

Narrative Approach as A Medium for *Sejahtera* Student Mentality at The Centre for Foundation Studies, IIUM

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Abstract: *The Institute for Public Health's National Health and Morbidity Survey 2022 found that problems among Malaysian youths have alarmingly increased. According to the research, one in every eight teenagers had considered suicide, growing from 10.0% in 2017 to 13.1% in 2022; one in ten teenagers had attempted suicide, increasing from 6.9% in 2017 to 9.5% in 2022; and one in four felt depressed. This growing trend on mental health problems has been growing progressively since 2012. Hence, the study explores an integrated and supplementary approach in promoting positive mental health at the Centre for Foundation Studies, IIUM. The proposed qualitative narrative analysis/approach integrates the practice of narration of Quranic and Islamic stories on selected exemplary figures with the normal orientation programmes. A non-probability sampling technique i.e., voluntary sampling, is employed for sample collection i.e., 2596 (students) and 46 (staff). The respondents are given 2 different sets of questionnaires: consisting of 8 questions for students and 11 questions for the staff. The questionnaires cover 7 constructs or areas of study and employ 5-point Likert scale measurement. The responses from the respondents are analysed quantitatively to get the average (mean) Sentiment score for each construct. The analyses of the responses indicate that the overall acceptance of 4.41 Sentiment score, with 4.40 Sentiment score on relevancy of the approach used and the comprehension level. The study concludes that the narrative approach is well-accepted as a medium promoting healthy mentality, while also highlighting the requirements of proper training and organisation of the module.*

Keywords: *Mental Health, Narrative Approach, Islam*

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INTRODUCTION

Mentally healthy people are more equipped to deal with life's stresses, recognize their talents, learn, and work quickly, and give back to their communities (Mental Health, 2022). Because it influences physical health, quality of life, and productivity, mental health is one of the most important facets of health. A core human right is access to mental health. Additionally, it is essential for socioeconomic, communal, and personal development. Mental health issues include psychosocial impairments, mental illnesses, and other mental states linked to high levels of suffering, functional limitations, or risk of self-harm (Mental Health, 2022). Although this is not always or necessarily the case, people with mental health disorders are more likely to have lower levels of mental well-being.

The teenage years are special and influential. Teenagers are more susceptible to mental health issues due to physical, emotional, and social changes, such as experiencing poverty, abuse, or violence. Teenagers' health and wellbeing during teenage and into adulthood depend on safeguarding them from harm, fostering socio-emotional learning and psychological well-being, and ensuring access to mental health care (Mental Health of Adolescent, 2021).

In recent years, difficulties with teen mental health have proliferated. Young people face most of the burden for those diseases that endanger many decades of productive adult life because 75% of mental illnesses manifest before the age of 25 (McGorri & Mei, 2018). Mental health disorders affect 1 in 7 (10–19-year-olds) children and adolescents worldwide (14%) yet are frequently undiagnosed and untreated (Mental Health of Adolescent, 2021). Mental health problems that are prevalent in Malaysia include anxiety, depression, stress, and suicide thoughts (Yahya, 2023). The Institute for Public Health's National Health and Morbidity Survey 2022 found that problems among Malaysian youths have alarmingly increased. According to the research, one in every eight teenagers had considered suicide, growing from 10.0% in 2017 to 13.1% in 2022; one in ten teenagers had attempted suicide, increasing from 6.9% in 2017 to 9.5% in 2022; and one in four felt depressed (Institute for Public Health, 2022). This growing trend on mental health problems has been growing progressively since 2012.

Despite the initiatives and campaigns to raise awareness of the problem, it should be noted that the stigma associated with mental illness contributes to its underreporting in Malaysia and around the world (Yahya, 2023). Mental illness is universally stigmatized. Public stigma, self-stigma, and label avoidance are three types of stigmas that can be obstacles to achieving one's goals (Corrigan & Wassel, 2008). The results of a 2016 study on stigma said that "there is no country, society, or culture where people with mental illness have the same societal value as people without mental illness." 2016 (Rossler). Due to the inability to recognize the link between mental disease and other physical disorders, the value of treating the issue of mental health may have been underappreciated.

Since many people tend to discriminate between mental and physical disorders, the mental disorder—which is conceptualized as being something intangible—is typically disregarded (Corrigan & Wassel, 2008). This clarifies the existence of stigma in our civilization and in every other society on the planet. Fighting the stigmas associated with mental illness is crucial for assisting people in achieving recovery-related objectives (Corrigan & Wassel, 2008). Mental health issues can increase the risk of getting communicable and noncommunicable diseases, as well as intentional and accidental harm, according to Yanos, DeLuca, Roe, and Lysaker (2020).

