



# Expectations Of Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) Stakeholders On The Ulul Albab Curriculum At A MARA Junior Science College (MRSM)

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## Abstract

Ulul Albab is an educational programme of integration between the existing programmes in MARA Junior Science College (MRSM) with the religious school programme including Tahfiz Al-Quran. MRSM Ulul Albab education programme is designed to produce professional experts, entrepreneurs and technocrats that are well versed in the field of religion-based Al-Quran and *Sunnah* as Ulul Albab generation. This study aims to explore stakeholders' expectations on the Ulul Albab programme in MRSM Kota Putra, Besut Terengganu towards students' *sahsiah*. The methodology used was qualitative in nature in the form of semi-structured interviews conducted with the four MARA stakeholders. Validity and reliability of data were done through several techniques employed such as member checking, rich thick description, clarification of researcher biases, peer review and debriefing, and external audit. The findings from this study indicate that inculcation of *akhlak* is fundamental in human capital development. This is the case because stakeholders believe that the main intention of the programme is to develop an Ulul Albab generation who are not only knowledgeable and skilled but also possess good qualities namely devotion, noble, responsible and committed to religion, nation and state. Aside from that, findings also showed that teaching and learning that is based on love is fundamental in fostering good *akhlak*.

**Keywords:** Ulul Albab, stakeholders, expectations and *sahsiah*

## 1. Introduction

Ulul Albab programme is originally an idea and inspiration of MARA chairman, YB Dato' Seri Idris Jusoh as an attempt to integrate Islamic education into all curriculum programmes in schools. This is an educational programme of integration between the existing programme in MARA Junior Science College (MRSM) with the religious school programme including Tahfiz Al-Quran. MRSM Ulul Albab education programme is designed to produce professional experts, entrepreneurs and technocrats that are well versed in the field of religion-based al-Quran and *Sunnah* as Ulul Albab generation. The main objective of this programme is to develop Ulul Albab generation who are not only knowledgeable and skilled but also possess good qualities namely devoted, noble, responsible and committed to religion, nation and state. Accordingly, MRSM Kota Putra, Besut Terengganu Malaysia has been selected as the pioneer of the programme and currently this programme is also implemented in two other MRSMs which are MRSM Kepala Batas and MRSM Gemencheh.

In general, the word "Ulul Albab" is attributed to a group of individuals who possess the characteristics of Ulul Albab as mentioned in the Al-Quran. The term Ulul Albab in the Quran has demonstrated its values, greatness and importance to Muslims and mankind at large. According to the Quranic translation, Ulul Albab is defined as "those who understand" (*orang yang berakal*) and "those who have a mind" (*orang yang mempunyai fikiran*). Meanwhile, Al-

Marbawi Dictionary stated that Ulul Albab is originally derived from two-words which are Ulu and Al-Albab. Ulu means “who have” (*yang mempunyai*), while Al-Albab is a plural form from the word “lubb”, which stands for “the essence of something” (*pati sesuatu*), “pure mind” (*akal yang bersih*) and “heart” (*hati*).

Imam Ibn Kathir in his interpretation has illustrated Ulul Albab as those who have pure and ideal thoughts and are able to understand meanings in a right way. Ultimately they will discover the truth that could save them in the world and hereafter. This requires them to develop a mature mind until they are able to distinguish between right and wrong, between good and bad and between beneficial and futile as deemed by Allah as Ulul Albab individuals as stated in surah *al-Zumar*:

*"Therefore reveal to My servants. (They are) those who make a great effort to listen to the words (which conveyed) and they follow the words; those are the people who have been given guidance by Allah and they are Ulul Albab"*

There are various definitions related to Ulul Albab, raised by philosophers based on their point of views. Idris (2006) as cited in Wan Mariana & Mohd Shafiee (2012), defined Ulul Albab as individuals with strong foundation of Al-Quran, extensive and diverse knowledge as well as able to think and observe events of God's creation through the eyes and sharp mind and eventually learn from it.

