

## Evaluating the Humanistic Curriculum Implementation of MRSM Ulul Albab Program

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### Abstract

A drastic movement made by the *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (MARA) through its subsidiary, MARA Junior Science College (MRSM) back in 2008 had made a combined scientific and *Quranik*-based programme possible; The Ulul Albab Programme. An existing MRSM (MRSM Kota Putra) was upgraded to become the MRSM Ulul Albab. The programme was first implemented in 2008. The same Ulul Albab Programme was carried out by Imtiaz, a private school conceptualised by Idris Jusoh, the then Minister of Education, in Kuala Besut Terengganu way back in 1996. Fundamentally, Ulul Albab Programme comprises of three major components which are *Quranik*, *Insiklopedik*, and *Ijtihadik*. Ideally, the Ulul Albab Programme is set to produce professional experts, entrepreneurs and technocrats that are well versed in Quran and portraying as well as practicing the values of Islam. Throughout the years of implementation, several positive outcome-based indicators from the Ulul Albab programme emerge at Imtiaz. Hence, the same outcome-based indicators are also expected from MRSM Ulul Albab Kota Putra. However, the outcome-based indicators were incapable of evaluating the *sahsiah* and *ijtihadik* components fairly. Therefore, a much more complex curriculum implementation evaluation initiative through students' and teachers' experiences are very much needed in order to holistically understand and evaluate the success of Ulul Albab program implementation at MRSM Kota Putra. This paper discusses; (1) The problems faced in evaluating the Ulul Albab curriculum implementation, (2) Conceptualising of a proper model, of which Stake's Responsive Evaluation for the evaluation of Ulul Albab's curriculum implementation, and (3) Conceptualising a theoretical framework for the evaluation of Ulul Albab's curriculum implementation.

**Keywords:** Curriculum Implementation, Curriculum Evaluation, Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model, Mrsm Ulul Albab Programme.

### Introduction and Purpose

Our Prime Minister, YAB Dato' Sri Najib Tun Razak had announced six National Key Results Areas (NKRA) for a better Malaysia in the year 2009. Through the third NKRA, the government aimed to provide quality and affordable educational access to all Malaysians (Pusat Maklumat

Rakyat, 2012). The third NKRA was translated into action by the former chairman of MARA, who was then the second Minister of Education, Dato' Seri Idris Jusoh through the introduction of MARA Junior Science College (MRSM) Ulul Albab. The MRSM Ulul Albab program was set to combine both scientific and *Quranik (hafazan)* based educations within a single curriculum, namely the Ulul Albab Programme. It is hoped that through the introduction of this programme, the quality of education in Malaysia, particularly within the MARA system can be elevated to a higher level, as well as producing better quality students and *hafiz* in the future. Moreover, the Ulul Albab programme is also hoped to produce intellectuals with towering personality and values, in line with the expectations of the National Philosophy of Education (Commissioner of Law Revision, 2006).

Conceptually, the Ulul Albab programme incorporates three main components which are (a) *Quranik*, (b) *Insiklopedik*, and (c) *Ijtihadik*. In making sure a success implementation of the Ulul Albab programme, a specific module is developed as well as various assessment methodologies were brought fourth, for instance the *Quranik* module, and specific academic and *sahsiah* assessment instrumentations. *Quranik* module is intended to assist teachers on students' *hafazan*, two main national examinations, of which *Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR)* and *Sijil Peperiksaan Malaysia (SPM)* were intended to measure students' academic excellences, and finally the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS) as well as students' disciplinary track records were used to measure students' *sahsiah* development (Sarinah Sulaiman, 2012).

Although all these assessment instruments and module are seen enough to provide indicators on the success of Ulul Albab programme implementation, they only provide outcome-based results that are non-holistic in nature, particularly in assessing the students' *sahsiah* development and assessing the process of implementation itself. Therefore, a better-fit theoretical framework to assess the development of students' *sahsiah* development as well as assessing the actual process of implementation must be formulated in order to holistically evaluate the success of Ulul Albab programme implementation. Hence, in this paper, the authors discuss the problems faced in evaluating the Ulul Albab curriculum implementation, and also why the Stake's Responsive Evaluation was chosen for the evaluation of Ulul Albab's curriculum implementation. Next, the authors discuss on the conceptualisation of theoretical framework for the curriculum implementation evaluation of the Ulul Albab's programme.

