An Evaluation of the *SUMUR* Program Implementation from the *Naqib's* Perspective

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Abstract

The Sahsiah Unggul Murid (SUMUR) (Virtuous Student Character) program was recently introduced in all Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama (SMKA) (National Religious Secondary Schools) and Sekolah Agama Bantuan Kerajaan (SABK) (Government Aided Religious Schools) in Malaysia in the year 2010. This program has been implemented through usrah (mentoring group) with each group being headed by a naqib (student mentor). Nevertheless, the credibility of the student mentors themselves is a matter of discussion. There were student mentors who did not use an interesting style of delivery, lack closeness with usrah members, are too soft-spoken to be effectively heard and tardy for the program. The driving force for the implementation of this SUMUR program are the student mentors who are constantly close to students in the respective usrah groups. The objective of this study is to explore the role of the naqib in the implementation of this program, in addition to examining the naqib's function in the building of the student character. The Stake Responsive Evaluation Model was used adopting a qualitative method through interviews which focused on five nuqaba' (plural for naqib; male student mentor) and naqibat (plural for naqibah; female student mentor) at the SMKA Sheikh Haji Mohd Said in the State of Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Study findings argue that the naqib plays the role of an agent who invites to righteousness, prevents vice and strengthens the ties of brotherhood among usrah members; all of which in turn enhance the credibility of a naqib. Hence, training for the naqib needs to be enhanced from time to time in ensuring that the SUMUR program achieves the objectives set by the Islamic Education Division of the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MoE). In conclusion, the SUMUR program introduced has run smoothly in this school and has the advantages of enhancing student character, moving them closer to Allah (S.W.T.), training them for leadership, and bridging ukhuwwah (brotherhood or sisterhood). The naqib was found to play an important role in helping to implement the SUMUR program and building student character. It is suggested that there is a need for a more comprehensive study encompassing the views of school administrators and murabbi (guide teachers) on the running of this SUMUR program at the national level to ensure that program stays on the right track.

Keywords: program evaluation; virtuous student character; national religious secondary school; student mentor;

1. Introduction

Exposure to Islamic teachings requires the attention of society, especially for students. Students need to be guided to appreciate Islamic teachings because of their vulnerability to negative influences and they are easily lured into activities which deviate from Islamic teachings. If this matter is not curbed, the Muslim society will be easily endangered with various social problems. With regards to this, implementation of religious activities and programs should be planned, arranged and implemented, especially in schools. Schools are suitable and easy locations for implementing religious activities such as *Maulidur Rasul* (Prophet's Birthday) celebrations, *Majlis Tadarus al-Qur'an* (Qur'an recital function) and *usrah* programs. The importance of holding such programs in school is a matter which requires a serious attention from the school administration.

The capacity of Islam as a leading discipline must be upheld because the calibre of a Muslim depends on the quality of education he or she has acquired. The application of Islamic values within the Muslim person needs to be

practised from school-going age. Through this early step, sustained guidance and education will holistically give birth to the kind of Muslim who lives up to Islamic requirements (Nawi et al., 2012). Of late, Malaysian local researchers have a keen interest in analyzing the historical context of Islamic education. These can be seen, for instance, from the writing on the history of the institutionalization of *Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR)* (People's Religious Schools) which, according to Umar et al. (2012d), began since the early days of Malaysian independence.

It was followed by the registration of the *SAR* as the *Sekolah Agama Bantuan Kerajaan (SABK)* (Government-Aided Religious Schools) which was an attempt at improving the education quality for that particular school. As far as *SABK* is concerned, Umar et al. (2012c) asserted that the school must be allocated with full financial fund from the Malaysian Ministry of Education in terms of school administration, principal and teachers' salaries, the subject per capita expenses and all other types of government aids. Umar et al. (2012a) also suggested that the school lot remains a belonging of the school's administrative board. The administration of *SABK* is jointly managed by the Malaysian Ministry of Education and the *Yayasan* (Foundation), *Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri* (State Islamic Religious Department) or School Governing Board. Meanwhile the subject curriculum of *al-Azhar* University which was adopted in Malaysian religious schools is to be retained, even though its curriculum has never been recognized as part of the national curriculum. The implementation of *al-Azhar* curriculum in the main stream education is a dilemma due to differences in approach, understanding and purpose to fulfil each educational policy (Umar et al., 2012d).

