Inference of Sejahtera Academic Framework (SAF) principles in architecture pedagogy at DoA-KAED, IIUM

Nayeem Asif [*], Fadzidah Abdullah[2], Zeenat Begam Yusof [3], Aliyah Nur Zafirah Sanusi[4], Aida Kesuma Azmin[5] and Noorizhar Ismail[6]

[1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]*Deaprtment of Architecture/ Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design, IIUM, Malaysia*

[*]*(nayeem@iium.edu.my) Email of the corresponding author*

Abstract – Malaysia is deemed to leverage its human capital towards skillful professionals. In all fields of tertiary education, students are shaped with the foundations of digitalization, cloud computing, the Internet of Things, (IoT); Artificial Intelligent (A.I), Big Data, metaverse, autonomous robotics etc. Nevertheless, with all these emergent advancements, is there any guarantee that human value would not be jeopardized? This article infers the discourse of humanizing education, using the notion of Sejahtera Academic Framework (SAF) principles, especially on its applicability to architecture pedagogy. With the emergence of IR 4.0 advancements that overwhelms the tertiary education, a question has arisen, is there any guarantee that human value would not be jeopardized? Hence, this paper has the objective to evaluate the current pedagogic practice in architecture education in relation to the core principles and the auxiliary tools of Sejahtera Academic Framework (SAF). To achieve the objective, qualitative approach of content analysis is conducted as a strategy to inquire understanding on the subject discussed. This preliminary research is significant to ensure alignment between SAF and architecture pedagogy could be established firmly, to support the university's vision.

Keywords – : Humanizing Education, Architectural Education, IR 4.0, Sejahtera Academic Framework.

I. INTRODUCTION

This Parallel with the global movement of the fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0), Malaysia is deemed to leverage its human capital towards skilful professionals. In all fields of tertiary education, students are shaped with the foundations of digitalisation, cloud computing, the Internet of Things, (IoT); Artificial Intelligent (A.I), Big Data, metaverse, autonomous robotics etc. Nevertheless, with all these emergent advancements, is there any guarantee that human value would not be jeopardised?

International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) refuses to be the factory that "produces" simple minded mass productions who are only skilled at what they have been assembled for, void of human values and virtues. Hence, Sejahtera Academic Framework (SAF) was crafted with the objective of nurturing holistic human beings who have been entrusted on us in a *"jami'ah insaniah"* environment [1]

Among the seven mission of IIUM to actualize its vision, there are: to undertake the special and greatly needed task of reforming the contemporary

Muslim mentality and integrating Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences in a positive manner and to produce better quality intellectuals, professionals and scholars by integrating the qualities of faith *(iman)*, knowledge *('ilm)*, and good character *(akhlaq)* to serve as agents of comprehensive and balanced progress as well as sustainable development in Malaysia and in Muslim world. [2]

In its recent endeavour, IIUM adopted the Sejahtera Academic Framework as its model for re-defining education in the global platform, at a time when the "only constant" in global scenario is "rapid change", as the world is hit by pandemic, poverty, war at one hand and unprecedented technological development on the other hand. To use the positive change to fight or mitigate the negative, SAF is envisioned as a dynamic model that can reform itself through time while maintaining its core principles.

SAF works a mechanism within the university where the Kulliyyah, departments, institutions, human elements are active components continuously moving to materialize the idea of SAF. For a mechanism, if one component of it does not perform in harmony with other, then the overall mechanism faces malfunctioning. Therefore, it is significant to study different component of the mechanism by suitable experts to ensure that the components are up to date and fit enough for functioning now as well as flexible enough to transform itself according to the need of time. Hence, architecture-pedagogy as practised in Department of Architecture (DoA), Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design (KAED) is suggested to be evaluated systematically (curriculum, teaching-delivery method and assessment) so that it fits perfectly within the overall idea of Sejahtera Academic Framework.

II. BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Architecture education in practice is based on applied pedagogy that integrates knowledge with practical problem-based exercise to carry out experimental research, to critique practice and provide the tools, skills and attitudes needed to reinvent it [3]. Worldwide, it is one of the disciplines aimed towards professional development to produce skilled graduates ready to join the workforce. Its simile can be found in other professional degrees such as medicine or law. In

principle, architecture education aims to empower the students with applied knowledge that incubate innovation, aesthetics and functionality in their thought process [4]. The approach shares many commonalities with Sejahtera Academic Framework (SAF). In its effort to humanize education, SAF is focused on four principles, i.e. empowerment, flexibility, innovation, and accountability. In application, SAF revisits the epistemology of knowledge from the Islamic point of view that produces human being as a mercy to mankind instead of focusing on producing mere 'workforce' that is popular nowadays. Fundamentally, SAF and Architectural pedagogy have commonalities as both shares similar principles. However, SAF being a fairly new scheme in an academic discipline, there is a need for thorough evaluation on the shared fundamentals of architecture education and SAF so that the current teaching delivery method for architecture can be realigned with the proposals of SAF to fulfil the mission of integration of knowledge for humanizing education.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *IIUM and Education goal in the 21st century*

Education is a human right and a force for sustainable development and peace. Every goal in the 2030 Agenda requires education to empower people with the knowledge, skills, and values to live in dignity, build their lives and contribute to their societies. Ambitions for education are essentially captured in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030. [5]

While governments hold the main responsibility for ensuring the right to quality education, the 2030 Agenda is a universal and collective commitment. It requires political will, global and regional collaboration and the engagement of all governments, civil society, private sector, youth, UN and other multilateral agencies to tackle educational challenges and build systems that are inclusive, equitable and relevant to all learners. [6]

IIUM since 2018, has adopted "humanizing education" as its main strategic goal. It is well documented in the IIUM Roadmap 2019-2020 translating into a model of *Insan Sejahtera*, which are well-aligned to the vision and mission of IIUM.

Among other things, the mission statements included an explicit statement on the need for sustainable development whereby the desired result is a state of society where living conditions and resources are mobilized to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural ecosystem. The aspiration is civilizational. [7]

The on-going pandemic crisis is a reminder that disruptions will occur - and the disruptions may be either positive or negative. IIUM graduates then, should be equipped to face an uncertain world - not just in terms of knowledge and competencies, but also attitude. Ill.-JM graduates should be able to cope with adversity to come out better than ever. If ever their adversity quotient is measured, it would be high.

In this spirit of humanizing education in the IIUM mould, the tagline of the university reflects the characteristics of the people in the university - be they students or staff. The core elements of *"Khalifah. Amanah. Iqra'. Rahmatan lil'Alamin"* (KhAIR) are further adopted as our graduate attributes. [1]

B. IIUM and the philosophy of knowledge

IIUM aims to provide conducive shared learning (culture of *Iqra'*) ecosystem geared towards the convergence of knowledge founded on the *tawhid* in realizing comprehensive excellence. The fundamental constituent principle of the University is deeply rooted in the meaning and spirit of surah Al-'Alaq, verses 1 to 5 of the Holy Qur'an.

Education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality of Man through the training of Man's spirit, intellect, the rational self, feelings and bodily senses. Education should, therefore, cater for the growth of man in all its aspects: spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, linguistic, both individually and collectively and motivate all these aspects towards goodness and the attainment of perfection. [8], [9]

Inspired by the worldview of *tawhid* and the Islamic philosophy of the unity of knowledge as well as its concept of holistic education, the University aims at becoming a leading international centre of excellence in education research and innovation which seeks to restore the dynamic and progressive role of the *Ummah* in all branches of knowledge for the betterment of human life and civilization. Towards actualizing the University's vision, IIUM endeavours 7 specific missions as stated in its constitution. The Mission Statement of the University may be summarised as the following four core elements:

- Integration
- Islamisation
- Internationalisation
- Comprehensive Excellence [2]

C. Sejahtera Academic Framework

The Sejahtera Academic Framework is both "old" and "new". It is "old" in the sense that the core values and the vision and mission of the University continue to be the bedrock. It is "new" in that it weaves together the current and future major agenda while demanding each and every one of us - at both the individual and organisational levels - reflect on our roles and responsibilities to move the University into the future.

