

# Becoming a Perpetual Learner in Globalization Era

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**Abstract**—This title is important due to two things, first, internally, there is a tendency within the community where people put a high regard on academic titles, diploma, and not on the knowledge or competencies of those academic titles. Second, externally, there is a digital revolution that creates global competition, where every one of us is challenged to be a perpetual learner. Otherwise, we will be cast aside as human being, which according to Michael Fullan, is morally, socially, and economically unfit to live.

Perpetual learner, as James R. Davis and Adelaide B. Davis, pointed out that refers to person who loves new things, new ideas, and new skill. Perpetual learner is not only learning to know but also to think and to solve the problem. Perpetual learner tries to learn and develop the learning not only through formal learning and through text books but also from experience and realities.

Perpetual learner has five distinctive characters: first, has high curiosity that makes the person keen to learn. Second, loves to share knowledge and experience with others. Third, keen to develop the knowledge. Fourth, has contribution for the development of humanity and culture. Fifth, humble and opens toward input and others' opinion. The new age, globalization age, requires new human, the perpetual learners.

**Keywords**—*Learner, Learning, Competition, Globalization, Knowledge Development*.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Discourse on perpetual learn is an important thing in this globalization era. Because, in this new age, technological advancement has brought some new phenomena. First, fundamental change, a rapid and fundamental change. This proves the thesis put forward by the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, who mentioned, "change is the only constant." Second, evolutionary hangover phenomenon, where the change in education world is not as fast as the change that happens in life and in job world. Third, in this digital revolution era, as Sharon has mentioned, that everyone should master technology, befriended and even have the culture of technology.<sup>1</sup> In such situation, the human resource of the 21<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sharon P. Robinson and Ken Kay, *21st Century Knowledge and Skills in Educator Preparation, Partnership for Twenty first Century Skill*, American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 2010, p. 7. Compare with Young Hoan Cho, et.al, *Authentic Problem Solving and Learning in the 21st Century: Perspective from Singapore and beyond*, Springer, Singapore, 2015, p. 4-5.

century, should be perpetual learner/true learner. Otherwise, he will be lost in the competition against the machine. As its consequence, Michael Fullan, has pointed out that this kind of people will be cast aside, and become people that are morally, socially, and economically unfit to live.<sup>2</sup>

This paper will briefly discuss the nature of perpetual learners, the reasons and arguments behind the need for the 21<sup>st</sup> century human resource to become perpetual learners. This paper will further discuss the characteristics of perpetual learners and link them to the globalization's threats and opportunity.

## II. THE NATURE OF PERPETUAL LEARNERS

In my opinion, people can be put into two categories. First, people with diploma/certificate mentality. This refers to people who have a high regard on titles (academic titles), and not the knowledge, competencies, skills, and personal character. The second type of people are high people with high scientific mentality. I consider the latter type of people as "perpetual learners/true learners". They are different from the certificate mentality people, perpetual learners are people who keen to learn, deepen their knowledge mastery, continuously improve their work skills and character, and try to exist in this competitive new era, globalization era.<sup>3</sup>

Perpetual learner, as James R. Davis and Adelaide B. Davis pointed out, refers to people who love new things, new ideas, and new skill. He or she is not only learning to know, but more than that she or he learns to think and to solve problem. Perpetual learner develops his or her knowledge not only from formal education and text books, but also through experiences and reality. R. Davis called this type of people as perpetual learner.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Michael Fullan and Maria Langwarty, *A Rich Seam: How New Pedagogies Find deep learning*, California, USA, ISTE (The International Society for Technology in Education), 2014, p. g. Compare with Patrick Griffin and Esther Care, *Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills: Methods and Approach*, Assessment Research Center, University of Melboune, Australia, 2015, p. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> A.Ilyas Ismail, "Manusia Pembelajar," *Harian Umum Republika*, Senin, 22 Juni 2015.

<sup>4</sup>James R. Davis and Adelaide B. Davis, *Managing Your Own Learning*, San Fransisco, Berrett Koehler Publisher, 2000, p. 1-2. Compare with Jim Eison, *Using Active Learning*

In this new era, every one of us has to become a perpetual learner, and this has become even more true for an educator or a teacher. He or she should be concern on his or her students' academic ability, and keep innovation, conducts various improvement and innovation, either in learning methods or in evaluation systems. Teacher's vision and innovation as Doni Kusuma has pointed out is the character of teacher learner.<sup>5</sup>

### III. ARGUMENTS TO BECOME PERPETUAL LEARNER

In general, there are three reasons why we have to become perpetual learners. First, on Islamic point of view, as we all aware, the Qur'an puts a high regard on science and knowledge and on people who practice and develop knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Learning activity, conducting research, and developing knowledge is the first duty in Islam.<sup>7</sup> The iqra' order (iqra' philosophy) necessitates that all Muslims become learners.<sup>8</sup>

Second, the argument on globalization. As many experts pointed out, the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands at least four basic competencies, namely: ability to think critically and to solve the problem, communication, collaboration, and creative and innovation in thinking and acting.<sup>9</sup> These four competencies will not be fulfilled unless one become a learner.

