

***Wasatiyyah* as An Instrument for Student Development at the Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA)¹**

Nurhafizatulhikmah Seribini²

Abstract: Holistic development, alongside knowledge acquisition, is a key element in the mission statement of many higher education institutions. In fulfilment of this mission, universities play a significant role in creating and sustaining an environment that is rich with developmental opportunities to nurture balanced intellectual, religious, moral, social and physical growth of the students. This goal of comprehensive human development aligns with the ideals of *Wasatiyyah* and as such, the student development programmes in higher education institutions- especially of Islamic background- can be examined in light of the concept of *Wasatiyyah*. This article examines the initiatives that have been undertaken in an Islamic higher education institution, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA) and evaluates the application of *Wasatiyyah* in the goals and approach to student development. Next, it reflects on the challenges that UNISSA encounters in the process and in comparison, to other higher educational institutions in the country. Finally, it explores opportunities for improvement

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² Deputy Dean of Students, Student Affairs Section, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA), Brunei Darussalam. Email: fiza.seribini@unissa.edu.bn

and recommendations for UNISSA to further achieve its mission of producing valuable, contributing individuals who can be of service to the community and the nation.

Keywords: *Wasatiyyah*, Student Development, educational institution, Brunei Darussalam

Introduction

National level developments related to *Wasatiyyah* in Southeast Asia, such as the establishment of *Wasatiyyah* Institute, Malaysia and *Wasatiyyah* Institute for Peace and Development, Thailand in 2012 and 2014 respectively, as well as the announcement of National *Wasatiyyah* Policy in Malaysia in 2016, ensure that *Wasatiyyah* occupies a significant space in regional consciousness. Globally and regionally, the concept is often discussed in the contexts of religious extremism as well as harmonious inter-faith/culture relations. In the past five years however, the scholarship on the applications of *Wasatiyyah* in other aspects of a contemporary Muslim society is steadily thriving. For instance, Omer (2015) looks at the manifestation of *Wasatiyyah* in Islamic built environment through the maintenance of balance between form and function and the avoidance of extravagance. In the context of civil service governance, *Wasatiyyah* is examined in the contexts of delivering a comprehensive performance appraisal that is fair and just (Abdul Ghani Azmi et. al, 2015). Similarly, Syed Ismail et al. (2017) assert that *Wasatiyyah* values are already in place in the Malaysian civil service and as such, propose for their enhancement in the aspects of service delivery. Meanwhile, in the context of

economy, Ismail, Sarif & Azan (2017) look at how entrepreneurship ventures that pursue social benefits in addition to making profits are manifesting the values of *Wasatiyyah* as they strive to tackle the issue of poverty and wealth distribution and maintain national unity. In the context of *muamalah* or social relations, Khadijah et.al (2017) observe the important role that *Wasatiyyah* values such as modesty and tolerance play in influencing the social interactions between new Muslim converts with other Muslims and non-Muslims.

Another aspect of a contemporary society that is important to examine in relation to *Wasatiyyah* is that of education. Higher education institutions, particularly Islamic institutions, shoulder an important role in educating the Ummah to achieve “comprehensive excellence – materially, spiritually, morally, intellectually, scientifically, professionally, culturally” (Hassan, 2013). In the university context, he specifically calls for universities to examine the ideals and realities of *Wasatiyyah* in the domain of student development. Student development encompasses “the ways in which a student grows, progresses or increases his or her developmental capabilities” (Rodgers, 1990, cited in Patton, Renn, Guido & Quayle, 2016). As such, this article seeks to contribute towards this discussion of integrating *Wasatiyyah* in higher education, particularly set in the background of an Islamic university in Brunei, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA). The first part of this article briefly relates the concept of *Wasatiyyah* and the values associated with it. Next, descriptive and analytical methods are utilized to identify and analyse the values of *Wasatiyyah* that are

embedded in the initiatives implemented under the student development agenda of UNISSA in the areas of curriculum, co-curriculum and socio-cultural setting. It reflects on the challenges that UNISSA encounters and finally explores possible solutions and recommendations for UNISSA to further achieve its mission of producing valuable, contributing members of society.