Meanwhile Shahran (2006) asserted that Ulul Albab as a group of people who are given privileged by Allah s.w.t, in which those that are given wisdom and knowledge. Osman (2006) highlighted that Ulul Albab are encyclopedic scholars (*ulamak ensiklopedik*) who are the most important individuals who spread the spirit of Islam and mold Islamic civilization based on their ability to master various fields of knowledge (Wan Mariana & Mohd Shafiee, 2012).

In his book entitled ‘*Generasi Ulul Albab Segunung Harapan Seteguh Gagasan*’, Sabri (2009) had listed several perspectives regarding the definition of Ulul Albab from various Islamic scholars’ perspectives. One of them is the former Perlis mufti, Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin who has defined Ulul Albab as those who possess wisdom and a mature understanding that allows them to make accurate judgments. His notion is supported by Abdullah (2006) which states that Ulul Albab are those who are wise and possess knowledge in the field of *fardhu ain* and *fardhu kifayah*. Meanwhile, according to Danial Zainal Abidin (2007) the term Ulul Albab portrays individuals who think deeply and are able to put all things in the right perspectives. In addition, these individuals live out the concept of remembrance and thought by chanting and glorifying Allah through observation of God's creation (Sabri, 2009).

From these definitions, it can be concluded that the concept of Ulul Albab serves as an important paradigm in every action based on deep mastery of knowledge which can be applied in any circumstances and challenges faced by the Muslim communities and the world in general. Therefore, there is a need to integrate the concept of Ulul Albab in the Malaysian education system in order to produce ideal human being (*insan kamil*).

With the intention of upholding the ideals of Islamic and holistic education as indicated in the National Philosophy of Education through the curriculum, MRSM has implemented Ulul Albab programme which integrated three important components namely *Quranik*, *Ensiklopedik* and *Ijtihadik*. Ulul Albab programme emphasizes a different teaching and learning process that places a strong emphasis on the Quran. The main objective of the implementation of Ulul Albab programme is to produce an Ulul Albab generation which possesses three characteristics which are *Quranik*, *Ensiklopedik* and *Ijtihadik*. Students in this programme are required to memorize 30 constituents of the Quran and understand the concept of reading, remember, understand, think, practice and disseminate. The target of memorization is 30 *juz'* Al-Quran in a 3-year period.

Apart from producing Al-Quran generation, Ulul Albab programme also seeks to develop encyclopedic generation. According to Idris (2008), encyclopedic generations are those who acquire various disciplines (multidisciplinary) and various types of language (multilingual) as well as highly skilled and become as a key source of reference to the community. In the pursuit of materializing encyclopedic generation, students are required to learn other languages such as Japanese and Mandarin.

Apart from that, in this era of globalization, technology in general and the Information & Communication Technology (ICT) in particular have become one of the significant tools in enhancing teaching and learning process. Therefore, students are also equipped with the most recent ICT resources and multimedia facilities to assist their learning process. Idris (2008) asserted that *ijtihadik* education could be defined as an educational process that is able to produce intellectuals and Muslim scientist who are creative, determined and willing to try new things and generate new ideas for the betterment of mankind. In addition, *ijtihadik* generations are able to think and make correct judgment and capable in solving crisis faced by the society. With the intention of producing *ijtihadik* generations, students are encouraged to take parts in extra co-curricular activities in order to enhance the character, intellect and physical development of students. Additionally, the Ulul Albab programme is also integrating three main extra-curricular activities; horseback riding, swimming, and archery. Figure 1 illustrates the whole concept of Ulul Albab programme.