### **Problem Statement and Justification**

It is generally accepted that scientific evaluation approach through outcome-based indicator is commonly used to evaluate the success of a particular curriculum. However, the urgency of having humanistic and holistic curriculum evaluation is very much needed due to the increasing number of innovative 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum designs that integrate not only the intellectual domain but also other important elements such as affective and social domains (Grimson, 2002). The movement towards 21<sup>st</sup> century education has been long foreseen by the government of Malaysia back in 1987 when the National Philosophy of Education (NPE) was fully written and implemented. Since the introduction of NPE, various educational institutions were developing their curricula based on a holistic approach, of which focusing not only the academics, but other aspects of meaningful education as well. In regard, MARA has taken an innovative approach by introducing the Ulul Albab programme for MRSM.

Evaluating the implementation of the Ulul Albab programme is indeed challenging and abstract in nature. This is due to the fact that the success of the programme does not only involve students' academic achievement, but also the students' *sahsiah*. Through years of implementation, Ulul Albab programme at Imtiaz has shown several positive outcome-based achievements. For instance, Imtiaz was ranked top ten in 2009 PMR, and ranked top 20 in 2009 SPM examinations, as well as winning several state and national level competitions in the same year (Shukery Mohamed, 2011). Although positive outcome-based achievements are evident, Imtiaz is not certain of the success of students' *sahsiah* development due to the dynamicity and complexity of measuring students' *sahsiah* development. Often, a so-called long-term effect was always used to justify the development of students' *sahsiah*. The same positive outcome-based indicators are also seen for MRSM Kota Putra. Based on the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (KKLW) outcome-based assessment report in 2012, the overall academic performance is significantly increased (Sarina Sulaiman, 2012). Moreover, the report also stated since the number of discipline cases is low, it is concluded that *sahsiah* development is happening in MRSM Kota Putra. On the contrary, the outcome of (Tennessee Self Concept Scale (TSCS) showed a conflicting research finding. Overall, the students' self-concept scores were lower than expected (Sarina Sulaiman, 2012). In regard, the researcher speculated that the finding was highly associated with students' modesty attribute in answering the TSCS questionnaire; hence their self-concepts scores were lower than expected.

Based on the speculation, it is evident that the instrument used to measure students' *sahsiah* was unreliable and improper. The authors agreed that, the real issue in getting a reliable research finding was actually not the students' modesty attribute but rather improper theoretical framework in evaluating the success of Ulul Albab implementation holistically and unreliable instruments used to measure students' *sahsiah*. Literally, in order to carry out a holistic curriculum evaluation, a humanistic-oriented curriculum evaluation model must be applied (Orstein & Hunkins, 2004). Through the implementation of this humanistic-oriented model, the focus of evaluating will not only on finding the outcomes of a particular curriculum but rather understanding the process of its implementation holistically (Stake, 1974; Orstein & Hunkins, 2004). This will result in a much more in-depth understanding and analysis of what is the real situation experienced by teachers and students of the Ulul Albab programme.

It is agreed that, in order to understand holistically the experiences of Kota Putra teachers and students while implementing the Ulul Albab programme, a classical model of curriculum evaluation named Responsive Evaluation Model by Stake (1975) should be implemented. The model was named 'responsive' due to the initial requirement to determine stakeholders' expectations on a particular curriculum before one actually evaluate a curriculum. For the case of the Ulul Albab programme, stakeholders of MARA are indeed the think-tankers of whose expectations must be acknowledged. Therefore, this model is fairly suitable since it acknowledges views and expectations of the stakeholders and later uses the expectations to guide the evaluation process through series of interviews with the Ulul Albab programme implementers - teachers and students. Moreover, due to the in-depth and holistic nature of Stake's model, a much more meaningful finding in evaluating the students' *sahsiah* can be documented.

