

Glocalization of the Gülen Education Model: An Analysis of the Gülen-Inspired Schools in Indonesia

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This paper examines the “glocalization” process of the implementation of the Turkish-based Gülen Educational Model within Indonesian society. We seek to answer the question of how the Gülen Educational Model is implemented and becomes transformed as it establishes itself within the Indonesian legal, cultural, and social environment. Methodology included in-depth interviews with school principals, school visits, meetings with teachers, and examination of relevant documents. In contrast to other research, instead of examining Gülen’s writings for his educational philosophy, we develop a Gülen Educational Model based on the insights and ideas of the principals. That is, we use their interpretation, understanding, and implementation of the Gülen Educational Model as our guide. We see in practice how the model manifests itself in the specific forms of the schools. Moreover, we assess the effectiveness of the schools and their broader impact on the educational system in Indonesia. We find highly successful Indonesian schools whose impact extends beyond their graduates to becoming a model for the reformation and revitalization of schools throughout Indonesia.

The term, glocalization is a blending of the words, “global” (or globalization) and “localization”. This term has been widely used to describe the process whereby an international business expands into foreign markets by adapting its products and services to the needs and requirements of the local market. In turn, the local market has the potential to transform the business as well (Robertson 1995). If we apply this concept to the transmission of values and systems of a non-profit or of a social movement, we can better understand how a social movement transforms itself, as it becomes an international movement. Specifically, here we examine how the Gülen model of education has undergone glocalization as the movement has expanded beyond the borders of Turkey over the past twenty years. We consider the case of the largest Islamic country, Indonesia, with an eye toward better understanding how a “glocalized” Gülen-inspired system of education manifests itself in this country. The questions guiding this research include: What would such a “glocalized” system of education look like? What would be its core values that one could find wherever on the globe the Gülen-inspired model was implemented? What parts would be adapted to the local culture? Finally, how might the local culture be changed by the implementation of such a globalized system of education?

The Gülen Movement “originated in 1970s Turkey as a faith-inspired initiative to improve educational opportunities for a local community; over the three and a half decades since then, it has grown into a transnational educational, inter-cultural and interfaith movement, with participants numbering in the millions with securely established, respected institutions ...mostly schools on every continent” (Cetin 2010, p. xv). Today, this Turkish Diaspora reaches approximately 120 countries. The movement is named after Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish scholar, writer, and preacher. What is unique about Gülen’s philosophical writings is that they have inspired millions to put his philosophy into action. In Turkey, this movement is known as “hizmet” a Turkish word meaning service. This is an apt word as the movement is fueled by the grassroots activity of volunteers who have dedicated themselves to serving humanity. Gülen’s writings and speeches have inspired Turks to make their hijra^[1] to other countries with the express purpose of serving humanity by starting schools.

When volunteers of the Gülen Movement emigrate to a country with the express intent of starting a school, they bring with them (1) a set of ideas, informed by Gülen, of the philosophy of education, (2) a system for designing and implementing schools based on more than forty years’ experience of establishing 1,000s of schools and learning centers within Turkey and worldwide, and (3) a shared set of values. The Gülen-movement is a non-confrontational social movement that adapts itself to the status quo and the existing laws, culture, and norms of each country in which it works. As such, members glocalize the educational model within the laws, regulations, and cultural expectations of each country. This paper examines what happens to the Gülen-inspired model when “movement meets reality”, so to speak.

Much has been written about Gülen’s educational philosophy. We will not detail his philosophy here, but instead refer the reader to other sources (Agai 2003; Gülen 2004; Robinson 2008). Here, we simply emphasize (1) the supreme importance Gülen gives to education as essential to realizing our full humanity and (2) his encouragement to others, especially the Turkish people, that they serve humanity through starting schools and engaging in educational activities. “Gülen considers the problem of poor or absent education to be the most important problem of the century” (Ergene, p.96). Gülen writes, “Now that we live in a global village, education is the best way to serve humanity and to establish a dialogue with other civilizations. But above all else, education is a humane service; we were sent here to learn and be perfected through education” (Gülen 2004, p. 198).