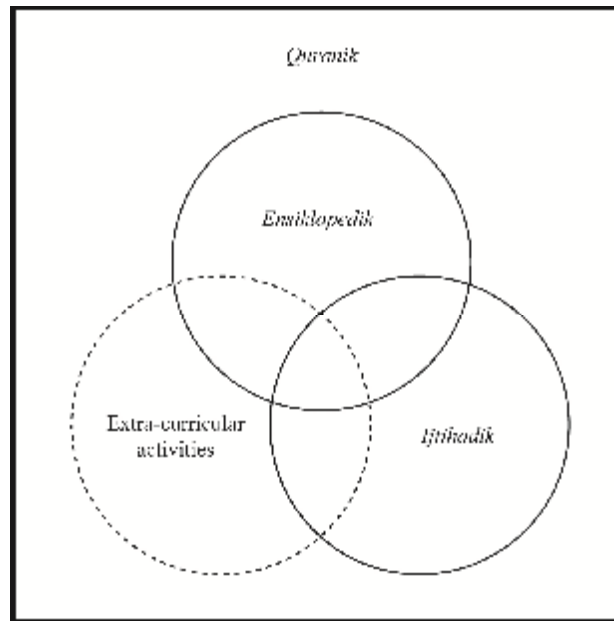


Figure 1. The Ulul Albab Curriculum Model

After five years of implementation of the Ulul Albab programme in MRSM Kota Putra, there is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of the Ulul Albab programme in producing professional experts, entrepreneurs and technocrats that are well versed in Quran as well as portraying and practicing the values of Islam. Therefore, this study aims to explore Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) stakeholders' expectations towards students' *sahsiah* at MRSM Kota Putra.

#### 1.1 Responsive Evaluation Model: Determination of Stakeholder Expectation

Evaluation of curriculum is crucial to determine whether the existing curriculum should be revised, maintained or replaced, help refine instruction and learning, and decide whether the existing managerial organization of the programme should be sustained or restructured (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009). In order to holistically understand and evaluate the success of the curriculum, a responsive evaluation model was adopted in this study. Responsive evaluation model is based explicitly on the assumption that the concerns of the stakeholders, those for whom the evaluation, is crucial in determining the evaluation issues. According to Guba & Lincoln (1989), stakeholders could be defined as "persons with some common characteristics (administrators, instructors, students, sponsors) who have a stake in the performance (outcome or impact) of the programme being evaluated" (Curran et al., 2003). A responsive evaluation explores the expectations of the programme stakeholders and those expectations are used in evaluating the merit and worth of the educational programme as well as become the basis for the formulation of standards and criteria for the programme that is being evaluated (Curran et al., 2003). Therefore, an evaluation of the stakeholders' expectation on the Ulul Albab curriculum is desirable. There are eight steps in conducting responsive evaluation model. In the context of this study, the researcher only adopted the first two steps of the model; (a) the evaluator first met with the clients, staff, and audiences to gain insights of their perspectives on the educational programme and (b) evaluator drew on such discussions and the analysis of any document to decide the scope of the evaluation project (Glatthorn, 1987). The steps of responsive evaluation model are illustrated in Figure 2 below.