On the character building of religious school students, systematic character improvement in defined stages may be gained by following the *usrah* program in view of the program objectives (Mustari & Mohd Salleh, 2010). During adolescence period, school plays an important role in socialization and students who commit misconduct at school are at risk of dropping-out and performing low academically. It is important to understand reasons for their misconduct at school and to take preventive measurements (Bolkan, Çakıcı & Çakıcı, 2012). *Usrah* groups in *SMKA*'s, which are led by the *naqib*s, are the driving force behind the *SUMUR* program. The *SUMUR* program consists of four core programs; namely the Courtesy Program, *Mutadayyin* (Worshipper) Program, Personal Image Program and the Self-Identity Program.

When it comes to learning situation, Azizeh et al. (2010) suggests that teachers, the curriculum, the syllabus, textbooks and school activities must continuously be improved so that students can maintain a positive attitude and the process of teaching and learning remain effective. In the context of Malaysia, many researches have been done related to the improvement of students teaching and learning including the implementation of forum method and the incorporation of learning styles in educational technology (Pai, 2012; Cooper, 1982; Mohd Nawi et al., 2013; Mohd Nawi et al., 2012). This is in addition to the improvements in learning conditions and facilities such as the aids from the government to Islamic religious schools, whose students are also encouraged to have those methods in their learning activity.

2. Problem Statement

The *SUMUR* Program was recently introduced in all *SMKA*'s and *SABK*'s in Malaysia in the year 2010. This program has been implemented through *usrah* groups with each group being headed by a *naqib.* Nevertheless, the credibility issue of the *naqib* themselves is a matter of discussion. A study by Mustari and Mohd Salleh (2010) found that there were some *naqib*s who did not use an interesting style of delivery, lack closeness with *usrah* members, were too soft-spoken to be effectively heard and tardy for the program. The *naqib*s who are constantly close to students in their respective *usrah* groups are the driving force behind the implementation of this *SUMUR* program (Nordin et al. 2011). Hence, the purpose of this study is to explore the role of the *naqib* in the implementation of this program, in addition to examining the *naqib*'s function in the building of student character.

3. Participant-Oriented Evaluation Model

There are several classifications of program evaluation models based on objectives, management, participation and clientele. The purpose of evaluation of a program are to study whether or not the progam objectives have been met and for the betterment of the program. Hence, an evaluation conducted may give information to all parties, whether policy-makers, managers, program implementers, participants, staff and stakeholders to decide whether the program should go on, be improved or even be terminated. Since the year 1990, some trends have influenced program evaluation. Program evaluations have become widespread in several countries beside the USA and Canada, and have developed in Japan, Central America, South America and India, involving many managers and professionals in an evaluation agency. An evaluation program today focuses on evaluating program outcomes or effectiveness.

Stake Responsive Evaluation Model (1975), Guba and Lincoln Naturalistic Evaluation Model (1985), Fettermen Empowerment Evaluation Model (1994), Patton Developmental Evaluation Model (1994) and Cousins and Whitmore

Participation Model (1998) are among the most frequently used models in participant-oriented evaluation programs. All these models share a similarity in terms of multiple stakeholders involved. These models also emphasize on the involvement of all stakeholders, including those who might be marginalized in a program (those not selected to follow a program). These models are based on the opinion that a comprehensive view by those directly and indirectly involved will give a comprehensive evaluation of the running of a program.

