



Fostering Intercultural Understanding: A Reading-Based Framework for Islamic Universities in the International Context

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Abstract. The requirement for promoting intercultural understanding has slowly increased today's globalized world, particularly in the so-called broader society of higher education. In this article, an overarching framework is proposed for the development of intercultural competence among students in Islamic Universities engaged in all domains situated at the global level. Based at the intersection of language education, cultural studies, and international relations, the framework articulates a reading-based approach that promotes students' exposure to diverse perspectives from other international contexts as well sharing knowledge in a dialog issue. By bringing together theoretical insights, pedagogical strategies and practical suggestions: this framework seeks to provide a systematic and flexible guide for Islamic universities in the inclusion of intercultural deprives.

Keywords: Intercultural understanding, reading comprehension, Islamic universities, international context, framework.

1. Introduction

With the global village concept already being effectively practiced through communication coupled with ease in transport, it is imperative that one has adequate knowledge about different cultures. In my opinion this is not about awareness just because there are cultural differences, it is about legitimizing such differences. This is especially pertinent for those who aspired, in their efforts and endeavors, to make a difference in our global society and achieve personal fulfillment. A special mention in this context would be the Islamic universities that have very important functions to perform in this context. They are not simply centers of knowledge and scholastic achievement; they are facilities that help build character and ethical principles of future leaders. These are institutions that focus on thinking, in the forming of character, and in preservation of culture. Although, they are grounded in some specific Islamic principles, they reflect the general longing for the acquisition of wisdom and the pursuit of the period's justice between people (Al-Sofi, 2015).

However, Muslim universities, which until recently were considered to be the premier centers of Islamic higher learning is in a crucial crossroads (Husein et al., 2022). They also need to be capable to uphold and define their own identity, as well as their vision and mission, while, at the same time, educating their students to be able to effectively compete and function in today's more and more integrated world. In other words, they have to stick to the Islamic roots, ethic and conduct in their educational institutions, at the same time preparing their students for impacting other communities of human beings. They have to be committed to the efforts on the formation of a new, more fair, more calm and more diverse world jointly with other cultures and societies as the contribution for the humanity in all the countries. Such potentially coinciding and potentially conflicting goals may and should result in the pedagogical model and the curriculum where intercultural dialogue would be integrated and

firmly embedded into the overall institutional and educational codes as well as into the very DNA of the institutions.

To this end, and as there are currently no such proposals, it is suggested a theoretical reading-based framework for international Islamic universities (Maspul, 2024a). The unique contribution of this model is that it places reading as the most powerful transformative educational element in the center of the system. This approach helps educators to develop a strategy to empower students to be interculturally more perspective and significant despite their diverse cultural and linguistic origins. We draw on innovative interdisciplinary work, including but not limited to language education, cultural studies, and international relations, providing practical ways to integrate the framework into the teaching of intercultural studies.

Consequently, and since no such examples have been offered so far, it is presented an idealistic reading-centered model designed for Islamic universities in a global environment. The model is based on the following assertions: that reading equals the most powerful pedagogical tool of transformation; that it can be the key route to increasing intercultural literacy among students from diverse cultural and linguistic traditions; and that on the strength of recent empirical studies in such fields as applied linguistics, cultural theory and international affairs, it is made a number of down-to-earth recommendations about how this is to be done (Permatasari & Andriyanti, 2021).

In our educational approach, we hold the utmost respect for the pivotal role teachers play in helping students embrace the richness of diverse cultures (Chima Abimbola Eden et al., 2024). Teachers are not just instructors; they are mentors who guide students through meaningful discussions, encouraging them to explore complex subjects. They provide not only academic support but also emotional guidance, nurturing an environment where students feel empowered to express themselves freely. This atmosphere fosters open dialogue, where students can tackle tough topics, challenge assumptions, and refine their communication skills alongside peers from various backgrounds. Moreover, leveraging technology and online resources adds an exciting dimension to learning, allowing students to connect with classmates worldwide, enriching their educational experience.

2. Methods

The study was conducted through a series of important steps. Initially, a literature review approach was chosen, involving extensive research in libraries (Durst et al., 2023). Twenty pertinent articles from Google Scholar were scrutinized. Documentation served as the primary method of data gathering. First, we began by pinpointing the main focus of our research and brainstorming relevant keywords to help us find the necessary information. It is then turned to scientific search engines to locate articles that matched our criteria. Once we had gathered the data, we embarked on a meticulous analysis. This involved using thematic and interaction analyses to delve deep into the content and extract meaningful insights. This entailed several stages: filtering out irrelevant data after a comprehensive article review, organizing pertinent data into a structured format for clarity and ease of interpretation, and finally, interpreting the data findings by correlating them with relevant theories to draw conclusions.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Intercultural Learning Framework for Reading Instruction in International Islamic Higher Education

Learning about different cultures in Islamic higher education is like exploring a rich tapestry of languages, cultures, and beliefs (Pendidikan Islam et al., 2023). As we develop a solid approach to teaching reading in this context, we've discovered some helpful strategies

that improve our students' ability to understand and appreciate diverse cultures.

