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# Students understanding of comprehensive excellent: preliminary studies in international islamic university of Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

This study was to investigate perceptions of selected International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) students' regarding the definition and manifestation of Comprehensive Excellence in the university's vision and mission statement of Integration, Internationalization, Islamization, and Comprehensive Excellence (Triple ICE) – irrespective of gender, nationality or academic achievement. Individual interview sessions lasting between 45 minutes to 55 minutes were conducted on selected IIUM students at separate venues and times. Each dimension was transcribed from the interview questions and decoded into a template. Main ideas were extracted from the template to answer the research questions within the purpose of the study. Two selected co-raters were identified to evaluate the main ideas of the researcher's template in order to assure its reliability and validity. A percentage range of 96% to 100% showed that the items were highly reliable and valid. The results showed that Comprehensive Excellence was understood by a selected group of students only, thus more students need to be exposed to the conception of Comprehensive Excellence and other components of Triple ICE of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). This study may aid IIUM to compete and excel with other universities – locally and/or internationally as well as to prepare employable and marketable graduates.

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### Introduction

Comprehensive Excellence as embodied in the mission of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) when it was established in 1983 and aims to regain the Muslim *ummah* global leadership in the quest, acquisition and application of knowledge and skills to its students.

The mission of IIUM has been simplified and given an acronym of 'III CE' or "Triple ICE" during the initial establishment of the University. Triple ICE stands for Integration, Internationalization, Islamization and Comprehensive Excellence. Hence, the university's vision, mission and philosophy clearly define its objective and ultimate achievements.

This study intends to investigate the manifestation of the university's mission towards Comprehensive Excellence among students across the board irrespective of Kulliyah, that is, both the undergraduates as well as the post graduates in the main IIUM campus. Some aspects of the facilities and campus environment were considered in order to understand student's acceptance towards subject matter.

#### Statement of the Problem

In this study, we are interested to know how well IIUM has achieved its Comprehensive Educational Excellence mission and vision. Therefore, the researchers intend to investigate the perceptions of both the undergraduates and the postgraduates on the level of their perceptions and understanding towards Comprehensive (Educational) Excellence.

The study has two crucial concerns of understanding and identifying IIUM students' definition of Comprehensive Excellence in terms of meaning, barriers to achieve, the

supporting environment, ways to overcome these barriers, as well as the suggestions/recommendations from them during their duration of study at the university. The entailing part to the main purpose is to identify whether it meets the students' perception needs or not.

#### Research Questions

**The following are the research questions that must be answered in order to fulfill the purpose of this study:**

1. Definition and understanding of Comprehensive Excellence (CE) among selected IIUM students.
2. What are the barriers towards CE attainment?
3. What kind of supporting environment in the achievement of CE?
4. How do they overcome these obstacles?
5. What are their suggestions/recommendations?

#### Conceptual Framework

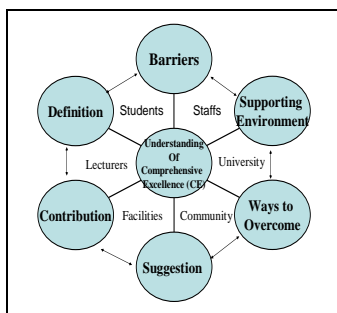
This study was done with university students' perceptions towards influencing factors on academic-related issues that crossed different populations and geographic regions. The results revealed that there were multiple domains in students' perceptions that are related to academic issues and educational quality (Bos and Tarnai, 1999; Douglas, 1998; Frank, 2003; Gravani, 2006; House and Levy-Milne, 2006; Kaya and Weber, 2003; Leite et al., 2006; Mackey, 2002; Nesbitt and Burton, 2006; O'Connell and Dymont, 2006; Richardson, 2006; Trotter, 2006; Weber and Russ, 1997). By basing on *the ecological approach*, the individual factor, the family factor, the peers, the university context, the community and the social policy characteristics are all associated with academic-related issue.

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This study hypothesized that students are influenced by the university system, namely: the students, the staffs, the lecturers, the facilities, the university and the community. These factors have significant contribution to students on their perceptions and evaluations towards certain educational-related issues. Hence, the conceptual framework for this study (Figure 1) was drawn up in order to ease the process of identifying and investigating the understanding among the selected IIUM students with regards to comprehensive (educational) excellence during their duration of study by looking at: (1) *Definition of CE*, (2) *Barriers to CE*, (3) *Supporting environment*, (4) *Ways to overcome the difficulties*, (5) *Suggestions towards CE*, and (6) *Contribution of CE*. The related components involved in the attainment of comprehensive excellence are highlighted in this framework.