Indonesia presents a unique case; it is the largest Islamic country in the world with estimates of over 200 million Muslims (Miller 2009). Historically, Indonesia has been described as a “moderate” Islamic country. Scholars, most notably Barton (2006b), have compared it to Turkey as both being examples of modern, democratic, economically advancing countries with Muslim majorities. Moreover, Indonesia formally acknowledges and protects rights of minority groups, particularly religious minorities. It boasts one of the highest levels of religiosity in the world according to Gallup (See Gallup WorldView), yet remains a moderate, open society with no compulsion of religious practices. A unique aspect of Indonesian history is that the country turned towards Islam not through conquering, but from exposure to Islam through trade.

Political and educational elites in Indonesia recognize the importance of a quality education for the betterment of their country and as a way to address ongoing conflicts within the country. Since the

fall of former President Suharto in 1998, some radical elements have emerged. Religious conflicts between Muslims and Christians in some isolated parts of Indonesia have resulted in thousands of lives lost (Osman 2010). The former President of Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid, called on Indonesians to learn from Fethullah Gülen about developing a noble character through education. "...our schools operate in a moral vacuum. This moral vacuum has led to various violations that exist in society, including rampant corruption and other bureaucratic abuses...We in Indonesia must learn from our friends in Turkey." (translation of a quote from <http://www.pasiadindonesia.org/>). The Gülen Movement opened its first school in Indonesia in 1995 and is sufficiently well established there for us to examine the glocalization of the Gülen Educational Model.

The primary data collection method for this paper was in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are a qualitative research technique involving conducting intensive one-on-one interviews. They are designed to explore issues in-depth, and they offer immediate flexibility during the interview to explore new ideas and to clarify issues and complex thoughts. In-depth interviews were conducted with principals and administrators of Gülen Movement schools. These were supplemented with their written responses to an open-ended questionnaire with follow-up questions as needed. Also, this study included fieldwork with visits to several Gülen Movement schools in Turkey and Indonesia. During the spring of 2010 six of the seven Gülen Movement campuses in Indonesia were visited. These visits included meeting with administrators and some teachers. From 2008 to 2010, several schools were visited in Turkey including elementary-only day schools, boarding schools, and universities.

The primary topics of the interviews were characteristics of the schools (e.g. type of school, number of students, teachers, and staff, ages, grades, tuition, percentage of students on scholarship), the cultural and legal environments of the country as it relates to establishing and administering schools, the principals' understanding of Gülen's educational philosophy, how they implement his philosophy in the schools, ways they have adapted Gülen's model to fit the local context, important accomplishments of their schools, the "secrets of success", and what the parents say about the schools. While this study is limited to Indonesia, the interview participants also have experience working in Gülen Movement schools in other countries including Afghanistan, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Russia, Vietnam, and Uzbekistan.

The analysis focuses on answering the primary research questions: what is the idealized form of the Gülen Educational Model as viewed by the principals and administrators; how is it "glocalized" and what core values remain; how is the local culture changed by the presence of the Gülen Movement Schools?

We begin with the interviewees' perspectives and understanding of the idealized form of the Gülen Educational Model. One interviewee provided his thoughts on the key components of the Gülen Educational Model. This interviewee's first assignment abroad in 1992 was to start a school in Uzbekistan. He later started a school in Albania. In regards to Gülen's philosophy of education, he says that:

We can fix everything with education. The more you know, the more you love. If you don't know anything about what it means to be a human being, how are you going to love them? [Two parts have to be address in education] – one is science and one is religion. If you just do religion without science, you get ignorance. If you do science with no religion, you get atheism. The combination of both is what we need.

According to this interviewee, at its core, the idealized form of the Gülen Educational Model advocates (1) teaching universal human values through role modeling and (2) teaching modern, scientific, and technological knowledge through classroom instruction. The preferred way to accomplish this education is through a boarding school where the child starts the week on Sunday night and finishes it on Friday (when the student leaves for the weekend to visit family). Dedicated, sincere teachers invoke the love of learning in the classroom in a culture that promotes utmost respect for the teacher, while in the evening university students who live in the dorms with the high school students, care for them, help them with their studies, and, most importantly, be a role model for them. They are known as “belletmen” which is a Turkish word meaning “help in detail”^[2]. In most cases, the belletmen were graduates of Gülen-inspired schools. The interviewee views the belletmen model as critical to the success of the schools and their students.

