

Academic Collaboration Challenge Students from Yemeni, Nigeria and Cambodia at Islamic University in Indonesia

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Abstract: Academic collaboration is an important element in higher education that supports the exchange of knowledge, skills and experiences between students from various cultural and social backgrounds. In the context of an Islamic University, this study explores the challenges faced by Yemeni, Nigerian, and Cambodian students in academic collaboration. These challenges include cultural and communication differences, as well as their impact on understanding learning methods. The qualitative method of collecting data through resource interviews or field studies was very appropriate for researching this article. The interview was aimed at obtaining two sources' perspectives, namely; international students and teaching staff to collect data. This study aims to identify and analyze the challenges of academic collaboration between students from these three countries, as well as solutions to overcome the obstacles. The results of research examining the challenges of academic collaboration between Yemeni, Nigerian and Cambodian students at Islamic universities, in this article show that there were cultural and linguistic challenges, which had an impact on the understanding of Islamic teachings for Yemeni, Nigerian and Cambodian students in Indonesia. Therefore, there was a need for solutions such as integration between international students and the surrounding environment and provision from the university and international students themselves before living in Indonesia. In conclusion, this article highlights the challenges and their impacts as well as solutions.

Keywords: *challenges, collaboration, international students, Islamic university*

Introduction

Universities are currently facing several of challenges that encourage them to open up opportunities for international students. One of the main factors driving this

phenomenon is increasing global competition in the world of higher education. The internationalization of education involves the movement of staff and students in two different directions. One way is through strategic collaboration and exchange between

various educational institutions globally (Zuhdi, 2019). By accepting students from various countries, universities can increase the international reputation of the university itself (Diana & Hakim, 2020). Apart from that, the need to expand academic collaboration across countries has also become an encouragement for universities to open their doors to international students. This collaboration not only enriches students' learning experiences but also expands their professional networks in the future (Hamzah, 2016). Cross-cultural academic collaboration in university environments is increasingly in the spotlight in contemporary academic literature. Challenges of Academic Collaboration for Yemeni, Nigerian, and Cambodian students at Islamic universities receive special attention because they illustrate the complexity of cross-cultural interactions in an increasingly global higher education context. According to research by Marginson and Rhoades, international students often experience various obstacles in adapting to new academic cultures and building productive collaborations in different environments (Tight, 2022).

Differences in culture and lifestyle between the country of origin and the destination country cause culture shock, where students have to adapt to new values, traditions and habits (Alasmari, 2023). Students and educators in the Asian region rarely face difficulties because the cultures of ASEAN countries have many similarities (Susilawati et al., 2020). However, social facts that emerge in the context of the challenges of academic collaboration between Yemeni, Nigerian and Cambodian students at Islamic Universities include cultural and linguistic differences. So it has an impact on Islamic learning methods for students from these three countries (Thamrin, 2022). According to research by Byram, social factors such as language differences, cultural norms, and value systems often become obstacles in

intercultural interactions (Safitri, 2016). Stated that while studying, international students face challenges related to their reading and writing abilities (Widiasih et al., 2020). This fact is reinforced by data showing that countries such as Yemen and Nigeria are experiencing serious challenges related to migration and conflict, which may influence the perceptions and experiences of students from these countries in collaborating in the academic environment (Sugawara & Nikaido, 2014).

Students from Yemen, Nigeria and Cambodia are worthy subjects for research in the theme of Challenges of Academic Collaboration at Islamic Universities because of the diversity of cultures, backgrounds and experiences they bring. Their participation creates a rich representation of the challenges and opportunities for cross-cultural collaboration in academic settings. For example, how differences in culture, language and social norms can influence interactions between international and local students in higher education (Ismail et al., 2023). By understanding the perspectives and experiences of students from Yemen, Nigeria, and Cambodia, research can provide valuable insights for improving the effectiveness of cross-cultural academic collaboration in Islamic higher education institutions.