**Figure 1 The Conceptual Framework for The Understanding of Comprehensive Excellence Significance of the Study**

All throughout this research, the researchers hoped that it would be possible to indicate the level of attainment of IIUM's mission, especially the Comprehensive Excellence in all Kulliyahs and how well it is manifested in the department's curricula. As there is no single documented study conducted yet to measure, the researchers' purport that it is significant to investigate the matter considering that it has been about more than eight years since it was formulated.

The findings of this study will provide insight on the extent of how much the Comprehensive (Educational) Excellence has been manifested into the curricula. The study will be able to highlight possible areas of concerns and problems that are related to the task of attaining the mission of IIUM. The study will also provide a source of reference for relevant authorities at IIUM on what should be done to ensure further success in the attainment of the IIUM's mission. This (IIUM) policy and strategy will make the students more aware of their academic directions and ways of achieving high performance in their studies.

#### **Limitations & Delimitations of the Study**

The purposive sample of the study consists of IIUM students only as the study's respondents. However, the respondents' refusal to be interviewed limits the size to only selected IIUM students. Time constraint in the collection of data was added by the identification of selected students as the respondents of this study. No generalizations can be made to the results of the research as it is limited to the selected IIUM students' point of view only.

This research is about the understanding of the definition, Comprehensive Educational Excellence, among selected IIUM students of the Gombak campus. Due to the nature of this research, the controlled factors involved in conducting the present study are:

The choice of whom to interview or be the respondents, based on the criteria of race, gender, nationality, level of study, specialization, values and many others;

1. The relationship between the interviewers cum the researchers with the interviewees will be subject to scrutiny by researchers involve in the present study;
2. The sample size, is that, whether one is sufficient or not, will be the deciding factor in reaching for rich information as time constraint as well as financial constraint will put a hinge in the volume of in-depth information needed by the researchers;
3. The level of study and the fluency of the communicating language (in this case, preferably English) are the criteria that make the researchers selective in finding respondents among the IIUM students at the main campus of Gombak.

#### **Research Design**

The researchers obtained phenomenological research design as they decided to study selected students' perceptions pertaining to the definition of comprehensive excellence, and how it is related to their surroundings as well as their environment of study and the curricula. According to Creswell (2005), a researcher conducts a phenomenological and grounded theory design when the study of groups of selected students provides an understanding of a larger issue. In this study, the groups of people representing the selected students were those who are known to and are close friends of the researchers. Therefore, understanding on the students' perceptions towards the definition of comprehensive excellence by employing the qualitative technique of grounded theory in the analysis was provided.

In answering all the research questions of this study, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews – individually. In a semi-structured interview, the largest part of the interview was guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the question was determined ahead of time (Meriam, 1996).

The researchers employed purposive sampling to handpick and select a sample size of five respondents from the IIUM students' population. The sample size selected was from the postgraduate and the undergraduate levels of study. Of this, only three respondents' interviews were analyzed (number P1, P2 and P4) because of the richness of information gathered for this study. According to Kuzel (1992) and Morse (1989), as cited in Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative sampling tends to be purposive rather than random. Random sampling is not suitable for social processes because it can reduce it into uninterpretable processes. It can also lead to biasness with a small number of cases.

The study employed the qualitative research method of interviews. The intent of qualitative research methods is to collect data from informants (in educational settings) that will help outsiders understand the construction of such meanings. The first researcher (that is, the R1) made direct appointments with the Pilot participant, the P1 participant and the P2 participant to be the respondents. The date and the time for the interview sessions were then fixed with them. As for the P3 participant, the P4 participant and the P5 participant, the second researcher (that is, the R2) was the one who made the appointments for the first researcher (R1) to conduct the interview sessions. The researcher (that is, the R1) recorded the interview sessions using either the audio tape recorder or the MP4 and field notes.

Basically, the researcher established rapport in the initial stage of the interview, slowly warming up to the interview questions relating to the research questions. The interviews were held individually at different times, dates and venues. Each interview session took about 40-50 fifty minutes. The recorded verbal interviews will then be transcribed and analyzed.