In addition, we face unprecedented challenges because of the ongoing COVID-19 worldwide pandemic, which calls for extraordinary action. To reduce the amount of in-person interaction between teachers and students, the learning environment is being forced to transition to online

learning platforms. Even before the arrival of Covid-19, several students stated that they were having difficulty coping with their mental health issues to handle this new way of study and all the difficulties that previously existed (Mheidy, Fares & Fares, 2020; Moawad, 2020). Face-to-face engagement benefits students' wellbeing, according to Bulut (2019). Adolescence is a distinct stage of experimentation and discovery, which presents an additional challenge. Teenagers desire to interact freely with the outside world and frequently choose to spend more time with their friends than with their family. This disruption could result in further difficulties that affect wellbeing (Van & Parolin, 2020). According to Amran and Jamaludin (2021), the four main themes that teenagers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic were altered sleep habits, exhaustion brought on by stress, dysfunctional eating patterns, and a lack of physical activity.

From the viewpoints of the Quran, Wagdy (1970) explained the stark difference between the physical growth of the human body and his feelings, as mentioned in sura 95, verse 4-6. Man must deal with his own mental turmoil and his innate propensity for brutality, passionate outbursts, avarice, and aggressive behaviour (Wagdy, 1970). Man must therefore confront these flaws in himself and work hard to overcome them. According to the Quran, the first technique to deal with psychological stress is to return to human nature, which is the foundation of mental relaxation (Moazedi & Asadi, 2012). Avoidance of human nature may result in moral illnesses. As a result, in Islam, human nature is thought to improve mental wellness. Spiritual beliefs and the use of the concept of God in the Holy Quran are two of the best and most effective strategies to preserve and improve mental health (Moazedi & Asadi, 2012; Koenig & Al Shohaib, 2019).

For all parties involved, the steadily rising rate of mental health issues among Malaysian teenagers is a serious concern. It is important to draw attention to and take effective measures to enhance the younger generation's lack of both mental and physical resilience. As the country's cherished future generation, the problem needs to be considered holistically and discussed at all levels, as it appears that present solutions and efforts to solve the problem are still insufficient and lack coordination.

The International Islamic University Malaysia created the idea of *Insan Sejahtera* as a component of the *Sejahtera Academic Framework (SAF)*, a complete educational framework (Dzulkifli, 2019). For the sustained growth of Malaysia, the Muslim ummah, and the entire world's population, *Insan Sejahtera* serves as the framework's goal. It is a manifestation of well-balanced persons who have been integrated with good faith, knowledge, and good character (*Sejahtera Academic Framework*, 2021). Starting 2020/2021 session, the new students at the Centre for Foundation Studies are exposed to the modules of *Insan Sejahtera* during their *Ta'aruf* Programme.

The goals of *Insan Sejahtera* Modules are to:

- i. educate new students to the IIUM's aspirations;
- ii. instil the IIUM's key values (*Taqwa*, *Amanah*, Accountability, and Justice) through the idea of *SEJAHTERA*;
- iii. provide students with hands-on experience with these values.
- iv. to foster a sense of attachment and affection for IIUM;
- v. to connect and orient the students to their new learning environment and resources; and
- vi. to inspire the incoming students with qualities of leadership, adab, humility, attitude, and *rahmatan lil 'alamin*.

One of the most important components of an educational success is to use effective methods to achieve a goal because the method of education is seen as a way of delivering the lessons to

the students (Karolina, Melawati, Hidayat & Jamaluddin, 2022). At the Centre for Foundation Studies, narrative approach was chosen as the standard approach for the *Insan Sejahtera* Module.

MODULES	TOPIC	STORY/STIMULUS	ACTIVITIES	OUTCOME
KHALIFAH	1. The leader in you	The story of Talut in Al Quran	Group presentation of exemplary leaders and their leadership quality.	Students to reflect on the leadership quality and attributes.
	2. Be responsible	The story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn in Al Quran	Presentation on SDGs and ideas of implementation.	Awareness on the holistic concept of responsibilities in life.
AMANAH	1. Trustworthiness	The story of Umar Al Khattab and the milkmaid	Extraction of lessons from the story and sharing of articles.	Reflect on the value of honesty and integrity.
	2. <i>Shukr</i>	The story of Abu Qilabah al Jarmi	Sending thank you note to someone (parents, teachers, sibling, friend).	Students to reflect on the concept of gratefulness (<i>shukr</i>)
IQRA'	1. Passion for knowledge	The story of Prophet Musa AS and Khadr AS in Al Quran	Sharing personal struggle in seeking knowledge and words of wisdom.	Students to reflect on the needs for seeking knowledge.
	2. <i>Adab</i> in seeking knowledge		Reflection of <i>adab</i> and jigsaw presentation on the topic.	Students to reflect on the importance of <i>adab</i> .
RAHMATAN LIL 'ALAMIN	Prophet Muhammad SAW: <i>Rahmatan lil 'Alamin</i>	<i>Fath al-Makkah</i> The final sermon of Prophet Muhammad	Group presentation on KHAIR infographic prepared earlier,	Students to understand the importance of holistic development.