### Theoretical Framework

This section briefly explains (a) the Ulul Albab curriculum model and Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model, and (b) formulating the theoretical framework for Ulul Albab curriculum implementation evaluation by combining both Ulul Albab curriculum model and Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model.

### Ulul Albab Curriculum Model

Ulul Albab programme was designed based on three main components. The components are *Quranik*, *Ensiklopedik*, and *Ijtihadik* (Shukery Mohamed, 2011). *Quranik* component focuses on two aspects which are acquiring skills in *hafazan*, and Arabic language. *Ensiklopedik* focuses on two aspects as well which are acquiring the multi-disciplinary and multi-lingual, whereas *Ijtihadik* focuses on the critical and creative thinking skills (Shukery Mohamed, 2011), as well as other domains of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Although these three components are the basis of Ulul Albab curriculum, *Quranik* is regarded as the key component in designing the Ulul Albab curriculum. This is the case since every student that undergoes the programme must be highly proficient in Quran recital, *hafazan*, and interpretation. Additionally, the Ulul Albab programme is also integrating three main extra-curricular activities, of which horseback riding, swimming, and archery. These extra-curricular activities are regarded crucial in cultivating the *Ijtihad* component in Ulul Albab programme since these are the *sunnah* of prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. The main stakeholders of MARA believed that by re-living the *sunnah*, students will be more engaged with the values and virtues of Islam and later develop their skills and *sahsiah* within the worldview of Islam. In regard, these hands-on co-curricular activities are expected to benefit the students by relating the values acquired from the Quran and knowledge acquired from academic subjects with real life situations. To summarise, Figure 1 illustrates the Ulul Albab curriculum model.

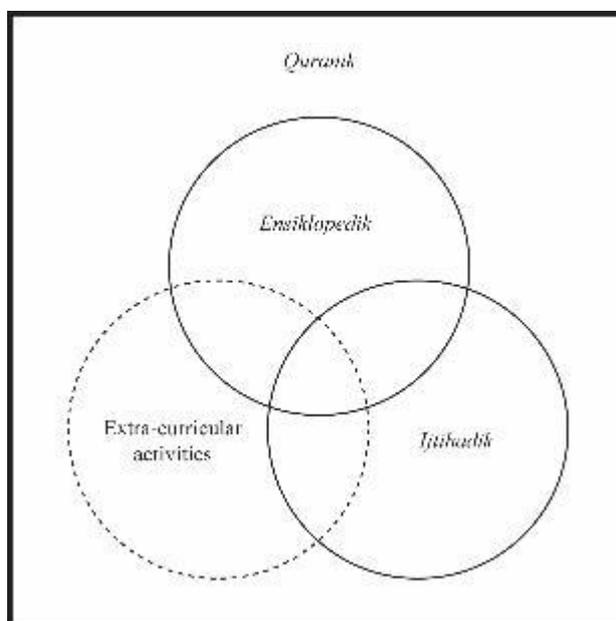


Figure 1. The Ulul Albab Curriculum Model

### Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model

Responsive evaluation proposed by Stake (1975) is considered as less formal and pluralistic in nature since its central focus is on addressing the stakeholders' expectations and experiences

such as administrators, teachers, students, and parents. It emphasizes evaluation being conducted in the settings where teaching and learning activities occur through interactions and observations rather than giving too much attention on predetermined issues. In regard, Stake's model of evaluation relies heavily on qualitative techniques such as interview and observation. In order to carry out a responsive evaluation model, an evaluator must first meet the clients of a particular educational programme to gain their perspectives and expectations towards the programme. Later the evaluator determines the type of document analysis to determine the scope of the evaluation project. Next, the evaluator observes the program closely to get a sense of its operation and to note any unintended deviations from announced intents. Next, the evaluator discovers the stated and real purposes of the project and the concerns various audiences have about it and the evaluation. Later the evaluator identifies the issues and problems with which the evaluation should be concerned. For each issue and problem, the evaluator develops an evaluation design, specifying the kinds of data needed. More to that, the evaluator then selects the means needed to acquire the data desired. Most often, the means will be human observers or judges. Only then the evaluator implements the data-collection procedures. Next the evaluator later organizes the information into themes and prepares "portrayals" that communicate in natural ways the thematic reports based on the data collected. The portrayals may involve videotapes, artefacts, case studies, or other "faithful representations". Lastly, by again being sensitive to the concerns of the stakeholders, the evaluator decides which audiences require which reports and chooses formats most appropriate for given audiences (Glatthorn, 1987). In summary, the steps of responsive evaluation are illustrated in Figure 2 below.

