



Case Study 3 IQMA: Cultivating the Potential of the Mind

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Abstract: The brain is the greatest gift from God. It has marveled thousands of brain experts worldwide but it has to be noted that the brain needs proper stimulation in order for it to perform to its maximum capacity. IQMA Training Sdn Bhd was established with this aim in mind, that is, to enhance human development through training to give the brain maximum stimulation. Both the right and left parts of the brain need to complement each other to produce a competent well rounded individual. Through the provision of training, IQMA hopes to develop emotionally and spiritually well-balanced competent individuals through its technique of using quick mental arithmetic calculation using the ten fingers and an abacus, aided by its human development modules. Nevertheless, being a tuition service by nature, IQMA needs to stand tall among its competitors in the industry.

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the significant extent to which tuition is an integral part of the educational environment can no longer be denied. Previously, tuition catered for weaker students who needed extra help, but today, tuition classes have become a norm in an environment where education is highly competitive and parents feel the need to provide additional coaching to keep up with the expectations of examinations and society (Balakrishnan, 2011). It has become the common solution for parents who want their children to excel academically. The emphasis on examinations in the Malaysian education system both initiates its existence and sustains its importance in society. The range of subjects offered in tuition is the same as those in the syllabus at schools, thus shadowing the

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school without fail. As can be deduced, tutoring is perceived as a necessity for households in Malaysia (Kenayathulla, 2013).

According to 2009 statistics from the Ministry of Education (MOE), there were 2,871 registered tuition centres in Malaysia, with 224,164 students enrolled and 13,230 teachers (MOE, 2011). It is apparent that tuition has major economic implications. Tuition has become a business that mobilises extensive resources and encourages employment regardless of whether it is conducted on an individual basis or in an institutionalised form. On one hand, it is seen as meeting parents' demands and on the other hand, it can also be viewed as a symptom of the world wide shift towards privatisation and commercialisation of education. Either way, that tuition is a serious business cannot be disputed.

ESTABLISHMENT OF IQMA AND ITS HISTORY

It is not uncommon to hear critical and painful remarks about Malay pupils when it comes to mathematics. They are said to give up easily when confused by a complex problem, slow to grasp concepts and supposedly doomed to be bad at mathematics. These are not just casual comments by the public. Parents and teachers alike share these assumptions, often citing them to explain the low mathematics passing rate among the Malays. Parents are now relying on extra classes and tuition in order to give coaching to their children when it comes to mathematics. Driven by this awareness, IQMA Human Resources Development was established on 20 April 1997 with the aim of rectifying the poor performance of Malay students in mathematics. IQMA which stands for IQ Mental Arithmetic is a quick mental calculation method using the ten fingers and abacus in performing basic arithmetic. The abacus mental picture training and the use of fingers to visualise calculation are believed to increase memory power and sharpen mental formation for a child. Speed training in the quick mental calculation concept enables the child to gain better reflexes. In addition, speed hearing training during the oral session in the learning process encourages the child to give full attention to study by listening more attentively and effectively. Using an abacus requires coordination of the main nerves of a human body for eyes, ears, and fingers. Constant practice of the use of the ten fingers when doing arithmetics using an abacus provides stimulations that are socially responsive and intellectually congruent for growth of brain cells.

IQMA holds the strong belief that each child is born with an inner ability to excel in every endeavour in life. This belief is rooted from firm faith in the citation contained in the Al-Quran:

“Verily, We created man of the best stature (mould)” (At-Tin; 4)

When talking about man of the best stature, we are looking at the greatest gift from Allah which is the brain. Human brain consists of nearly 10 to 15 billion neurons which is more than twice the size of the world population. Studies of the brain have found that the longer the exposure to the right kind of stimulations, the more the brain

grows. The outcome for the abacus mathematics and mental arithmetic programme is brighter kids. Studies on brain development reveal that to achieve optimum intelligence and brain capacity, both the right and left parts of the brain need to communicate, cooperate and be trained simultaneously. The creativity function from the right part needs to be boosted by the information stored in the left part, whereas the mathematical and physical abilities have to work together with the space perception from the right part consecutively to become a fully competent individual (Gardner, 2011). Abacus mathematics establishes a clear logic concept of numbering for small children.