The researchers had the privilege (or the advantage) of being able to listen in on the voices of the selected interviewees of the post-graduate and undergraduate students in IIUM. Through these interview sessions, the researchers began to understand how their experiences affect their perceptions of comprehensive excellence, especially those relating to the comprehensive educational excellence. These interview sessions focused on their understanding of comprehensive excellence, the barriers and the ways of overcoming them as well as what would their contributions be toward the attainment of comprehensive educational excellence at IIUM during their period of study. In addition, these interview sessions also revealed the differences in mindset between the post-graduate and the undergraduate respondents.

#### **Data Analysis**

All of the interview sessions were tape-recorded using an MP4. Following the final session, the researcher transcribed the discussion tapes. Before analyzing the data, the researcher reviewed the audiotapes and transcriptions for consistency. The data analysis included coding and organizing interviewees' comments into five (5) major questions asked. Within each question, comments were then arranged into groups of main ideas pertaining to the research questions and the purpose of the study. The ready data was then tabulated in order to be evaluated by two selected co-raters as well as one of the researchers. The results of this evaluation will indicate the reliability of the data with regards to the research questions. The researchers maintained the credibility of the data by submitting the data analysis including the verbatim transcript and the evaluation by the co-raters to the lecturer-in-charge.

#### **Internal Reliability**

Two co-raters were selected to evaluate the main ideas of the interview transcriptions of the respondents. The result of co-rater 1 equals to 96% (that is,  $24/25 \times 100$ ), and the result of co-rater 2 equals to 100%. This proved that the ideas in the main transcript were according to the templates of the respondents and that the transcript had answered the research questions. The objectives of the research were therefore answered; and the reliability and validity of the interview questions were within the acceptable range.

#### **Results**

##### **1. The Definition of Comprehensive Excellence (CE)**

Comprehensive Excellence is "the quality that shows by the students" (1U:15-20). Thus, comprehensive excellence is specifically the development of student in every aspect of their lives, both academically and spiritually.

It is a holistic aspect:

##### **1) The Complete Encompassing Towards Students' Development:**

"...complete encompassing I mean like ...every aspects of students' development is there like for instance you are staying in UIA it means like UIA is trying to produce...graduates who are spiritually, intellectually, religiously, academically, up right and competitive. So that's how I look at the comprehensive excellent" (3P: 4).

##### **2) Excellent in Every Angle:**

"...when we talk about comprehensive excellence, as the student, we don't look at the achievement at the study only. [In addition], we look at his/her attitude, his/her behavior, how he/she behaves with his/her parents, his/her friends.[In addition], what here how he/she I mean he/she had human with the environment, he/she as man and God relationship. [Therefore], I think comprehensive excellence is how we have to look at every angle not just you say student has comprehensive excellence but

his/her attitude is bad or his/her behavior is bad so it is nothing. For me comprehensive excellence is much is excellent at every angle" (2M: 16).

##### **3) Survival in the Global World**

The *marketability* and/or *employability* of a person are also the criteria for the quality of Comprehensive Excellence that students "can survive based on what you studying in this university" into the "the real world" (1U:15-20). According to her definition, the definition of Comprehensive Excellence was inclined towards developing the quality of students as well as being a 'good human capital whose qualities of students contain both theoretical knowledge and practical skills that are marketable that can lead them to survive in the real world.' In addition, they can balance between who have the knowledge and the ethical manner. This definition restricts the aim of IIUM that put the knowledge and virtue together. It can be modeled from the concept of *Homo Islamicus* (Anwar, 1996) that attempt to explain the contemporary Muslim in the global era that is marketable as a good human capital and at the same time, they are thinking of social justice.

##### **2. Difficulties to Achieve Comprehensive Excellence**

The sample reveals that both internal factors and external factors play important roles in barricading or hindering the attainment or the inclusion of excellence in the students' length of study at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).

##### **External Factors**

###### **Curriculum**

In terms of curricula, it may not meet the needs of being marketable or the economic requirements of the job market due to its inflexibility and the teacher-centered orientation. "...because ...they wanna bring I mean 'bout the Islamic values inside this university but then sometime its not really in line with what we learn, I means like not exactly suit what the theory itself so I mean like hmm... sometime we have to make something like change. In the changes we have to be more flexible in term of the hmm study itself, do not really depends on what exactly stated in the course but we have to broaden our mind. So that I think, I mean as the system of education itself like depending on certain input umm may cause a difficulty towards the student perhaps the lecturer. That's what I mean" (1U:21-26).