SAF pays a greater attention to create a flexible teaching and learning environment for the lecturers and students. Courses are revised and constructed with a space for modifications and further improvements. Flexibility encourages innovative thinking. Academics are motivated to adapt and adopt new ideas, methods for better products and outcomes at all levels.

At its core SAF insists IIUM academic programmes must be recognized and continue to provide knowledge and skills that are of different natures; religious, contemporary, hard and soft skills. Sejahtera Academic Framework was crafted - to enable the International Islamic University Malaysia to not just manage or adapt, but to lead the way - foreseeing the incoming disruptions, coming up with our own innovative solutions, while maintaining true to our vision and mission, especially on serving Allah and bringing good to the world (*rahmatan lil'alamin*) - in short, educating in current students "now" to face the future, regardless of what the future might be. [1]

1) Constants and dynamic components of SAF

SAF is envisioned to be a platform for the various parts of the universities to speak together in a common language that speaks to contemporary and future issues, allowing everyone to develop and fulfil IIUM's potential.

The concept of SAF is a "work in progress" not in the sense this is unfinished, but a "work in progress" because we will never rest on our laurels,

and there are always room for continual improvement, to keep offering the best that IIUM can, and to be the best IIUM can be. Hence, there are components in SAF itself which are firmly rooted on a strong base and remain constant during implementation and there are components which are dynamic as the world is ever evolving and taking new shapes more rapidly than ever before. So the dynamic components allow the room for update and improvement of SAF with the ever changing world scenario.
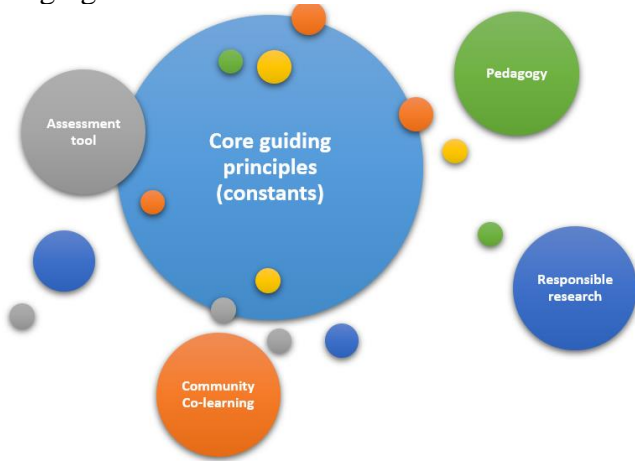

Fig. 1 Constants and dynamic components of SAF

2) SAF core principles

The overarching principle of the academic framework is a humanising principle i.e., the belief in the potential of the human being and putting people first. Decisions are not made based on logistics or expediency, but on what is the most appropriate practice to make the learning experience a most impactful one for those involved. Structure must follow strategy. The specific guiding principles in developing and implementing the curriculum are *empowerment, flexibility, innovation and accountability*.

Empowerment is the "authority or power given to someone to do something." In the context of SAF, empowerment can be seen in various ways - the Senate empowers the Centers of Studies to make decisions pertaining to their particular programmes, and the Centre of Studies empowers the instructors, to make decisions pertaining to their particular course.

The lecturer is empowered to make decisions regarding the best practices for his/her classes especially with regard to pedagogy and assessment. Students are empowered to decide on their academic pathway within the framework given.

Fig. 2 SAF core guiding principles

Flexibility is the ability to be easily modified. The COVID19 pandemic has also brought home the point that universities need to have the flexibility culture ingrained in our system so as to ensure that we are able to face instant and unplanned disruptions without sacrificing the quality of education being offered.

Innovation is the reason to empower the different parties and to provide a flexible structure is to encourage innovation, including social innovation. Innovation is a new idea, method, product, etc. for a better outcome.