We need to know what the peculiarities of education are in each country, such as the peculiarities of education in Yemen, traditionally, in North Yemen, education mainly takes place in religious schools, where children study the Koran, or in schools run by local initiatives. However, not all children can enter these schools, and the majority of students are boys, only a few girls can attend school (Shodiqin, 2021a). Briefly, the peculiarities of education in Nigeria lie in the government's concrete efforts to improve the quality of education through certain programs and focus on reducing disparities as well as improving

teacher quality (Ernaliana & Rasidi, 2021). Meanwhile in Cambodia, one of the peculiarities is using the mosque as the main center. The presence of this mosque fosters a sense of solidarity and encourages the formation of educational institutions such as madrasas or Islamic boarding schools. Mosques are not only places of worship but are also used for various activities and shared needs. sometimes mosques are also used to welcome guests or other events (Wekke, 2023).

This research aims to identify and analyze the concrete challenges faced by international students, especially Yemeni, Nigerian and Cambodian students in academic collaboration in an Islamic university environment. As well as formulating strategies or solutions to overcome these challenges, to increase the effectiveness of academic collaboration. One model that supports improving the quality of learning and is applied in learning is the collaborative model (Rahman et al., 2022). This research also needs to be discussed because one form of the emergence of internationalization in higher education, namely the process in which universities incorporate international aspects into their educational goals, functions or delivery. This includes curriculum development and innovation, exchange of lecturers and students, expansion of study programs, use of technology for learning, cultural training, provision of education for international students, as well as collaboration in research and publications. Thus, this research aims to contribute to strengthening cross-cultural academic collaboration at Islamic Universities and the broader global higher education context (A'la et al., 2016).

Based on relevant sources, universities have played an important role by providing national and international level skills to regular and international-students (Fahlevi, 2015). So the research argument is based on

the complexity of the challenges faced by international students in the learning process at Islamic universities in Indonesia. Factors such as different cultural and linguistic challenges are important elements that influence the dynamics of academic collaboration in a university environment. It is hoped that this research will provide benefits and in-depth insight into how cross-cultural academic collaboration can be strengthened and implemented effectively at Islamic Universities and in the wider global higher education context.

Research Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a focus on literature study patterns and field study patterns with interview techniques as the main method of data collection (Small, 2011). Choosing a qualitative approach to find and conclude facts that are easier to understand to produce new hypotheses (Hennink et al., 2020). The research subjects consisted of Yemeni, Nigerian and Cambodian students who were studying at UIN Walisongo Semarang, Central Java, as well as 2 teaching staff; consisting of Islamic boarding school caregivers and lecturers. Resource persons were selected taking into account age, time lived in Indonesia, alumni, and position or position to obtain diverse points of view. The main data collection technique was interviews, taking place over 14 days. Interview questions will be designed to explore students' learning experiences and explore the challenges faced in academic collaboration. The research procedure will include the identification and selection stages resource person, interview scheduling that is adjusted to the resource person's and researcher's schedule, conducting one-on-one interviews with the resource person, as well as documentation with participant permission (Rachmawati, 2017).

After collecting data, proceed with analyzing the data. Interview data will be compiled and analyzed to identify key themes related to the challenges of academic collaboration. The data that has been collected is then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which involves data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or data verification (Adlini et al., 2022). The relevant data analysis is in the form of words rather than numbers collected in various ways such as observation, interviews, quotations from documents or recordings. According to Miles and Huberman, the first data analysis by reducing data or processing raw data contained in revised field notes includes selection, focus, simplification, abstraction and transformation. Next, presenting the data, data presentation refers to a structured arrangement of information to facilitate the process of drawing conclusions and taking steps. Through presenting data, we can gain an understanding of the events that occurred and carry out further analysis or take steps based on this understanding. And the last one is concluding or verifying data. This activity involves interpreting the data displayed and simplifying it, noting patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows, and propositions. These conclusions are also thorough, tested for truth and validity (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

In this view, data analysis and data collection interact and repeat themselves. The researcher continually moves between these activities during the data collection process, then switches between simplifying, displaying, and drawing conclusions/verification to continue the research. For example, as data is coded or simplified, new ideas emerge about what

needs to be included in the table for data display. Entering data requires further simplification. Once the table is filled, initial conclusions are drawn, which can trigger decisions to add new columns to the table to test those conclusions (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2019). This analysis process will enable researchers to understand in depth the challenges faced by students in academic collaboration on Islamic campuses in Indonesia.