Figure 1. The *Insan Sejahtera* Module

Therefore, there are 3 main objectives of this study, which are:

1. To explore the narrative approach as a medium to promote healthy (*sejahtera*) mentality through *Insan Sejahtera* Module programme.
2. To capitalise the stories of exemplary figures from the Quran and Islamic traditions as the main subject matters for the narration.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of the approach as a supplementary mental health promotion initiative.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A narrative, in the broadest definition, is an account given by a narrator of characters and events taking place through time and location in some kind of pattern (Smith & Shortt, 2003). However, the functions and efficacy of narrative in both building and expressing a moral sense have received little attention in the study of moral development. According to Tappan and Brown (1989), stories are crucial to both the study and the teaching of morality, and the recognition of the authorship of moral decisions, deeds, and sentiments signifies the culmination of the development of moral sensitivity.

The active narrative feature would encourage students to engage in extraordinary actions like co-construction (participating in narrative construction), exploration (actively engaging in narrative exploration by observing how characters' intentions influence their actions in the evolving narrative), and finally reflection because it would immerse them in a fascinating world inhabited by diverse characters (Piaget, 1954). These three processes are regarded as crucial

for encouraging students' moral reasoning skills and other aspects of cognitive development (Saharuddin, Hussein & Yasin, 2021).

Participating in a story learning setting could be very important in a curriculum. It offers two pedagogical objectives: motivation and effective learning (Saharuddin, Hussein & Yasin, 2021). Since teachers and instructors began implementing constructivist learning in their teaching and learning processes, which emphasizes knowledge creation instead of repetitive instruction, the idea of learning efficiency has developed substantially (Mayer, 1989).

From Islamic perspective, narrative approach deals with the stories recorded in the Holy Quran and Islamic traditions. The Holy Quran is filled with good stories that can be examples for character development (Khasanah & Mazida, 2021; Hai, 2017), as Allah SWT has taught the Prophet through the stories of the prophets and the righteous before. The Quran recognizes the effectiveness of narrative approach and story-saying that there are many clear examples of the verses related to social and character development highlighted for Muslim to ponder and reflect (Hai, 2017).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In choosing the samples for the feedback, non-probability sampling techniques were used in the study. The respondents were chosen for the samples using a voluntary sampling procedure. 2596 students all freely took part in the study. The samples, or 2596 students, constituted 74.34% of the cohort 2022/2023's total first admission student population, or 3492 students.

Table 1. The demographic data of the respondents (students)

No.	Programme	Frequency
1.	Architecture and Environmental Design	168
2.	Allied Health Sciences	117
3.	Arabic Language for International Communication	37
4.	Arabic	85
5.	English	126
6.	Biological Science	107
7.	Dentistry	33
8.	English Language for International Communication	64
9.	Engineering and Computer Science	555
10.	Economics and Management Sciences	228
11.	Human Science	222
12.	Islamic Revealed Knowledge	222
13.	Laws	180
14.	Malay Language for International Communication	40
15.	Medicine	79
16.	Nursing	88
17.	Physical Science	116
18.	Pharmacy	76
19.	Tourism Planning and Hospitality Management	53
Total		2596

The staff or facilitator samples were chosen separately using quota sampling methods. With the exception of CELPAD, samples were drawn from every academic field. The staff provided a total of 46 samples.

Table 2. The demographic data of the respondents (staff)

No.	Department	Frequency
1.	Architecture and Environmental Design	5
2.	Biology	5
3.	Chemistry	5
4.	Economics and Management Sciences	5
5.	Human Science	3
6.	Information and Communication Technology	4
7.	Islamic Revealed Knowledge	5
8.	Legal Studies	1
9.	Languages and Management	1
10.	Mathematics	5
11.	Physics	7
Total		46

Through an online survey, the study's data were gathered. The samples were distributed through the questionnaire using the Google Forms platform. It should be noted that the survey for students was completed immediately following the *Insan Sejahtera* Module's conclusion, whereas the survey for staff was completed about three months later.

Table 3. The questions for the survey and the construct/area of study

No	Category	Question	Construct
1	Student	1. Overall, the <i>Insan Sejahtera</i> Module is good	Overall Acceptance
		2. The <i>Insan Sejahtera</i> Module has made me learn many new things	Comprehension Level
		3. The <i>Insan Sejahtera</i> Module is easy to understand	Comprehension Level
		4. The <i>Insan Sejahtera</i> Module is useful for me as a student/Muslim	Relevancy of Approach
		5. Overall, the facilitator was good	Training
		6. The facilitator showed good personality traits/ <i>akhlaq</i>	Motivation
		7. The facilitator delivered the module in an interesting way.	Module Activities
		8. The facilitator was well-prepared	Module Organisation
2	Staff	1. The module was relevant and useful.	Overall Acceptance
		2. The narrative approach used was interesting and suitable.	Relevancy of Approach
		3. Instructor's enthusiasm was:	Motivation
		4. The class size was appropriate.	Module Activities
		5. The module was structured and well organised.	Module Organisation
		6. The module increased my knowledge of the subject matter.	Comprehension Level
		7. The module was intellectually challenging.	Comprehension Level
		8. The training for the module was adequate and timely.	Training
		9. The activities for the module were appropriate and	Module Activities

sufficient.