Third, argument on nation's development with cultural approach (mental revolution). It has to be acknowledged that some of our society still hold on to that feudalistic view, tendency to put high regard of titles and not knowledge, ability and character. Myrdal called this phenomena as "soft

state", a nation that has no strong discipline and work ethos.<sup>10</sup> KH Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) as cited by Greg Barton, had once joked about three diseases (read: things that are lacking) on Indonesians: lack of ratio or irrational, lack of maturity or immature, and lack of morality amoral.<sup>11</sup>

### IV. CHARACTER OF PERPETUAL LEARNER

Perpetual learner, at least has five attitudes as his or her main characters or intellectual ethos as follow:

First, has high level of curiosity. This attitude makes him or her keen to learn and has strong willingness to learn. Various researches have revealed that smart children are largely due to their keenness to learn, and not due to them being taught. Regardless to the status as lecturers or students, without curiosity to learn, people will not become learners.<sup>12</sup>

From this curiosity, several important attitudes emerge: (1) keenness, that is interest toward an object . (2) Focus, that is discriminating to concentrate attention and thoughts. (3) motivation, that is strong determination to achieve the target of his or her curiosity and interest.<sup>13</sup> Thus, curiosity is derived from motivation and determination. It is important to note that motivation is the key factor in the success of learning. Hence, Dianna Van Blerkom said, "*The Student who are not motivated are tend to be less successful.*"<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, he or she likes to share with friends or others. Knowledge is unique because it will not be exhausted when it is shared, rather it will increase when shared. There is a popular advice by Professor Andi Hakim Nasution, Rector of IPB (1978-1987). He once stated that if we exchange an apple, we will still get an apple, not two apples. But if we exchange knowledge, we will not only get one but more. In modern

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*Instructional Strategies to Create Excitement and Enhance Learning*, Department of Adult, Career, and Higher Education University of South Florida, 2010, p. 3-4.

<sup>5</sup>Doni Kusuma, *Pendidikan Karakter di Zaman Keblinger: Mengembangkan Visi Guru Sebagai Pendidik Karakter dan Pelaku Perubahan*, Jakarat, PT Grasindo, 2009, h. 168. Compare with Helen Timperly, et.al., *Teacher Professional Learning and Development*, New Zeland, Minstry of Education, 2007, p. 18-22. Lee S. Shulman, *What Teachers Should Know and Able To do*, National Board of Professional Teaching Standard, Arlington, 2016, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup>QS. al-Mujadilah/58 : 13.

<sup>7</sup>QS. al-'Alaq/96: 1-5.

<sup>8</sup>A. Ilyas Ismail, *True Islam: Intelektual, Moral, Spiritual*, Jakarta, Mitra Wacana Media, 2013, p. 114.

<sup>9</sup>Dennis Van Roekel, *Preparing 21st Century Students for A Global Society: An Educator's Guide to the Four Cs*, National Education Association, USA, 2012, p. 5. Compare with Laura Greenstein, *Assessing 21st Century Skills: A Guide to Evaluating Mastery and Authentic Learning*, Sage Publication, California, 2012, p. 3-6.

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<sup>10</sup>Gunnar Myrdal at Paul Patrick Streeten, *Thinking about Development*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 197. Compare with Lars Magnusson, *Nation, State and the Industrial Revolution: The Visible Hand*, New York, Routledge, 2009, p. 1-2.

<sup>11</sup>Greg Barton, *Abdurrahman wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President*, Australia, UNSW Press, 2002, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup>Iwan Pranoto, "Kasmaran Berilmu Pengetahuan," *Kompas*, Jumat, 14 Desember 2012. Compare with Hanna Dumont, et.al, *The Nature of Learning: Using Research to Inspire Practice*, OECD., 2012, p. 6-7.

<sup>13</sup>Hendra Surya, *Menjadi Manusia Pembelajar*, Jakarta, Media Komputindo, 2009, h. 3. Compare with Myron H. Dembo and Helena Seli, *Motivation and Learning Strategies for College Success*, New York, Routledge, 2013, p.51.

<sup>14</sup>Dianna L. Van Blerkom, *College Study Skill: Becoming A Strategic Learner*, Boston, Wadsworth, 2012, p. xxv.

language, this type of learning philosophy and learning methodology is called “Partnership Learning.”<sup>15</sup>

Third, in addition to sharing, perpetual learner is keen to expand their knowledge in various ways. One of them is through breaking the limits of our knowledge. Others are through stepping out of the comfort zone. Stepping out from the comfort zone needs distinctive technique and courage. Philip E Johnson recommends another way to expand the knowledge, by practice thinking, and connect ourselves with various living wisdom and knowledge, not a dead knowledge that has to be recited and memorized daily.<sup>16</sup>

Fourth, he or she has contribution toward the advancement of knowledge and humanity. Within the Islamic perspective, knowledge is not for the knowledge itself, rather it is for the benefit of the ummah as the embodiment of our obedience to Allah SWT. The first commandment given to our Prophet Muhammad PBUH, can be understood that the Iqra' commandment in its social manifestation through research or development of science, it has to be done within the framework of *bi ism-I rabbik*, on the name of God, in the sense of for the goodness and the prosperity of mankind.<sup>17</sup>

Fifth, the perpetual learner has the humble attitude and *tawadhu*. Regardless to his or her broad knowledge, and to his or her contribution to the progress of knowledge and civilization, perpetual learners will not feel superior because of their contribution as they use the rice philosophy, the more they have, the humbler they will be.

