

## **Characteristic of Students' Personality for An *Ulul Albab* Program Student Intake in Malaysia**

**Umi Kalthom Abdul Manaf<sup>a</sup>, Fadzilah Abdul Rahman<sup>a</sup>, Fathiyah Mohd Fakhruddin<sup>a</sup>  
Siti Solehah Ibrahim<sup>b</sup>**

<sup>a</sup>Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia

<sup>b</sup>SMK Bandar Baru Ampang, Kuala Lumpur

Corresponding e-mail: umi.manaf@gmail.com

### ***Abstract***

The study was conducted to determine the criteria in students' selection for admission to the *Ulul Albab* program at a MARA Junior Science College, Gemencheh, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The primary mission of the *Ulul Albab* curriculum is to develop a personality who is scientifically inclined in science and technology and also knowledgeable in the Quran and Sunnah through the enculturation of the Quran. The emphasis on developing students' personality character is also in line with the intention stated in the Blueprint (MEB) starting from the year 2013-2025. Since the character is one of the important things that need to be addressed, the study is deemed necessary to determine the characteristics of the personality necessary for the selection of students into the *Ulul Albab* program through the perspective of administrators, teachers, parents and students. The design of the study is a qualitative approach through a case study to answer the research question. Purposive sampling was used for the selection of the respondents. A semi-structured interview technique was conducted to collect data. Through the analysis, it was found that there are 22 main themes that have been identified, namely, the love of the Koran, extraversion, adept at reading the Quran, *al-syaja'ah* properties, *Ta'zim*, perseverance, keeping in touch with God, interested in learning concepts that understand, responsible, having a vision in life, confidence with God's help, being diligent, interested in science *aqli*, motivated, sincere, humble, trying to improve himself, seeking the truth, able to handle life and trust. These characteristics are appropriate for students to have prior to entering the school for a smooth journey in the *Ulul Albab* program.

Keywords: MARA Junior Science College, *Ulul Albab*, Students' Personality, character building

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

In this challenging world of education, the Malaysian government has taken several initiatives to increase the students' performance in order to achieving the hopes and aspiration as outlined in the National Philosophy of Education (NPE). The main aim of the NPE is to produce a good quality individual through the processes of education with a focus on the beliefs and devotion to God (Mok Soon Sang, 2011; Habsah et al., 2009).

Even though the academic performance is the core in education, according to Syed Najmuddin et. al. (2009), it is also the government's aspiration to produce individuals of our own mold in a society arising from physical development of cultural values. It shows

that personality is given priority in the development of a nation.

Among the several efforts initiated by the government to elevate the field of education is through the formulation of the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025). There are 11 strategies or operational shifts in the blueprint as the basis in addressing changes in education. For instances, among the operational shifts, the aspect of 'producing a society that appreciates values', which is the third operational shift that needs to be emphasized to students during the processes of teaching and learning (MOE, 2013). The result through the enculturation of these values is for students to gain universal core values and have a strong national identity even after end of schooling session.

## 2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The forming of personality is one of the features that need to be emphasized in the students and it is a process for building a holistic individual. If properly understood, building the personality is very closely related to moral education, which is the core in Islamic Education (Muhammad Rodhi, 2013). The need in screening student admission into exclusive programs such as *Ulul Albab* is to curb the deterioration of personality from becoming more critical in the near future. Nowadays, there are so many cases concerning this as reported by the mass media.

According to a report from the New Straits Times (August, 2005), an average of seven students were arrested daily and an average of three of them is between the ages of 13 to 15 years old. In 2011 alone, a total number of 11,218 students or 2.05% were involved in serious cases such as bully, truancy and some light cases such as personal neatness. This suggests that about 2 to 3 percent of them still worth the due attention. From the total number of students arrested, 72,873 (66.1%) involving secondary school students and 37,345 (33.9%) were from primary school (Ministry of Education, 2012).