Belletmen are supervised by a dorm manager, and the dorm manager works under the vice principal responsible for guidance. There is also an academic vice principal who is responsible for the classroom instruction. Thus, the administrative hierarchy includes both branches – one for life in the dorm and the other for life in the classroom. In this way, Gülen's emphasis on addressing both the heart and mind is accomplished. Usually, the students are not allowed to leave the school; generally, they have a store within the school for their immediate needs. During playtime, study time, and teatime, they talk with the belletmen, play card games, and sports. The belletmen live at the school dorm, and they attend the local university during the day. Usually, they receive a scholarship to help with their university expenses and their families support them as well. Their primary job is to be a role model for the students, and “they make big changes in kids' lives.” “The belletmen make the Gülen-inspired schools unique. [They demonstrate] dedication, altruism; basically they give up their lives for serving that country.”

From the Indonesian schools, I received responses to an open-ended questionnaire from six principals or vice-principals. They shared what they thought were the core ideas of Gülen's educational philosophy that they had implemented into their school design. In some fashion, they each touched on the idea of educating the whole human being, not only science, but also character development. For example:

“Education success is not only in science. Morals, manners, and religious values are also very important in the implementation of life. We educate the students with love and attitude.”

“In our education system students study science intensively and deeply so they comment and understand what is scientifically supported because science and spiritual necessity must be combined, one of them is not enough like a bird has two wings one is science and one is spirit.”^[3]

They also emphasized the importance of producing good citizens:

“To produce high quality [citizens] who will be useful for others and contribute to their people and countries living side by side with other nations and religions to create harmony and world peace.”

“Love-affection, respect each other, moral and religious values, educate the people who will be useful and contribute to his/her people and countries positively and also for all world people and teaching our students living with harmony with other nations and religions.”

Role modeling was another key feature of the model.

“From Gülen’s educational philosophy that we apply in our school is about how we serve students by providing a good example, explaining the phenomena that occur in society, learning and serving the community with actions, each lesson is aimed that every students can have good character, to educate the whole completeness human aspects of intelligence, emotional and spiritual.”

Thus, from the point of view of those who have been founding and working in Gülen-inspired schools most of their adult lives, we can identify core concepts of the Gülen Educational Model. These include an approach to educating the whole human being – heart and mind. The preferred model to manifest this approach is a boarding school where the student has an immersive experience where his or her head is fed during the classroom instruction and his/her heart is developed through role modeling both from the teachers and with intensive mentoring from the belletmen – young university students who, preferably, also had the experience of attending a Gülen-inspired school in their youth. A manifest goal is not just to create world-class intellects but also to produce students of good character who will live and help others live in harmony in the world.

Gülen-Inspired Schools in Indonesia. Now, we will examine more specifically the Gülen-inspired schools in Indonesia. Here, we ask, in practice, how does Gülen’s educational philosophy manifest itself in the schools? First, we will consider the legal requirements affecting the establishment of the schools in Indonesia, then the overall characteristics of the school, how the Gülen Education Model is adapted within the Indonesian schools, and the success, effectiveness, and impact of the Gülen-Inspired schools.

Indonesia provides a legal option for foreigners to open international schools, but there is no legal permission for foreigners to open up private schools for Indonesians. However, Indonesian foundations can open private schools. Therefore, all the Gülen-inspired schools are started by Indonesian foundations, or sometimes the local government becomes the catalyst for the opening of a new school. The Movement has a non-governmental organization (NGO) headquartered in Jakarta called PASIAD (Pacific Countries Social and Economic Solidarity Association). PASIAD partners with the Indonesian foundations and cooperates with them to start the schools. While each school has its unique story of how it came to be established, this is the general arrangement. The Indonesian foundations own the schools; they are Indonesian schools; and some of the classes are taught in Indonesian, and other classes, like the science classes, are taught in English. Turkish language class can be optional, and it is usually only two hours per week. PASIAD provides

teachers and equipment for the schools. Each school has two head administrators, an Indonesian principal and a Turkish administrator whose is representative of PASIAD. At least half of the teachers are Indonesian; by law the schools can have no more than 50% foreign teachers. All schools have the goal of relying on just tuition payments to meet their schools' needs without outside support. The schools are run as nonprofit organizations. Any monetary surplus from tuition is used to improve the schools. According to one of interviewees, the benefit to work with PASIAD is that they are bringing their proven-successful educational model and well-educated dedicated teachers. He says that PASIAD is improving the quality of education in the country.