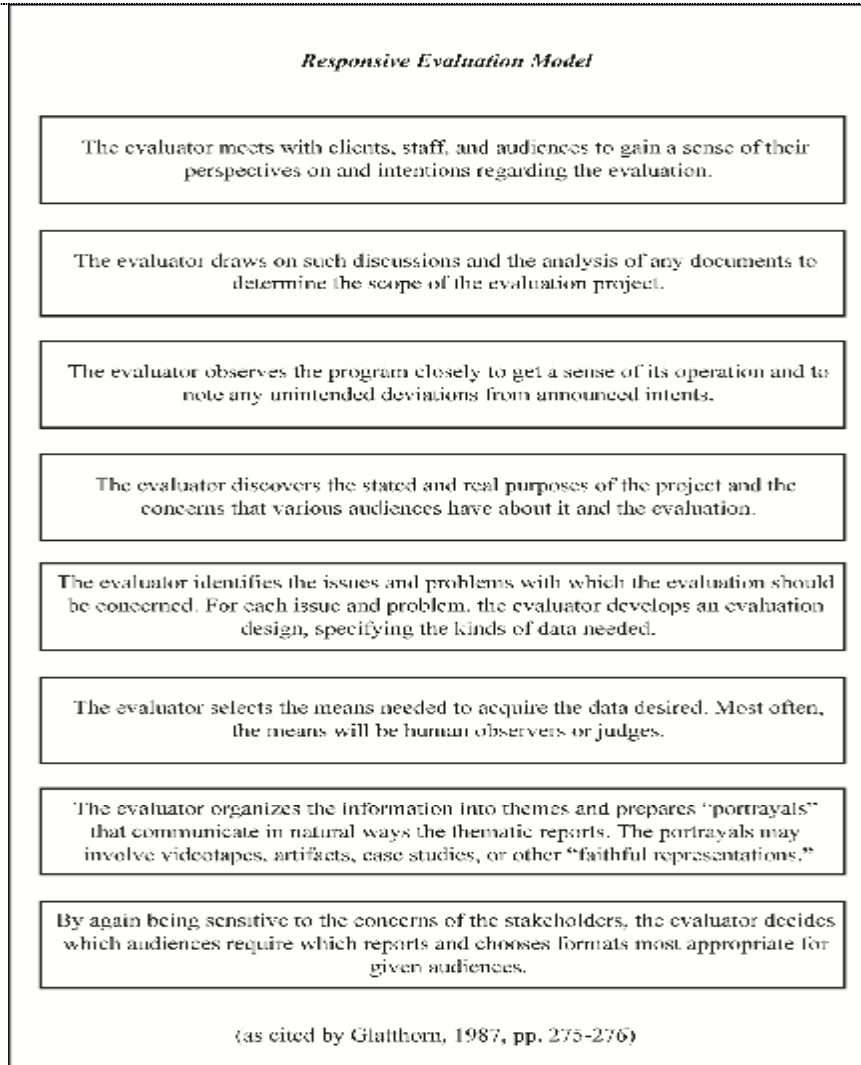


Figure 2. Responsive Evaluation Steps

Stake (1967, 1975, 1976) in Chafel (1981) proposes that an educational evaluation is effective when it is responsive towards the concerns that exist in the minds of the various audiences participating in a programme including stakeholders, school administrators, practitioners, and students. Stake has argued that evaluation results should be more relevant- "more relevant to what is of importance, is happening in learning, in teaching, in administration; more relevant to the concerns of participants and audiences of a particular programme." (Gallagher, 1976).

Stakeholders play an important role in curriculum evaluation. Since they have a stake in the evaluation, their perspectives, interests and expectations need to be taken into account in order to increase the likelihood of the evaluation findings to be accepted and acted upon. Feedback, recommendations, critique and advice from stakeholders will improve the content and implementation of the curriculum so as to meet the expectation of the stakeholders as well as the needs of the learners.

Involving diverse stakeholders during programme evaluation will also deepen the researcher's understanding of the social and political contexts affecting the programme. By doing so, the researcher will become aware of the social and political contexts that will likely have implications on the programme and the evaluation. Collaboration with stakeholders during the evaluation will give the researcher access to a broad range of knowledge, from statistical methods to cultural understandings of the programme (United States Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011).

### 1.2 Spirituality and Sahsiah

In Islamic perspective, spirituality is viewed as "the linking of actions to the purpose of life" (Adnan, 2009). Essentially, the main purpose in life for Muslims is to worship and seek the pleasure of Allah in our actions, therefore, spirituality in this sense is linking the actions of an individual to the purpose of their life. Hence, all actions undertaken with the sole intention to draw nearer to Allah are considered spiritual because they link action with the purposes of life. Additionally, Muslims must make sure that their actions are always in accordance to the commands and prohibitions of Allah in order to attain His pleasure.