Bearing this concept in mind, IQMA was set up to devise a learning technique that is believed to put both the right and left part so of the brain at work at the same time to complement each other's capacity in performing basic arithmetic. IQMA was then led by four graduates of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) (known as ITM then). Together they devoted their time and energy to come up with a complete mental arithmetic module designed for primary children aged seven to twelve. Starting with only a few students within the area in the Klang Valley, IQMA was committed to expanding its wings to other areas by assigning each one of the four leaders to be responsible for a certain area as consultant. Each consultant was responsible for recruiting teachers to teach mental arithmetic to students within their area. Slowly but steadily IQMA began to expand its services to a number of areas like Shah Alam, Kepong, Gombak, Ampang, Setapak, to name a few.

IQMA'S MOTTO, VISION AND MISSION

With the motto "Learn it, Do it, Live it", IQMA Human Resources Development, a Bumiputra-owned entity is driven and motivated to execute its task and responsibility not merely as a profit-oriented company but also to fulfil its quest of enhancing human development with the ultimate aim of developing competent individuals who are well-balanced emotionally and spiritually. Realising the importance of upgrading the understanding of mathematics among the Malays in particular, IQMA set out to offer its expertise to primary students. With the recruitment of teachers to teach and facilitate the teaching-learning process in mental arithmetic, IQMA laid out its goals:

- By 2015, IQMA will be the preferred mental arithmetic trainer in Southeast Asia.³
- IQMA will train young learners with comprehensive mental arithmetic skills to assist them excel in calculation based subjects especially mathematics.
- IQMA will contribute to mind, emotion and spiritual development in order to produce competent well rounded individuals through its human development module that will assist the mental arithmetic classes.
- IQMA will contribute to the development of individuals who will not only excel in mathematics but also in other subjects by stimulating both the right and left parts of the brain through its well-designed modules.

³ <http://www.iqmatraining.com/v1/index.php/mengenai-kami.html>

These goals are set with the ultimate aim of optimising the potential of the brain and mind supported by spiritual conscience through the quick mental arithmetic and calculation technique of IQMA together with its comprehensive and well devised human development modules. IQMA is determined to serve as a learning institution that gives and shares with the community in order to build human civilisation and to leave a legacy in education and ultimately to successfully deliver the task with the intention of seeking *rahmah* from Allah SWT.⁴

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Referring to themselves as facilitators, IQMA is led by four Executive Directors with each one assigned to specific duties to achieve the goals set forth and to ensure smooth operation of the company.

- Hajah Latifah Yusoff who is in charge of Marketing and Finance holds a Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Electrical Engineering (UiTM). Hajah Latifah has been involved in mental arithmetic since 1996 and possesses ten years of teaching experience in a private college in Kuala Lumpur. She has also participated in various human resource courses such as the Children Education course organised by NURI Education Centre and Industrial Human Development course by Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor (JAIS). Hajah Latifah is the consultant serving the areas of Shah Alam, Klang, Subang Jaya, Puchong and Bangi.
- Norlian Nordin who is in charge of Mental Arithmetic Training, holds a Diploma in Statistics from UiTM (1984). Norlian previously served as a Management Executive at the Education Preparation Centre, UiTM. She also has had the experience of being the headmistress of Educare Joy School for three years and a voluntary English teacher at Tadika Kemas in 1995. Norlian has taught mental arithmetics to students for seventeen years and has vast experience in training IQMA's teachers. Norlian is the consultant serving the areas of Kepong, Damansara, Sungai Buloh and Selayang.
- Faridah Maludin, who is in charge of Human Development Training, holds a Diploma in Computer Sciences from UiTM, Shah Alam (1984). Faridah has been involved in mental arithmetic teaching for more than ten years and is currently actively involved in training and organising motivational courses for teenagers.
- Zuraini Abdullah, who is in charge of Corporate Services and Finance, has a Diploma in Computer Science from UiTM, Shah Alam (1983). Zuraini was a computer programmer prior to her involvement in mental arithmetic teaching. She has seven years of experience teaching mental arithmetic to students and in the training of IQMA's teachers in teaching mental arithmetic. Zuraini attended various courses on education for children when she served as a teacher at Tadika An-Nur Joy. She has vast experience in facilitating courses for various student

⁴ ibid

motivational camps. She is the consultant serving the areas of Gombak, Ulu Kelang, Taman Keramat and Cheras.