High achievers are also not spared from problems associated with personality related issues. This can be seen through the occurrence cases of bullying such as two students were reported severely beaten as reported in the online report titled “*Pelajar MRSM patah rusuk kes belrasah senior (2014)*” / “Case of MRSM Student suffers broken rib after being beaten by seniors” (2014). It is considered a serious case whereby the victim was in fact beaten by eight of his seniors at Mara Junior Science College Balik Pulau in late October 2014.

In addition, there was also an incident in 2013 in which a Form two student claimed to be badly beaten by two other students at MRSM Kepala Batas. In the incident, more than two students allegedly beat him up before being forced to swallow drugs (Abdul Hakim, 2013). With this problem that arises repeatedly, it is important to look at the aspects of students' personality and not just on academic excellence.

The importance of students' personality can be seen through a study conducted by Umi Kalthom

et al. (2013) where the stakeholders have set certain expectations on MRSM students by assuming that cultivation of noble values is a platform for the development of holistic human capital. But, unfortunately the contrary happened because the expectations of stakeholders were not reaching the desired level.

This is evidenced by the results of the study conducted by Umi Kalthom et al (2013) on students in MRSM Kota Putra, i.e. the first school that implemented the *Ulul Albab* program. The study shows that a number of the MRSM students were experiencing a personality conflict and identity crisis. Although the problem of personality in the MRSM *Ulul Albab* was seen unfolding and not so serious but it should not be taken lightly. Therefore, this study is important so that selection of students for the next admission to the *Ulul Albab* program can counteract the problem of personality rather than prolonging it without any solution.

A personality specification must be set as to reorganize the process of screening candidates for admission to MRSM *Ulul Albab*. The specification should be seen through several perspectives such as (i) individuals who are directly involved with the *Ulul Albab* program, (ii) the perspective of the administrators who are actually running the *Ulul Albab* program, (iii) the perspective of teachers teaching at MRSM *Ulul Albab*, as well as from (iv) the perspective of the parents themselves and (v) candidates who will be eventually studying at MRSM *Ulul Albab*.

Therefore, a study concerning the scrutinizing of candidates' personalities for the selection to the *Ulul Albab* MRSM should be conducted to ensure that admission of students to MRSM *Ulul Albab* is based on the personality specification and importantly the distinctiveness of the selection of students can be streamlined across all MRSM *Ulul Albab* in the country.

### 2.1 Objective of the study

The purpose of this study is to determine the characteristics of the personality of the selection of students to the *Ulul Albab* program at MARA Junior Science College (MRSM) Gemenchah, Negeri Sembilan based on the perspectives of administrators, teachers, parents and students.

## 2.2 Research Questions

Through the statements presented, emerged a question on what are the required characteristics of the personality for the selection to MARA Junior Science College (MRSM) Gemencheh, Negeri Sembilan in accordance to the perspectives of the administrators, teachers, parents and students. Naturally the precise criterias must be in place, which are essentials towards a smooth process of learning.