Accountability is being responsible and able to justify the decisions made as one is empowered to make those decisions. E.g. when lecturers choose to use a certain pedagogical tool, they must also be held accountable for the success or failure of that tool. [1]

3) Auxiliary tools

Apart from the core principles, SAF also draw up several auxiliary tools as a supplementary variable for humanizing education. For example, the complex dynamics of global and local issues today have forced us to rethink and re-evaluate our education system to remain relevant as higher education institutions. The constant change in the nature of issues on the ground demands us to be more involved and reorient our curriculum to not merely gaining knowledge from the textbooks or

journals, but taking the community and nature as the teacher. In order to address this need, the reorientation needs to include soft skills such as systemic thinking, trans-disciplinary cognitive skills, leadership skills, and communication skills as these skills are deemed important to answer the issues. Thus, **Community learning** [formal + informal] beyond classroom has become one of the possible tool that may have positive impact on the overall learning process.

The University Required Courses (**UniCORE**) is a set of courses that are required to be taken by all IIUM undergraduate students. The main objective of UniCORE is to imbue IIUM students with a solid foundation that speaks to the philosophy, vision and mission of the University. The UniCORE is expected to lay a well-grounded foundation through understanding the fundamentals of oneself and how the formation of noble characteristics occur from the balance of all main elements in an individual.

As befit the overarching principle of humanising education, the pedagogical practices shall reflect more **student-centred learning (SCL)** rather than teacher-led instruction. An SCL environment is not an environment where the students are always right, and their desires are pandered to. Instead, it is an environment where they are engaged and take responsibility for their own learning. The instructors will provide the environment and opportunities towards this end. With both fulfilling their *amanah*, the classrooms (including labs, studios etc.) will become dynamic spaces buzzing with intellectual discourse and the genuine pursuit of knowledge and skills.

The IIUM recognises that **assessment** is an important component of effective teaching and learning processes. The quality of assessment is vital to the University's claim about the quality of its graduates, which defines the trust and confidence of stakeholders. Assessment determines the quality of student outcomes and shapes the learning that will take place - assessment is a catalyst for progress and reform in educational practices. [1]

D. Architecture program of DoA-KAED, IIUM

The programme of architecture, as part of IIUM academic programme, moved with the mission and vision for integration, Islamisation, Internationalisation and Comprehensive Excellence (IIICE). The programme, through the Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design (KAED) have the mission to transfo1m students from all schools, including religious schools such as *tahfiz*, into technocrats with *iman* (faith), *ilm* (knowledge), *amal* (practice), *akhlaq* (good character) and *ihsan* (courteous) in their daily and professional lives. In tangent with the general leaning processes in architecture, the course outlines were integrated with Islamic world view alongside the general and main stream worldview i.e. Western worldview, as comparison, reorientation, discouragement, synthesise, reconstruct, improvement, new construct, *haram* (prohibited), *halal* (permissible) or *nasihah* (advise) modus operandi. [10]

In teaching invention and learning architecture and the built environment, the IIUM school of architecture established in 1996, had set its direction and output in two folds i.e.:

- To be an accredited professional programme for architecture and
- To produce graduates that will champion and advocate the green, sustainable and correcting the "balance" agenda as a *khalifah* in accordance to the *tawhidic* paradigm, for Mankind.

Tawhidic paradigm, as cited by Ismawi Zen, 'Relevance of *Tawhidic* Paradigm to Environmental Design' delivered at the Seventh Inaugural Lecture on 17th January 2002 at Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design, International Islamic University Malaysia, unite the three different concerns that are inherent in a Man, i.e. Man's relationship with the Creator, with his fellow Man and with Environment. *Tawhidic* paradigm stressed on the first relationship of Man with his Creator as this will subsequently controls the two later relationships naturally. The doctrine advocates the understanding of higher reasons for man's existence on Earth, i.e. as servants of the Creator as the true basis of environment which will eventually create a more sustainable prosperity for Mankind. The search for excellence is part of a *Tawhidic* approach so as to gain the divine pleasure of the Creator and not just purely a capitalistic endeavour. [10]

4) Design studio: Problem based learning

Architectural Design Studio courses as the core architectural courses require major planning and forethought to its content and delivery. As a cauldron of applied arts, environmental sciences and social sciences in the built environment, apart from planning its hierarchy strategy of learning scale (of size and complexity) and from one level to another, Architectural Design courses also entails managing its various stages of implementation for every semester. Each semester includes the management and preparation of the project content as "problem based" or the "case study" that should be in accordance to the level of study and indicated in the course outline; management on the process of its delivery and monitoring including briefing, studio trips, input lectures and workshops; management of setting assessment standards, conduct assessment, rationalisation of the marks and management of the resources itself -staff and students, so that content and process is integrated and inculcated in every student as the focus.