First, cultural contextualization in text selection: Central to this framework is the conscious selection of reading materials that reflect the cultural diversity of the student body while being consistent with the principles of Islamic education. The aim is to curate texts that cover a range of cultural backgrounds, linguistic nuances and thematic relevance, thereby giving students the opportunity to critically engage with different perspectives while deepening their understanding of Islamic principles (Sharma & Christ, 2017).

Second, multimodal pedagogy promotes understanding: Integrating multimodal approaches into reading instruction is critical to adapting to the diverse learning styles and language skills found in international Islamic higher education settings (Djamdjuri et al., 2021). By integrating visual aids, audio recordings, and interactive multimedia platforms, educators can meet the diverse needs of learners, resulting in deeper understanding and retention of text content across cultural boundaries.

Furthermore, we place a strong emphasis on fostering dialogue and collaboration among students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Olivos et al., 2010). Our approach underscores the significance of these interactions and collaborative tasks in fostering students' appreciation and empathy towards other cultures. By facilitating group discussions and encouraging interactions, educators cultivate dynamic learning environments where students can freely exchange ideas, question perspectives, and glean insights from one another. In doing so, we break down cultural barriers and enhance the educational journey for all participants.

In this framework, a crucial part is helping students develop a deep understanding of different cultures by looking at texts closely and thinking about the context they are in. As students begin to question the biases present in their readings and explore alternative perspectives, they naturally develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for diverse cultures. This growth equips them with the skills needed to navigate various situations with sensitivity and empathy.

Another key part of our approach is combining language learning with Islamic Studies (Roza, 2020). This blending ensures students not only get better at languages but also learn more about their spirituality. By reading and discussing classic Islamic texts together, students not only improve their language skills but also gain a richer understanding of Islamic culture and beliefs. This helps them see religion in a broader, global context.

Ultimately, utilizing advanced learning technology is embracing digital platforms for learning provides unparalleled chances to overcome geographical limitations and develop intercultural skills in online educational settings (Sholeh, 2023). Through utilizing digital resources for group reading sessions, virtual cultural interactions, and immediate language assistance, instructors can craft immersive learning opportunities that go beyond physical constraints, promoting global awareness and intercultural proficiency among learners.

In wrapping up, creating a well-rounded intercultural learning plan for teaching reading in international Islamic higher education is a big step towards shaping students who are deeply engaged with the world, equipped with the ability to understand different cultures, think critically, and have a good grasp of Islamic teachings. This effort aims to prepare them to navigate the intricacies of our interconnected world with wisdom and compassion. By adopting the principles laid out in this plan, educators can start a journey of innovative teaching that goes beyond cultural differences and builds a community of learners dedicated to open discussion, empathy, and mutual appreciation.

When it comes to teaching reading with a focus on different cultures, it's all about blending certain teaching elements that naturally encourage intercultural understanding (Shi,

2022). These elements play a vital role in creating a welcoming and diverse learning space. Let's take a look at some of the teaching methods that naturally lend themselves to this intercultural approach to reading instruction:

- a. It's really important to offer students a variety of reading materials that reflect different cultures, languages, and points of view. This helps them explore diverse voices and experiences, which not only enhances their reading abilities but also broadens their understanding of different cultures
- b. When teachers weave cultural context into reading materials, it really helps students connect with the texts on a deeper level. By including background details, historical contexts, and cultural subtleties related to the texts they're learning, teachers make it easier for students to grasp the content more fully. This not only enriches their understanding of the material but also encourages them to appreciate different cultures.
- c. Providing language assistance and translation support can really make a difference for students who are learning in a second language or a foreign language. This kind of help makes reading materials more accessible to everyone, reducing language barriers and making it easier for students from different language backgrounds to fully participate and engage with the texts.
- d. By promoting open conversations and thoughtful examination of reading materials from various cultural viewpoints, we can nurture a greater understanding between cultures. Through structured discussions, students get to delve into cultural differences and similarities, question stereotypes, and cultivate empathy for different perspectives, which ultimately helps them value and appreciate the diversity of cultures.
- e. When we introduce interactive learning experiences like group readings, role-playing, and multimedia presentations, it really gets students involved in what they're learning. These activities not only encourage teamwork and interaction among classmates but also provide hands-on learning opportunities that help students better understand different cultures while improving their reading skills at the same time.
- f. By including activities that prompt self-reflection, we encourage students to think about their own cultural backgrounds, biases, and beliefs. This self-awareness helps students become more sensitive and respectful when encountering cultural differences, ultimately helping them become better equipped to understand and appreciate diverse perspectives in their reading journey.
- g. When teachers create assessment methods that embrace cultural diversity and cater to various learning styles, it ensures fair evaluation of students' reading abilities. By providing options like portfolio assessments, oral presentations, and multimedia projects, teachers can gauge students' understanding and critical thinking skills in ways that respect their cultural backgrounds and linguistic differences.
- h. When teachers bring global viewpoints into reading lessons, it helps students see beyond their immediate surroundings and grasp the bigger picture of worldwide issues and connections. By including literature and readings from various parts of the world, teachers open students' eyes to global realities and nurture a sense of belonging to the global community within the context of learning about different cultures.

