamental change in the paradigm of Islamic education in universities regarding hablum min Allah’s position towards hablum min an-nas.

It should be noted that the cooperation partners mentioned in the framework offered, for example, a religious development centre, a personality development course, a mosque, a student activity unit, the surrounding community, including an orphanage, were not interviewed and observed in this study. Their opinions are essential as part of this research discussion and to generate implications. Further research needs to be done to get their perspectives. We are also concerned with Bahasa Indonesia’s use (participants’ national language) during the interview and the English translation of the transcripts. This could yield distinct meanings in the data analysis procedure. Finally, one of our field researchers is a lecturer at one of the universities used as the research sample. His presence during data collection may affect the responses given by participants.

Conclusions

University teachers’ efforts to provide Islamic religious education based on spirituality have been well constructed in a framework offered by integrating core and supporting learning. There is the application of direct experience that supports the spiritual strengthening of students. Through this integration, students can attain an essential Islamic spiritual experience. Students gain positive and meaningful experiences about social and community life (hablum min an-nas). Meanwhile, students can increase knowledge and practice in performing prayers and reading the Al-Qur’an correctly (hablum min Allah).

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