



STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY
CIRCLE AT THE INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC
UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA (IIUM) IN 2010/2011
SESSION

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the issues of students' class participation level in the Study Circle programme and factors that contribute to it. The objectives of the study are to identify the students' class participation level, the factors that are responsible for it and to find ways to increase the effectiveness of the Study Circle programme. The study on the Study Circle programme was conducted from 22nd September 2010 to 11th February 2011, in Semesters 1 and 2, 2010/2011 for a period of four and a half months. For data collection purpose, the study employed the qualitative method using participant observation approach and survey via questionnaire. Two mass lectures and three tutorial sessions of female Study Circle classes during the 2010/2011 academic session were selected for the said purpose. For the survey, ten Malay female students agreed to participate and respond to the questionnaire distributed to them. The findings of the study show that the students' class participation level was not satisfying. There were several factors for this. Interestingly, the study shows that the informants did not perceive factors such as face-saving practice, shyness and peer perception as the responsible factors that determined their class participation level in the Study Circle programme. In actual fact, the most important factor that influenced students' participation was the surrounding factors which include facilitators' attributes, feedback, teaching methods and styles, class size and class time. As for teaching styles and methods, the study found that student-centered approach was preferred in comparison with the teacher-centered approach. The student-centered approach includes the application of problem-based, inquiry-based and project-based learnings of which they strongly believed that the students' class participation would take place actively, particularly when there was a two-way communication between the facilitators and the students. Finally, this study suggests that future research on Study Circle programme needs to be conducted particularly in the Study Circle curriculum which could eventually improve and at the same time ensure active participation from the students. In addition, it is also highly recommended that a comparative study on the above issue be undertaken for the betterment of the Study Circle programme in the future.

خلاصة البحث

تناقش هذه الدراسة القضايا التي تتعلق بمستوى مشاركة الطلاب في الفصل في برنامج الحلقة الدراسية، والعوامل التي تسهم في ذلك. وتمثل أهداف هذه الدراسة في تحديد مستوى مشاركة الطلاب في الفصل، والعوامل التي تؤثر في ذلك، وتحاول الدراسة كذلك إيجاد طرق لزيادة فعالية برنامج الحلقة الدراسية. وأجريت الدراسة في برنامج الحلقة الدراسية في الفترة من 22 سبتمبر 2010م؛ إلى 11 فبراير 2011م، في الفصلين الدراسيين الأول والثاني للسنة الأكاديمية 2010م-2011م، وكانت مدة الدراسة أربعة أشهر ونصف الشهر. ووظفت الدراسة المنهج النوعي (الوصفي) في البحث لهدف جمع البيانات، مستخدمةً مدخل ملاحظة المشاركين، والمسح عن طريق الاستبيان، ولإجراء البحث تم اختيار مُحاضرتين، وثلاث دورات تدريبية للفصول النسوية التي تستخدم الحلقة الدراسية. أما بالنسبة للمسح فقد وافقت عشر طالبات ملايويات على الاستجابة لأسئلة الاستبانة التي وزعت عليهن. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن مستوى مشاركة الطلاب في الفصل غير مرضية، وأسهمت في ذلك عدة عوامل إلا أن من دواعي الانتباه أن نتائج هذه الدراسة أظهرت أن المخبرين نظروا إلى الدراسة بوصفها عوامل لتحديد مستوى مشاركتهم في الفصل في برنامج الحلقة الدراسية، ولم يؤثر في ذلك الحياء، أو الزمالة، أو دواعي حفظ الوجه. وفي الحقيقة تُعدُّ العوامل المحيطة بالطلاب هي العامل المؤثر في مشاركة الطلاب، ويشمل ذلك سمات الوسطاء، والتغذية الراجعة، وطريقة وأسلوب التدريس، وحجم الفصل الدراسي، ووقت الفصل. وفي طريقة التدريس وأسلوبه، وجدت الدراسة أن مدخل مركزية الدارس مُفضَّل على مدخل مركزية المعلم، وتشمل مركزية الدارس أو المتعلم؛ التعليم القائم على حل المشكلات، وعلى الاستفسار والتحقق، وعلى الخطط والمشاريع، وهذا النوع من التعليم لا بد أن يُشارك فيه الطلاب مشاركة فاعلة، خاصة عند وجود تواصل بين المعلم (الوسيط)، والطلاب. وأخيراً فقد اقترحت هذه الدراسة للبحوث المستقبلية في برنامج الحلقة الدراسية أن تكون في منهج الحلقة الدراسية، حتى تتطور، وتضمن مشاركة فاعلة من الطلاب، بالإضافة إلى توصية بإجراء دراسة مقارنة لمنهج الحلقة الدراسية من أجل تحسين برنامج الحلقة الدراسية في المستقبل.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Sociology and Anthropology).

