

Exploring The Character Strength of Indonesian Muslim Students

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Abstract

Students in Islamic higher education institution are part of the next Muslim generation. They will have significant role to build the nation and *ummah* in the future. To be able to improve the quality and well-being of Muslim future generation, it is imperative to explore the character strength of Muslim University students. This research aims to inquire the student's character strength in a private Islamic University in Jakarta. Quantitative approach is applied to explore the indicators of character strength among the research subjects. The data was collected with a questionnaire based on adaptation of Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) scale. The data was obtained from 315 students from several faculties in a private Islamic University in Jakarta. The result suggests that out of 24 characters, 5 characters are quite dominant among the research subjects. These characters are gratitude, love of learning, kindness, citizenship, and bravery. Discussion, limitations, and suggestions are explained in the end of the paper.

Keywords: *character strength, muslim students, virtues*

Introduction

Students in Islamic higher education institution are part of the next Muslim generation. They would have significant role to build the nation and *ummah* in the future. To be able to improve the quality and well-being of Muslim future generation, it is imperative to concern about the student life.

Like many other individuals, to be more successful in life, there are some challenges that should be handled by college students (Papalia, Olds, and Feldman, 2007). The challenges are faced by students since the beginning of the course until graduation. For students in the early years, they need a process of adaptation for the change of learning system, recognize the new environment, mingle with new friends, and how to perform independently (Stallman, 2009). In subsequent years, they were faced with the challenge to set the time between studying, developing social networks, as

well as determine and build a career (Stallman, 2009).

Beside the demands of their developmental stage, students are also exposed to the other academic and social challenges in the college. Misra and Castillo (2004) found a variety of academic demands on students, such as the family demands to excel academically, doing the coursework, a competition with a friend to get a good assessment, and also the changes of the education system that push them to be more independence. Other academic challenges associated with career success in the future, teaching method, and lecturing activities itself (Santrock, 2008). In addition to the academic demands, the students are also faced with the demands of social relationships, such as to establish good relations with college friends, work in teams, to follow the activities of student organizations, as well as find a potential partner (Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999).

The diversity of the demands of the academic and non-academic that must be passed by the students can hinder the optimal well-being by creating psychological distress. This statement is supported by the findings of Verger et al (2009) which states that the level of psychological distress in students tend to be higher compared to the working population of the same sex and similar age. A high level of psychological distress associated with feelings of anxiety and depression, low self-esteem, and poor ability to concentrate, overcome difficulties, and engage in social relationships (Goldberg & Williams, 1991). If psychological stress become chronic, it can impede the ability to learn and give attention (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004, 2010), which in turn can disrupt students' academic performance (Dyrbye, Thomas, & Shanafelt, 2005; Nerdrum, Rustoen, & Ronnestad, 2009). Other studies have also shown that unresolved psychological distress is also related to an increased risk of illness and absenteeism (Nystuen, Hagen, and Herrin, 2001).

In accordance with the opinion of Peterson & Seligman (2004), one of the factors that relate with good psychological well-being is individual positive character strength. Character strength is related with the concept of virtue (virtue). Based on the extensive research, Peterson & Seligman (2004) divided human virtues into six categories: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Virtues are universal and selected through a process of evolution because it is important for the survival of (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), a person is said to have good character if he has all the virtues.

Each virtue has several specific characters (Peterson and Seligman, 2004).

According to Seligman (2002), the individual has a positive and negative character. However, what is meant by the character strength is a positive character that brings people to the positive feeling. Therefore, character strength is an element or psychological mechanisms that are related to virtues. By knowing the dominance character strength, the interventions related to the development of psychological well-being and student character strength can be more targeted. Thus, this research aims to explore the Muslim college student's character strength.

Character Strength

Character strength in one virtue is unique and comparable with other virtues (Linley and Joseph, 2004). For instance, the virtue of wisdom can be achieved through strength such as creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness and so forth (Linley and Joseph, 2004). Thus, every virtue consists of several characters. Below is explained further about the 24 characters that is classified in six virtues.

Classification of Character Strengths

The following describes the classification of the six virtues and 24 character of an individual (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2002; Linley and Joseph, 2004):

1. Wisdom and Knowledge

Wisdom is one form of intelligence but in contrast to IQ, it is not the knowledge gained from reading books, lectures, or study (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Peterson and Seligman (2004) state strengths of wisdom include a positive attitude associated with finesse and using the information in achieving a quality life. Strength of the wisdom and knowledge is the cognitive aspects include:

- a. Creativity (Originality, ingenuity)

A creative must have an idea or behavior that can be recognized original, new, surprising or unusual (Peterson and Seligman, 2004).

- b. Curiosity (interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experiences)

Curiosity is an interest in a person to experience (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Person who have curiosity want to know new experiences, different and challenging (Peterson and Seligman, 2004).