When teachers incorporate these teaching elements into reading lessons, they can build an engaging and welcoming learning atmosphere that encourages students to understand different cultures, improve their language skills, and become critical readers. This approach is particularly valuable in international Islamic higher education settings.

3.2 Intercultural Learning Framework for Reading in Islamic Higher Education

The Intercultural Learning Framework for Reading in Islamic Higher Education offers a systematic method for promoting intercultural understanding and competency through reading lessons in academic settings that follow Islamic principles and values (Susilowati, 2023). This framework aims to navigate the intricate relationship between language, culture, and religious viewpoints in Islamic higher education, providing educators with a clear guide to establish reading environments that embrace diverse cultures and foster critical thinking, empathy, and global awareness among students.

This framework focuses on carefully choosing reading materials that represent the varied cultural backgrounds of students and the Islamic tradition. These texts cover a wide range of cultures, languages, and relevant themes, enabling students to interact with different viewpoints while also enhancing their grasp of Islamic teachings. By connecting reading materials with Islamic values and principles, educators create chances for students to delve into how faith and culture intersect, encouraging a deeper understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultural legacy within Islamic scholarship.

At the heart of this framework is the use of different teaching methods to meet the diverse learning needs and language skills of students in international Islamic higher education. By using visual aids, audio recordings, and interactive multimedia platforms, educators can address the various requirements of learners, helping them better understand and remember what they're reading regardless of cultural differences. By making use of technology to enhance learning, educators can create engaging reading experiences that go beyond geographical boundaries, encouraging students to think globally and understand different cultures more deeply.

Additionally, this framework highlights the significance of encouraging conversations between different cultures and creating opportunities for collaborative learning. By encouraging students to interact with each other and discuss topics in groups, educators create lively environments where students can share their views, question assumptions, and build understanding together. This approach helps break down cultural barriers and makes learning more enriching. Through reflective activities and analyzing reading materials in context, students are prompted to examine the cultural biases present in texts and consider different perspectives, which equips them to navigate diverse cultural situations with sensitivity and insight.

In essence, the Intercultural Learning Framework for Reading in Islamic Higher Education offers a revolutionary way of teaching reading that goes beyond cultural barriers (Maspul, 2024b). It aims to create a community of students who are globally aware, possessing the skills to critically analyze, understand Islamic teachings, and navigate the complexities of our interconnected world with compassion and insight. By adopting the principles of this framework, educators embark on a path of educational innovation that celebrates the diverse cultural landscape of Islamic higher education, fostering a culture of dialogue, comprehension, and mutual respect among students.

4. Conclusions

To wrap up, the creation and application of the Intercultural Learning Framework for Reading Instruction in International Islamic Higher Education mark a noteworthy achievement in educational advancement within Islamic higher education. This framework presents a strong and thorough method of teaching reading that goes beyond cultural limitations, promoting intercultural understanding, and encouraging students to think critically.

By focusing on carefully choosing a variety of reading materials that reflect different cultures, incorporating different teaching methods, and encouraging discussions between students from various backgrounds, this framework prepares students with the skills and understanding needed to navigate the intricacies of our interconnected world with insight, compassion, and cultural awareness.

Furthermore, by placing reading materials within the context of Islamic values and principles, educators pay homage to the deep cultural roots of Islamic scholarship while promoting a sophisticated understanding of faith in a global context. Through reflection and careful analysis, students gain the confidence to critically approach texts, challenge societal biases, and navigate cultural interactions with sensitivity and insight. Ultimately, the Intercultural Learning Framework for Reading Instruction in International Islamic Higher Education strives to cultivate students who are globally aware, capable of embracing diversity, fostering empathy, and contributing positively to a more inclusive and interconnected world. By adopting this framework, educators embark on a journey of educational excellence that transcends cultural boundaries and encourages a community of learners dedicated to open dialogue, mutual understanding, and respect.

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