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Knowledge and Human Sciences

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Faizah Binti Mohd Fakhruddin

Signature

Date

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Abstract in Arabic	iii
Approval Page.....	iv
Declaration Page	v
Copyright Page.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Statement of the Problem	7
1.2 Background of the Research	9
1.3 Research Questions	14
1.4 Research Objectives	14
1.5 Theoretical Framework	14
1.6 Research Methodology.....	17
1.7 Organization of Thesis	18
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	20
CHAPTER 3: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON CLASS PARTICIPATION	47
3.0 Introduction.....	47
3.1 Students' Class Participation Level	47
3.2 Class Participation and Its Factors	51
3.3 Teaching Styles in the Study Circle Programme	54
3.4 Conclusion	57
CHAPTER 4: ROLE OF FACILITATORS AND STUDENTS' CLASS PARTICIPATION	60
4.0 Introduction.....	60
4.1 Students' Class Participation Level	60
4.1.1 Partial Involvement	60
4.1.1.1 Volunteering in Initiating Class Discussion and Sharing Ideas	61
4.1.1.2 Responses to Questions Asked.....	71
4.1.2 Non-Involvement But With Association of Unrelated Class Activities	72
4.1.2.1 Social Opportunist.....	72
4.1.2.2 Intentional Loafer	75
4.1.2.3 Alternatively Involved Students.....	75

4.1.3 Complete Non-Involvement	76
4.2 Conclusion	77
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	79
5.0 Conclusion	79
5.1 Recommendations for Future Study	82
5.2 Policy Implication	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY	86
APPENDIX I	98

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Study circles have long been practiced by Muslims since the time of Prophet Muḥammad (*s.a.w*). In the Muslim tradition, these circles are commonly known as *usrah* or *ḥalaqah*. Ziauddin (1988) defines *usrah* as:

Literally *usrah* means a ‘family’ and the group of four or five reflects the moral and social solidarity that a family generates. But *usrah* is not a mere ‘family’ group: it is the realization of Islamic community on a very small scale (213).

Meanwhile, Yon (2010) defines *halaqah* as:

“circle” or more specifically refers to a small religious gathering in which a teacher sits surrounded by 5-10 students. In practice, the term *ḥalaqah* has the same meaning as *usrah*, “family” (2).

Normally there is someone from among the members who leads the circle. In the Muslim tradition, this leader is commonly called *naqīb* (for male) or *naqībah* (for female). According to Sidek (2005), there are two kinds of leadership in each religion-oriented study circle. First, there is a ‘man of reference’. He is a man of knowledge and a specialist of a particular field. He is the resource person who is responsible for the questions raised by the members. Second, there is a leader who acts as a chairperson. He is mainly responsible for the smooth running of the programme. His tasks are to make sure that everybody participates while he provides new information and offers ways to solve problems. Sometimes, there might be both types of leaders in one session of study circle.

Study circle was considered as one of the teaching methodologies that Prophet Muhammad (*s.a.w*) favoured most. During the early period of the spread of Islam in

Mecca, the *da'wah* (propagation of the message of Islam) was done in secret. The house of al-Arqām Ibn Abi al-Arqām became the centre for such activity (al-Sallaabee, 2005). It was located in Assafa, Mecca (al-Jamīlatī & al-Tuwānisīyyah, 1978). Al- Jamīlatī and al-Tuwānisīyyah state that at the beginning, only few Companions participated. Later on, the number grew to 38 members who had different occupations and social status.