As cited in Studio Teaching Project website at http://fod.msu.edu/oir/studio-teaching concentration in studio teaching boils down to the student, the process and the final outcome. For IIUM, the student, the process is measured through their progress and final outcome as guided in Table 3 of IIUM Architecture Design Studio Assessment Guide and Table 4 on Student Studio Assessment Criteria Weightage, after many years of deliberation. The percentage and emphasis vary through levels of complexity as the design problems. The value of Islam as the universal value based on *tawhidic* paradigm including the 'common sense' values as a human being, were integrated in the many facets of the design project development from planning and design concepts, i.e.to the 'how' and 'why' the deliverables are processed. Although the students were expected to have a sense of individuality and independence to develop design ideas on their own, practice of face-to-face (1: 1) tutorial or consultation, as a concept of madrasah learning

I.e. equivalent to atelier and apprenticeship learning was implemented. IIUM's intention of producing good and ethical architect's as a *khalifah* in a person, to the wellbeing of the built environment, in mass, is still the key. Hence, to understand and deduce students' general comprehension of the project being a significant

social contribution can only be made through face-to-face meeting of the *murabbi* with the student.

5) Integration of theory courses with design-based activities

In order to maintain relevancy of the offered theory courses with that of the counterpart of studio projects, each theory course is coupled with specific level of studies for effective integration with concurrent studio project. The integration allows greater flexibility and diversity in the teaching delivery method as well as offers the student to relate their knowledge back to the industrial practice through problem-based design studio tasks.

6) Assessment mechanism

Assessment of students' work for design across the sections is based on the same criteria and marking scheme set by the Studio Coordinator on the set rubrics. Group works are presented through presentation boards, multimedia, models and written report in hardcopy as well as in a digital copy. Either a spokesman among the group present or they take turns. Group works is assessed as a group for the work and as individuals, through their assigned role, for participation. Individual work is assessed through tutorials, desk crit (critique), interim crit and final crit. Final crit involved both internal and external assessors from the industry. At some time, the client of the project takes part in the assessment for live or simulated projects. The criteria provided for assessment vary for user-client of the facility from the technical and design assessment by the academic staff. The involvement of lay-man or users of the facility is intentional. It provides students meaning to their designs that address others other than themselves in meeting the needs and philosophy of the client.

7) Design studio as a mechanism to humanize teaching-learning environment

The role of teachers in IIUM goes beyond the role of a teacher with a written term of reference as a *murabbi*. Design is core for architecture and the studio is the laboratory or madrasah of a make-believe world for would-be architects. This study had chosen studio management and studio teaching as the case study. Choice of "problem based" or "case study" projects with intangible element of social and environmental contributions based on

"*tawhid*" or remembrance on the oneness of the "Creator" as a submission, is constantly raised amidst the act of balancing in meeting the accredited requirements of the professional board. The bigger needs of the society, *Ummah*, humanity and the environment, with the expectations of the future *khalifah*'s is kept in view always.

In architectural discipline, the teachers need to self- nurtured with good conscience and responsibility towards Allah, Mankind and Environment to produce as many quality architects and architecture related *khalifahs* to enhance the built environment based on the *tawhidic* approach. Architecture pedagogy needs constant reviewing to suit the nature of the stakeholders - the students, the society, *Ummah*, humanity, the environment, within the *tawhidic* framework. Hence, implementing SAF within the current pedagogy may bring the desired impact in actualizing a humanized teaching-learning environment within the mechanism of architecture design studio and in addition the supplementary integrated theory courses.

