

The Role of co-Curricular Activities in Islamic Higher Education: Engaging Gen-Z with Developmental Theories

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Abstract— The 4.0 Era has revolutionized education through the digital transformation of academic systems and curriculum design. This study investigates the role of co-curricular activities in Islamic higher education and their potential to attract and engage Gen-Z. Theories of humanism, recreation, self-development, and rational choice emphasize the importance of integrating values into co-curricular frameworks. The research also highlights the challenges faced by Islamic institutions, including the limited integration of co-curricular activities and alignment with the career-oriented priorities of Gen-Z. A qualitative approach was employed through document analysis, observation, and in-depth, unstructured interviews to confirm and elaborate on the study's focus. The findings point to the need for co-curricular models that integrate Islamic values, fostering intellectual, social, and spiritual growth while simultaneously enhancing enrolment appeal.

Keywords— *Islamic Education, Co-Curriculars, Gen-Z, and Engagement.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The accelerated evolution of digital technology under Era 4.0 profoundly impacts educational paradigms, including administrative processes and curriculum design (Rodliyaton et al., 2022). Notably, the reforms extend beyond classrooms to influence extracurricular activities, which play a vital role in shaping student engagement (Supriyatno et al., 2021). For Islamic higher education institutions, addressing the dynamic preferences of Generation Z while maintaining competitive enrolment rates presents a unique challenge (Nasir et al., 2021; Rodliyaton et al., 2022). This paper investigates the interplay between digital transformation, extracurricular activities, and student enrolment patterns, with a specific focus on co-curricular activities underpinned by Islamic values (Nassr et al., 2021; Ulya, 2018).

Digitalisation has transformed academic administration through platforms such as SIAKAD and EdLink (Suyadi et al., 2022), but gaps remain in extracurricular engagement. Studies from global institutions demonstrate the effectiveness of extracurricular activities in enhancing student interest and enrolment (Assegaf et al., 2022; Fikra & Darmalaksana, 2022; Musthofa et al., 2023), yet this focus is less pronounced in Islamic educational institutions, particularly newer ones like AIN, Lhokseumawe (Shadowing, 2023).

Co-curricular activities have been linked to intellectual and social development, career satisfaction (Abdullah, 2017), and enrolment motivation (Assegaf et

al., 2012). However, the integration of such activities within Islamic institutions remains limited. This necessitates a model that incorporates Islamic values, enabling a humanistic approach to education that aligns with the institution's vision and mission (Witono & Widodo, 2023).

This study is grounded in four key theoretical frameworks, each providing a lens through which to address the gaps identified in the integration of co-curricular activities and their impact on student engagement in Islamic higher education institutions.

The framework of Humanism's theory, emphasizes personal growth and the internalization of values such as compassion and empathy. Rooted in the works of Rogers (1951) in work of Ben-Yehuda (2015) and further elaborated by Menzli et al., (2022), this perspective aligns seamlessly with the goals of Islamic education, which aim to nurture holistic individuals. By fostering emotional and ethical development, humanism underscores the importance of embedding values that resonate deeply with students' personal and spiritual lives (Oberreiter, 2021).

Recreation Theory forms the second pillar of this study, highlighting the significance of leisure activities in promoting social and cognitive development (Ergüven, 2023). This theory advocates for outdoor and off-campus engagement as crucial components of co-curricular activities (Aşan & Emeksiz, 2018; Nkwanyana, 2020). Such initiatives not only enhance students' physical well-being but also create opportunities for meaningful interactions and experiential learning, which are vital in

cultivating a balanced and enriching educational experience.

The third theoretical framework is Self-Development Theory, which focuses on the process of self-socialization and the internalization of societal values (Houck & Spegman, 1999; Reitz, 2022). Co-curricular activities, viewed through this lens, serve as a platform for fostering mutual care, building social connections (Reitz, 2022), and enabling students to integrate themselves effectively into the broader community (Frick & Chevalier, 2023). This theory underscores the role of these activities in shaping well-rounded individuals who are socially conscious and value-driven.