It is believed that study circle was formally and systematically introduced by Prophet (*s.a.w*) after the Muslims' migration from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E (Ghazali, 2004). Study circle was normally held after congregational prayers. It was conducted in the mosques as well as in the houses of Prophet (*s.a.w*) and his Companions (*r.a*). The situation was recorded in many *hadīth* such as:

Abu Waqid al-Laithi (*r.a*) narrated: While Allāh's Apostle (*s.a.w*) was sitting in the mosque (with some people) three men came, two of them came in front of Allāh's Apostle (*s.a.w*) and the third one went away, and then one of them found a place in the circle and sat there while the second man sat behind the gathering, and the third one went away. When Allāh's Apostle (*s.a.w*) finished his sermon, he said: "Shall I tell you about these three persons? One of them betook himself to Allāh and so Allāh accepted him and accommodated him; the second was left shy before Allāh, so Allāh did the same for him and sheltered him in His Mercy (and did not punish him), while the third turned far from Allāh, and went away, so Allāh turned His face from him likewise." (al-Bukhārī, *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1, ed. 2006: 335-337)

According to Ghazali (2004), Prophet (*s.a.w*) and his Companions (*r.a*) sat in a circle mostly to learn religious knowledge such as '*aqīdah* (strict monotheistic faith on Oneness of God), *sharī'ah* (laws/jurisprudence), social, political and economic issues under the light of the Qur'anic guidance. M. Alawi (2002) further adds that *tafsīr* (exegesis of the Qur'an) was seriously discussed besides performing the routine of the recitation of the Qur'an and *dhikr* (remembrance of Allāh *s.w.t*).

After the Prophet (s.a.w) passed away, Muslim civilization developed, and many other disciplines were discussed inside the study circle. They include *'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (science of the Qur'an), *'Ulūm al-Hadīth* (science of the *hadīth*), *Nahū* (Arabic grammar) and *Adāb* (literature). During the time of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, the issues relating to state administration were brought up in the discussions too (al-Sibā'ī, 2002). Sciences of *Hikmah* (wisdom), *Mantiq* (logic), *Kalām* (philosophy/theology), music, astronomy and medicine were also discussed especially at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In the 1940s, *Imām* Hassan al-Banna adopted and encouraged study circle or *usrah* to be practiced among the members of the Muslim Brothers' movement. *Usrah* is considered as a method to disseminate spiritual or religious education and some skills among the followers of this movement.

The *usrah* were normally conducted in the mosque. Participants recited the *ma'thurat* (a collection of selected Qur'anic verses and supplication) at the beginning of the session. Then, some of them preached some *tadhkirah* (spiritual reminder) for the rest of the members. They were motivated by the *Imāms* (leaders) to always remain steadfast in doing deeds for the sake of Islam. This was systematically encouraged from time to time by reciting the articles of *risālah al-nabiyy al-ummiyyīn* written by their *Imāms* (Ali Abdul Halim, 1989). Each *usrah* had a head or leader, and these heads would consult *Imām* al-Banna on the curriculum and running of the *usrah*.

In Malaysia, the task of propagating *da'wah* was intensified in the early 1970s. Sidek (2005) states that the phenomenon was an implication of several factors. First, starting from the 1970s, there were heightened concerns and enthusiasm of nominal Muslims to get to know Islam better. These people were mostly professionals who

had minimum knowledge of religion. They were those who had gained non-religious education either within or outside Malaysia. *Usrah* became a platform for them to ask and exchange thoughts especially relating to religious matters.