Humble here means the mental attitude of the perpetual learners where they consider that their knowledge is less, and there are still much to learn. This is the attitude of the perpetual learners, they do not become exclusive and they are always open minded and willing to open dialog with others.

This humble attitude has once showed by the Greek Philosopher, Socrates (466-399 SM), where he said, “I only know that I don't know.” Imam Syafi'i (w 204 H), the founder of the Syafi'I school, was no less humble and tawadhu. He often cried when he read a book, he realized that he just knew something that was written by others [read: known] by others years before him.

As it was told in his compilation of poems (*Diwan al-Syafi'i*), Imam Syafi'I felt that he become more stupid each day, and he said, “Kullama izdad-tu 'ilman, zadani 'ilaman bi

<sup>15</sup>Laura Greenstein, *op.cit.* p.3. Compare with Mick Healey, *et.al.*, Engagement Trough Partnership: Students as Partners in Learrning and Teaching in Higher Education, UK, The Higher Education Academy, 2014, p.12-19. Jim Knight, Parnership Learning, The University of Cansas Center For Research on Learning, 2002, p. 7-18.

<sup>16</sup> Philip E. Johnson, *Fifty Nifty Ways to Help Your Child Become A Better Learner*, USA, Tuscon Arizona, 2004, p. 14-22.

<sup>17</sup>A. Ilyas Ismail, *True Islam*, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

*jahli.*” (the more my knowledge increase, the more I know of my stupidity).<sup>18</sup> As a leading mujtahid, Imam Syafi'i also never claims himself as the most righteous person. In variety of his opinions clashes, almost in 200 matters, with his teacher, Imam Malik, he said: “*Ra'yi shawab yahtamil al-khatha' wa ra'yu ghairi khatha' yaahtamil al-shawab*” (my opinion is right [however] it has mistaken probability; other's opinion is wrong, [however] it has right probability).<sup>19</sup>

Imam Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man bin Tsabit (w 150 H) the founder of Hanafi school, was also very humble. He never considered his opinion as something final and had to be followed. In his intellectual discourses, he always stated: “*Kalamuna hadza ra'yun, faman kana 'indahu khairun minhu falyati bihi.*” (This is my opinion. If there are other opinions who are more appropriate, you should come to them and take it).<sup>20</sup>

Thus, all Islamic scholars and leaders in the middle ages passed down the same wisdom and good example, humbleness. They were never hesitating to say, “I do not know” (*La Adri*). As it is well known, that at the end of their writings, they never forgot to put, “*Wa Allah-u a'lam bi al-shawab*” sentence, which means that to return all the truth belongs to Allah SWT. Those are the characters of the perpetual learners. *Wa Allahu a'lam!*

<sup>18</sup>Muhammad Ibrahim Salim, *Diwan al-Imam al-Syafi'I al-Musamma al-Jauhar al-Nafis fi Syi'r al-Imam Muhammad ibn Idris*, Mesir, Maktabah Ibn Sina, p. 117.

<sup>19</sup>Pernyataan Imam Syafi'I ini mengandung makna bahwa beliau sebagai imam *mujtahid* amat menekankan kebebasan berpikir dan toleransi yang sangat tinggi terhadap perbedaan pendapat dan pemikiran. Lihat Abd al-Hakim al-Faituri, al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin, Nomer 2305, June 7 - 2008. Compare with *dialoge of Abu Hamdan*, *Ma al-Ma'na min Kalam al-Imam al-Syafi'i: Ra'yi Shawab Yahtamil al-Khatha' wa Ra'yu Ghairi Khatha' Yaahtamil al-Shawab*, Multaqa Ahl al-Hadits, Muntada Dirasat al-Fiqhiyah, <http://www.ahlalhdeeth.com>. Agust 20-2017.

<sup>20</sup>Muhammad Syahrur, “*Ihda' wa syukr*” fi *Dirasah al-Islamiyah al-Mu'ashira fi al-Daulah wa al-Mujtama'*, Damaskus, Al-Ahali li al-Thiba'ah wa al-Nasyr, 1994, p. 12. Compare with 'Alawi ibn Ahmad al-Saqqaf al-Makki al-Syafi'I, *al-Fawa'id al-Makkiyah firma Yahtajuhu Thalabat al-Syafi'iyah*, Beirut, Dar al-Basya'ir al-Islamiyah, 2004.