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Assessing Students' Spiritual Practice in IIUM (International Islamic University of Malaysia)

ABSTRACT: Spirituality was highly valued in the teaching and learning process in Malaysia. The MoE (Ministry of Education) Malaysia has incorporated elements of Islamic and Moral Education in the education system in Malaysia. This is done to generate a balanced individual and overall potential development of the physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual beliefs, and devotion to Allah. Thus, the objective of this study is to determine the spiritual practice experienced by IIUM (International Islamic University of Malaysia) students. This study used qualitative method, and process of data collection is done through interview techniques. The interview techniques are able to provide a framework within which respondents can express their understanding and knowledge of their own manner. These findings clearly indicate that the daily or weekly spiritual practice performed by IIUM students is such as five daily practices for spiritual development: prayer, meditation, service, recite the Al-Qur'an, and integrity. Prayer, recite the Al-Qur'an, and meditation feed the spirit; while integrity and service exercise will develop the strength and capacities as Muslim. Together they constitute the injunctions one is to follow to develop spiritually.

KEY WORD: Spiritual practice, Muslim student, assessment, Islamic and moral education, prayer, meditation, service, recite the Al-Qur'an, and integrity.

ABSTRAKSI: "Penilaian Amalan Rohani Pelajar di UIAM (Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia)". Kerohanian adalah nilai yang tinggi dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran di Malaysia. KPM (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia) telah menggabungkan unsur-unsur Pendidikan Moral dan Islam dalam sistem pendidikan di Malaysia. Ini dilakukan untuk menjaga pembangunan yang seimbang bagi individu dan keseluruhan potensi jasmani, emosi, rohani dan intelek, dan kepatuhan kepada Allah. Oleh itu, objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan pengalaman amalan rohani oleh pelajar-pelajar UIAM. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kualitatif, dan proses pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui teknik temuduga. Teknik temuduga dapat menyediakan rangka kerja yang membolehkan responden dapat meluahkan pemahaman dan pengetahuan tentang mereka dan cara mereka sendiri. Penemuan ini jelas menunjukkan bahawa amalan harian atau mingguan rohani yang dilakukan oleh pelajar UIAM adalah lima amalan setiap hari untuk pembangunan rohani, seperti: doa, meditasi, perkhidmatan, membaca Al-Qur'an, dan integriti. Sholat, membaca Al-Qur'an, dan meditasi memberi makanan rohani; manakala integriti dan menjalankan perkhidmatan akan membangunkan kekuatan dan kapasiti sebagai orang Islam. Bersama-sama ianya membentuk injunksi seseorang untuk mengikuti dan membangunkan rohani.

KATA KUNCI: Amalan rohani, pelajar Islam, penilaian, pendidikan moral dan Islam, doa, meditasi, perkhidmatan, membaca Al-Qur'an, dan integriti.

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How to cite this article? Radzi, Farhana Mohamad, Siti Salwa Md Sawari & Mohd Al-'Ikhsan Ghazali. (2016). "Assessing Students' Spiritual Practice in IIUM (International Islamic University of Malaysia)" in *INSANCITA: Journal of Islamic Studies in Indonesia and Southeast Asia*, Vol.1(1), February, pp.121-126. Bandung, Indonesia: Minda Masagi Press, ISSN 2443-1776.

Chronicle of the article: Accepted (December 1, 2015); Revised (January 10, 2016); and Published (5 February 2016).

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality is relating to the soul or spirit (Bordas, 2012; and Hölscher, 2013), usually in contrast to material things; and relating to religious (Fincham & Beach, 2013; Balboni, Puchalski & Peteet, 2014; and Mathisen *et al.*, 2015), or sacred things rather than worldly things. Spiritual practices are those actions that lead to spirituality (Pargament, 2011). It is possible to identify universal values, principles, and practices by examining those that are common to most of the world's cultures, traditions, and religions, though some disagreement will remain (Putnam & Campbell, 2012; and Witte, 2012).