Second, the policy on the inculcation of Islamic values launched by the Malaysian government in the early 1980s also encouraged the *usrah* activity to mushroom inside the country. The consciousness to participate was further strengthened by the government's and voluntary organizations' human development programmes. The 'Islamization of Knowledge' activities were widely spread through *usrah*. For instance, the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) introduced *usrah* to Muslims in Malaysia starting from 1972 with adults and youths as their main target group. This mostly took place in rural and urban areas and university campuses. Sidek (2005) reports that in 1990, there were more than 500 study circles all over Malaysia. Two hundred and fourteen of them were reported on Malaysian university and college campuses which were organized by the National Muslim Students Organizations of Malaysia (PKPIM).

The study circles are usually held in any places and at any time. They are normally conducted once a week. Sidek (2005) observes many routines are done by members before the *usrah* starts. They include prayers that are done congregationally, recitation of some verses from the Qur'an and meals taken together.

Regarding the topics that are discussed in the *usrah*, Sidek (2005: 20) states that "...study circles in Malaysia are under religious orientations..." However, members can choose any issues to discuss. These include religious, political, economic, educational and social issues; within and outside the country.

Sidek (2005) reports that in 1990, there were 445 study circle groups conducted on the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) campus. At this

time, the facilitators were the senior undergraduate students. The IIUM Study Circle programme has been implemented since IIUM's establishment in 1983¹. This programme was the university's required subject since it was under the Centre for Fundamental Knowledge. It was formerly called the *usrah* programme. Later on the name of the programme was changed to Study Circle programme in 2010. There is no documented data relating to the number of study circle groups in its early implementation. Students were required to attend the programme for eight semesters. The instructors were the IIUM lecturers.

It is said that in Problem-Based Learning classes for which the Study Circle programme is one, facilitative-collaborative teaching style is most preferable. Facilitators are supposedly responsible to sharpen their students' communication skills. Asking leading questions to stimulate students' critical thinking, listening to their opinions and creating a comfortable platform for their progress are encouraged to bring the best out of them (Neville, 1999).

In recent years, teaching styles are studied to conform to students' learning styles (Nicoll-Senft & Seider, 2010; Yuksel, 2008). In Nicoll-Senft and Seider's (2010: 19-27) study during the fall 2007 semester, seven lecturers of the Central Connecticut State University, U.S.A had implemented teaching styles that are pertinent to the four types of students' learning styles. The four types of learning styles recognized in this study are those identified by McCarthy (1987). They include the imaginative learners who enjoy learning from their personal experience, through dialogues and discussions with others. Second, the analytic learners who are fond of the precise details and enjoy the formulation of theories and models. Third, common sense learners who are good at applying the information they receive in a

¹ Ismail Abdullah, personal communication, January 5, 2010.

practical way. Finally, dynamic learners who are keen to learn by self-discovery. They are able to utilize the information taught to them and apply it in their own ways. The teaching styles used in this study are designed to suit the said four learning styles. For the students, classes are more enjoyable, they have better understanding of the courses' contents, are able to relate themselves with the taught subjects and apply it practically and there is improvement of students' participation and motivation.

In addition, Yuksel (2008) is of the opinion that the traditional teaching styles mainly exercised by teachers are not sufficient to prepare students to embrace the necessary thinking skills. Besides teaching students how to learn, teachers tend to spoon-feed the students. Conversely, it is better if the teachers can identify their students' diverse ability through their preferred learning styles and match them with suitable teaching styles.

Besides focusing on how students' learning styles can affect the teaching and learning process, studies on students' perception of how their instructors teach and how they prefer them to teach have also been done (Salah, Qasim, Marwan & Hosam, 2006; Zhang, 2004). Salah et al. (2006: 460-464) did a study on how students at the College of Medicine and Medical Sciences, Arabian Gulf University, Bahrain viewed their tutors' teaching styles. The study also examined how the tutors rated their teaching styles. It was found out that most of the tutors perceived themselves more as learner-centered tutors. In fact, the students thought that their tutors were more teacher-centered in their teaching styles. Meanwhile, Zhang's (2004) study on a sample of 255 five students of the University of Hong Kong show that they preferred to have a teaching style that encourages more on intricate information practice and creative thinking.