###### **Rules and Regulations: Internalization of Virtue and Knowledge**

The centralized or unanticipated atmosphere/culture such as the rules and regulations obstructed the students' creativity and critical thinking (think in the box). Student mentions, "I think basically about the rules and the regulation in IIUM itself" (1U:27-28). "...this university I think like sometime they don't really allow the student to express their opinion I mean like lets say like on not to say only opinion but then to express their own way in term of presenting the idea the knowledge itself. So, because they are bound by the rules and regulation so sometime they don't know how to make it so, they just become depending on certain things" (1U:27-28).

Moreover, students might not internalize theory as well as the Islamic point of view properly: "...we can see that being Islamic encourage us to do is the good [deeds], but the practice we can see lacking here and there in terms of how the brother and sister interact with other also. I think some maybe feel that if environment will be improved there ..." (2M: 39-40).

###### **Imbalance Facility**

The imbalanced facility between Kulliyyah, for example, the experimental laboratory between the Kulliyyah of Applied Science (i.e. Architecture, Engineering) and Social Science (i.e. Human Science): "Ok, a... clearly we can see in that Kulliyyah of

Architecture or Engineering perhaps they been provided with comprehensive a... I mean product or...the facilities itself. However, if you go to the human sciences [take] for example even sometime the... I mean like the students don't have the facility like you can go to the lab itself it doesn't really represent a lab, I mean like you wanna conduct an experiment there is something imbalance there I mean where is the fund they are suppose to be used for the human sciences itself" (1U:29-30).

#### **Insufficient Facility**

The accessibility of knowledge on the cyber space is not sufficient especially the surfing of internet and wireless facilities: "...I mean like more knowledgeable in accessing the knowledge because we know in technology world we have to browse the internet itself" (1U:29-30). "...because when we talk about the internet facility...I think this university has to improve in terms of this facility because ... So university introduce the wireless facility I though from the beginning this facility must be free but unfortunately unlucky this facility is coming with the certain charge. However, if the charge is the reasonable I mean with the service is ok. It is ok. However, I find that the service is not OK, so I think as the Master student I believe that searching internet is give you more additional resources. So when this facility is not enough provided with university I think they have to improve this" (2M: 27-28).

Moreover the sports complex does not seem attractive to the undergraduate students. He mentioned that the sports complex does not have good programs and maintenance as: "Sport complex itself does not really represent umm the quality. I mean, as maintenance is not there and ...the events that conduct around the places is not really ...represent the name of UIA itself, it shows like it just a small college..." (1U:33-34).

#### **Unequal Facility**

Undergraduate students seem to suffer more on this point especially

pertaining to the quality of hostel or mahallah facilities between them and the postgraduate students. He feels that "there is discrepancy between undergraduate and postgraduate students like the hostel or mahallah, it's more obvious" (1U:32-34).

#### **Out-dated Facilities: Computers, Softwares and Textbooks**

"... [in] the lab I find the computers too old enough for, you know for

2006, and with all the vision of 2020... other [than that] one thing and also the software that they are using...I guess it should be updated...for books in the resource centre... I usually ask them what is the new [or latest]... edition" (3P:71-76).

#### **The (Main) Library**

Although all the participants agreed that the quality of the library is good, certain things have to be improved such as "... [the] library at this moment is ok. But still they need in some sort of improvement" (1U:35-36) such as book stabbing and system that cannot serve student's needs especially during the examination. "like in terms of the books stabbing provide for students and system itself have to be changed because let's say during the examination student more focus to the library I mean like to centralize the library make something be changed but then I mean like the crowded around with disturb students the other students. So student means as excellent itself cannot achieve because some the extraneous factor that may causes the change..." (1U:35-36).