Several studies suggest spiritual and religious involvements as important dimensions that influence adolescents' development. This is supported by Gallup and Bezilla who reported that 95% of American adolescents believed in God (Shek, 2012). Meanwhile, another study carried out by Bibby (2006) in Shek (2012) discovered that 75% of the respondents regarded themselves as members of a religion, 60% viewed spirituality as important, and 48% indicated

that they had spiritual needs. These findings are consistent with a research conducted by Astin et al. (2005), who found that among 112, 232 freshmen 77% of them regarded themselves as “spiritual beings” and approximately 80% of them acknowledged that they had interest in spirituality. Based from a data collected from a study conducted by Benson & Roehlkepartain (2008) indicated that most young people view spiritual development as an important part of their lives. The literature cited above repeatedly suggests that spirituality plays a huge role in adolescent’s development.

There may be a relationship between spirituality and students’ character building as several studies have suggested that religious people tend to avoid behaviors that are often regarded as undisciplined and harmful to their well-being (Jeynes, 2002). A number of researches reveal that religiously committed teens are less likely to become involved in social problem including drug and alcohol abuse (Bahr, Hawks, & Wang, 1993; Brownfield & Sorenson, 1991; Nylander, Tung, & Xu, 1996). Other studies also found that religiously committed teens are less likely to engage in sexual behavior or become pregnant while they are still teenagers (Beck, Cole, & Hammond, 1991; Holman & Harding, 1996; Miller & Olson, 1988) cited in Jeynes (2002).

Numerous authors have pointed the role of spirituality and religious values in contributing to positive moral behaviors and attitudes. For example, Donahue & Benson (1995) conducted a study on the relationship between religiousness and adolescent well-being and result indicated that there was a positive association between adolescent religiosity and presence of prosocial values and behavior. The religious adolescents in the study were found to acquire good personality such as helping others and volunteering than were their less religious peers. Apart from that, the study also revealed a negative relationship between religiousness and tendency to commit suicide, substance abuse, premature sexual involvement and delinquency among the adolescents. The study also suggested the need to integrate religious programmes in the society in the pursuit of developing an ideal and healthy community. The findings from previous researches cited above indicate that spiritual aspect is a major factor in influencing character and moral development.

### 1.3 Research Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was a combination of both Responsive Evaluation Model and Ulul Albab curriculum model. Focus was given on determining the *sahsiah* expectations through teaching and learning process from the four main MARA stakeholders; former MARA Chairman, Director of MARA Secondary Education Division, ex principal of Imtiaz school in Kuala Besut, and ex principal of MRSM Ulul Albab Kota Putra. The three main components of Ulul Albab programme portrayed in the theoretical framework act as scope of discussion for this study. Any expectations derived from the stakeholders that are beyond the aspects of *Quranik*, *Ensiklopedik*, and *Ijtihadik* will not be taken into consideration. Figure 3 illustrates the theoretical framework of this study.