Therefore, it is imperative for this research to observe the classroom-based learning or Study Circle from the Islamic perspective. This is in accordance to the principle laid down in the Qur'an. Allāh *s.w.t* says, "...Allāh will raise up (in grades) those who believe among you and those who have knowledge and Allāh is aware of what you do" (*al-Mujādalah*: 11). Abū-Mūsa (*r.a*) narrated that the Prophet (*s.a.w*) said:

The example of guidance and knowledge with which Allāh has sent me is like abundant rain falling on the earth, some of which was fertile soil that absorbed rain water and brought forth vegetation and grass in abundance. (And) another portion of it was hard and held the rain and Allāh caused the people to benefit with [sic] it and they utilized it for drinking, making their animals drink from it and for irrigating the land for cultivation. (And) a portion of it was barren which could neither hold the water nor bring forth vegetation. The first is the example of the person who understands Allāh's religion and makes use of it which Allāh (the Exalted and Almighty) has revealed through me (the Prophet) and learns and then teaches others. The last example is that of a person who does not care for it and does not take Allāh's guidance revealed through me (he is like that barren land). (*al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1: 83)

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The prophetic tradition of conducting study circle is practiced in Malaysia since the 1970s². Since then, it is a common phenomenon of informal gatherings held among Malaysian Muslims. Study Circle programme that is conducted in IIUM aims to impart skills and knowledge to the students. In the Study Circle programme, students are given marks which are usually broken down as follows: 10% for students' *shakhṣ iyyah* (character), 10% for classroom presentations, 20% for attendance, 40% for memorization of selected Qur'anic verses, *hadīth* (Prophet's sayings) and *du'ā'* (supplication) and the remaining 20% for the final exam. The assessment however,

² The details of the development of this study circle in Malaysia will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

becomes difficult because of students' passivity in class that inadvertently affects their marks.

Bahiyah (1992: 97-98) claims that her Malay ESL (English as a Second Language) learners in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) are shy to actively participate in her class. Most of the time, the students prefer to remain silent in the classroom. Their levels of participation and initiation of class discussions are low. They also rarely volunteer to answer questions. Keeping silent, giving short answers or speaking in very low tones are the most familiar reactions facilitators might get if the students are forced to participate. Other than that, students may have difficulty in communicating their feelings and standing up for their opinions. At other times, they are afraid to speak up lest their friends will laugh at them if they commit any mistake.

Another study that describes students' problematic classroom behaviours is one by Mulryan (1992). From her observation of American fifth and sixth-grade learners during their cooperative small-groups in Mathematics, she categorizes the passive students as withdrawn, discouraged, despondent, unmotivated, bored and selfish³.

There are several possible reasons that could be attributed to low participation among Malay students in the Study Circle programme. They include Malay cultural beliefs and socialization with regard to parenting styles (Zainal, 1995; Allwood & Asmah, 2005; Keshavarz & Rozumah, 2009). As described in Zainal's (1995: 64-65) study on Malays' beliefs, they are mostly governed by traditional etiquette and morality. The sense of respecting the older generation is emphasized. For example, in terms of addressing others, the younger generations have to address the older ones with appropriate terms like big brother, aunty, uncle, grandmother, grandfather, etc.

³ The characteristics of passive learners will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

Allwood and Asmah (2005: 10-29) further state that the Malays also stress on the importance of preserving one's honour. They must always rationally think before saying or doing something. This face-saving practice is a cautious step that prevents them from harming others' reputation and to avoid any conflict.

In another study, Keshavarz and Rozumah (2009) focus on the parenting styles of the Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups in Malaysia. It is said that the collectivist society of Malaysia tends to exercise authoritarian parenting style. Irrespective of one's ethnic group, this study shows that the authoritarian parenting style has contributed to passivity. For instance, the authors state that Malaysian children are obedient, well-disciplined and are tied to their ethnic groups' cultural values. This might be the results of authoritarian childrearing practice that Baumrind (1991) describes as demanding and controlling. Children are expected to obey the family's set of standards while negotiation and speaking up are discouraged.