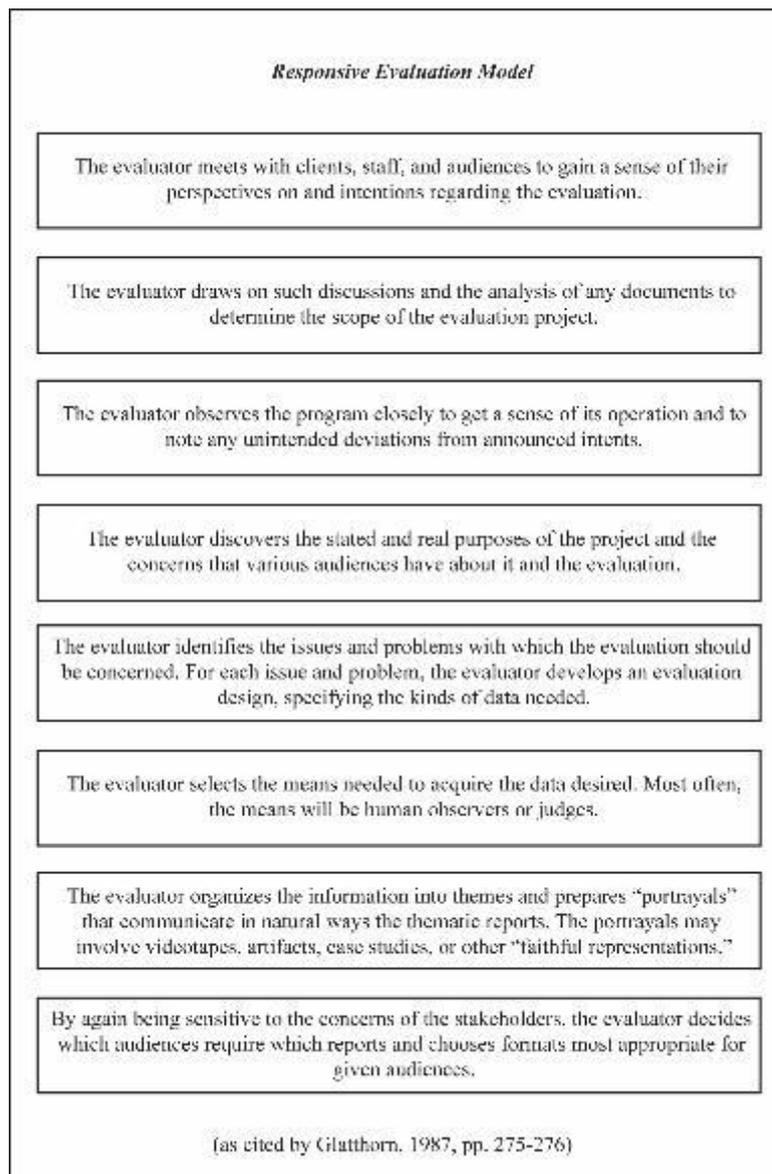


Figure 2. Responsive Evaluation Steps

### Theoretical Framework for Ulul Albab Curriculum Implementation Evaluation

In order to make the Ulul Albab curriculum implementation evaluation meaningful, both Ulul Albab curriculum model and Responsive Evaluation Model are combined. The combination of these two models makes up the theoretical framework for the evaluation process. Essentially, the Ulul Albab curriculum model makes up the basic framework, of which consists of three major components, *Quranik*, *Ensiklopedik*, and *Ijtihadik*. In evaluating the curriculum implementation of Ulul Albab, every aspect of these three components must be taken into consideration by documenting evidences and data from three main groups, of which the main stakeholders of MARA, teachers, and students through implementing the eight steps of evaluation outlined by Stake (1975). Specifically, MARA main stakeholders will provide the expectations of Ulul Albab programme towards learning and teaching processes that promote academic achievement and *sahsiah* development. Teachers will provide insights based on their teaching experiences, while students will provide insights based on their learning experiences towards academic and *sahsiah* development. Altogether, the data collected will be used to determine whether or not the implementation of Ulul Albab curriculum at MRSM

Kota Putra is a success. In summary, Figure 3 below illustrates the theoretical framework for Ulul Albab curriculum implementation evaluation.