- c. Open-mindedness (judgment, critical thinking)

A desire to actively seek evidence to refute or criticize the beliefs, plans, or objectives of others and to consider the evidence fairly if there is evidence that required (Peterson and Seligman, 2004).

- d. Love of learning

Individuals who have an attitude of love of learning in a positive way will be motivated to acquire new knowledge or skills or improve their skills and knowledge already possessed. They attempt to gain and improve the skills and knowledge independently or formally (Linley and Joseph, 2004).

- e. Perspective (wisdom)

Perspective (wisdom) refers to the ability to prepare for life provision in a long time, which is understandable for himself and others (Peterson and Seligman, 2004).

2. Courage

This is an emotional strength that involves the use of a desire to achieve the objectives in the face of two conflicting things either external or internal (Linley and Joseph, 2004). The strength or strengths of courage include:

- a. Bravery (valor)

Do not shy away from threat, challenge, difficulty or pain, dare to reveal the truth in spite of conflict with another person, acting in accordance with the conviction, although not preferred, including physical courage, but is not limited to it (Linley and Joseph, 2004).

- b. Persistence (perseverance, industriousness)

Resolving what to do, diligent in carrying out a series of activities despite the obstacles and difficulties, and perform tasks with pleasure (Linley and Joseph, 2004; Peterson and Seligman, 2004).

- c. Integrity (honesty authenticity)

Integrity comes from the Latin word meaning something that is thorough, untouched, whole and everything (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Tell the truth, to ask yourself is, without pretending, responsible for feelings and actions (Linley and Joseph, 2004).

- d. Vitality (zest)

Living a life with excitement and energy, do not do anything halfway, live life as an adventurer, feeling happy and active life (Linley and Joseph, 2004).

3. Humanity

Humanity is the strength associated with the interpersonal life. Person with this virtue shows mercy, do good although will not get a reply, understand even will be punished (Linley and Joseph, 2004). Humanity in the field of psychology is the form of altruistic or pro-social behavior (Linley and Joseph, 2004). Strengths of humanity is:

- a. Love

Assessing important close relationships with others, especially sharing and mutual care, in close contact with other people (Linley and Joseph, 2004).

- b. Kindness (generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, niceness)

Doing good and good deeds for others, help others and keep them (Linley and Joseph, 2004). These strengths can be in the form of behavioral help or do good to others

or who have a close relationship with the individual.

c. Social intelligence

Concerned for the reasons and feelings of others and ourselves, knowing what to do to adapt to different social situations, knowing what moves others (Linley and Joseph, 2004).

4. *Justice*

Justice is strength in society that underlies the emergence of a healthy community life. Strength in the justice consists of:

a. Citizenship (social responsibility, loyalty, teamwork)

Such individuals have a responsibility to do their jobs as members of a group and be aware of their obligations, working for the benefit of the group rather than personal interests, loyal to friends and trustworthy will always do their utmost to achieve group goals (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

b. Fairness

Treat others with the same based on the notion of honesty and fairness, not letting personal biases in decisions relating to others, giving a fair chance to everyone (Linley and Joseph, 2004).

c. Leadership

Individuals with this strength usually encourage the group to achieve a goal while maintaining good relations with members of other groups, can organize a group activity and monitor for these activities go well.

5. *Temperance*

Temperance is the strength that protects the individual from everything that is superfluous. Strength in Temperance consists of:

a. Forgiveness and mercy

Forgive others who have made a mistake, give the other person a second chance, and do not grudge a few application of this power (Linley and Joseph, 2004).

b. Humility / modesty

Individuals who have this power does not talk about the success that has been achieved and let success speak for themselves (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). The individual is not seeking attention, do not consider him as more special and realize the mistakes and shortcomings (Linley and Joseph, 2004). Modesty is different from the more external humility. Modesty means both simple in the appearance, while humility is internal behavior, which means have a tendency to feel that he is not the center of the world.

c. Prudence

Beware of choice, do not take dangerous risk, do not say or do anything that might be regrettable (Linley and Joseph, 2004).

d. Self-regulation (self-control)

Individuals with this power can regulate what is perceived and performed, discipline, can control the passions and emotions (Linley and Joseph, 2004).

6. *Transcendence*

Transcendence is the strength that creates a close relationship between the individual and the universe and give meaning to the individual. Strength transcendence consists of:

a. Appreciation of beauty and excellence (awe, wonder, elevation)

Pay attention and appreciate beauty, excellence, and performance skills in all domains of life, in nature, in art, in mathematics, in science and in

everyday experiences (Linley and Joseph, 2004).