Having said all these, the central focus of this study is to emphasize on the Malay students' class participation level in the Study Circle programme. The class participation level could be either low or high depending on the nature as well as the teaching styles adopted in the programme. In addition, the study also explores issues surrounding the teaching styles adopted in ensuring the effectiveness of the Study Circle programme towards the students' class participation.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

IIUM Study Circle programme is comprised of two modules; Study Circle 1 and Study Circle 2. These modules are required subjects that need to be taken by all IIUM first year undergraduate students. They are conducted in two semesters. Each module comprises of 0.5 credit hours. Both are held for two hours per session or for each

week. There are ten meetings altogether that must be attended by both students and facilitators. The sessions are divided into two types of classes; lecture and tutorial classes. Lecture classes are conducted by one or two part-time chief facilitators. These chief facilitators are chosen among IIUM post-graduate students. Meanwhile, tutorial classes are handled mostly by part-time facilitators among IIUM undergraduate students.

The current programme takes place on specific time and day and at certain venues. Usually, Wednesday nights, Friday noons and Saturday mornings are chosen as the Co-Curricular Activity Centre (CCAC) days. The venues to conduct the programme are determined by the CCAC. They include tutorial and lecture rooms within selected faculties in IIUM.

Students may apply to be facilitators by filling up the CCAC job application form. However, some might be appointed by their own facilitators while they are students inside the programme. This is possible since all facilitators are asked to submit a list of potential facilitators at the end of every semester. The facilitators need to be able to read the Qur'an, know the *tajwīd* (rules of reciting the Qur'an), willing to learn from others and have the ability to speak in English (Ismail Abdullah, personal communication, January 17, 2011). Interviews are normally conducted at the beginning of every semester. The said criteria will be checked by *Ustadh* Ismail Abdullah; the Assistant Director of CCAC, Student Development Division during the interview sessions.

The number of working facilitators in each semester depends on the number of registered students for the course (one facilitator per 15 students). In Semester 1, 2010/2011, there were only 166 sections with 59 working chief facilitators and 127

facilitators⁴. The number increased in Semester 2, 2010/2011 with 60 working chief facilitators and 138 facilitators as 205 sections were offered. Each chief facilitator usually has three facilitators under his or her supervision. Every facilitator on the other hand, has mostly 14 to 15 students within one section. This means that chief facilitators normally deal with almost 45 students at a time, in lecture classes. Tutorial classes take place in Week 1, 2, 4, 6 and 8 of any given semester. Lecture classes on the other hand, take place in Week 3, 5, 7, 9 and 10. In other words, every chief facilitator and facilitator handles five sessions for each semester.

Both modules comprise of the same marking scheme in evaluating the students' works. The 100% includes 20% of students' attendance, 20% of final examination and 60% of continuous assessment. The 60% of continuous assessment comprises of an evaluation of students' *shakhsiyyah* or character (10%), their presentation in class (10%) and their memorization of selected Qur'anic verses, *hadīth* (Prophet's sayings) and *du'ā'* (supplication) (40%).

Study Circle 1 focuses on mission awareness while Study Circle 2 provides students with a better understanding of the concept of *istiqāmah* (steadfastness) in life. The Study Circle Guidebook provides some suggested topics to be discussed every week in order to achieve the course's objectives. However, the facilitators are free to choose any teaching methods, discussion topics and activities depending on the needs of their students. For example, debates, public speaking, group discussions, video-viewing and outing activities are highly encouraged to make the programme interesting and entertaining for students.