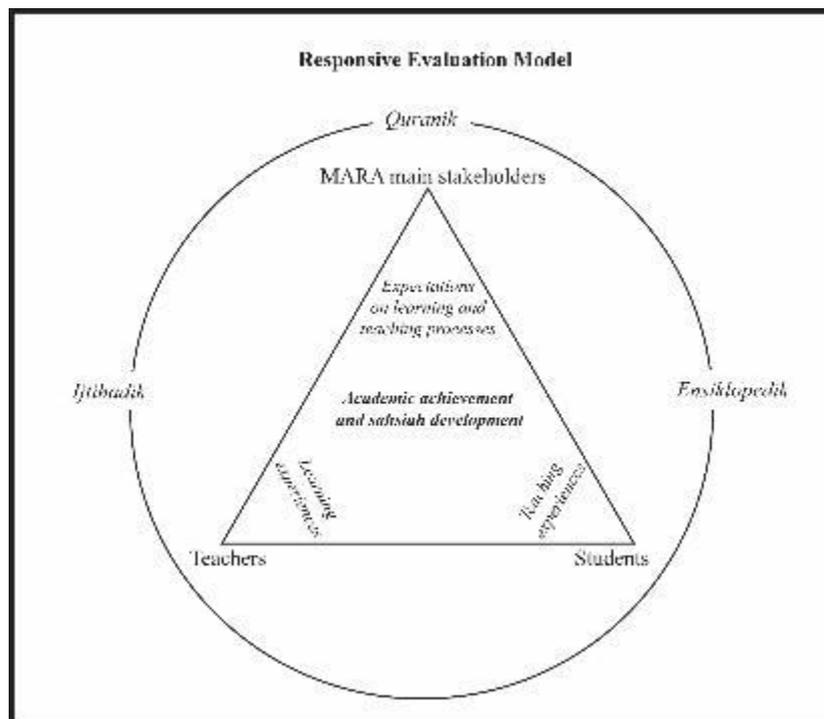


Figure 3. Theoretical Framework for Ulul Albab Curriculum Implementation Evaluation

### Conclusion

Ulul Albab programme at MRSM has come to its five-year cycle of implementation. Therefore, a curriculum evaluation must be carried out in order to determine the effectiveness of the program in improving students' academic achievements and whether or not the programme promotes students' *sahsiah* development. Although a study was done to evaluate the outcomes of Ulul Albab programmes, the fact that it only gathers information through outcome-based indicators was inevitably unfair and misleading towards the whole process of Ulul Albab programme implementation, particularly on determining the success of promoting students' *sahsiah*. Furthermore, since there was no apparent formularisation of theoretical framework to direct the evaluation process, it made the study even more indistinct. As a result, conflicting findings on the students' *sahsiah* development was evident. Therefore, a proper holistic model of curriculum evaluation must be taken into consideration in order to provide insights of what is really happening within the process of the Ulul Albab curriculum implementation, through understanding teachers' and students' experiences. In regard, a humanistic model of curriculum evaluation is very much needed since it focuses on understanding the process of curriculum implementation rather than the outcomes of a particular curriculum (Stake, 1974; Orstein & Hunkins, 2004). Furthermore, the curriculum evaluation model must be able to seek expectations of the stakeholders towards the Ulul Albab programme and later match the expectations with the actual experiences of teachers and students in order to evaluate how far the expectations are met. Thus, Stake's Responsive Evaluation Model is suggested, along with specific theoretical framework in order to direct the curriculum implementation evaluation of Ulul Albab programme at MRSM Kota Putra.

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