- b. Gratitude
Realize and wish to thank the good things that have happened, and take the time to express (Linley and Joseph, 2004). Those who have this strength are aware and thankful for the good things he had ever experienced, and always took the time to say thank you.
- c. Hope (optimism, future-mindedness, future-orientation)
Expect the best in the future and strive to achieve it, believing that a good future is a thing that can be achieved, and will behave in such a way that events are expected happened and believed that his efforts will produce the expected results of the (Linley and Joseph, 2004).
- d. Humor (playfulness)
Likes to laugh and tease others, bring happiness to people, see the positive side, making jokes (Linley and Joseph, 2004).
- e. Spirituality (religiousness, faith, purpose)
Believe about a higher purpose and meaning of the universe, knowing role in the grand scheme, had beliefs about the meaning of life that shape the behavior and provide a sense of calm and comfortable in life.

The characters that are most important to the group of individuals is called signature strength. It represents the character strength of the individual or the group.

The purpose of this study is to explore the character strength profile of Indonesian Muslim college students.

Method

This study applied quantitative, non-experimental, and descriptive method. To determine the strength of character, Peterson and Seligman developed a measuring tool called the VIA-IS (Values In Action Inventory of Strengths). VIA-IS consists of 240 items which 10 items for each character, and measured by 5-point Likert scale (Linley and Joseph, 2004). VIA-IS instrument had been adapted by Lestari (2006) to measure the strength of character on the sample of nurses. Akmal & Nurwianti (2012) then use the instrument of the VIA-IS to determine the strength of character to the Minang ethnic. This study will use the adaptation of VIA-IS from Akmal & Nurwianti (2012) which has been tested for reliability among Indonesian subjects.

Inclusion criteria for the participant are university student who is in the age of late adolescents according to Sarwono (2010). In this research, sample is obtained from non-probability convenience sampling based on availability and willingness to participate in this research.

The sample of this research was 315 students coming from several faculties (economics, psychology, information and technology, law, and medical faculty) in one of the private Islamic Universities at Jakarta. The majority of the sample were female (70.5%) and recently underwent a one-year college (37.2%). The majority of study participants came to stay at the boarding house (49.2%) during college. In the terms of average expenditure per month, most of the study participants had expenditure in the range 1.5 million - 3 million (34.3%). Most of the participants had a parent who has the status "married" (89.9%) with varying levels of education. The majority of participants had fathers with bachelor degree educational background (46.7%) and mother with a high

school education background (35.9%) and bachelor degree (35.6%). Most of the father of participants are entrepreneurs/self-employed (33.3%), while the majority of participant's mothers work as a housewife (48.6%).

To get a profile of the character strengths, the researchers conducted three steps of analysis. On the first step, the total score of each character was calculated for each subject. Therefore, each individual will get a profile of strength of character in 24 different types of characters. Second, using statistical calculations, 24 scores of character strength in each person rated sequentially from the highest to the lowest. Thus, character strength ratings from 1 to 24 for each individual. The highest score of character identified as the most important

character strength of the individual. Third, the researcher calculated the frequency of the most important character (number 1) from the subjects. The frequency of each character divided by the number of subjects, then, presented into percentage. For example, there are 36 students ranked gratitude as number 1, most important character, so gratitude scored as 11,43%. 23 of the students put kindness as the most important character (rank number 1), so kindness has 7,3%. The complete result of this analysis is presented in the form of character strength rank.

Result

Results summary about the most important character of participants are informed in table 1:

Table 1
Character Strength Profile

Character Strength	Percentage (%)	Rank
<i>Gratitude</i>	11.43	1
<i>Kindness</i>	7.30	2
<i>Love of learning</i>	6.67	3
<i>Bravery</i>	6.67	3
<i>Citizenship</i>	6.67	3
<i>Self-regulation</i>	5.40	4
<i>Forgiveness</i>	4.76	5
<i>Love</i>	4.13	6
<i>Humility</i>	4.137	6
<i>Spirituality</i>	4.13	6
<i>Creativity</i>	3.81	7
<i>Leadership</i>	3.81	7
<i>Perspective</i>	3.49	8
<i>Social intelligence</i>	3.17	9
<i>Hope</i>	3.17	9
<i>Humor</i>	3.17	9
<i>Persistence</i>	2.86	10
<i>Appreciation of beauty</i>	2.86	10
<i>Curiosity</i>	2.54	11
<i>Prudence</i>	2.54	11
<i>Integrity</i>	1.95	12
<i>Vitality</i>	1.95	12
<i>Fairness</i>	1.95	12
<i>Open mindedness</i>	1.59	13

For the table above, it seems gratitude is the signature strength possessed by most Indonesian Muslim college students (11.43%). The character strength that are also quite dominant in the Indonesian Muslim college student who participate in this study are: kindness, love of learning, bravery and citizenship.