IQMA OPERATIONS

Though the Executive Directors serve as consultants to the designated areas, they also take on teaching functions as there is an insufficient number of trained teachers to teach. As a consultant, each executive director is responsible for recruiting and training potential teachers within the designated areas to teach mental arithmetic as well as inculcate emotional and spiritual balance in the class through a human development session during class hours. The consultant is also responsible for the marketing of services, that is, mental arithmetic modules to potential students within their areas. The target customers are primary school children. IQMA's marketing has always focussed on students in Sekolah Rendah Agama [Public Religious Schools(Primary)] where the consultants with the help of the teachers distribute IQMA's flyers to the students.

Each consultant is expected to hold meetings at least twice a month with their teachers to discuss issues or matters related to teaching and also problems faced in relation to the effectiveness of their class. Any problems encountered with the students will also be brought up in the management meeting. The consultant is also responsible for updating the teachers on any new developments or policies of the company if any, in the meeting. The consultant and the teachers are also encouraged to discuss and share any ideas to enhance the teaching and learning environment in their mental arithmetic classes. Since their clients are the students, there is an obvious need to make sure that students are happy and that they enjoy the class to ensure maximum mental arithmetic acquisition.

IQMA Classes

The mental arithmetic course is organised into five levels. Students are expected to complete each level within two and a half months. This means the students are expected to complete the whole mental arithmetic course in one and a half to two years. For each level, two books need to be completed: Book A is for exercises in class and Book B is for work to be done at home. Book B also serves as a continuous practice to ensure a firm grip and understanding of the concepts taught in the class to be done at home.

Most of the IQMA classes are held at the clients' premises and in this case at the schools' premises and usually held during the weekends either on Saturday or Sunday. The registration of a new intake is usually done in the third week of January, after the children have settled down with school matters. Usually the first class is taken up with registration and an introduction to mental arithmetic. During the first class of each level, students are given a bag with two books. For Level 1, it will be Book 1A and 1B, a pencil and an eraser. Parents are encouraged to listen to a briefing given by

the consultant explaining to the parents what mental arithmetic is about and its benefits to children's development.

The class usually has children from different ages and family backgrounds. The students are usually seven to twelve years in age and occasionally there may be one or two students from secondary school level aged thirteen and fourteen. The students are not divided according to age as they all start with the same level which is Level 1. The teacher will first introduce the concept of mental arithmetic in chorus and each student is expected to be attentive in order to understand the concept. The teacher will show how to calculate using her fingers and the students are expected to follow. After the drilling sessions, the students are asked to do the exercises in Book 1A in class and will be given work in Book 1B to be done at home. The teacher will go around monitoring the students and helping any student who has not grasped the concept correctly. The students are encouraged to complete the exercises within a stipulated time and the teacher will go around checking and marking their work on the spot.

At Level 1, the students will be taught to calculate using their fingers for numbers less than 100 and also the initial approach to multiplication and division. There are 28 formulas to be learnt and understood by the students throughout Level 1. These formulas will be used repeatedly throughout the mental arithmetic course from Level 1 to Level 5. In the second level, the abacus will be introduced and the use of fingers will be reinforced for numbers more than 100. At this level, decimals will be introduced. The actual mental calculation will also be introduced at the second level where the exercises will only involve numbers up to 100. Level 3 to Level 4 are just reinforcement of the formulas using fingers, abacus and mental calculation but with bigger numbers up to 100,000. Level 5 deals with the application of the mental arithmetic skills to problem based questions. IQMA mental arithmetic classes are for eight hours per month, which means two hours for each class over a period of four weeks every month.