This type of qualitative approach through field studies still requires a literature review, to obtain conclusions in the form of strong facts (Darmalaksana, 2020). With this approach, researchers studied the dynamics of collaboration between students from three countries by collecting data through observation, interviews and document analysis. The collected data is then compiled, simplified, and interpreted to identify patterns, regularities, and factors that influence the success or challenges of the collaboration. Miles and Huberman's analytical method allows for an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of cross-cultural collaboration in Islamic higher education, as well as developing relevant recommendations to increase the effectiveness of academic collaboration between students from Yemen, Nigeria and Cambodia at the Islamic University.

Finding and Discussion

Resource Person Profile

This research using a narrative inquiry approach involved 4 students from 3 different countries as main sources and 2 lecturers.

Table 1. Information data

No	Source Code	Department	Brief Identity of Sources
1.	MIY1	UIN Walisongo student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Age 21 years - Alumni Al-Noor School Yaman - Student from Yemen
2.	MIY2	UIN Walisongo student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Age 22 years - Alumni of Al-Sediq School Yemen - Student from Yemen
3.	MIN	UIN Walisongo student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Age 22 years - Alumni Al-Huda Academy Katsina Yemen - Student from Nigeria
4.	WHAT	UIN Walisongo student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Age 21 years - Alumni of Institute An-Nikmah Al-Islamiyah Phnom Penh - Student from Cambodia
5.	D1	Islamic boarding school Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Age 51 years - S1 Alumni of IAIN Walisongo Semarang (1996) - Masters Alumni IAIN Walisongo Semarang (2001) - Doctor Alumni IAIN Walisongo Semarang (2014) - Became an Islamic boarding school Leader since 2007
6.	D2	Permanent lecturer at UIN Walisongo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Age 58 years - S1 Alumni of IAIN Walisongo Semarang (1991) - Masters Alumni IAIN Walisongo Semarang (1999) - Became a permanent lecturer since 2012

Source: Interview Source and Google (2024)

The table includes data from sources consisting of students and educators at UIN Walisongo as well as Islamic boarding school caregivers. The first to fourth resource persons are UIN Walisongo students, with diverse educational backgrounds and origins, including from Yemen and Nigeria, as well as Cambodia. The fifth resource person is an Islamic boarding school caretaker who has a higher education background from IAIN Walisongo Semarang and has served since 2017. Meanwhile, the sixth resource person is a permanent lecturer at UIN Walisongo who has completed higher education at IAIN

Walisongo Semarang and has become a permanent lecturer since 2012.

Academic Collaboration

Etymologically, collaborative or *collaborative* is derived from the word "co" and "labor" namely the unification of energy or increasing capabilities that can be utilized, so that they can achieve goals that have been agreed upon or set together (Choirul, 2020). "*Collaboration is the mutual engagement of participants in a coordinated effort to solve a*

problem together" (Lai, 2011). This means that collaboration can be interpreted as mutually supportive involvement to solve problems simultaneously. Another opinion says collaborative learning is a learning strategy where two or more individuals are involved cooperatively in a learning process (Warsah et al., 2021). Interaction in this collaboration is characterized by the same goal, a balanced structure with intensive negotiation through interactivity, and mutual dependence on each other.

Success in education is the result of collaboration between elements in the education system that support each other (et al., 2019). This opinion can be linked to the results of the interview D1 "Collaboration does not only occur during discussions, but also in daily interactions. When they were at the Islamic boarding school, they started collaborating. This is not only limited to talking about lecture material, but everything. "In my opinion, this is important because international students in Islamic boarding schools help speed up the process of assimilation between foreign students and regular students".

In this article, we only discuss academic collaboration. So academic collaboration can be understood as a process of intensive cooperation between individuals or groups, which aims to achieve common goals in an academic context. Collaborative learning provides significant benefits such as making it easier for students to understand the material, stimulating active involvement, and creating a more enjoyable learning atmosphere (Alauddin et al., 2023). Academic collaboration involves a variety of working methods, including group discussions, creating joint projects, and co-authoring publications, all of which aim to generate new knowledge or deepen understanding of the topic being studied.