Study Circle 1 Guidebook strongly suggests having a group binding activity in order to make students feel comfortable and allow them to know each other in the first

⁴ *Tarbiyyah wa al-Irsyād* Unit, Co-Curricular Activity Centre of IIUM.

week of the programme. Other than that, a slight briefing about the Study Circle system needs to be given to the new students since they are not yet familiar with it. In addition, brief highlights on the Malaysian society and the Muslim population are recommended. Sources and classification of knowledge are then to be discussed in Week 2. In Week 3, discussion on the same topic is expanded further into the concept of knowledge in Islam. It includes the issues of *adab* (manners) and *akhlāq* (etiquette) in acquiring knowledge. Week 4 focuses on the means of nourishing and purifying the *fiṭrah* (natural disposition) and inner self. Next, Week 5 highlights various types of challenges faced by Muslims in this new millennium. This helps students to realize them and to be better prepared for these challenges. Week 6 then underlines the danger of deviationist teachings. This may indirectly supply the students with the means of doing *da'wah* (propagating of the message of Islam) to the deviated sects within Muslim communities as well as adherents of other religions. During Week 7, discussions are on the types of *kufir* (disbelief), *shirk* (idolatry/partnership/association) and *nifāq* (hypocrisy) as forms of threats to Muslims' faith. The discussions are further extended to other social problems that prevail in the Muslim *ummah* (society) including temptation and corruption in Week 8. Next, the concept of *al-falāh* (success) and *al-khusrān* (failure) in this world and the Hereafter are stressed in Week 9. Finally, *muhāsabah* (self-evaluation) and mass gathering are held in the final week of the programme.

Study Circle 2 Guidebook recommends a discussion on the need for *istiqāmah* in life during the first week of Study Circle 2's meeting. The means of acquiring this quality are elucidated by providing examples of practices done by Prophet Muḥammad (*s.a.w*) and his Companions (*r.a*). The discussion is then expanded in Week 2 by contemplating on the role of education and *da'wah* in developing the sense

of *istiqāmah* in every individual. Prophet Muhammad (*s.a.w*) who possessed good qualities as a *dā'ī* (preacher) and *murabbi* (teacher) is seen as the most ideal model to be emulated. Next, the importance of creative and critical thinking among contemporary Muslims is stressed in Week 3. This is significant to protect future generations from the onslaught of negative ideas supplied by the modern world. The continuation of these issues is encouraged when Week 4 is reserved for discussion on ethics of disagreement in Islam. This should provide students with the ability to effectively utilize their critical and creative mind to appropriately agree or disagree with others. Week 5 focuses on the issues of love and dating among Muslims. Since it is a controversial issue that may lead to social problems, it should be highlighted effectively in the session. Then, the importance of good planning in reviving the Islamic civilization is stressed by pondering upon Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's Vision 2020 and Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's Islam Hadhari in Week 6. The significance of *istiqāmah* in preserving the natural environment is discussed in Week 7. After that, the roles of intellectuals, universities and Islamic organizations are addressed for the better future of the *ummah* in Week 8. Finally, the practical aspects of *janāzah* management (shrouding of the dead body) takes place in Week 9 before *muḥāsabah* is held in Week 10.

Sidek's (2005) study on the Study Circle in IIUM describes its patterns of participation, leadership, communication and content. He reports that active participation from almost every student was observed during class discussion. This is because they were told to be prepared for class. In addition, they knew that participation was vital. They were punctual and were very interested to learn. However, the sessions were quite formal. The facilitator looked serious and a bit controlling. The relationship between him and the students was rigid. No jokes were

made to ease the taut situation. As a result, the discussions became quite lifeless because they were tied up with the provided literature. This situation might distort the university's mission and vision in preparing students to face current challenges. According to Sidek (2003), five basic skills of thinking, communication, leadership and followership, self and organizational management and thought and strategic implementation are highly imperative to be stressed inside the IIUM Study Circle.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. What are the classroom behaviours according to students' class participation level that reduces Study Circle's efficiency?
- ii. How do surrounding factors contribute to inefficient classroom interaction styles?
- iii. What is the relationship between teaching style and Study Circle's effectiveness?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- i. To identify the level of student participation in Study Circle classes.
- ii. To find out possible factors that are responsible for students' different class participation levels.
- iii. To find ways to increase the effectiveness of the Study Circle programme.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The symbolic interactionist approach is used in this research as this study looks at patterns of students' behaviour within the classroom in order to grasp the meaning or relevance behind their actions. The inconsistencies of their behaviour are also studied.