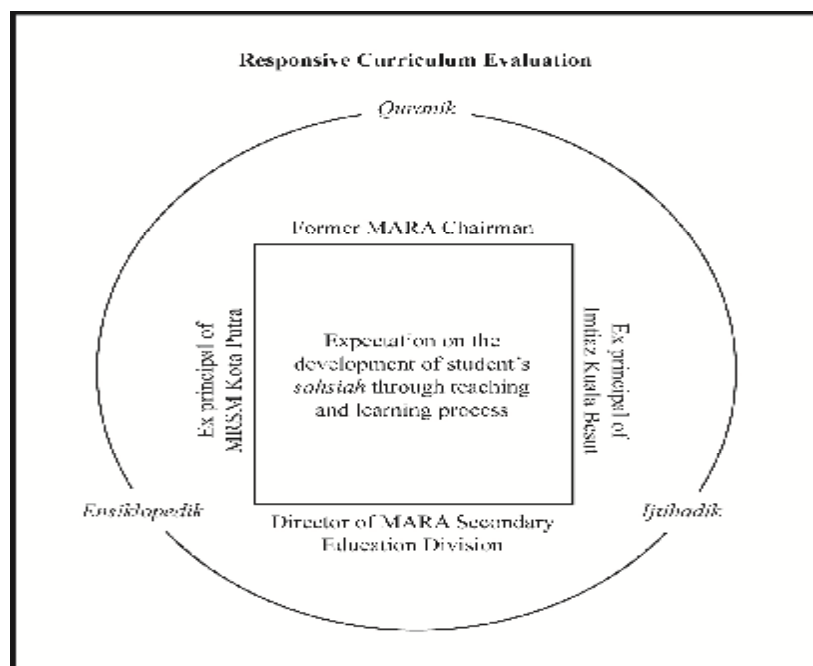


Figure 3. Research Theoretical Framework.

## 2. Research Methodology

A qualitative case study was undertaken to investigate the expectations of MARA stakeholders on the Ulul Albab curriculum at MRSM Kota Putra. Through this approach, it allows the researcher to discover the social realities in the natural settings. Qualitative researchers believe that human behaviour is always bound to the context in which it occurs and thus, behaviour need to be studied holistically in order to obtain more complete pictures of the situation. (Hong, 2007). This concurs with the characteristic of qualitative research emphasized by Ornstein & Hunkins (2009), "humanistic evaluators argue for a more holistic approach to evaluation, one that provides detailed portraits of the situations being evaluated". By employing qualitative methods in this educational research, it enables the researcher to investigate the stakeholders' beliefs, priorities, perspectives and their expectations of the programme. Humanistic

evaluators recognize that individuals have different values, experiences, and abilities and thus, possess different perceptions of "reality". The intention was to capture a glimpse into this reality and to gain insights into 'what is going-on' during the implementation process. This is in line with Bogdan & Biklen (2003, p. 42) who emphasized that qualitative research is "naturalistic, inductive and concern with process and meaning".

Through discussion with the stakeholders, it enables the researcher to fully understand their reasons and beliefs in their vision of the Ulul Albab curriculum. Punch (1998, p. 150), asserts that "qualitative research aims to understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting, recognizing its complexity and its context". Similarly Green & Bricki (2007) affirm that qualitative research aims to answer questions about the 'what', 'how', or 'why' of a phenomenon rather than 'how many' or 'how much', which are answered by quantitative approach. Merriam (2002, p. 6) also states that "qualitative research attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant's perspective". Therefore, in order to gain insights and understand how a community or individuals perceive a particular issue, qualitative methods are the most appropriate.

The participants for this research were selected through purposive sampling technique. Four MARA stakeholders were purposely selected based on their role in conceptualizing and implementing the Ulul Albab programme in MRSM Kota Putra. They are the former MARA Chairman, the Director of MARA Secondary Education Division, ex principal of Imtiaz school in Kuala Besut, and the exprincipal of MRSM Kota Putra.

Table 1 lists the participants involved in this study, along with their roles towards the Ulul Albab programme. Full cooperation was given in a semi-structured interviews and discussions that were conducted individually. Consent was given by the four participants prior to the interviews. The stakeholders were assured that their participation is to be kept anonymous. Data collected were transcribed and analyzed using the software *Atlas.ti* version 7. Intensive data coding were used to obtain common themes that emerge in response to the research question. To ensure validity and reliability of data, several techniques were employed such as member checking, rich thick description, clarification of researcher bias, peer review and debriefing, and external audit.

Table 1. List of participants and their roles in Ulul Albab programme in MRSM Kota Putra.

	Informant 1	Informant 2	Informant 3	Informant 4
Role	Conceptualising and initiating the Ulul Albab programme in MRSM Kota Putra.	Conceptualising and initiating the Ulul Albab programme in MRSM Kota Putra.	Implementing Conceptualising and initiating the Ulul Albab programme in MRSM Kota Putra.	Conceptualising and implementing the Ulul Albab programme.