10. The time allocated for each module was adequate and sufficient. Module Activities

11. The module e-book materials were sufficient and organised. Module Organisation

The study's questions are listed in Table 3. The survey has 11 questions for the staff and 8 questions for the students. The questionnaire's coverage includes the following 7 areas/constructs:

- i. The overall acceptance of the module
- ii. The comprehension level
- iii. The relevancy of the approach
- iv. The module organisation
- v. The motivation (staff)
- vi. The module activities
- vii. The training (staff)

The respondents' responses to the questionnaire were averaged using a 5-point Likert scale. The Sentiment score for each of the previously mentioned 7 areas was calculated after the findings were analyzed.

RESULTS

Both the staff assessment result and the student evaluation result are shown in Tables 4 and 5, respectively.

Table 4. The result of staff evaluation

Question Scale	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11
1	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	8	2	3	2
2	3	2	2	6	2	2	3	15	9	11	3
3	10	15	12	10	16	7	11	13	15	13	14
4	22	15	18	20	16	23	23	8	14	15	18
5	13	14	11	8	11	14	9	2	6	4	9
Mean	4.02	3.89	3.70	3.57	3.74	4.07	3.83	2.59	3.28	3.13	3.63

Table 5. The result of student evaluation

Question Scale	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
1	3	2	1	1	0	2	2	1
2	6	11	1	2	5	14	7	7
3	73	106	15	22	53	134	70	64
4	360	398	138	216	366	577	385	412
5	2154	2079	2441	2355	2172	1869	2132	2112
Mean	4.79	4.75	4.93	4.90	4.81	4.66	4.79	4.78

The data were combined and grouped into the 7 research areas/constructs, as shown in Table 3, because the staff questionnaire had 11 questions and the student questionnaire had 8 items. The average (mean) Sentiment score for the regions was then determined by analyzing the scores for all the areas based on comments from the faculty and students.

Table 6. Consolidated results based on the 7 construct/areas of study

No.	Construct	Student Score	Question Number	Staff Score	Question Number	Sentiment (Mean)
1.	Overall acceptance	4.79	1	4.02	1	4.41
2.	Comprehension levels	4.84	2, 3	3.95	6, 7	4.40
		(mean)		(mean)		
3.	Relevancy of approach	4.90	4	3.89	2	4.40
4.	Module organisation	4.78	8	3.69	5, 11	4.24
				(mean)		
5.	Motivation (staff)	4.66	6	3.70	3	4.18
6.	Module activities	4.79	7	3.21	4, 9, 10	4.06
				(mean)		
7.	Training (staff)	4.81	5	2.59	8	3.70

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the analysis, the module's overall approval received the highest Sentiment score, or 4.41. This suggests that both staff and students had a favorable opinion of the module and had accepted it. The other 2 areas with significantly higher scores were the module's approach's relevance (4.40) and the comprehension level (4.40). These three findings indicate that the community positively accepts the narrative approach and methodology of the Insan Sejahtera Module at the Centre for Foundation Studies.

On the other hand, the staff training and module activities received considerably lower scores, 3.70 and 4.06, in comparison to the other sections. The lower evaluation score for training the personnel could indicate that there aren't enough training sessions available. According to comments in the survey, the staff's training for the Insan Sejahtera Module is of utmost importance because it was built on a narrative approach, which is new in terms of practice and previous knowledge for most of the staff. The low grade for the module activities was mostly due to the emphasis on classroom exercises. Numerous ideas emphasized the need for additional outside and engaging activities.

This study was done to evaluate how the implementation of narrative approach in Insan Sejahtera Module was implemented at the IIUM Center for Foundation Studies. It was started as a continuous quality improvement measure for upcoming module updates. The findings of the study indicated that:

- i. The Insan Sejahtera module at the Centre for Foundation Studies is well received by the Centre's staff and students;
- ii. The new approach, the narrative approach, is positively accepted as the approach for the module;
- iii. The areas that need improvement are the staff training, the activities, the time allotted for each sub-module, and the complexity of the module e-book;
- iv. The requirement for thorough planning regarding the continuance of the KhAIR components or the Insan Sejahtera Module beyond the Ta'aruf program.

In overall, the research has successfully fulfilled the intended objective of the study.

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