

EDITORIAL

Higher Education in the Post-Covid 19 Era: Sejahtera and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education at all levels, leaving the poor and vulnerable most affected. According to UNICEF, more than 616 million students have been adversely affected by full or partial school closures. To show the magnitude of the impact of these closures, it has been estimated that up to 70 percent of all 10 year olds in low and middle income countries have been left unable to read or comprehend simple texts, up from a pre-pandemic average of about 50 percent. Thus, although the pandemic seems to be mainly over, its effects are going to be with us for a long time.

In higher education, while the pandemic has been equally disruptive, it has opened up opportunities and rekindled conversations that were long overdue. Prior to the pandemic, there had been too much focus on mechanical yardsticks of institutional quality, focusing on global university ranking metrics as the ultimate goal. Institutions such as the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) that had taken a contrarian view were generally looked at with disdain by ranking enthusiasts. The pandemic has shown us why a more humane approach is the key to making higher education institutions the main drivers of sustainable development and overall global wellbeing.

Even before the pandemic, IIUM championed the idea of *sejahtera*, a Malay term rooted in Islamic notions of balance, harmony and general wellbeing. This is the key for universities to become *rahmatan lil-alamiin* (a mercy for all beings) and to help man actualise his duty as *khalifah* (vicegerent and custodian of this universe), charged with the duty of *i'maar* (developing and improving it) rather than *ifsaad* (spoiling or destroying). With these values in mind, IIUM developed the *Sejahtera Academic Framework*, work on which began in 2019, just before the start of the Covid 19 pandemic.

As the pandemic unfolded, it is abundantly clear how IIUM was right to focus on this key element as its guiding spirit. In Malaysia, the word *sejahtera* was among the most widely used, thanks to its adoption by the ministry of health as the name for the health monitoring application that everyone had to use on a daily basis.

As we leave the lockdown days behind us, it is time to refocus on redefining the mission of higher education. Specific attention has to be paid to the aspects of sustainable development as the pandemic has shown us that failure to achieve sustainable goals comes at a very high cost. The covid 19 pandemic has shown us that failure to achieve sustainable goals affects not only the poor low income countries but even the richest most developed countries can be affected when unexpected events happen.

This issue brings together papers that in some way or another contribute to the issue of sustainable development and how higher education institutions can contribute. The key paper here is that by Mohamad Sahari Nordin, Suhailah Hussien, Hamidon Abd Hamid and Khairusy Syakirin Has-Yun Hashim. It validated a measure of *sejahtera* living and explored its prevalence among university students. Ratnawati Mohd Asraf, Atiqah Hanah and Nadya Supian conducted a qualitative inquiry investigating the health beliefs and willingness to engage in type 2 diabetes T2D preventive behaviours among Malay youth. Considering the special vulnerability of people living with disabilities, Adigun Akeem Ayodeji, Aminu Ahmed Popoola, Adio Wahab Soliu and Adio Abdulgafar Alafara investigated the impact of social support on the psychosocial adjustment of children living with a disability (CLWD) in Lagos, Nigeria.

We have all witnessed the key role played by leadership during times of uncertainty and Hamdan Chehdimae and Hairuddin Mohd Ali's focuses on this by studying leadership practices among islamic private secondary school principals in southern Thailand by validating a model of strategic educational leadership. Meanwhile, Nor Zatul-Iffa Ismail, Noor Lide Abu Kassim and Zamalia Mahmud modelled Factors Influencing Students' Performance in Basic Statistical Concepts.

Finally, recognizing the key role played by language, especially during times of crisis, one the papers critically analyses how language is acquired or learned and the last paper prepared a teaching corpora of Arabic religious words borrowed in Malay language through the texts of Friday sermons in Malaysia.

Whereas the contributions are apparently diverse in their coverage, they are all united by the spirit of *sejahtera* which out to be the guiding principle of higher education henceforth.

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