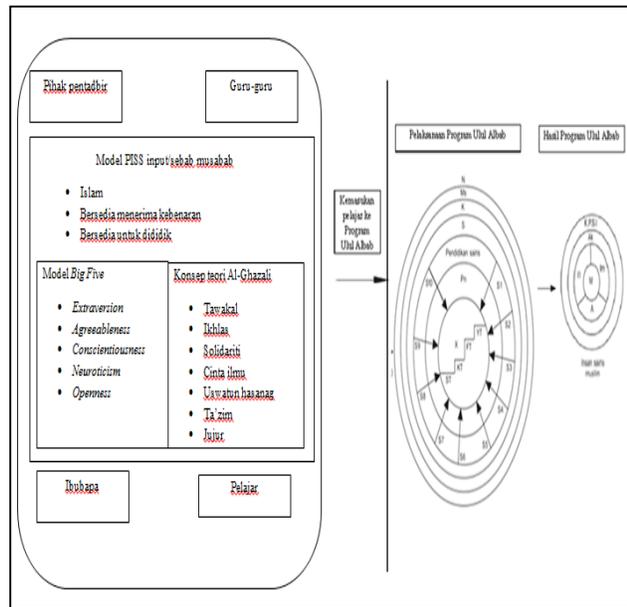


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The establishment of MRSM is in line with the wishes set forth in the New Economic Policy (NEP) as to address the problems that occurred at that particular time. With the development and changes that have happened in the country in 2009, the transformation of the MRSM education system has taken place through the efforts by Y.B. Dato 'Seri Idris Jusoh who proposed the establishment of MRSM *Ulul Albab* based on the concept of learning through the enculturation of the Al Qur'an.

There are 3 key elements in MRSM Ulul Albab system, namely of the elements of Encyclopedic, Ijtihadik and Quranic. The implementation of the Ulul Albab curriculum from the mainstream

MRSM led to the changes in the existing program and also in the aspects of the selection of students. Compared with the objective in the mainstream MRSM, the MRSM Ulul Albab's aim is to produce the Ulul Albab generation that possesses respectable and astounding personalities. Finally it will steer towards carrying out a study on the specification required on students' personalities and it was based on the opinion of a prominent Islamic scholar, Imam Al-Ghazali and it was further supported by incorporating western views and ideas.

Students' personalities were determined through two perspectives, namely Islamic and Western perspectives and also by taking into account the Al-Ghazali's views on personality. Meanwhile, in the western perspective, the *Big Five* model was applied by the researcher. The framework of the study below summarizes on how the students' personalities were analyzed based on a combination of both perspectives.

## 4. METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

The method in this study is by using a qualitative approach which involved setting up the main characteristics of students' personalities, purposive sampling were then used because it is believed to be able to represent the core objectives of the research in regards to the study of the phenomenon.

Semi structured interviews with the respondents were the main method for data collection. Semi structured interviews refer to interviews that actually guide the research by combining both the structured and unstructured questions (Merriam, 2009). Since this study was conducted thoroughly, involving all parties directly and indirectly with *Ulul Albab*, the important respondents identified were the administrators, teachers, parents and students.

### 4.1 Semi Structured Interviews

In the qualitative research, the role of the researcher is different from other research methods, where the researchers are considered as data collection tools (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This implies that data is obtained through human

instruments, rather than through tests or questionnaires as in quantitative research methods. Out on the field, researchers will conduct interviews with the respondents. However, as was explained by Merriam (2002), human instruments have drawbacks i.e. it will lead to the issue of biases that may affect the study. Therefore, the researchers need to identify and monitor the bias issues as to ensure that they do not affect the interpretation of data.

For this study, the researchers used structured partial interview techniques. It refers to a type of interviews that actually guide the research by combining both the structured and unstructured questions (Merriam, 2009). The interview questions are more flexible and most of the interviews conducted were by using a list of questions or issues as the process to further extend to gather more in-depth information. Data collection method through semi-structured interviews was also carried out by using the SONY MP3 voice recorder equipped with MP3 Rec & Play software as a transcript tool. The recorder, which assisted the researcher, was used to listen back to the recording and able to transfer data from the form of audio recording to the form of transcription. The semi structured interview technique carried out in this study involved interviews with 4 groups of respondents i.e. 5 administrators at MRSM Ulul Albab, (i) namely Principals, (ii) Deputy Principal, (iii) Deputy Principal of Student Affairs, (iv) Deputy Principal Co-curriculum Affairs, (v) Deputy Principal of Academic Affairs.

In addition, six interviews were conducted in the focus group, among them were academic teachers group consisting of 5 teachers, Islamic religious teachers group (*ustadz* and *ustadzah*) consisting of 6 people, as well as 2 groups consisting of 5 pairs of parents (father and mother) and 2 groups of students consisting of 11 students in the first group and 12 students in a second group. In total there were 4 groups interviewed by the researcher.