E. SAF competency framework in relation to architecture pedagogy

The following figure shows a conceptual visualization of architecture pedagogy within the work-in-progress SAF model.
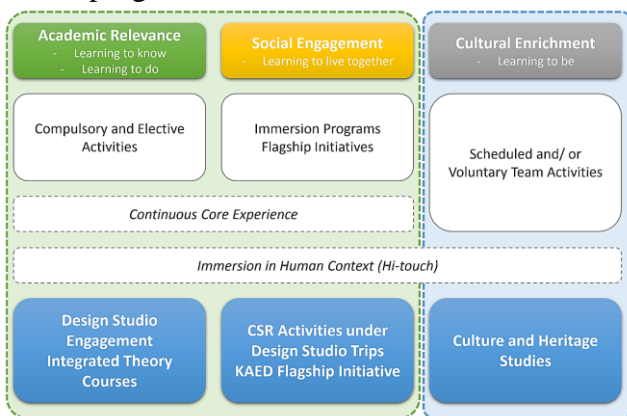

Fig. 3 Architecture pedagogy within the work-in-progress SAF model adopted from Meeting of IIUM Great Minds 2019

F. Preliminary Finding

In its essence Sejahtera Academic Framework is not entirely a new concept, rather an organized and refined version of discreet ideas for governing education. The proposed ideas are seemingly embedded in the architecture pedagogy as practiced in DoA-KAED. For example, figure 3 illustrates the components of SAF model can be inferred to that of the curriculum of architectural studies. However, the alignment of these can be done more firmly once a strong relationship can be established with the core principle of SAF with the current architecture pedagogy. In order to achieve that, the current research is proposed to inquire in-depth on to what extent the relationship can be established as well as to recommend fine tuning for realignment of pedagogical practice if needed.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This article infers the discourse of humanizing education, using the notion of Sejahtera Academic Framework (SAF) principles, especially on its applicability to architecture pedagogy. This paper has the objective to evaluate the current pedagogic practice in architecture education in relation to the core principles and the auxiliary tools of Sejahtera Academic Framework (SAF). To achieve the objective, qualitative approach of content analysis is conducted as a strategy to inquire understanding on the subject discussed. This research is significant to guide the direction of DoA's near future endeavour, to examine the curriculum thoroughly in terms of their outlines, teaching-learning delivery, assessment method and finally the relevancy of the outcomes of those courses.

The courses will be selected based on the available information as well as the cohort on which the teaching-learning delivery was conducted to capture longitudinal data over a certain period of time. The recorded data will be organized based on the core principles of SAF and analysed through content analysis.

The planned endeavour is only intended to lay the ground for SAF-architecture pedagogy integration. The expected outcome of the research will be the components shared by SAF and architecture education in the Malaysian context. Further research on this topic can be done by evaluating architectural pedagogy in its entirety that reflects the principles of SAF as a whole.

V. PRELIMINARY SUPPOSITIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the above discussion there are several implications that can be expected as the outcome of the study. As mentioned earlier, there is a visible

similarity between the core principles of SAF and the *tawhidic* principle of architecture pedagogy s adopted by DoA-KAED. As the university is going towards the scenario where adaptation to unforeseen and unpredicted world circumstances has been prioritized and IIUM as a regional centre of excellence, it is now high time to re-evaluate the pedagogic approach as taken by DoA and align it with the Sejahtera Academic Framework. In doing so, it can be expected that, DoA as a significant component of the larger initiative can mould itself to contribute in humanizing architecture education in the context of Malaysia and oversees.

VI. CONCLUSION

Change is inevitable, change is constant. It is up to the institution and its components to initiate the journey towards adapting the new according to the need of time, so it can serve as an active component of the global world instead of becoming a relic in the museum of time. From its establishment in 1996 until now, DoA-KAED has tested, adopted numerous possibilities to constantly improve its teaching-delivery method and to remain steadfast in upholding its *tawhidic* paradigm which in turn make it special among the other similar departments in other institutions. Now that IIUM is moving towards implementing the idea of Sejahtera in phases to actualize its motto of leading the way, DoA-KAED can secure its fair place in the journey by realigning its pedagogical framework according to the concept of SAF.

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