Language Challenge

As international students, they face major challenges in the form of language differences (Yuliyani et al., 2023). Especially when research sources come from various countries. The short time required to learn the language of instruction can be an obstacle for students, affecting their ability to understand academic material, interact with classmates, and adjust to life off campus. The language used in academic and everyday environments is not their mother tongue, so they must learn the language of instruction quickly to participate effectively in lectures, discussions and social activities (Solihat, 2018). This opinion is strengthened by the results of interviews with 4 international students who have both experienced language challenges.

As a result of an interview with MIY1, he admitted *"Yes, there are things I don't understand like pronouncing "ng" in Indonesian"*. This opinion is added to by MIK's narrative that he also experienced language difficulties. *"To be honest, I have difficulty understanding language. I mean, I don't understand what the lecturer said when he delivered the material in class"*. These two interview results were confirmed by MIY2 who provided the fact that *"International students often experience difficulties in terms of language barriers such as writing lessons, participating in class, social interaction, and pronunciation"*. Narasumer MIN also shared his experience in language challenges. *"If you speak English, it's certainly easier than Indonesian. Like the most difficult thing is when pronouncing, for example, Ngaliyan"*.

This statement is almost the same as D2's opinion *"International students here actually already have basic knowledge. They are similar to students who transfer or exchange lessons, so their understanding is not too different. However, their abilities may not be visible due to*

communication barriers. For example, in discussions or doing assignments, they take longer to understand the language used. Sometimes, they also respond slowly to questions". However, D1 responded, *"We use Indonesian and Javanese, right? So, in many activities, they have language barriers".* So the results of interviews regarding language barriers provide recognition of the existence of obstacles or challenges, both from students and caregivers and lecturers.

From the confessions of the four interviewees stating that there are language challenges, this statement is in line with the opinion of D2, who noted that international students have the same basic knowledge as local students, but their abilities may not be visible due to barriers in communication. D1 added that the use of Indonesian and Javanese in many activities is also an obstacle for international students. Thus, the interview results show that there is a consensus regarding the challenges faced by international students in terms of language, both from the perspective of students and lecturers.

Cultural Challenges

International students studying at Islamic universities are often faced with a variety of cultural challenges that impact their academic experiences and daily life. Their day one of the challenges is adapting to religious and cultural norms that are different from their culture of origin. For example, differences in religious practices, dress codes, and social norms. International students also have difficulty understanding the broader cultural context, including social norm that are not directly related to religion. Understandably, people from different cultural backgrounds may experience difficulties in understanding and adapting to new academic norms and values (Singh & Jack,

2022). This opinion is in line with the facts presented by several sources.

MIK expressed the same opinion, *"Here, we are allowed to dance as Muslims, but in Cambodia, we are not allowed, so the first time I came here, it felt like a new experience".* In this case, the teaching staff also responded to the challenges of cultural differences faced by Yemeni, Nigerian and Cambodian students. D1, as the caretaker of an Islamic boarding school which is occupied by international sources and permanent lecturers, gave his response, *"In Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia there is a culture such as the students shaking hands (kissing the hand) of their ustadz or ustadzah, in their country of origin there is none, and I also let that happen. So all international students greet normally, not like the greeting according to our culture. Even though in terms of learning, they follow Islamic boarding school rules, we don't need to eliminate their culture like that. For me as an Islamic boarding school teacher, the most important thing is respect for the students, such as; actively participating in activities and following the rules".*

Traditionally not all children have the opportunity to attend these schools, and the majority of students who attend are boys, and only a few girls attend (Shodiqin, 2021b). This statement was confirmed by MIY2 sources *"Yes, there are indeed differences in the way of Islamic education between men and women in Indonesia and Yemen. In Indonesia there are increasing efforts to provide equal access to education for men and women, although traditional gender roles may persist. in several areas. Well, in Yemen there is still gender separation in education more generally, such as institutions or classes that are still separated between men and women. In Indonesia, the culture is diverse, so various interpretations, practices or Islamic laws have emerged. On the other hand, in Yemen, traditional culture and tribal influences are still strong in shaping religious education or it can be understood that much of the education there is still traditional.*

This makes acculturation between diverse cultures and religious teachings more common in Indonesia than in Yemen”.