Since the students are of varying ages, the class usually starts in chorus and progresses according to an individual pace of understanding. The faster learners, the more intelligent and the hardworking students will progress faster and complete the level faster compared to those who are less smart and less attentive. Obviously they will extend less effort to complete the level within the targeted period. This different level of intelligence and the different attitudes towards learning has resulted in varying levels of progress among students in one class and the class will, at the end, proceed on an individual basis throughout the year. The attitude and intelligence level of each student is different and thus needs different levels of attention from the teacher. This scenario poses problems and difficulties to the teacher if there are more than ten students in a class.

IQMA's Marketing Strategy

Marketing is a crucial component of this type of business, given that tuition services are mushrooming especially in the urban areas. There are at least ten tuition centres

offering similar services within the same areas IQMA is operating. Every year IQMA's consultants with the help of their teachers will market the products and services to school children, but the marketing of these services are confined to students of only Sekolah Rendah Agama [Public Religious Schools(Primary level)] in the designated areas. Usually in the fourth week of January, IQMA will go to these selected schools to distribute flyers to the students. The distribution of flyers is done with the approval of the headmasters of the schools. It is hoped that the students will bring home the flyers and show it to the parents who will decide whether to enrol their children in IQMA. Banners and buntings will also be put up at several strategic places to advertise IQMA and its mental arithmetic classes. These banners and buntings will have the contact number of the consultants, the registration dates and venue. The consultant will expect phone calls from parents who are interested in enrolling their children.

Marketing is also done through word of mouth. Students who are currently enrolled will be encouraged by the teacher to promote mental arithmetic to their other schoolmates. Even satisfied parents who are happy with their children's improvement in mathematics will spread the news to other parents and serve to promote IQMA.

IQMA Revenue and the Teachers' Salary

Since mental arithmetic is the only product and service offered by IQMA, the revenue and the salary of the teachers are mainly sourced from the tuition fees. The monthly fee is RM50 for each student regardless of the level they are in. Parents are expected to pay the fee every first week of the month but of course many parents do not adhere to this rule strictly. IQMA shares the amount collected for the month with the teacher. This means that the more the students enrolled, the more the teacher's income will be. So it is crucial to have a good marketing strategy to attract parents into enrolling their children to IQMA mental arithmetic tuition class.

There are also mental arithmetic intensive courses offered by IQMA to those who are interested. The participants are normally preschool teachers, parents, headmasters and individuals who are interested in joining IQMA Training as teachers. As IQMA can generate quite a substantial income from such kind courses, they are offered throughout the year. The participants are then expected to either join IQMA Training as teachers or even as consultants for new areas, or they can open mental arithmetic classes under the supervision of the consultant for the chosen area. The preschool teachers may want to offer mental arithmetic tuition to their preschool students as an additional subject outside normal class hours.

IQMA'S FUTURE

On 17 February 2013, IQMA Human Resources Development underwent a rebranding process in an attempt to make its existence more visible in the mental arithmetic business and to sustain itself as a viable entity. Since that date, IQMA Human Resources Development underwent a name change to IQMA Training Sdn Bhd. While on this rebranding process, IQMA Training Sdn Bhd expanded its products and services to

pre-schoolers, preschool teachers as well as to the public. Together with this rebranding process, IQMA came up with new modules specifically designed for younger learners as young as six years old to be able to grasp the basic mental arithmetic skill before embarking on the actual mathematics subject in school.

The marketing strategy now has also expanded to preschools within the same designated areas with the hope of expanding its wings further. The new design of the modules have been well accepted by the targeted customers. On completion of the pre-stage, they will proceed to the old modules meant for older students which is the five levels mentioned earlier.

The rebranding process includes revisions on the existing modules to make it more competitive and more interesting in order to sustain the students' interest. The cover pages of the books for each level have been redesigned to make it more presentable and eye catching. Both the preschool modules and also the existing modules are designed such that the continuation of skills acquired in the preschool module is further enhanced and practiced repeatedly throughout the five levels to ensure a concrete grasp and understanding of the skills taught.