### 3. Results

The study found that for *sahsiah* expectation, two sub-themes were identified namely, (a) teaching and learning that is based on love is fundamental in fostering good *akhlak*, and (b) inculcation of *akhlak* in human capital development. Frequency percentage of statements for each sub-theme is displayed in Table 2 below to provide an overview of the main theme.

Table 2. Distribution of sub-themes for *sahsiah* expectations

Sub-themes	Number of Citations	Percentage (%)
Teaching and learning that is based on love is fundamental in fostering good <i>akhlak</i>	9	53
Inculcation of <i>akhlak</i> in human capital development	8	47

#### 3.1 Teaching and Learning that is based on Love is Fundamental in Fostering Good *Akhlak*

The finding found that teaching and learning that is based on love is fundamental in fostering good *akhlak* is the dominant expectation on the Ulul Albab programme in Kota Putra. This is reflected by the statement of informant 2:

"Then I told my colleagues that if we can motivate our children, half of our problems can be solved. What do you mean by motivation? By using the approach of love, though not as perfect as *Ar-Rahman, Ar-Rahim*."

Informant 2 also emphasized that teachers need to have empathy for their students and to be passionate in teaching and learning, and also committed to achievement of their students.

*"Teachers do not have options, they need to use such approach. Teachers must have high empathy."*

*"Passion, passion in doing the work. And want to see the success of his students. Working as a teacher, a very noble profession. Not only bring happiness in the world, but also in hereafter. Useful knowledge, we can also gain the benefits."*

*"I think there are a lot of data that can be referred to. Students who failed in monthly examination, semester examination, trial examination, and at the end of the day they attained grade A in add math because the elements and factors of love. Now being popularized by Ar-Rahman and Ar-Rahim."*

Informant 1 also stressed the importance of love as a basis of education and the introduction of the concept of Ar-Rahman and Ar-Rahim as in his statement:

*"Because of that, even in Besut, this Ulul Albab, X go and talk about how to be a good Murabbi, not just a good teacher but imparting moral values in school. Introduce love is a fundamental aspect in teaching. Introduce the concept of Ar-Rahman and Ar-Rahim."*

*"When teachers do not understand, how are the students going to understand? Teachers themselves do not understand. So it's a process. I'm talking about the pedagogy of Ar-Rahman and Ar-Rahim where the element of love is embedded in the education system. You talk about imparting knowledge, you do not talk about imparting values. You don't talk about thinking culture. You don't talk about culture of education in universities. It cannot be changed."*

*"You then read Al-Fatihah. It's there again, you know. And God do not put there for no reasons. So it's based on love. If it's based on love, you can get things on because you do it out of love, you teach out of love. It's very fundamental, you know. Because it's there. Very fundamental. So you cannot produce good moral values without love."*

*"You have to be good, you have to be balanced. But it's got to be based on love still. Because love is a very strong factor in akhlak."*

*"Passionate is not enough. Passionate is one thing. Passionate is what we are doing. But you not doing it out of love."*

From the above statements, it can be concluded that the stakeholders hope that teachers will integrate the element of love in the teaching and learning process. This is the case because a good teacher should not solely teach academic subjects but also to develop a knowledgeable person with high moral values.

### 3.2 Inculcation of Akhlak in Human Capital Development

The findings show that inculcation of *akhlak* in human capital development recorded the second highest percentage of the stakeholders' expectations on the Ulul Albab programme in Kota Putra. This is supported by the statement of informant 1:

*"Now I'm putting akhlak as important element in the whole development of the school."*

*"But is it wholesome? That's the question. Is it integrated? Approaching integrated personalities."*

Informant 2 also hopes that Albab Ulul programme is able to produce ideal students in terms of academic and *sahsiah* as in his statement:

*"It means that we want a package that is very perfect to me to provide students who are competent in the future."*