Initially these models are for studying in-depth what happens in a program. It contradicts the objective-based evaluation model (Tyler, 1950) which stresses achievement of objectives as of utmost importance. For participant-oriented groups, the priority is to understand the experience of those involved in the program. The Stake Responsive Evaluation Model (1975) is an evaluation which looks at the situation of a program in progress. Stakeholders are not actively involved in an evaluation conducted and it differs greatly from the participative evaluation concept presently introduced. In this Stake Responsive Evaluation Model, the evaluator obtains much information from various stakeholders, even though the evaluator is considered an outsider. The role of the evaluator is merely to understand the situation and problems faced in a program and then to act professionally by reporting proposals for improvement (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012).

The Guba and Lincoln Naturalistic Evaluation Model (1985) sees the evaluator as a mediator between stakeholders with different views of the program to reach a consensus. This participant-oriented model has been developed with the Practical Participative Evaluation Model (Cousin & Earl, 1992), Transformation Participative Evaluation Model (Fetterman, 1994) and the Deliberative Democratic Evaluation Model (House & Howe, 1999).

These three models discuss the active participaton of stakeholders in evaluation. Further, evaluators and some stakeholders share in making decisions in the Practical Participative Evaluation Model, while the Transformation Participative Evaluation Model gives the power to stakeholders to conduct an evaluation. This model is more towards a political factor, particularly in less developed countries such as Central America and India. The party marginalized in a program will be selected in an evaluation and will be exposed to how a program evaluation is done. The advantage of the participant-oriented model is that it gives better understanding on the running of a program. All involved parties, directdirectly or not, are given a chance to state their views encompassing objectives, implementation, retraints and problems faced, particularly for newly introduced programs. This model also acts to steer the program on the right course. Minor refinements may be done at the onset of the program.

Some of the studies which use the Stake Responsive Evaluation Model are studies by Abma et al. (2009a, 2009b), Freeman et al. (2010a, 2010b), Platt (2011), Vernon et al. (2008), Molewijk et al. (2008) and also Van Der Knaap (2006). All evaluation programs except that by Van Der Knaap (2006) discuss the views of stakeholders and these studies concern the health field. Many views are obtained from patients, the government, hospitals, doctors and nurses on the effectiveness of a certain treatment or medicine administered; whereas, the study by Van Der Knaap (2006) is an evaluation of the effectiveness of the civil service. The evaluation brought about a dialogue and decision-making among stakeholders. Case study method is an approach used to obtain information from stakeholders.

Hence, the Stake Responsive Evaluation Model is chosen to evaluate the *SUMUR* program recently introduced in the year 2010. The role of the researcher as an external evaluator suits the concept of this evaluation model which considers the evaluator as an outside party with no interest in the implementation of the *SUMUR* program. The researcher gathers as much information about the program and reports on the implementation of the *SUMUR* program to the party responsible.

The *SUMUR* Program Realising the reality of the student character building process as a continuous long-term process regardless of the school background, the *SUMUR* program is thereby launched in April 2010 and implemented in *SMKA* and *SABK*. This program is a comprehensive approach to build a virtuous student character, specifically for students in religious schools. It is implemented by the Islamic Education Division of the Malaysian Ministry of Education and has five main objectives:

- To produce students with praiseworthy personality worthy of emulation by other students;
- To produce students who are constantly pursuing knowledge for happiness in this world and the hereafter;
- To put into practice good health care in daily life;
- To build the resilience in facing challenges in life; and
- To enhance leadership abilities and develop the spirit of patriotism.

The goal of the *SUMUR* program is in line with the *usrah* program of the *Badan Agama, Dakwah, Akhlak dan Rohani (BADAR)* (Religious, Propagation, Virtue and Spiritual Body), in terms of the main goal in the building of the virtuous character in aspects of personal and leadership quality. The *SUMUR* program comprises of four core sub-programs encompassing Courtesy, *Mutadayyin* (Worshipper), Self-Image and Self-Identity Programs. Through the

Courtesy Program, students are taught mutual respect, mutual assistance, appreciation and use of appropriate language for communication. Through the *Mutadayyin* (Worshipper) Program, students are taught to keep up quality obligatory *salat* (prayers), *tadarus* (Qur'an recital) and practise continuous *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and *du'a'* (supplication) in daily life. Whereas through the Self-Image Program, students are taught to present an Islamic image, observe their social and leadership manners and cultivate an active and proactive attitude. The Self-Identity Program trains students to have confidence, patience and perseverance, establish their stance and maintain a high morale.