From the opinions of both international students and Islamic boarding school caregivers, we can conclude that all international students have cultural challenges in the new place they live. However, this does not become a complicated problem and disrupts the academic process. During the interview process, the interviewees did not provide detailed cultural challenges they experienced, they only provided brief experiences of challenges (from a cultural perspective).

Impact

From the opinions of both international students and Islamic boarding school caregivers, we can draw a conclusion that all international students definitely have cultural challenges in the new place they live. However, this does not become a complicated problem and disrupts the academic process. During the interview process, the interviewees did not provide detailed cultural challenges they experienced, they only provided brief experiences of challenges (from a cultural perspective) (Singh & Jack, 2022). The foreign cooperation unit at the Ministry of Religion, which is responsible for several PTKINs, has not fully carried out its duties properly. The lack of coordination in communication resulted in international cooperation by PTKIN only stopping at the MoU signing stage (Yuliyani et al., 2023). This opinion could be one of the causes of challenges for international students, such as experiencing difficulties due to cultural and language differences, so that understanding Islam feels foreign and difficult to understand.

International students have difficulty participating or discussing in class, and

responses to reading material or group activities are often hampered, most likely due to different academic practices from their home countries (Chen et al., 2019). This opinion is similar to the opinion of MIN's source, who said *“One of the impacts due to language and cultural challenges, in my opinion, is that it is a bit confusing because here everyone follows the Shafi'i school of thought, while in my country we follow the Malik school of thought. There are lots of differences. Like istighasah activities at the cottage, it's really hard for me to understand”*. Added to this is MIY2's narrative which explains that there are differences in ways of learning and understanding Islam in Indonesia and in their country of origin *“Because in Yemen there are still many who are original or have not had much acculturation and so on, while in Indonesia, Islam has acculturated with local culture, traditions and history. So some aspects of Islamic teachings in Indonesia sometimes make me have to think hard (because of mixed acculturation without conflict). Because of that, I have to learn more about religious activities here. Well, this is one of them, the impact is a bit difficult to understand some lessons and some things”*. The two statements from the two speakers were further strengthened by the facts conveyed by MIK *“I often have language problems, because my language is Tagalog, of course I feel the impact, such as when the lecturer explains material in class, or when interacting in the boarding school and university environment with friends, I have to think several times to understand what they were saying, sometimes I had to open translate to understand what they were saying”*.

The presence of language challenges can hinder their speaking abilities, hinder their participation in class discussions, prevent them from building social relationships, and ultimately, affect their self-confidence and emotional well-being (Taabudillah, 2023). This opinion has several similarities with the opinion of resource person D2 as a permanent lecturer who

stated *“So far the international students I have seen are weak in terms of methodology, such as writing papers, arranging words and sentences when speaking”*. D1 also commented on the system of studying Islam at Islamic boarding schools. *“One of the impacts is that when studying the Koran at Islamic boarding schools, one of them is reading the Yellow Book using Javanese. They clearly don't understand”*. D1 does not force international students to understand the contents of the Yellow Book study, the most important thing is that they want to join in following the learning and rules at the Islamic boarding school.

The conclusion from these opinions and the narratives conveyed by MIN, MIY2, MIK, D2, and D1 speakers is that language and cultural challenges can have a significant impact on international students' participation and abilities in various contexts, including in class discussions, building social relationships, and developing self-confidence and emotional well-being. This is in line with research which indicates that language barriers can hinder the ability to speak and interact. In addition, the interviewees' opinions also highlighted difficulties in learning methodology, understanding the Islamic religion, and adapting to the local language and culture, which shows the importance of support and flexibility in the context of international education.