*"We also want to produce human capital for the future. So from the aspects of religion, I suppose. So my personal view is I'm for, for this is Ulul Albab."*

*"Nowadays they interact with each other, isn't it? And then we have 21st century skills and environmental skills. So it has to do with humanity, talking about environmental, we want to have students who are responsible of this college, its hygiene, room and toilet. It seems insignificant, but it will be able to shape good character among the students."*

In addition, he also hopes that Quran memorization in Ulul Albab programme could develop individuals who possess ideal *sahsiah*, which is an important element in the formation of human capital. This is evidenced by his statement:

*"As a result of this programme, it will produce students with noble character."*

*"Quran memorization is not the only aspect in Ulul Albab syllabus. The students are required to learn Arabic. They have that understanding. So when they understand that, internal changes may occur, which in turn, will produce good character. During this 21st century, we cannot neglect character building aspect."*

By memorizing the Quran, it is hoped that it will produce students who have good morals and character. This is proven by the statement of informant 3:

*"So we hope that these students will become good persons by memorizing the Quran."*

From the above statements, it can be concluded that through Ulul Albab programme, the stakeholder group hopes that the programme could inculcate good *akhlak* and *sahsiah* among the students and produce students who are not only knowledgeable and competent but also skilled in the field of religion based on the Quran and *Sunnah*.

#### **4. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendation**

Fundamentally, through the Ulul Albab programme, the stakeholders hope that the programme could inculcate good *akhlak* and *sahsiah* among the students. This is the case because the stakeholders believe that the main intention of the programme is to develop an Ulul Albab generation who are not only knowledgeable and skilled but also possess good qualities namely devoted, noble, responsible and committed to religion, nation and state. Quran memorization in Ulul Albab programme is expected to be able to develop individuals who possess ideal *sahsiah*, which is an important element in the formation of human capital. Through Quran memorization, it could increase spirituality (Salasiah, Rosmawati & Fariza, 2012). This is supported by a recent study conducted by Jeynes (2009) which demonstrated a positive connection between spirituality and students' school behavior. A study conducted by King & Furrow (2004) also demonstrates that having strong religious and spirituality beliefs not only seems to help protect adolescents from problem behaviour, but it also seems to promote prosocial behaviour. Moreover, the finding is consistent with the result of the previous study carried out by Donahue and Benson (1995) whereby the religious adolescents were more likely to value helping others and volunteering than were their less religious peers. From the review it is evident that the role of spirituality and religious values is pertinent in contributing positive moral behaviors and attitudes.

The stakeholders also hope that teachers will integrate the element of love in the teaching and learning process. According to Ministry of Education (1992), love is one of the 16 values stipulated in national curriculum framework. Abd. Rahim (1993) asserts that love is one of the important elements in human's life as it could drive society towards social stability. In addition, love plays a huge role in nurturing students' positive behaviours, as a result from their emotional stability. Maslow (1954) emphasizes that without love one will feel lonely because human's desire is to love and to be loved. Therefore, inculcating love in teaching and learning process will strengthen students' emotion and ultimately develop students' moral values.

Overall, this study provides feedback on the stakeholders' expectations of the Ulul Albab programme in MRSM. MRSM Ulul Albab educational programme is designed to produce professional experts, entrepreneurs and technocrats that are well versed in the field of religion-based Quran and *Sunnah* as Ulul Albab generation. The main objective of this programme is to develop Ulul Albab generations who are balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God and live according to the Quran and *Sunnah*. In order to evaluate whether the programme succeeds in producing Ulul Albab community who have creative and critical thinking abilities and at the same time possess ideal personality, an evaluation of the stakeholders' expectation of the programme needs to be conducted first to see whether their expectations are being met. Representing their needs and interests throughout the implementation of the programme is fundamental to ensure the programme's success.

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\* *akhlak*: with moralistic values

\* *sahsiah*: personality



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