Spirituality was highly valued in the teaching and learning process in Malaysia. The MoE (Ministry of Education) Malaysia has incorporated elements of Islamic and Moral Education in the education system in Malaysia. This is done to generate a balanced individual and overall potential development of the physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual beliefs, and devotion to Allah (Zubairi & Sawari, 2014).

However, there is a gap between current practice of education system implementation and National Education Philosophy, especially in the spiritual domain development issues. A study was conducted by Rohana Hamzah, Kamarudzaman Md Isa & Roziyah Mohd Janor (2010) to disassemble the philosophy behind the development away from the spiritual domain and developing a conceptual model of the spiritual development potential process through the educational process. It is important to strengthen the applications of spiritual element in education (Hamzah, Isa & Janor, 2010).

Therefore, this study emphasized the role of spiritual practices among students of IIUM (International Islamic University of Malaysia). This is because the country need a smart generation not just in terms of intellectual, but also smart in terms of mental and soul. In fact, there are students who excel academically, but spiritually fragile so caught up in activities that

are not supposed to. Therefore, this study was undertaken to answer the research questions about the forms of spiritual practice that are practiced among students.

So, the objective of the study should be given attention as it serves as a reference framework for ensuring the implementation of the study run smoothly and systematically. Thus, the objective of this study is to determine the spiritual practice experience by IIUM students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students in religiously affiliated schools tend to exhibit a higher level of academic achievement (Stewart, 2013; and Bowman, Felix & Ortis, 2014) than their peers in secular schools, particularly in low-income urban neighbourhoods. For example, studies continue to find that urban students in public schools lag behind in educational achievement, compared with students in religious schools. Spirituality and spiritual practices can act as a leaven to affect positively the character of our culture, communities and institutions, but their presence and influence is limited in much of civil society (Clarcken, 2009).

Spirituality and spiritual practices can be viewed as aspects of spiritual and moral intelligences (Zohar, 2012; Rani, Ghani, Ahmad, 2013; and Dobbstein, Dos Santos & Herbst, 2015), and they can all be considered as components of moral education. As emotional and social intelligence have expanded our view of human intelligence, spiritual, and moral intelligence add important and needed components to our holistic view of human intelligence. They have great potential to improve our understanding of learning and behaviour (Borba, 2001). Educators have a responsibility to offer students a balanced opportunity to develop their full capacities (Sawari & Awang Mat, 2014).

Education is a moral endeavour and the classroom is saturated with moral meaning (Hansen, 1995; and Sawari & Awang Mat, 2014). Teachers can create a just and caring

environment, and, along with parents, be models of morality and spirituality, exemplifying the virtues they seek to inspire in their students (Sawari & Mustafa, 2014; and Sawari, Awang Mat & Ghazali, 2014).

Educational leaders and administrators can also practice these same behaviours with the faculty, staff, students, parents, and others. Such moral behaviour is highly associated with leadership effectiveness (Lennick & Kiel, 2005).

Educators and educational leaders show respect by modelling how they value others by treating them in a courteous and considerate way. They can teach respect, enhance respect for authority, and emphasize good manners and courtesy in the classroom. Kindness is taught by demonstrating concern about the welfare and feelings of others through teaching its meaning and value, establishing a zero tolerance for meanness, and encouraging and pointing out its positive effect (Ortis, 2014).

By teaching students to respect the dignity and rights of all persons, even those whose beliefs and behaviours we may disagree with, we teach tolerance. We engender it by instilling an appreciation for diversity, countering stereotypes, and not tolerating prejudice. We can teach fairness by treating others fairly, helping them learn to behave fairly, and to stand up against unfairness and injustice.

Based on A.B. Newberg, E.G. d'Aquili & V.P. Rause (2001) and D. Baker & N. Edwards (2012) works, spiritual practices such as contemplative prayer and meditation involve an increase in activity in a number of frontal brain regions, including the prefrontal. As tools and techniques advance, they are increasingly being associated with neurobiological events. They are now seen as intrinsic part of human experience. General physiological and emotional resilience is also associated with spirituality.