Rational Choice Theory provides insight into the decision-making processes of students (Herfeld, 2020), particularly their choices related to enrollment in educational institutions. As articulated by Krstić (2022), this framework posits that students make rational evaluations based on institutional offerings, weighing factors such as value alignment and practical benefits. This theory reinforces the need for Islamic higher education institutions to design co-curricular activities that are both appealing and value-driven, ensuring that they resonate with the aspirations and expectations of Generation Z.

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives offer a comprehensive foundation for understanding the interplay between co-curricular activities, student engagement, and institutional appeal, particularly within the context of Islamic higher education in Era 4.0.

The research identifies several critical gaps in the current understanding and implementation of co-curricular activities within Islamic higher education institutions.

First, while co-curricular activities are widely recognized for their significant role in fostering student success and enhancing institutional reputation, their development within Islamic institutions remains limited. This underdevelopment hampers the ability of these institutions to leverage such programs as tools for academic and social enrichment.

Second, there is a notable gap in understanding how co-curricular activities align with the preferences and priorities of Generation Z. This cohort, known for its career-oriented mindset, seeks activities that are not only engaging but also contribute to their professional aspirations. However, the extent to which existing co-curricular offerings address these needs is inadequately explored.

Third, the integration of Islamic values into co-curricular frameworks has been insufficiently examined. For newer institutions in particular, the challenge lies in designing activities that not only align with contemporary educational goals but also embody the religious and cultural ethos central to Islamic education.

Lastly, the lack of structured models for managing extracurricular activities, such as the Co-Curricular Transcript (CCT), presents a significant barrier. Without systematic approaches to designing, implementing, and documenting these activities, institutions face difficulties in enhancing student engagement and showcasing the value of their programs effectively.

These gaps underscore the need for comprehensive research to develop co-curricular models that integrate Islamic values, meet the expectations of Generation Z, and establish structured systems for extracurricular management, thereby positioning Islamic higher education institutions as competitive and holistic learning environments.

This paper aims to explore how co-curricular activities can enhance the student experience for Generation Z while adhering to Islamic principles, using frameworks such as Humanism, Recreation Theory, Self-Development Theory, and Rational Choice Theory.

A. Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the integration of co-curricular activities within Islamic higher education institutions and their impact on the enrolment of Generation Z students. The research focuses on examining how co-curricular frameworks can incorporate Islamic values while addressing the career-oriented priorities of Generation Z. The following outlines the methodological steps used to achieve the study's objectives.

B. Research Design

A case study design is utilized to gain in-depth insights into the current state of co-curricular activities in Islamic higher education institutions. This design facilitates a focused examination of specific institutions, providing a detailed understanding of the challenges and opportunities present (Adams, 2008; Andrés et al., 2023).

The study focuses on IAIN Lhokseumawe, selected for its relatively recent establishment and the observed gaps in their co-curricular offerings.

Purposive sampling is employed to select participants, ensuring representation from diverse stakeholders such as academic administrators, faculty members, students, and parents.

C. Data Collection Techniques

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic, data collection employs a variety of methods (Adler et al., 2017; Ashari et al., 2023). Semi-structured interviews are conducted with key stakeholders, including academic managers, faculty members, and student leaders.

These interviews aim to explore the current state of co-curricular activities, their alignment with institutional goals, and their appeal to Generation Z students. The flexible nature of the semi-structured format allows for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives.

D. Data Analysis

The study uses thematic analysis to identify meaningful patterns and themes from the collected data. This process begins with transcribing interviews and focus group discussions, ensuring a detailed and accurate record for analysis. The transcribed data are systematically coded, with recurring concepts and ideas grouped into meaningful categories.

Through this coding process, themes emerge that align with the study's key areas of focus, including the development of co-curricular activities, the preferences of Generation Z, the integration of Islamic values into extracurricular frameworks, and the challenges institutions face in implementing these initiatives. The identified themes are then synthesized to form a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand, providing the foundation for actionable recommendations that can help institutions refine their co-curricular offerings to better align with student needs and institutional goals.

II. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Islamic higher education institutions are tasked with providing a comprehensive educational experience that nurtures students' intellectual, moral, and spiritual development. As we move into the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Era 4.0) (Ashari et al., 2023), the educational landscape is transforming with the increased digitisation of academic systems and the evolution of student expectations. Generation Z, the cohort born between 1997 and 2012 (Herawati et al., 2022), is coming of age and entering higher education institutions. With their highly digital and career-oriented mindset (Jeresano & Carretero, 2022), this generation presents unique challenges and opportunities for Islamic higher education institutions, particularly when it comes to fostering engagement through co-curricular activities.

Co-curricular activities, which go beyond the academic curriculum, play a crucial role in student development. These activities are designed to complement academic learning, focusing on the development of social, emotional, and physical skills (Raslie & Ting, 2021; Szymkowiak et al., 2021). In Islamic higher education institutions, these activities are often shaped by the ethical and spiritual values rooted in Islamic teachings.

The Influence of Digitalisation in Islamic Higher Education

The digitalisation of higher education, particularly in the context of Islamic institutions, is an essential topic of discussion. Era 4.0 has brought forth significant changes, such as the use of digital platforms for academic administration, the introduction of online learning environments, and the integration of technological tools in teaching and learning (Masruri & Waliah, 2023; Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016). For Islamic higher education institutions, the challenge lies in balancing the need for modernisation with the core principles of Islamic education, which values personal growth, spiritual development, and ethical conduct.

While digital tools like EdLink and SIAKAD have streamlined academic administration (Rodliyaton et al., 2022), the integration of technology in co-curricular activities remains underdeveloped in many institutions. Islamic higher education institutions, IAIN Lhokseumawe struggle to create and manage co-curricular offerings that engage students while integrating Islamic values. Digital platforms, however, present an opportunity to bridge this gap by offering students virtual avenues for engagement, networking, and skill-building (Nasir et al., 2021).

The integration of digitalisation with co-curricular activities can also help increase enrolment by offering students more opportunities for participation in activities that align with their career aspirations, interests, and digital engagement preferences. For instance, career development programs, online workshops, and virtual interfaith dialogues can all contribute to student engagement while adhering to the values of Islamic education.

Co-Curricular Activities in Islamic Higher Education Institutions

In Islamic higher education, the role of co-curricular activities is often understated. However, these activities have been shown to contribute significantly to intellectual, social, and career development. According to Rion (2008) and Niemelä (2022), engagement in extracurricular activities fosters intellectual growth, teamwork, and social competence. For Generation Z students, who are particularly focused on career development and personal growth, co-curricular activities can provide valuable skills that supplement academic learning.

However, these activities are structured and integrated within the broader educational framework. Islamic values must be a cornerstone of any co-curricular program within Islamic higher education institutions. Activities such as leadership development programs, community engagement, interfaith discussions, and charitable work offer opportunities to develop students' moral and ethical compass while honing their interpersonal and professional skills.

Co-curricular activities that align with Islamic teachings encourage students to engage with the world in a manner consistent with their religious and cultural

values. This allows them to make meaningful contributions to their communities while pursuing personal and academic excellence. Ofcourse, remains a gap in terms of formal models that integrate these activities into the academic and administrative frameworks of Islamic institutions.

Humanism in Co-Curricular Activities

Humanism is an educational philosophy that emphasizes the development of the whole person—intellectually, emotionally, and socially. Carl Rogers (1951), one of the prominent figures in humanistic psychology, argued that the primary goal of education should be to nurture the potential of individuals by fostering self-actualization, emotional intelligence, and empathy (Witono & Widodo, 2023). In Islamic education, the concept of humanism aligns closely with the objectives of nurturing well-rounded individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also morally and spiritually aware.

Humanistic education stresses the importance of creating environments where students can freely explore their thoughts and feelings while developing a sense of empathy and social responsibility (Bala, 2007). This is particularly relevant in the context of co-curricular activities in Islamic institutions, where programs can be designed to promote empathy, compassion, and social justice in line with Islamic values. For example, interfaith dialogues, charity work, and community service programs can help students develop empathy and moral responsibility, both of which are core principles in Islamic education.