The Indonesian schools include seven campuses in five cities. All of the schools have boys and girls, but in Aceh, the boys and girls are on separate campuses. All but one of the schools serve kindergarten through 12th grade. Boarding school is offered starting at 7th grade, although several of the schools currently have boarding facilities for boys only, but with plans to open facilities for girls. The student-teacher ratio is quite low, ranging from 14:1 to 8:1 with an average of 11:1. At each school about 20 to 25% of the students are on scholarship, but at the newest school established in 2009 (the girls' campus in Aceh), 45% of the schools are on scholarship. Belletmen help out in the dormitories. With these general characteristics, we see that the Indonesian schools conform to the Gülen Educational Model by offering a dorm environment where intensive mentoring takes place, a low student-teacher ratio that facilitates classroom learning, and they serve the needs of the local people by providing scholarships.

Some of the schools have nearly all of their junior and high school students as boarding students (over 95%), but the schools in Jakarta are an exception to this. For example, Pribadi Bilingual Boarding School in Jakarta has only fifty-five of its 361 students as full-time boarders and thirty-five of the boarders are scholarship students. To compensate for what the administrators view as a deviation from the ideal school model, the school takes extra care to involve the parents in school activities and to have after school and weekend programs to increase school involvement by both students and parents.

Principals of the schools were asked how they adapted the Gülen Educational Model to the social and cultural context of Indonesia. The principals indicated that the Gülen Educational Model fit well with the cultural context of Indonesia. One specified the following activities as inspired by Gülen's educational philosophy: schools with a boarding system, public service activities such as assistance to orphans, distribution of sacrificial animals for the Qurbani Holiday, scholarship aid, and iftar dinners, visiting parents program, and guidance from teachers, staff, dormitory supervisors, and alumnus. "All activities are well suited to the social and cultural life in Indonesia."

Other principals emphasized educating the whole student – heart and mind, including "inculcating love and moral values in daily life" and providing them an education that meets international standards to prepare their students to study anywhere in the world with confidence and an open mind. As stated by one principal:

The students we educate here at the school can study at any schools or universities in the world because their education level matches international education standards. Their mission is spreading peace and friendship in the world and they feel themselves as the representatives of these goals.

Our students always keep in mind that they will go abroad to study and will come back to Indonesia to share and use their knowledge and experiences for their people and country.

In most cases, the Gülen-inspired schools around the world do not teach any religion in the schools unless required by that country. The Indonesian girls' school in Aceh, has adapted to the special nature of the Aceh province:

As expected, there are some modifications resulting from the unique culture and social context of Aceh in Indonesia. Aceh is a province where we can see the effects of Shari'a (Islamic Rule) in all the institutions as well as our school, too. The Acehnese people are very religious in a way that makes you think they're conservative in many aspects of daily life. They pay attention to the application or performance of Islam. So a speech on religion is given by a student after lunch every day, and the students spare 10 minutes before starting the class in the morning to read Qur'an or say prayers together.

In general, we can conclude that the Gülen Educational Model, for the most part, can be fully realized in Indonesia. Some schools conform more perfectly to the model than others. The biggest deviation is those schools that are not able to fully realize the boarding school-belletmen combination. This deviation occurs in Jakarta where there are more commuter students. This occurs in part, just by virtue of it being situated in a very large metropolitan city, with no shortage of day students. Some parents prefer to have the day-school option. Also, it occurs because of the lack of boarding school facilities. The Pribadi Bilingual Boarding School in Jakarta is actively seeking a bigger facility – both to offer more boarding school opportunities as well as to open the junior and senior high grades to girls.