Discussion

Based on the analysis, it appears that the signature strength of Muslim students are gratitude, kindness, love of learning, bravery, and citizenship. Most of the signature characters strength of Muslim students linked to virtue of humanity, transcendence, and also intergroup relation. In terms of gratitude, people with high gratitude realize and always appreciate good things that have happened, and take the time to express it (Linley and Joseph, 2004). Those who have this strength are aware and thankful for the good things he had ever experienced, and always took the time to say thank you. Kindness itself is doing good and good deeds for others, help others and keep them (Linley and Joseph, 2004), whereas individuals with citizenship (social responsibility, loyalty, teamwork) have a responsibility to review their jobs as members of a group and be aware of their obligations, working for the benefit of the group rather than personal interests, loyal to friends and trustworthy. They will always review their role to achieve goal in the group (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

These three characters (gratitude, kindness, and citizenship) seems relevant with the basic values embraced by the Indonesian people which listed in the Indonesian main values or Pancasila. It includes belief in God (related to transcendence), Humanity (associated with kindness), and Unity or Democracy (which can be associated with citizenship). Thus, it can be concluded that the Muslim students

in Indonesia showed character which relevant to the collective and spiritual value of Indonesian society. They were able to show good behavior to others, appreciate and be grateful with what has been obtained from God and life, and happy to show loyalty and cooperation or doing 'gotong royong' in the group. The high sense of gratitude in Muslim students which was found in this study is also consistent with results of previous studies by Akmal & Nurwianti (2012) and Listiyandini (2015) which shows that the people in Indonesia tend to have high gratitude. This high gratitude also found to predict happiness (Akmal & Nurwianti, 2012) and resilience (Listiyandini, 2015) on a sample of people in Indonesia.

Beside the conformity with the basic values of most Indonesian society, there are also some signature strengths which regard to the functions and duties of student development. In this case, participants in the study showed the character of bravery and love of learning. Individuals who have an attitude of love of learning in a positive way will be motivated to acquire new knowledge or skills or improve their skills and knowledge, independently or formally (Linley and Joseph, 2004). As a student, there are a variety of academic tasks that must be resolved, related to the lectures as well as additional tasks outside the classroom. This requires them to always continue to learn and develop scientific knowledge independently. Therefore, it is very logical if this love of learning becomes more prominent than other characters.

Beside it relates with their function as a student, the signature strength can also be attributed to their developmental stage. As a young person, they are still very flexible to always learn new things, which ultimately create the importance of love of learning. In addition to the love of learning, as a youth who still has the desire to explore

and seek new challenges, bravery character also prominent in the Muslim student. People with high bravery do not shy away from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; dare to reveal the truth in spite of conflict with another person, and acting in accordance with the conviction although not preferred (Linley & Joseph, 2004). With their courage, the Muslim student is able to make a change, do not be afraid of conflict or failure, or in other words, they tend to choose things that are new and may be considered risky. The high love of learning, and bravery can become good resources for them to move forward, evolve, and not afraid to try new challenges.

Gratitude, kindness, and citizenship can represent the characters which are held by the most Indonesian, and the love of learning and bravery represent the character of Indonesian Muslim students as youth who brave and love of learning. Unfortunately, there are several other characters which also have benefit, but not prominent in Indonesian Muslim students. Some characters which is found by previous research related to personal resilience, such as leadership, spirituality, social intelligence, persistence, and open-mindedness (Listiyandini & Akmal, 2015) is not salience. Thus, it needs to be improved.

Based on the result of this study, a profile of the character strength of Indonesian Muslim students can be inferred. Nevertheless, there are still some limitations to this study, such as samples which are only taken from one university so it does not represent the whole of Muslim students in Indonesia. This research also doesn't explore about variables that might explain or contribute to the signature strength which found in this study. Future studies are necessary to carry out these issues.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, the signature strength of Indonesian Muslim college students that were found in this study are gratitude, kindness, love of learning, bravery, and citizenship. Gratitude, kindness, and citizenship are in accordance with the general picture of collective and spiritual values held by most of the Indonesian people, which is Pancasila. Bravery and love of learning are considered to be a representation of youth characters who still love to learn new things and looking for a challenge. However, there are some characters which still need to be optimized for helping them to be more success in facing student life challenges, such as persistence, social intelligence, leadership, open-mindedness, and spirituality.

Implication of the Study

For Muslim students in Indonesia, it is necessary to retain some character strength that has been good and considered to increase the happiness and resilience, such as gratitude. On the other side, it seems that the character development can be directed to the characters that still not prominent but more necessary for facing challenges in student life. The characters that need to be improved includes persistence, social intelligence, leadership, open-mindedness, and spirituality.

Suggestion for Future Study

1. Using more samples to get better reflection of the population and doing a research in the different sample characteristics, such as students coming from low-socio economic status.
2. Exploring more about the other factors that might contributes to the character strength, such as social support, religious identification, or early life experience, such as school climate and parenting that

includes parental value identification, warmth and support.

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