The Concept and Values of *Wasatiyyah*

Linguistically, *Wasatiyyah* is a derivation and elaboration from the root *wasat* which appear five times in different forms in the Qur'an (Quranic Arabic Corpus, <http://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=wsT>). Being a concept derived from divine revelations, it is important to note that contemporary scholars have been cautious in grounding their attempts to define the terminology on the Qur'an and prophetic traditions as well as the interpretation of established Islamic scholars. Thus, the existing body of literature on *Wasatiyyah* feature no shortage of epistemological and etymological discussion of the concept and terminology of *Wasatiyyah* (Kamali, 2008; Ibrahim et.al, 2013; Hassan, 2013; Hanapi, 2014; Mujani, Razali & Zakaria, 2015). The first instance in which the word *wasat* is featured, verse 143 in Al-Baqarah, Muslims are collectively described as *ummatah wasatan* or a "just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you" (Al-Baqarah: 143). This verse is a cornerstone of the *Wasatiyyah* concept, placing *ummatah wasatan* as an ideal or a goal to strive for, to be a community or a nation that practise the values of justice, excellence and balance, and thus qualified to serve

as “witnesses over the people”. Fulfilling these three qualities ensure Muslims uphold -in the best way possible- their divinely mandated obligation of enjoining what is good and right and prohibiting all that is bad and wrong. As such, Muslims become conscientious agents spreading and practising Islam as *Rahmatan lil alamin* (a mercy for all creations).

At the same time, *Wasatiyyah* is synonymous with ‘moderation’ because recent political discourse tends to highlight moderation as an antidote for religious extremism. Ibrahim et. al (2013) and Hassan (2013) however caution against taking moderation as the only defining dimension of *Wasatiyyah*, citing established religious scholars in placing more emphasis on the qualities of justice, excellence and balance. Moderation does not mean trivialization and laxity, but “equitable balance between extremes” and a realistic balance between extravagance and asceticism (Asad, 1980 in Ahmad & Amir, 2017). In Brunei Darussalam, the State Mufti of Brunei Darussalam in his keynote address during the 2015 Knowledge Convention on *Wasatiyyah* concurs, affirming the “characteristics of *Wasatiyyah* as included within the meanings of the highest, best, noblest, uppermost, fairest, greatest and most important.” It is not giving in, permissive and unregulated at the price of undermining *aqidah*. He emphasised the moderation enjoined in Islam is in terms of consumption, be it food and drinks, or economic consumption and balance in religious practices.

Essentially, as an approach, *Wasatiyyah* is a synthesis of positive values of justice, excellence, moderation, fairness,

goodness, tolerance, cooperation, optimum and balance in all aspects of human life. In other words, practising *Wasatiyyah* means comprehensive internalization and implementation of such values, not only in religion, but all domains of contemporary life such as social relations, economic, personal development and the pursuit of knowledge.

***Wasatiyyah* in Education and Student Development**

Moving from the political aspect of the discourse on *Wasatiyyah*, there is a need to shift the focus to the development of our youths and students. Youth is the prime age in the life of a person, when one's health, vitality, spirit and passion are at their optimal levels. Opinions, habits and beliefs are formed during this impressionable and formative years, and it is important for the time to be spent in personal development, pursuing knowledge and beneficial matters. For many, this period of youth coincides with their university or higher education years, and one essential aspect of the university experience is that of personal development.

Universities play a prominent role in developing and shaping the students' personal character, behaviour, ethics, personality, skills and worldviews to be more holistic. The sophistication of the knowledge gained during their university years, as well as the exposure students gain in this period may well be transformative in fostering their values, beliefs and ethics. The following observation by Quinlan (2011) describe the personal growth that higher education students display:

“greater cultural, aesthetic and intellectual sophistication; greater openness and ‘other-person’ orientation; greater humanitarian and altruistic values; greater likelihood of civic involvement and more positive attitudes toward racial equality and tolerance; greater understanding of other cultures and more egalitarian sex-roles. Students also make significant gains during the university years in their level of principled moral reasoning.”
(pg.3)

For religion-affiliated institutions or in contexts where religion is institutionalised in the national policy, religious values will play a significant part in realising the notion of ‘holistic’. This transformative goal through integrating religious values in education takes on an increased sense of urgency and importance as we are currently undergoing an “acute civilisational crisis” (Hassan, 2015). Outside of school, our students are exposed to hedonistic lifestyles, religious liberalism and fanaticism, social ills, drug abuse, bullying, vandalism and other crimes. Higher education is not impervious to these worrying trends. As universities chase global rankings, economic value, marketability and employability, universities are in danger of “excellence without a soul” (Lewis, 2006) with changing university priorities affecting the educational experience of university students (Fadzly, 2010; Quinlan, 2011). Universities thus have to strategically create and sustain a rich ethos that