The principals of the schools measure success in different ways. First is academic performance. The students perform at a very high level; as one principal stated, “[There is] no time restriction; students can study together with their teachers whenever they want.” I personally witnessed the dedication of the students when touring one of the schools late in the evening. We opened the door to the computer lab to find it filled with students quietly studying even though there was no teacher in sight. All of the schools have their students compete in regional, national, and international science Olympiads, and all schools receive medals. In fact, this past year, the Gülen-inspired Indonesian schools received 13 of the possible 16 medals awarded to Indonesian students at the most prestigious International Science Olympiads.

Principals also cite the good character of their students:

- [Our school] produces quality students who are good in science, belief and personality and [who] live side by side with others no matter what their nationality and religion is, bring good message, and live life with love and create peace in the world.

- The most important achievement in our school is student character development, success to go to favorite university of alumnus and student achievement at the national level and international.

From the point of people around school such as neighbors, they say that they trust the students of SBBS because of their high moral values and high-level education. They support us when we need help for any kind of positive or negative situations.

- Our students have already achieved the praise of other school teachers and university professors that they are well educated and show very high moral values. They say the students are not only hardworking but also well mannered. Many government officials know about our school's students and their achievements and they thank to our school administration for this and rewarding our staff and students. We got the best position at national Olympiads in all Indonesia receiving 11 medals.
- This year is the 11th year of the existence of our school in Indonesian education. We have many positive responses from the society, government, schools and universities. They like our school system. The boarding school is more effective and efficient to teach and guide the students to reach their goal.

Also, there is a high level of satisfaction among the students:

- The students are happy to stay and study in our school. Love their school, teachers, friends and lessons, and we have lovely brotherhood environment in our school.
- The students like their friends, teachers and school very much and they try to be together so that they don't often ask to go home. They stay at school and enjoy most of their time with their friends and study their lessons.

The principals report high satisfaction among the parents. Below are two typical comments:

Parents see the difference in their children's behavior and academic improvements in a very short time and they share this often with the class teachers. They not only share it with our teachers but also with other people around, their friends, neighbors and friends at their office. They are so happy that their children study at our school.

Our parents say they choose this school for the guidance the students get. The parents trust us; they see that students who go here become good people. The building is not great, but still we have no problems getting students. Parents say the atmosphere is different.

We asked the principals to discuss what they thought were the most Important factors for the success of their schools. The most common response was "the teachers".

One of the most important factors in our school is the teachers. We have quality teachers and tutors who are inspired by Gülen. They know how to deal with students very well. They have to be really patient in teaching, taking care of the students, make the students love the teachers and lessons, guide them and motivate them to be a better person for a better life.

The teachers. They are not only concerned about formal education, but they also are concerned about morality and belief. We have many students coming from different provinces, cultures, dialects and religions. What we do is to guide them to be an intelligent and good person in the future who can live side-by-side and appreciate those differences.

The teachers and tutors are not working for financial reasons, they are devoutly working for the children, and they believe that they will have a better reward in the hereafter if they could make the students successful in education and moral values.

Mainly the teacher's efforts are one of the most important factors in this issue. They focus on maximum benefit of the students in class, and they teach the lessons like that. Students get maximum satisfaction from lessons and their motivations to study increases.

Others describe the "secret of the success" of the schools through a model of a triangle. One corner is the student, one corner is the teacher, and the other corner is the family. The teachers incorporate the families into their child's education by having activities for them, supporting them, and through home visits. There is no idea of a "9 to 5 job"; when a family or a student needs help, teachers are there to help them.

To summarize, the success of the schools is validated from all corners. Acceptance of their graduates to universities at home and abroad, high test scores, and medal winners in national and international competitions at every school all indicate a high level of academic achievement. High praise and satisfaction from the parents, neighbors of the schools, politicians, and university educators confirm the success of the schools in not only achieving academic excellence, but also instilling good character in their students.

But here, we must consider an additional step. While these schools are strong, there are only 7 of them with a total of about 3,000 students in a country of over 220 million people. While the benefit to these 3,000 students and the graduates of these schools is apparent, what is the importance of these schools for the broader Indonesian society? One school notes that in 2004, the Indonesian government selected their school to be a "model school" for other schools in Indonesia.

Our school has been visited by universities, educational institutions and other schools to share about our school system and work together to expand each school system to a better education system. We have already done memorandum of understanding with more than 100 schools in Indonesia to be a partner school.