4. Methodology

Research methodology for this study is a qualitative using the methods of focused interview (Ary et al., 2002). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the researcher is required to have some idea or guidance to conduct the research even though he goes into the field openly, without structure or inductively. This means that even though the study is inductive, some general questions have to be prepared. As the purpose of this study is to understand and explain the implementation of the program, qualitative method is considered appropriate as the researcher meets with informants directly in the real location (Patton, 1990) and data obtained is induced. Data required is systematically generated and analysed base on the perception, feelings and knowledge of related informants. According to Patton (1990), interview is one of the ways to approach the student world and understand what they really experience and think. It is important for the researcher who wishes to know how they feel and view the program introduced.

The researcher may also record the respondents' answers using tape recording (Ary et al., 2002). The objective of a study through interview is to understand an incident through the respondent's perspective and not through generalisation. A sample decrease in qualitative study would not reduce the validity of the study because there is no standard amount in setting the sample amount in a qualitative study, the basis of the method is access and not generalisation. In addition, a qualitative study does not focus on sample amount or similar characteristics of respondents but focuses more on acquisition of detailed information in the researcher's efforts to answer the study's constructed questions (Mohd Tahir & Sidin, 2005). This study uses many open questions. Fontana and Frey (1994) as well as Merriem (1998) also state that there are three types of interview technique, namely, structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews.

The non-probablity sampling method is used in this study because it is believed that it represents a research objective related to the phenomenon of interest. The researcher believes that the interview approach is appropriate to be used on stakeholders in the SUMUR program, namely, five persons, three of whom are *naqib* and the other two are *naqibah.* The study was done at the *SMKA* Sheikh Haji Mohd Said (SHaMS) in the State of Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Through this study, the researcher uses the flexible semi-structured interview and this situation enables the respondents to explain what is in their mind to the researcher:

- "Can you tell me how were you selected as a *naqib* at SMKA SHaMS?
- "What is good being a *naqib* at SMKK SHaMS?

5. Finding and Results

The respondents' identities were concealed and given the code *Naqib* or *Naqibah* 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. Some themes have been inferred as in the following results:

5.1 Naqib as A Tarbiyyah (Nurturing) Agent to Invite to Goodness and Prevent Vice

Interview Findings with Naqib 1:

I have attended regular school before where we only learnt Islamic Education but did not fully practise it. Here it is different, we know the limits of socializing between boys and girls, courtesy towards teachers. All these we learnt in the surau (prayer hall), there are ustaz and murabbi (teachers) who guide us through tadhkirah (reminders). We are the driving force for friends and junior students. We disseminate what we acquire from the murabbi (guiding teachers) and alumni. We have a close relationship between teachers, students and the alumni who help us a lot. Our life in the dorm is like a family. We always remind each other.

Interview Findings with Naqibah 3:

Based on my experience from Form 1 to Form 5, I see the degrees of tarbiyyah (nurture) conducted by the senior girls on us. Previously we were usrah members. Then in Form 3 we were appointed as naqibah. Now in Form 5, our juniour usrah members in Form 3 are appointed as naqibah. The tarbiyyah tradition makes us play an important role in

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ensuring that the continuity of an Islamic environment will be maintained by our juniours after we leave this school later. In fact, the alumni still gives us guidance and makes us feel that the role of naqib and naqibah is really important in this usrah program.