provides students with numerous opportunities for growth. Hassan (2015) highlights that *Wasatiyyah* can be the foundation of reconstructing Islamic civilization in the Southeast Asian region, and higher education institutions- especially Islamic institutions- should play a more prominent role in actualizing the values of *Wasatiyyah*, especially in field of thinking and culture, and the field of “education and character development” (al-Qaradawi, 2010; cited in Hassan, 2015). Abdullah Sahin (2013) asserts that an important feature of Islamic education is that it should “facilitate growth by guiding and attending to the needs of the learner in the hope of bringing about a balanced and faithful personality” (p.183). Hanapi (2013) echoes similar focus, calling for committed effort towards imbuing Islamic values in the students’ moral character through a balanced curriculum, spiritual and physical, intellectual and moral, academic performance and love for the knowledge.

Hassan (2015) acknowledges that the schools, colleges and universities around Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam are already moving towards this - with missions and visions of producing “Ulul Albab Generation”, “Islamic Professionals”, “Intellectual Ulama”, “Islam as a *Syumul* Lifestyle” – which all concur with the concept and mission of *Wasatiyyah* of forming a generation that embodies the *Wasatiyyah* virtues of being just, virtuous, excellent and balanced. On a macro level, this movement towards *Wasatiyyah* can also be seen in socialization moves made by *Wasatiyyah* Institute Malaysia, Putrajaya whereby it held seminars in universities around Malaysia, specifically seeking to engage with university students, in addition to

nationwide distribution of '*Wasatiyyah* Kit', information packs distributed to disseminate information on *Wasatiyyah*. Similarly, in Indonesia, the national decree on strengthening Character Education in the country can be said to be a move towards integrating *Wasatiyyah* values, although it was not specifically branded as "*Wasatiyyah*" as is the case in Malaysia.

***Wasatiyyah* Values in Student Development in UNISSA**

It is in light of the development of *Wasatiyyah* in other universities in the region, as well as the understanding of *Wasatiyyah* in Brunei that we begin to examine *Wasatiyyah* values in Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA). Established in 1997, UNISSA is the first Islamic university in Brunei, and it has its target set as a world-class Islamic university which can produce pious, purposeful and benevolent students who contribute to the development of the community and the country. The current student population of 1096 students constitutes five faculties and one centre, namely Faculty of Usuluddin (Islamic Theology), Faculty of Shari'ah and Law, Faculty of Arabic Language & Translation, Faculty of Economics and Islamic Finance, Faculty of Islamic Development Management and Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Languages. The education paradigm is centred on Islamic studies and sciences, through 16 undergraduate and 21 postgraduate academic programmes.

The student development agenda in UNISSA is maintained by the university's Academic Planning and Monitoring Committee and the Student Welfare and Development

Committee. The former committee comprises of faculty deans and centre directors and the latter consists of representatives from each faculty, the Student Affairs Section, and the Co-curriculum Section. Both committees carry out the University's commitment to the advancement of students' intellectual and personal development in accordance to the vision and mission of the University. Now, although *Wasatiyyah* is not officially stated in the mission and vision of UNISSA, the values are manifested through initiatives and practices which have profound impact on student university experiences. For the purpose of this article, the following sections discern the integration of *Wasatiyyah* values as observed in the curriculum, co-curriculum and socio-cultural environment.

***Wasatiyyah* in the Curriculum**

Hassan (2015) posits that Islamic ASEAN universities are torch bearers towards the reconstruction of an excellent Islamic civilization. To occupy the elevated role of 'a witness' as espoused by the Qur'an (2:143), universities should produce individuals who "strive for comprehensive excellence in religious and worldly sciences, in the spirit of absolute and uncompromising monotheism (tawhīd), fulfilling the divine trust (amānah), performance of comprehensive worship of Allah ('Ibādah), vicegerency (khilāfah) and desiring to spread the mercy of Allah (SWT) to all the worlds (rahmatan li al-'ālamān)" (p.16). As such, alongside niche programs of Islamic studies, UNISSA offers integrated academic programmes in the fields of economics and finance, Syariah and law, and Islamic management studies. Students also have the option to be engaged in

interdisciplinary learning by taking up minor programmes in areas different than their core programme, such as Contemporary Da'wah, Syariah Law, Translation Studies, Islamic Economy, Islamic Management, Information and Communication Technology and Halal Science. While minor programmes are subject to academic eligibility, all students are required to complete a number of university-required courses throughout their duration of study as graduation requirement, which amount to These courses are recitation and memorization of Al-Qur'an; Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB, the national philosophy of Brunei); Islamic Virtues (*Akhlaq Islamiyyah*); Islamic History and Civilization; English Language; Arabic Language; Information and Communication Technology; Entrepreneurship and Industrial Training. For instance, Bachelor of Islamic Finance is an English-medium bachelor degree programme offered by the Faculty of Islamic Finance and Economics in UNISSA. Out of 132 credit hours that the students have to fulfil, 22 courses comprising 45 credit hours comprised on the aforementioned university-required courses.