The researcher used focus group interview approach because the researcher wanted to study the characteristics of personality on a group of students who would eventually go through the *Ulul Albab* curriculum. The focus group gives advantages when the interaction between the study respondents during the

interview give rise to good and profound information when they reach agreement on matters that were discussed and mentioned by them (Creswell, 2008). In analyzing the data, transcription was first done after the interviews were over. Several aspects were taken into account such as words, language, facial reactions and body gestures shown by respondents. This was to get the clear picture and actual data from the interviews conducted.

The researchers strived to read the transcription over and over again as to gain a deep understanding and the ability to identify the actual meanings. Subsequently the meanings were then streamlined against the research questions. The coding process was performed as soon as the interview data was completely transcribed. Encoding is a process to identify the category or theme that exists in a transcript or text (Othman, 2013).

There were 3 coding processes used which were (i) open coding, (ii) axial coding and (iii) selective coding. Key words or phrases found in the transcription were coded accordingly to answer the research questions. *Atlas.ti* software was used for the process of encoding.

There are many ways to identify main themes and sub themes in the data collected. Some researchers use word-based technique and this involves the repetition of words and keywords (Ryan and Bernard, 2000). In the context of this study, researcher identifies the themes in the text by investigating the total number of recurring words and keywords. In addition, researcher also analyzed specific keywords found in the interviews text.

On the effort to gather the data, this study was carried out at a boarding school, Mara Junior Science College *Ulul Albab* in Gemencheh, Negri Sembilan. The location of this study was chosen because it is the second college to carry out the *Ulul Albab* curriculum after it was introduced for 5 years.

## **5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the findings acquired from four research groups, comprised of administrators, teachers, parents and students, 22 themes were identified as characters of personality that students must possess for the admission to

MRSM Ulul Albab. The summary for the themes is as in the table below:

Table 4.1: Summary of Findings

Study Respondents	Theme
Administrator	<i>Love the Quran</i> <i>Extraversion</i>
Teachers	Proficient in reading the Al Quran <i>Al-Syaja'ah</i> <i>Ta'zim</i>
Parents	Students need to have courage <i>Al-Syaja'ah</i> Strong relationship with Allah (God) Interest in Ulul Albab leaning concept Extraversion
Students	Responsible Love for Al Quran Perseverance Vision in life Confident in the helps from Allah Hard working Interest in Al-aqli knowledge <i>Al-Syaja'ah</i> Motivated Humble Striving for improvement Seeking for the truth Living with Principles Trustworthy

Among all the themes depicted, there are two themes that were mentioned repeatedly by the respondents. The first theme, *Al-Syaja'ah* character has been described as one of the characteristics of the required student character, by all respondents i.e. the administrators, teachers, parents and students alike. The emphasis by all respondents on the importance of *Al-Syaja'ah's* character shows that the character should be present in each candidate as criteria for the selection and eventually the admission to the MRSM *Ulul Albab*. All candidates must possess *Al-Syaja'ah*, which is translated as “being courageous in all aspects of life”.

Next, the theme that was also mentioned repeatedly by administrators and students is the “Love for Al Quran”. It shows that candidates wishing to enter MRSM *Ulul Albab* need to have

the character and personality of “Loving the Al Quran”. This is in fact in line with the vision and mission of the *Ulul Albab's* program which emphasize on the importance of Al Quran

## 6. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, all the themes mentioned are important for these candidates to have before entering the program. However, the two most mentioned theme; *Al-Syaja'ah* and the “Love for the Al Quran” is important for a candidate to have. The right personality a candidate has will allow them to go through the program effectively. If a candidate enters the program of their own accord, there will not be many challenges to them and the management. However, if they enter the program due to coercion from their parents, there may be challenges that they may not be able to go through the program. The objective of creating an Ulul Alba generation is a noble idea and if it is well achieved, the nation will have citizens that are knowledgeable in science and technology as well as deep understanding of the religious aspects of life. We will then be able to create great future leaders of the nation.

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