Interview Findings with Naqib 4:

We hold a tasmi' (recital) of surah Sajadah, for example, for our juniors. If there is a program outside requiring us to be imam, it would be easier for them. This is because there is a scholar's opinion which does not allow us to read a surah from a wall while we do obligatory salat (prayers). In addition, I see that Form 1 juniors are getting used to wearing caps, turbans and do not pay attention to what others say.

5.2 Bridging Brotherhood (Ukhuwwah)

Interview Findings with *Naqibah 2:*

For the Muslimah, we are even closer. We recite *surah al-Mulk* only in the dorm. Each member of the dorm, regardless from which storey, will recite the *surah* together. We frequently say hello, how are you amongst dorm members, eat together and discuss problems in our studies. We also go outings together. We are like a family, calling amongst us respectful titles according to age seniority like *Kak Long* (Big Sister), *Kak Ngah* (Middle Sister), *Kak Cik* (Small Sister) and so on.

5.3 Credibility of Naqib

Interview Findings with *Naqibah 5:*

The strength of *usrah* lies not only with the *naqib* and *naqibah* but also with the *murabbi* and alumni whom I feel are the backbone to the tasks of the *naqib* and *naqibah*. At the *Naqib* and *Naqibah* Camp we are taught how to solve the problem of our juniors who are less interested in *usrah*. In addition, the traditional concept of *usrah* is to gather in a circle. We can go outings with our *usrah* group.

Interview Findings with *Naqib 3:*

I was 'zero' about religion. I was ignorant and quite wild. Rebellious to parents. Now, from zero, you can say, I am like a hero, my former *naqib* guided me. When I became *naqib*, I changed a lot and became an example to the juniours.

Based on the above findings showed that the role of *naqib* and *naqibah* in the implementation of SUMUR program is appropriate to the establishment of *SMKA* as it creates an *iqlim dini* (Islamic environment) and curbs the *usrah* members from committing vice. This is in line with a study by Abdul Razak (2006) that the characteristic of an effective religious secondary school is the implementation of an Islamic way of life in every aspect of learning and work, the practice of *muraqabah* (self-monitoring), feeling Allah (SWT) is constantly observing our every move. It is supported by a study by Muhammad Yasir (in Sidin et al., 2008) which discusses knowledge, understanding and appreciation by students of religious values which are able to curb social problems which undermine the personality of the adolescent. Through *usrah* relations, they become closer in accordance with the rule of *usrah* (al-Banna, 1985), that is, *al-ta'aruf* (getting to know), *al-tafahum* (understanding) and *al-takaful* (mutual assistance). Through *usrah*, they are also able to express all their problems and make efforts to overcome them because their relationship in *usrah* is like a family (Mustari & Mohd Salleh, 2010). And through *usrah*, the *naqib* and *naqibah* may also improve their personality because they are required to be examples to others. All their actions will be followed by others in the group. Hence, training for *naqib* and *naqibah* cannot be taken lightly as their personal quality forms the spine for the implementation of the SUMUR program in schools (Opir, 2012).

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, the *SUMUR* program introduced has run smoothly in this school and has the advantages of enhancing student character, moving them closer to Allah (S.W.T.), training them for leadership potential, and bridging *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood or sisterhood). The *naqib* or *naqibah* is found to play an important role in helping to implement the *SUMUR* program and building student character. It is suggested that a more comprehensive study encompassing the views of school administrators and *murabbi* (guide teachers) on the running of this *SUMUR* program at the national level needs to be conducted to ensure that this recently introduced program stays on the right track.

The implication of this study is that the parties responsible, namely the school administration and the Islamic Education Division of the Malaysian Ministry of Education, need to continue the existing *nuqaba'* training camp and focus on building leadership and communication skills. In addition, merit awards for the best *naqib* and/or *naqibah* needs to be

introduced to acknowledge their contribution in the smooth running of the *SUMUR* program. It is suggested that the school take the initiative to systemically create an alumni for *naqib* and *naqibah* so that their experiences may be shared by future or echelons of *naqib* and *naqibah*.

7. Acknowledgement

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