Basically, these memorandums of understanding are legal agreements within which the schools agree to help each other to improve the quality of education at each other's schools. With this cooperative agreement, the representatives of the schools agree to exchange teachers and students and technology, learning methodologies, and curriculum materials. The schools agree to facilitate the exchange of teachers and students and to equitably share the costs of such an exchange. These cooperative agreements provide a vehicle by which the successful methodologies of the Gülen Model of Education can be transmitted throughout Indonesian society. The agreements also indicate

that other schools recognize the Gülen-inspired Indonesian schools as successful. These agreements provide concrete evidence of the transmission of the ideas of this educational model within Indonesian society. We can say that the Gülen-inspired Indonesian schools have raised the benchmark for a quality education in Indonesia and are serving as a model for those schools that aspire towards excellence and improvement. Thus, we cannot say that the number of schools is small; therefore, they are not significant. Moreover, the Minister of Education while visiting Turkey shared that they are taking the schools as models for Indonesian schools. Other government officials have expressed interest in opening up Gülen-inspired schools in their regions of the country.

This paper has examined the adaptation of the Gülen Model of Education within a moderate Islamic country. We find that Gülen Movement members in Indonesia have been able to adapt the model with little alteration and have been able to share what could be called a 50-50 partnership with Indonesians in founding and running the schools. This successful adaptation could occur in part because, to some extent, Turkey and Indonesia are both considered moderate Islamic countries. Thus, to some extent their cultures and values overlap, although we do not want to minimize their differences, but at least they have a basis for understanding each other. Moreover, the legal requirements of Indonesian ownership and at least 50% Indonesian teachers forces a situation where from the beginning the schools are better able to adapt quickly to the specifics of Indonesian cultural and social norms – because the Indonesians are right there with them. These successful schools have arisen out of the partnership model, combined with the mostly wholesale application of the Gülen Educational Model, along with shared cultural values between Turkey and Indonesia.

Further research can help us better understand how the glocalization of the Gülen Education Model occurs in countries that are less similar to Turkey in terms of culture, religion, level of economic development, and type of governmental systems. As these schools are now in well over one hundred countries^[4], it should be possible to continue this work on a comparative basis.

Gülen Movement members believe with absolute certainty that in today's world our global conflicts will not be solved through brute force or military might. Ultimately, it is only through persuasion, tolerance, and understanding brought about through dialogue that we might enjoy a peaceful coexistence in this world. As a basis for fruitful dialogue we must have an educated citizenry whose minds and hearts are open, and who have nurtured universal human values within themselves, including valuing diversity and all human beings. It is only then, that we can hope to achieve the ultimate goal of the Gülen Movement -- for all human beings to live with each other in a peaceful coexistence while embracing their diversity. We must appreciate the long-range vision and time horizon of the Gülen Movement. In a world that has come to expect quick fixes for everything – even global conflicts, here we have a movement that is willing to take a multi-generational approach starting with our youth. We have much to learn about the hurdles to realizing this vision, and we can learn more as we study the process by which ideas get transmitted across a society as we see happening here with the Gülen-inspired schools in Indonesia.

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Footnote

[1] Hizmet volunteers view their immigration to other countries to start schools or to otherwise volunteer in the Gülen Movement as a "hijra" in the Quranic sense of the term, meaning to leave one's homeland for the sake of serving Allah (SWT) by serving Islam. They take their example from the sahabah, the companions of the Prophet Muhammed (SAW), who left their homes and their towns to spread Islam without ever any thought of returning.

[2] This is how my interviewee defined the word. Others define it as "tutor", but from an American viewpoint, perhaps the most accurate English translation is "mentor". Note that belletmen can be male or female.

[3] These principals' statements parallel what Gülen (2004, p.197) says, " ...there is an understanding of education that sees the illumination of the mind in science and knowledge, and the light of the heart in faith and virtue. This understanding, which makes the student soar in the skies of humanity on two wings and seek God's approval through service to others, has many things to offer."

[4] According to one of my interviewees, schools from 120 countries sent their students to Turkey to compete in the most recent Turkish Olympiads.

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