IQMA's Problems and Shortcomings

Every business has its own problems and challenges in order to succeed or even to sustain its business in the industry. As for IQMA, the main problem is to maintain the number of students throughout the year from January to December. It is very common for the number of students to decline significantly towards the end of the year. This is due to the fact that parents place high expectations on their children improving in mathematics within a few weeks. Parents will always translate their children's mathematics exam results at school with the effectiveness of these mental arithmetic modules. The midterm examination at schools which is somewhere in May has been a strong determinant of whether the students continue in the mental arithmetic class or leave based on their mathematics results. All too often, parents are ignorant of the fact that mental arithmetic is a skill to be acquired through progress to each level and as long as the students have not completed the first level they are not encouraged to apply the skills when doing mathematics at school. This is because mental arithmetic consists of 28 formulas to be acquired in the first level and will be repeatedly used and practised in the remaining levels. Mental arithmetic is definitely not a short route to learning mathematics and may take several years to secure the skills and receive permanent benefits. Parents should also understand that unless their students succeed in completing Level 1, the time and effort spent would be a waste. If the children have successfully completed at least Level 2, then mental arithmetic would serve as a lifetime asset, even if the student does not practice at all thereafter.

Another main concern of IQMA is to sustain the students' interest in completing the modules at least at the first level where they are expected to acquire the fundamental concepts of mental arithmetic. Usually the students' attention span is very limited and they do not seem to adhere to the stipulated time frame to complete each exercise

given in class. They are required to be able to complete one page of exercises which consists of at least 35 addition and subtraction exercises within less than ten minutes as this is a quick calculation method. The speed training should reflect the concept of the quick calculation method. However, the students seem to take a much longer time to complete the exercise thus defeating the actual aim of mental arithmetic.

Since the teachers' salary is merely based on monthly fees, defaults in payments by the parents will straightaway affect the teacher's salary. The monetary incentive, in this case the salary, is the major motivation driver for teachers. So if the salary is affected by defaults in payment by parents, coupled with a declining number of students towards the end of the year, it affects the teacher's performance in class, at some point. Thus, this will impact skills acquisitions by students. This is another major problem as well as a challenge facing IQMA.

There are quite a number of similar tuition centres and this poses a challenge for IQMA to sustain in the industry. Being the only Bumiputra owned company in mental arithmetic, IQMA strives to be the preferred one so as to meet its main vision of becoming the preferred mental arithmetic trainer in Southeast Asia by 2015 but it is still a very long way from reaching this goal. Only a small number of students have actually completed all the five levels of the IQMA mental arithmetic technique since the 15 years of its operation. This is a clear reflection of the actual low performance of IQMA in comparison to other similar tuition centres. This poses a threat to IQMA's future to sustain in the industry and to eventually meet its vision.

CONCLUSION

The tuition industry is indeed expanding rapidly in Malaysia in line with the examination oriented nature of the education system and the expectation of society for children to excel academically. As the degree of competition among these tuition services is undoubtedly high, each company has to be aggressive and competitive in order to sustain. As for IQMA Training Sdn Bhd, a lot more needs to be done apart from the rebranding process in order to stand tall in the industry and ultimately achieve its vision of becoming the preferred mental arithmetic trainer in Southeast Asia.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Though in existence 15 years in the mental arithmetic arena, IQMA still faces the same problems of maintaining the number of students enrolled for each year. Why do you think the problem recurs every year?
2. By evaluating the past and assessing the future direction of IQMA Training Sdn Bhd, suggest the course of action for IQMA Training Sdn Bhd in order to achieve its vision.
3. Discuss the marketing strategy adopted by IQMA and suggest improvements, if any, for IQMA to be better recognised regionally.
4. Do you think the rebranding decision will ultimately contribute to the development of IQMA to face the challenges in the industry?

5. Suggest what the management of IQMA should consider in their rebranding process so as to ensure its competitiveness.

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