Having the option to do a minor programme that complements their core programme, as well as the depth and breadth of university-required subjects are illustrative of the strategic focus areas of student development in UNISSA. They demonstrate- among others- an emphasis on the integration of religious values and ethics; economic empowerment based on Islamic values; propagation of Islam and strengthening of social and humanistic values-

objectives which are building towards the achievement of comprehensive *Wasatiyyah*.

UNISSA also utilizes an academic approach to student development. The university engages students in academic activities such as seminars and forums on issues which are important for the Ummah, such as religious extremism and humanitarian crisis. These events serve as a safe platform for the students to be exposed to and engaged in a dialogue with knowledgeable authorities on the issue. In 2017 alone, UNISSA conducted numerous seminars on women's issues, halal products and services, prophetic medicine, extremism, Islamic economics and finance, as well as volunteerism and humanitarian issues.

Another demonstration of the approach of *Wasatiyyah* in the curriculum is the acknowledgment of multiple schools of thought. UNISSA is home for the Mazhab Shafi'i Research Centre which is a centre of excellence for the reference and research of the Shafi'i school of thought. Nevertheless, courses such as Islamic Jurisprudence study and examine evidence, arguments and rulings put forward by other mazhabs. Thus, while Brunei officially follow the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence, analysing other mazhabs acknowledges the validity of the other three interpretations and their differences, demonstrating the *Wasatiyyah* value of fairness.

UNISSA students may also acquire further appreciation and lessons on tolerance, co-existence and diversities through the opportunities afforded by the Study Abroad Programme and

Industrial Training module. The first provides students with the opportunities to broaden their horizons by studying in a setting which may differ from their own in terms of cultures, beliefs, education system and values. The latter, although set locally, provides students with practical work experiences, gaining valuable insights into the aspirations and needs of the organisations. Both experiences entail living and working with others from diverse backgrounds and values, and as such, help students internalize the value of comprehensive *Wasatiyyah* through managing “coexistence (*al-ta'ayush*) with other people, and practicing tolerance (*al-tasāmuh*) with those who differ...faith in the necessity of religious plurality and cultural diversities, knowing one another across ethnic barriers, and mutual tolerance among peoples.” (p.17, in Hassan, 2015)

***Wasatiyyah* in Co-Curriculum**

In addition to formal curriculum, student developmental goals are also achieved through co-curriculum activities which balance out the pursuit of academic excellence with non-academic activities, in order to produce students who are balanced intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and physically. In UNISSA, all Year 1 and Year 2 students are required to take assessed co-curriculum electives which comprise of workshops on public speaking, Islamic leadership, photography, *tarannum* (qur'an recitation) and Islamic arts (calligraphy, hadrah, *tausyeh* and *dikir*). Furthermore, students learn about their communal obligations (Fard al-Kifayah) through Islamic funeral management course and hone their worship practices and recitals. A complement to this is the learning of established

Islamic texts or books led by a qualified teacher. This traditional Islamic learning and teaching methodology is called *talaqqi* - study circles which promote in-depth study. Engaging in study outside of class hours impart the importance of pursuing knowledge beyond their programmes of study.

Out-of-class learning is also pursued through the experiential learning of community service and engagement. UNISSA seeks to cultivate a sense of responsibility amongst the students- not only towards themselves, but also towards fulfilling their civic responsibilities, assisting them in their transition into the wider society. UNISSA is currently the only university in Brunei Darussalam to mandate 100 hours of community service as a prerequisite for graduation. Service can be dispensed through individual endeavours such as volunteering time and services at community events or relief efforts. Intensive engagement through development and implementation of own community service projects is even more encouraged. This allows students the opportunities to develop skills and experiences in leadership and project management, while achieving the objective of contributing and fostering close ties with the community. Students are expected to develop autonomy, responsibility and accountability, values consistent with excellent character development.

Comprehensive excellence is also pursued through health and wellness. Students participate actively in sports clubs and activities run independently by the students. The annual university sporting event runs every March where students

and staff alike participate in all manners of sports, building good relationship between them, practising ethical sportsmanship and fairness in competing, whilst at the same time observing modesty and other Islamic principles. Physical activities are seen as tools in service of a higher purpose of developing sound physical and mental wellness to perform *ibadah* or worship.