Ineffectiveness of the system highlighted, and some (common and

much-needed) facilities were insufficient: "...when we go to the library when we access to the internet I think the PC provided is not enough. Wristband I think for Malaysian

students OK [but] I think 75 or 100 per semester for internet and PC [when] but they provide us is not enough" (2M: 27-28). "I was asked to find article... on Standard English in Malaysia and I tried to look into it and I was told that I have to check on the NSTP like the New Straits Times. Therefore, I told to go to the library because they have all the files in there so I check on there [through the internet]. [Then I] go there and check on the hard copy of the newspaper but they said it was burnt. So I [take] what they have is only like from July from this year yeah from July this year so I have hard time to look [in] the archives. Ok, they told me [to] check on the online database. I checked on the online database but every time I click on the article, I was asked to subscribe. In addition, I check on [with] the library, and they said I have to pay, wow, so I paid one ringgit and fifty sen. So I said, what is this, we are already paid [paying] for [the]library for facility we are still have to pay for article like this. So I find it quite wow, wow what is this, it should be free because the library is subscribing, so I mean, what is that for one ringgit and fifty sen that already big enough" (3P:71-76).

#### **Ineffective System**

The standards of registration and administration are under par when compared with other Malaysian Universities: "...the registration of the subject, I mean you wanna register subject in one thing, registration and of the hostel.... Perhaps as a Malaysian ...the way that they provide our the funds to the system also is not good, basically it is about he administration, if the administration in IIUM is still low I can say it's still low if compared than other university because the a...who... I mean too slow" (1U:37-38).

"...they are always showing casing when you open the UIA website

they are show casing everything in there, but when you try to open it wow you will say wow! What is it? Yeah you feel disillusion..." "But then right now I cannot open my account what do you call it personal account because it is blocked and they said that I have to go to the financial division. Before when I wanted to open it I can check on my financial account but it did not reflect how much will I pay? It means like although you can access in the internet and check on your account, but it is still incomplete. So like, where is it now the advancement in technology?" (3P:77-79).

#### **Internal factors**

##### **Adjustment Problem for International Student**

As an international student who is "...by coming here I have to gamble

I have to risk" (3P:26). The alien-ness and the feeling of otherness made her homesick as well as forcing her to face several problems or culture shock. She states, "I find it's difficult to adjust ...the place, adjust to ...emotionally and psychologically" (P3:20-26).

For instance, the language, the biological clock (among others):

"...personally also I am person who is very passive so I find that it's difficult to interact with people especially international students where language is a barrier. Though I can speak English and I can understand English, but in this university where I came from you are meanly with the same people who are speak the same language and you don't have the difficulty" (P3:20-26). "...I find it's difficult also you said it is really difficult a biological clock. Like when I came here, I became lazy. During the morning, I find that it is too difficult to wake up and I do not know its difficulty but usually I like to sleep. Ok and I find, no, it is no difficulty but too much of rest is already like negative right. So too much of sleeping, too much of relaxation, too much

of thinking, too much of you know for this environment it leads to be in bored, it leads to be lonely. So when I am bore I am lonely it affects how I mean how I approach my study. So basically I find it is hard to focus and concentrate because of those things” (P3:20-26).

Moreover, the financial problem also creates the difficulties and disturbs her study: “First of all I risk financially ok. I have to look for main that I can be here though I don’t know UIA is a private or public university but the fact is we have and I have to pay for tuition fee” (P3:20-26).

#### **Low Self-Esteem**

The low self-esteem of students it seemed to affect them directly.

Several causes showed that this relates to the encouragement students get from the university. Student showed that he was suffering from this situation. He claimed that: “...they (university) don’t really, I mean encourage the students to be more comprehensive to, I means to strive for excellence, but then perhaps still wanna achieve the ISO itself, that what I can see sometimes they forget but the students are suffering because of that. So whenever the things happened like they cannot achieved on that student going to be blame, this is something like unfair I mean like, basically my internal factor don’t really give much points that’s the thing...”(1U:39-40).

#### **Supporting Factors to Achieve Comprehensive Excellence**

##### **Frontier of Islamic Environment**

As an International Islamic University, the Islamic atmosphere is highlighted in every activity. Ironically, the Islamic connotation influence as the push factors towards comprehensive excellence: “...because as we know IIUM is Islamic University. Therefore, [in] the environment also, we can see maybe a *juice of Islamic* in terms of how you wear in this campus. How you make a relationship with your friends...Islamic environment can boost you to be a good student to achieve comprehensive excellence...in the sense that not to focus on the achievement in academic but also in every aspect [and] every angles...”(2M: 21-24).