METHOD

This part discusses about the research procedures that would be possible by the researchers to conduct the study. The

researchers clearly explain how the data was collected, analyzed, and presented. Further explanations about the population and sample in this study are further elaborated by the researcher.

Research Design. In order to discover objective of this study, researchers used qualitative method. Process of data collection was done through interview techniques. This approach will gain preliminary insight and understanding of adolescent smoking girls isolate and hard to reach.

Sampling Procedure. Purposive sampling was used to identify four students from IIUM (International Islamic University of Malaysia). The eligibility criteria for participation in the study were the following: (1) students of IIUM; (2) Muslim; (3) willingness to participate in the study; and (4) a person not familiar with the interviewers.

Data Collection. A total of 4 interviews were conducted during weekday on 4 December 2013 at IIUM (International Islamic University of Malaysia) Campus in Gombak, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. All potential participants were informed about the purpose and the procedures of the study. Anonymous and voluntary participation were guaranteed to all participants, because no personal information regarding their identities was collected.

Oral consent was obtained before the interviews from all interviewees. Coding for all the four respondents was emphasized such as Respondent A, Respondent B, Respondent C, and Respondent D. In addition, extensive notes were made either during the interview or immediately after it (in case when the interviewee did not feel comfortable). Field notes were expanded after each interview.

Data Analysis. Expanded field notes of interviews were translated into a word-processing format. Preliminary analysis was made to find major themes during the initial stage. The data analysed for major theme are made and strengthened by previous studies related.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the researchers have found that all the respondents give positive responses in the interview sessions. When asking about their opinion about spiritual practice, they classify their opinion wisely as a Muslim. One respondent told that spiritual practice is related to the *taqwa*; one respondent clarify that spiritual practice involve physical and mental activities to help expand our mind set; while the other respondents said that spiritual practice something that is done because of the commandments of Allah and prevent what is prohibited.

This result based on respondents answer, as follows:

Spiritual practice is something related to *taqwa*. Spiritual practice is the way we reach *taqwa*. As Muslim, whatever we perform, all of our deeds will going to specialized, whether we perceived *taqwa* or not. So, we must mind our practices (interview with Respondent A, 4/12/2013).

Spiritual practice is that we do what have been told by Allah and prevent from doing *mazmumah* things, and as Muslim, when we do the spiritual practices, we must give fullest our heart to Allah (interview with Respondent B, 4/12/2013).

Spiritual practice is about our religious practices, which what are told by Allah for Muslim people. We also follow what our Prophet Muhammad deeds (interview with Respondent C, 4/12/2013).

About Five Key Practices. Five key practices found in the major faith traditions are presented as aids to effective education and learning process, such as prayer, meditation, service, recite the *Al-Qur'an*, and integrity.

First, Prayer. Prayer is supplication to, or communion and conversation with a higher power, Allah. Prayers can be acted, silent or spoken, to help cultivate a sense of spirituality and association with a transcendent force. Prayer is practiced widely, though it takes many forms and is offered for many reasons, such as asking for help, offering thanks, seeking forgiveness, giving praise, looking for answers,

and invoking protection.

In most religions, it is considered indispensable to inner spiritual development as it cultivates purity, humility, and detachment. The study found that there is some form of spiritual practice that is done by the respondents in this study as five daily prayers, *hajat* prayer, or *qiamullail*, congregational prayer.

The findings show that all the respondents perform five daily prayers every day and two respondents perform *hajat* prayer or *qiamullail* by one to two times a week. This describes that *hajat* prayer or *qiamullail* is a common religious practice, which practiced by the respondents of IIUM (International Islamic University of Malaysia).