Another important aspect of personal development in UNISSA is participating in campus event. While students spend most of the week with fellow students in their own programme of study, Wednesday and Saturday afternoons are for university-wide activities or events- opportunities to establish good social norms or *ukhuwwah islamiyyah* with other UNISSA students. This helps establish a sense of community which can help nurture social, and spiritual growth. Moreover, the goal of *tawazun* or balanced is pursued here through the organisation of a variety of activities that cater to the spiritual nourishment such as motivational and religious talks, workshops or classes, aesthetic appreciation of Islamic arts, acquisition of life skills and intellectual exposure to important issues of the ummah.

Along the line of engagement in university life is participation in leadership development activities such as Student Council and student organizations and clubs. These are medium through which students develop and enhance their leadership quality by internalizing the values of justice, fairness, tolerance and responsibility as they learn to manage and lead their team members, in acknowledgment and

fulfilment of their role as 'khalifah' who are entrusted with safeguarding the *amanah* and representing the collective interest of the student population.

***Wasatiyyah* in Socio-Cultural Environment**

As an Islamic university, Islamic values form the core of the ethos or environment in UNISSA and dictates the worldview and ethical and moral values observed by the institution. These permeate all aspects of collegial life in UNISSA, and measures are taken to ensure syariah values are upheld in the university. For example, observance of Islamic dress code is established in the university's code of conduct, as well as advocating the values of good manners (*adaab*), respect and tolerance in behaviour and use of language, especially considering the presence of international students and lecturers in the university. Contributing and generosity are nurtured through regular charity drives and programs to benefit those in need. *Adaab* or respect and appropriate Islamic ethics are also to be observed in interactions between genders, between lecturers and students, between the elder and the young. Besides integrating activities such as Quran recitation and mass prayers into the university lifestyle, the university strives to embed Islamic values in daily practices, and thus advocating Islamic lifestyle. Students are reminded of their contribution to *dakwah* through the display of exemplary moral character and discipline as students of an Islamic university and a Muslim in general. Events, activities and lesson commence with prayers and recitation of the *Fatihah*, whilst class hours are built around prayer times. At the student-run tuckshop on campus, students observe business ethics. Meanwhile, continuous efforts are made

towards maintaining decent physical campus environment that is clean, safe, peaceful and comfortable. Prayers spaces and hall are made available on campus with students taking turns to lead mass prayers or call for prayers. When conducting cleaning campaigns, the values of cleanliness and orderliness are underlined as part of the pursuit of excellence.

Another manifest *Wasatiyyah* value in the social-cultural aspect of student development can be seen in the composition of the student population. Students in UNISSA are streamed from Arabic schools that offer a combination of Islamic and General education and Sixth Form Centres offering General education. Both streams can access Islamic education in UNISSA delivered through the medium of Arabic and English language. Students from general education background have equal access and opportunity to study Arabic-medium programmes by way of the Arabic language training and foundational modules provided by the university prior to joining the Arabic-medium. The values of justice and fairness can be seen here from the access to Islamic education in UNISSA, where Arabic-medium and Islamic education is not an exclusive domain of Arabic-schools students. Furthermore, this provide the opportunity for students from different streams to engage in *ta'aruf*, as they acknowledge differences and commonalities in approaches and norms and build relationship and peaceful co-existence.

Challenges and Opportunities

In an Islamic university environment, students have the unique opportunity to explore how their religious values influence learning and personal development. As we have seen, besides the content and approach embedded in the curriculum, students' personal development is enhanced through co-curricular endeavours, community service, campus events and also the socio-cultural environment. Essentially, the planning and implementing of student development agenda in UNISSA are developed and delivered within the framework of *Wasatiyyah* values, aspiring to produce a *syumul* (holistic), balanced and contributing member of the Ummah, fit to be a witness for others.

The aspiration, however, is not without challenges, even more so in the 21st century where universities have to train students to deal with intellectual, philosophical and cultural challenges unseen before. Do universities- Islamic or not- provide enough support for student development, especially in being a global citizen, and a member of the ummah? How far does UNISSA fulfil the transformative or *tarbiyah* goal of education? Is Islam seen as a body of knowledge, or an all-encompassing, comprehensive lifestyle?