Solution

Language challenges not only impact their academic performance, but also their social life and ability to adapt to new environments (Quílez, 2019). Each individual must have their way to help them overcome their challenges. As experienced by international students, alongside them recognizing the challenges they face, they also have solutions for themselves.

Expanding social networks and getting support from the campus community and available resources is the main key, according to them. Having local lecturers or fellow students who care can also provide valuable cultural insight and open up opportunities for discussions that can improve your Indonesian language skills. They admit that they are actively involved and have the desire to join in every activity at universities and Islamic boarding schools to be the main factor in making it easier to study Islam in Indonesia.

MIK feels grateful because when he was hampered by the language of instruction (English and Indonesian), MIK received help from lecturers and peers *“I am not yet fluent in Indonesian, and I am not yet fluent in English. But I feel lucky because the lecturers and friends provide support and encouragement, so I study harder in learning languages, I also take BIPA provided by the university”*. MIY2 responds *“I think, cultural exchange programs, language courses, and Cultural clubs on campus help overcome cultural and language challenges as they exist BIPA held on campus. Build relationships with local students, seek mentorship from colleagues, and maintain an open, open-minded approach to ease the transition to a new environment”*. Meanwhile, MIN's response was *“I think the solution to every problem regarding challenges is to be at an Islamic boarding school because I experienced many things in my life. It was really fun hahaha”*.

With the right support and efforts to adapt, international students can overcome the challenges they face and contribute effectively to the academic environment (Alasmari, 2023). This statement is in line with the support from fellow students, academic staff, and cultural integration programs provided by the university, many international students successfully overcome these challenges in their studies in an Islamic university environment. D1 stated *“International students at Islamic boarding*

schools help foreign students to integrate more quickly into the new environment. In my opinion, living in an Islamic boarding school facilitates assimilation better than living in an exclusive rental. They participate in small discussions with regular santri to mediate language differences. As caregivers, we allow existing methods to continue. What is important is that international students have at least followed the rules and activities at the boarding school, even though they don't always understand them completely". In contrast to D2 who gave a response regarding a different solution *"The first, as soon as you enter Indonesian (before the lecture takes place) they should have learned the language of instruction first, so it is better to be matriculated in the language. Second, it is better to get to know the scientific culture first or get to know the culture of scientific standards that exist in the destination country"*.

The university has also provided facilities to improve their language skills, one of which is the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) program by the Language Development Center (PPB) UIN Walisongo Semarang which has been holding BIPA since 2018 (HUMAS UIN Walisongo Semarang, 2023). According to the results of interviews with sources, the BIPA program is held every holiday (every 2 months) due to conflicting schedules of international students with different majors and course times. In this case, researchers also have not been able to research directly related to the implementation of the BIPA program because of the deadline for writing articles and implementing BIPA which must wait for the latest schedule. So in this case the solution that is needed by international students is provision by the country of origin regarding the language of the destination country, an overview of the culture of the destination country, and some tips and tricks for being in the destination country. However, the destination country must also continue to collaborate with the destination universities

to provide language and culture learning spaces for international students, one of which is by directing international students to live in Islamic boarding schools.

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Conclusion

The research results show that the academic collaboration of Yemeni, Nigerian and Cambodian students at the Islamic University in Indonesia faces language challenges and cultural differences, which ultimately affect their learning process, such as in terms of understanding the Islamic religion. Every international student will experience new language and cultural barriers that have an impact on the understanding process, but they each have their solutions to overcome the challenges they face. Responses from Islamic boarding school administrators and lecturers show agreement, that international students

generally face language and cultural challenges that can become obstacles in academic collaboration, but teaching staff have looked for solutions that can help international students overcome these challenges.

This research still has weaknesses that need to be considered. First, the limited number of speakers and the language understanding of the speakers, even though English is used as the language of instruction, some resource persons still have difficulty understanding English, so the answers given are not always detailed. Second, the interview method still experiences instability, due to difficulties in aligning schedules for face-to-face interviews and the period to complete this article is only small, so interviews with international students are conducted online to accommodate the interviewee's free time. Therefore, these weaknesses need to be researched and addressed more deeply to ensure the validity and reliability of research findings.

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