Second, Meditation. Meditation has received different emphases in the great spiritual traditions with some involving demanding practice and discipline, and others taking the form of simple reflection and contemplation. Many techniques are given for meditation, all with the intention of leading a person to higher levels of being and consciousness.

If prayer is considered as speaking to a higher power, meditation would be listening. Many forms of mediation using breath control or relaxation are currently used in schools, but are not generally labelled mediation as some segments of society. Respondent B has said that she did the meditation as form of spiritual practice (interview with Respondent B, 4/12/2013).

Third, Service. Some imagine withdrawal from the material world as the path to the spirituality, which renders them of little service to themselves or others. Service is a necessary adjunct to the more private acts of prayer, meditation, and recite the *Al-Qur'an*, and is part of living a life of integrity.

Service moves from egocentric to ethnocentric to higher motivations leading to serving the highest good and ideals. Service is an integral part of education, as teaching is one of greatest service one can provide

another. Having students serve is a powerful way of learning. Two of the respondents did mention that they often join the community services that organized by the club or university (interview with Respondent C and Respondent D, 4/12/2013).

Fourth, Recite the *Al-Qur'an*. The holy word or word of Allah is invested with transforming power as evidenced by the influence it has exerted over people. The *Al-Qur'an* was regarded as the truth in its highest form. Daily reciting of the Allah's words, combined with the other spiritual practices it enjoins, is one of the most potent paths to spiritual development. All the three respondents also stated that they recite the *Al-Qur'an* everyday as their practice (interview with Respondent A, Respondent B, and Respondent C, 4/12/2013).

Fifth, Integrity. Besides prayer, meditation, and recite the *Al-Qur'an* to develop spirituality, we are to live a life of integrity if we wish to develop fully. Every religion has laws, ordinances, and teachings about how we should live in this world. They promote many virtues including truth, love, justice, unity, trustworthiness, detachment, selflessness, wisdom, courage, and temperance.

Living with integrity and according to virtues is a central part of school. Teachers teach it and society expects it. Problems arise when the virtues are identified with a religion or are seen as promoting some belief that is not generally held by that society. First respondent did stress on the integrity as a Muslim student (interview with Respondent D, 4/12/2013).

These findings clearly indicate that the daily or weekly spiritual practice performed by IIUM (International Islamic University of Malaysia) students is such as five daily practices for spiritual development: prayer, meditation, service, recite the *Al-Qur'an*, and integrity.

Prayer, recite the *Al-Qur'an*, and meditation feed the spirit; while integrity and service exercise will develop the strength and capacities as Muslim. Together they constitute the injunctions one is to follow to develop

spiritually. They range from primarily private, internal acts to public and external acts.

These injunctions, when taken to extremes can be harmful, as can eating or exercising. Moderation in all things is a universal teaching and principle that applies as much to spirituality as to the other realms of reality. Many of these practices have become empty rituals and forms devoid of the power needed to bring about the spirituality and transformation desired.

CONCLUSION

Overall, spiritual practices are important aspects of a university student in their learning process. Spiritual practices, such as prayer (five daily prayers, *hajat* prayer or *qiyamullail*, and congregational prayer), meditation, community service, recite the *Al-Qur'an*, and integrity are the most practiced forms of spirituality among students, especially students of IIUM (International Islamic University of Malaysia). As Muslims, form of spiritual practice is an important element that can be associated with a student's learning process. A high level of spirituality is also a factor that can motivate students to be working hard to achieve academic excellence.

This study shows that the spiritual practices affect students' learning process. Developing a spiritual practice should enable a person to better transcend selfishness and self-centeredness. By focusing on higher purposes and capabilities, the ability to take initiative in a creative and a disciplined way, sustain effort in the face of obstacles and behave responsibly should be enhanced. Prayer, meditation, recite the *Al-Qur'an*, service, and living a life of integrity are key practices to developing a healthy and happy life.¹

¹**Statement:** Herewith, we declare that this paper is our own work; it is not product of plagiarism and not yet also be reviewed as well as be published by other scholarly journals.

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