Moreover as the Islamic connotation, student seems to be inspired and motivated islamically that eventually it can fulfill the comprehensive excellence:

“Because this university carries the title the Islamic, so when we look at the rule and the environment, so people here have to. I mean, to try their best to project to make other look at them as the Islamic university...in another way, the environment and also the rule also has to [be] in line, I mean, the name of this university Islamic university” (2M:25-26).

##### **Female Equals to Male: Gender Issue**

As female, the Islamic atmosphere does not decrease the rights of women. They (the female) have the same rights as men to study, and enable to do what they want. She describes amazingly that being a woman and her ability is no barrier towards the attainment of comprehensive excellence: “...gender issue is amazing for me here! ... I find it amazing. There women who [also] have the same right with other woman [as well as] with the man, if you talk about right. It is equality... and then I find that they using the motorbike wow! I said when will be the time I also learn how to drive the motorbike” (3P:85-92).

Moreover, she feels that the equality in educational opportunities provides chances for women to further their studies and this would enhance comprehensive excellence: “...It can enhance in some ways because women are not be in the prejudice, are not being the discriminated. In another countries and another places women are seem to be ok like they are only allowed to finish the Bachelor Degree, marry and produce

children that’s it. They look at the children as the producer, manufacturer of children that is it. However, here I guess ...they are given the women the chance to proceed on...” (3P:93-96).

#### **Full Facilities Options of: Library, Mahallah/Hostel, Sports Complex,**

##### **Canteen, Tutorial Class and Internet.**

All samples agree that facilities provided by the university were “quite complete” (3P:42) as the source of knowledge which can increase the comprehensive excellence. They pointed out that:

##### **Library: Source of Knowledge**

“...I would say the library, the tutorial class and the internet facility I

think this the facility which is ... improved by the university to provide the students I mean to the good place to make a research and enough material in the library to I mean... to achieve what we call comprehensive excellence...” (2M: 29-30).

##### **Mahallah/Hostel: Privacy and Convenient**

“...hostel ... because I stay in my room when I am alone I have all the

privacy and freedom yeah I got it of course...” (3P:46). “I think for master student ...I’m very convenient in this accommodation one room for one student. It gives us the sort of privacy ... more opportunity to make thesis without disturbing by others. I think it is ok one room for master and Ph.D. student” (2M: 35-37).

##### **Sports and Recreation: Enough and Ok**

“...in terms of sport, we as student also ah have to focus for this also. I

don’t know whether the facility that they provide is enough or not but it is ok for me in terms of recreation...sports ok” (2M: 31-32).

##### **Food: Reasonable Price**

“...the food here also I mean ok. The price is not to say too cheap, but reasonable price. You cannot I mean expect that the price here can be lower I than outside I think the price here is reasonable and can afford for everyone” (2M:33-34).

##### **Friends: Peers’ Assistance (as Second Opinion)**

“...I think I believe when we face a sort of problem we can discuss or

solve to see what the others opinions or the second opinions about the matter we are facing now. Therefore, like friend also, when we have a friend [we] study together. I mean, it is good to motivate us and to keep the pass. I mean, not down and up but study yeah ...that’s why you need somebody to I mean help you in this, so you can keep pass study leave, not down and up. It is not good, I mean in terms of study. So you need some their [feedback/assistance]...” (2M: 48-49).

##### **Feed yourself as an Active Learners: An Intellectual Demanding Learner**

As the intellectual atmosphere, the lecture organized by the student

societies and the faculties inspire and enhance the comprehensive excellent: “...there are many ...lectures conducted by students for example that by *As-Salam* and by *Al-Aqsa* friends society. Actually I attended in those things and I find wow very intellectually how do you call it very intellectually ...enhancing” (3P:53-58).

“...I think what the Kulliyah did now is ok is good when they provide

sometimes they do talk and discussion in once a month, and then also a talk within two weeks once. Therefore, it is good I

mean to make student participate and the idea join the forum and seminars. I think in terms of academic I think it is ok" (2M: 54-57). "It has to be from your own initiative if you really have that desire in within you and you wanted to explore to discover your religion you will discover it here...Because you will find the books Islamic book in the library. If you are not, lazy you go there, find it, and learn something about it and if you are not lazy you can also attend to the lectures and you will get something else. But, but if you don't have that feeling if you don't have the desire again *mahallah* you will just be like somebody else who doesn't know way to go and doesn't know really Islam. I mean you only are Muslim by name but not with faith...for me, it is within you. It is you initiative. It is your struggle whatever your purposive life if you are really determines to have it you will have it" (3P:67-80).