Although UNISSA has made considerable strides in imbuing the values of *Wasatiyyah* in the student development agenda in the university, more can be done to help nurture a Muslim generation with a strong foundation of faith that underlines their intellectual actions and thought; upholds justice, fairness and excellence; and live with integrity and wisdom

(Hassan, 2015). Breaches of student ethics code, violations of academic regulations, underperformance and excessive lifestyles point to a gap between objectives and actual achievement. Al Alwani (2006, in Syah, 2016) maintains that the way forward is to persist in the restoring and nourishing of the connection between the Muslim minds and the Quran and the Sunnah. At the same time, due attention needs to be paid to maintaining balance between the responsibilities of this world and other-worldly goals. Students need to integrate the two aspects in order to internalize the notion of comprehensive excellence and comprehensive worship and not see them as mutually exclusive. As underlined in the Qur'an. "But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah has done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters" (Al-Qasas: 77).

As an institution, UNISSA needs to constantly monitor and evaluate the planning and implementation of its policies, programs and practices to ensure optimum achievement of objectives. The integration of *Wasatiyyah* has to be strategic and purposeful and be seen as a collective responsibility of everyone in the system, not just the university's lecturers. Administrators and service staff should demonstrate exemplary standards of personal conduct and professional responsibility as an example and a model for students' behaviour. In classes and campus activities, improvements can be made in terms of explicitly highlighting the values of excellence, moderation, fairness and others and linking to

students' experiences and lives. A step towards this has been made by UNISSA by implementing clients charter that focuses on workplace ethics and morals. *Ukhuwwah* or social relationship between staff, lecturers and students are forged and maintained through mass religious events and celebrations and social events. As a 'small' university, UNISSA is well positioned to take advantage of its size to optimize good relations in order to inculcate a sense of unity and belonging.

It is also opportune for more emphasis to be placed on fostering the service worldview for the students and the university community in general. Involving staff in the students' community service endeavours not only strengthen the relationship between members of the university, but also contribute towards creating a supportive environment for the students to continuously attune their worldview towards a purposeful life by serving others selflessly. Strategic and meaningful community service linked to programmes of study may also inspire students in observing the link between their academic pursuits and their contribution to society, and how they can achieve purpose and commit to service, in acknowledgment of the ways in which their education can be used to benefit others. Additionally, it is also perhaps high time for environmental stewardship to play a bigger role as students internalize that their responsibility as *khalifah* extends to the protection and maintenance of their surrounding environment as well.

Finally, in revitalising Islamic civilization, Al Qaradawi (2010, in Hassan, 2015) advocates educational efforts in the

field of thinking and culture (*maydan al-fikr wa al-thaqāfah*). In this regard, evaluation, perception and interpretation of “everything other than incontestable intellectual and religious matters” have to be realistic, neutral, objective and rational, based on Islamic faith, inquiry and reason. The teaching and practice of critical engagement, reflection and constructive dialogue and reflection allow for careful reconsideration and strategizing, and thus prepare our children for unprecedented current and future challenges and help inform their decisions in life.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article first contextualizes the pursuit of excellent student agenda in the divinely espoused mission of being Muslims who are capable of bearing the status and title of Witnesses over Mankind’ (*shuhadā’ ‘ala al-nās*). Student educational experience in curriculum, co-curriculum and socio-political factors are analysed for the *Wasatiyyah* qualities of justice, moderation and excellence. Although the values can be observed in UNISSA, in reality, the planned objectives may not be fulfilled, as evidenced by discipline cases and soulless engagement in university. This is of course a challenge that is not unique to UNISSA alone, as other universities can well testify to the scale of such problems in their institutions.

As such, while UNISSA is making commendable strides with current effort and initiatives in actualizing and maintaining the values of *Wasatiyyah*, formidable challenges lie ahead of UNISSA as it continues to grow, especially in the face of globalization, modernization and

development. Addressing the challenges facing Islamic education will require support and actions from many parties. It is a continuous cycle of check and balance, of reflecting and refining current practices, prioritising objectives and the setting of exemplary behaviour. It will require the support and action of the university, other staff and even members of the public, all in the concentrated effort of producing excellent and balanced graduates. UNISSA could also benefit from engaging with universities that are experienced in emphasising students' personal development agenda, in order to learn from their experiences and best practices- a comparison which is in fact an organic and expected extension to the descriptive approach of this article. Other recommendations put forward include the inculcating the service worldview in students and strategizing community service. Ultimately, student development is much more purposeful and meaningful when pursued from the Islamic, holistic perspective to further achieve its mission of producing valuable, contributing individuals who can be of service to the community and the nation, and can achieve the standards of witnesses over mankind.

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