Integrating humanism into co-curricular activities within Islamic higher education institutions can provide Generation Z students with an enriched educational experience. It enables them to internalize positive values, such as respect, compassion, and understanding (Ahmad Rizal et al., 2023), while participating in activities that foster personal and social growth.

Recreation Theory and Co-Curricular Activities

Recreation Theory, as discussed by Henderson et al., (2004), posits that recreational activities are vital for promoting physical, emotional, and social development. These activities are typically pursued for enjoyment and relaxation but also provide opportunities for learning, collaboration, and personal growth. In the context of Islamic higher education, recreational activities such as sports, outdoor adventures, and cultural festivals can contribute to students' holistic development.

Recreational activities in Islamic institutions not only promote physical well-being but also encourage students to engage with others in a relaxed and social environment. By offering recreational opportunities that adhere to Islamic principles, institutions can foster a sense of community, teamwork, and social responsibility among

students (Romanovskyi & Romanovska, 2020). This is particularly important for Generation Z students, who value experiences that are not only enjoyable but also meaningful.

Additionally, the integration of recreational activities within Islamic higher education institutions can help bridge the gap between academic and personal growth.

For instance, physical activities such as sports can teach students about teamwork, discipline, and perseverance, which are essential skills in both personal and professional life. Moreover, activities that encourage cultural exploration and creativity can broaden students' perspectives and help them engage with diverse worldviews in a respectful and open-minded manner.

Self-Development Theory and Co-Curricular Activities

Self-Development Theory, as introduced by McCann and Pearlman (1992), emphasizes the process of self-socialization and the internalization of societal values. This theory posits that individuals develop their identities and social skills through interaction with others and the environment. In the context of Islamic higher education, co-curricular activities serve as platforms for self-development, enabling students to engage in personal growth while developing social competencies.

Co-curricular activities that promote self-development allow students to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their role in society. In Islamic higher education institutions, such activities can include leadership development programs, mentorship opportunities, and volunteer initiatives. These activities help students cultivate qualities such as leadership, responsibility, and empathy, which are key elements of both personal and social development.

For Generation Z students, self-development is a critical aspect of their educational journey. As they are often focused on preparing for their careers, co-curricular activities that emphasize self-development provide the tools they need to navigate the complexities of the professional world. By integrating self-development theory into co-curricular programs, Islamic higher education institutions can better support students in becoming socially conscious, self-aware, and value-driven individuals.

Rational Choice Theory and Student Engagement

Rational Choice Theory, as articulated by Need & De Jong (2001), suggests that individuals make decisions based on a rational evaluation of available options. In the context of student enrolment, Rational Choice Theory posits that students will choose educational institutions based on factors such as academic offerings, campus culture, and co-curricular opportunities (Goldthorpe, 1998). For Islamic higher education institutions, the

challenge lies in designing co-curricular programs that are not only appealing to Generation Z but also align with their career-oriented mindset.

Students today are more discerning than ever before, and their decision to enroll in a particular institution often depends on the perceived value of the educational experience, both academically and extra-curricularly. This is where the integration of Islamic values into co-curricular activities becomes crucial. Islamic higher education institutions that offer co-curricular programs aligned with the interests and needs of Generation Z—such as career development workshops, leadership training, and entrepreneurial initiatives—are more likely to attract students who are seeking holistic educational experiences.

Rational Choice Theory also highlights the importance of offering co-curricular activities that provide tangible benefits, such as skills development and networking opportunities. By aligning co-curricular activities with the aspirations of Generation Z students, Islamic institutions can enhance student engagement and increase enrolment.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, co-curricular activities play a vital role in enhancing the student experience within Islamic higher education institutions. By integrating theories such as Humanism, Recreation Theory, Self-Development Theory, and Rational Choice Theory, institutions can develop co-curricular programs that foster holistic development while meeting the needs and expectations of Generation Z.

The digitalisation of educational systems presents an opportunity to enhance student engagement through online platforms and virtual co-curricular offerings. Islamic higher education institutions that embrace these opportunities while staying true to their values will be well-positioned to attract and engage Generation Z students, fostering an environment of academic excellence, personal growth, and social responsibility.

Conclusion should be consisting of answering research problem, based on the main research findings, theoretical significance/conceptual construction.

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