#### **Find the Real World: The Advantage of Practical**

The practical or practicum as real life skills is more crucial than the theory in order to enhance comprehensive excellence. For the undergraduates, undergoing the practical is the way to enter the real world where experiences can be meeting as the reality, which he emphasizes as follow: "...I can say I see much exposure from form the jobs market itself from the practical work and whenever we go for the other campus like we share our knowledge that one is the supporting environment..." (1U:41-44).

#### **Fulfill Knowledge: The Role of Lecturers and Supervisors**

As a master student, even though s/he has to concentrate on her/his thesis and spends time in library but realizes that the lecturer as her/his supervisor can assist to achieve comprehensive excellence. He mentions that "...I thought here, as master student in terms of relationship with the lecturers we have I don't think we don't have time to see them. But the time is very limited we have to focus on our researches in library so I think we also can be at lecturers or professor to talk something more related to our study..." (2M: 50-51).

#### **Physical environment**

The building, the landscape, and the man-made environment in the IIUM is a place of pleasure to the students as "...compare this university to other IPTA, I think this university is better in terms of the environment" (2M: 21-22). Moreover, good environment can also initiate the learning desire as "it enhances me 95 percent" (P3:35-36). In this regard: "it is good because .... silence ok. And this is very contusive the for people who wanted to reflect and who wanted to wonder and wonder to ...find solution for question that never been answered something like that" (P3:31-34).

#### **How to Overcome the Difficulties**

##### **Struggle as Self-Discipline**

"...I have to force myself or else like I have to go back the reason why I am here. So everyday almost everyday ...I struggle on putting myself on the right track. I keep asking myself why I am here and what the purpose why I have to left my country and you know scarify umm my time. So every now and then I have to tell myself that I have to focus on my study because primarily that the reason why I am here. Therefore, that is it. It's like the internal struggle for me to always keep on the tract why I'm here" (3P:29-30).

##### **Critical Thinking: Take Only the Good Things and Leave the Bad Things**

"I think we have to in doubt here because we are adult and matured here so that we can differentiate what is good what is bad for us. So we cannot blindly follow what other do so definitely the finally is the final decision is us. Therefore, we

decide which is good which is bad...is that, also...be comprehensive excellence" (2M: 39-40).

"...some bad thing so when we making friend and we live here we can also adapt what is good in this environment. Not to say the external can influenced us the bad thing but we also can take what is good surrounding us, friend, and the environment" (2M: 45-46).

#### **Self-Benchmarking: Motivation toward Success**

"...I have to set the benchmark. What [is] the benchmark I want to compare again? If I say that put I just the lower benchmark, maybe I can say that the I've achieved the comprehensive excellent. However, if I set the benchmark high, so I can say that currently I do not achieve the comprehensive excellent. Yet to achieve [it]" (2M: 58-65).

#### **Suggestions: Toward Comprehensive Excellence**

##### **Get Down From the Ivory Tower, and Look At the Reality.**

"don't really proud to be arrogant like you are International Islamic University so I mean like you can simply make any rules that you want but then it is not really suit but don't really represent the your university" (U1: 45-46).

Moreover, the university has to consider the feelings of students rather than look and care only for the image, as one student iterated "basically, CE [Comprehensive Excellence] is not really the matter but then, the matter is the university always strive for ISO itself doesn't give very effective impact towards the students" (U1: 53-54).

#### **Student-Centered Approach (es)**

Students' voice for participatory learning has to be pushed forward in the form of marketing and promotion as students' voice out the ideas. The teacher-centered teaching can no longer enhance comprehensive excellence, as it seems unable to meet the needs and demands of the new generation. This fact was as "perhaps the input that being provide to the students itself need to be improve like a syllabus, courses" (U1:47-48).

#### **Rules and Regulations: Their Effective Implementation**

"I think the empowerment must be focused...in terms of empowerment you can see ...sometimes roles it's just like we say we make a rule to be broken so when you set a rule then there is no empower enforcement to make it happen... So people will not respect like when you went to cafeteria you see the text brother and sister but you can see they sit not in their place so I think why you put the text this there if student don't have power to enforce the rule and the order you set. Because this is the small thing, I think in terms of excellent. If you don't focus on this I think finally you will get only the excellent student in academic but in terms of their attitude it not projects them ..." (2M: 52-53).

#### **Contributions toward Comprehensive Excellence**

##### **Personalize**

"I've learnt something from UIA. It is like the shouter that they accepted me like I am the orphan and they took me, they give me shouter even I did not pay my tuition fee yet...so ok *Insha'Allah* after I finish my degree hopefully... if I go anywhere in this world ok I will be bring ...in the name of UIA. I never am with very proud of it" (3P:103-108).

##### **Adaptation into the Real World**

"...I might use the knowledge. I mean the input that I received for here I got from here so I'll try to apply in the real world try to suite with the situation I means um...either it can be used or not but then some if sometime we can see the significant on that we have to make some changes" (U1:49-52).

**“Just Make Simple Thing (in order) to Make Big Thing Happens”**

“...the simple thing maybe. Because as I said earlier, we have a friend, so maybe informally we can give advice or just a nice talk. When we see something not nice maybe we can say, I mean, informally [give] friendly [advice] to our friend [by saying] what you did is wrong or sort of that just simple I mean it's starting from there because if you want to make it something big I think you don't have enough power to do that. So just making simple thing to make it the big thing happens...” (2M: 66-71).

**Summary**

The results of this study showed there was Comprehensive Excellence among students of IIUM while many are still not clear about its concept. Whilst, Comprehensive Excellence is not only confined to academic excellence in IIUM's pursuit, but rather it includes the physical, moral, spiritual, social and environmental dimensions in accordance with the holistic vision of Islam.

Moreover, the university is targeting to produce excellent researches, scientific outputs, and scholarly publications in which it now lacks. This is due mainly to the natural science based faculties that started in the last few years, and for the most part of the university's history, it has been an undergraduate teaching university.

This also means part of the quest is to produce ideal staff and students, who excel in curricular and co-curricular activities; one who performs their religious obligations conscientiously and diligently, upholding high moral and spiritual values in private life, and always willing to assist and aid students in non-academic matters. At the same time, have the ability to interact with people of diverse backgrounds and disciplines in the true spirit of Islamic *ukhuwah* or brother-hood/sisterhood.

The mission of Triple ICE is something that takes a very long time to achieve. Thus, the need for proper planning, and the scope of the mission must be broken down into small and short-term achievable targets, especially with Comprehensive Excellence. There are certainly problems and hurdles that get in the way of IIUM achieving this, but the IIUM community, especially the students, need the assurance of understanding the concepts of the Triple ICE, specifically, and the definition of Comprehensive Excellence and have the right attitude to accomplish the mission and attain comprehensive excellence.

Ignorance from some quarters in the university, especially among the postgraduate students also has to be carefully addressed and identified for solutions – short-term, medium-term and/or long-term. Deterrence such as insufficient funds, lack of incentives, and inadequate reference materials give rise to a reduced number of experts and excellent academic staff coming to the university. As such, it is the responsibility of everybody at the university – be it the academic staff and/or the non-academic staff – to work together to achieve the Triple ICE mission, and especially produce Comprehensive Excellence among its students.

**Recommendations**

The researchers forward and propose several recommendations that relate to the need of improving and understanding the manifestation of Triple ICE, especially pertaining to Comprehensive Excellence in the curriculum, co-curriculum, and the academic environment of students in IIUM. The most pertinent finding was that on the need to improve the manifestation of Comprehensive Excellence, especially amongst the IIUM students as well as the staff. The mastery of all knowledge and upholding it along with the embrace of many

dimensions such as physical, moral, spiritual, social, and environment in the curricula of all departments and Kulliyahs in accordance with the holistic vision of Islam. This is to make the students highly recognizable in and for the job-market. These students will be apparent for not only their academic excellence by attaining high grades but also by observing high Islamic ethics in conduct, high sense of dedication and commitment to their work, and a reputation for producing high quality research products.

The authorities of IIUM need to undertake specific measures to resolve the issue of academic excellence achievement by improving the evaluation system on key areas of the students' performances. Due to problems and hurdles that get in the way of IIUM achieving its Comprehensive Excellence, it is recommended that, from time to time, discussions, meetings, and intellectual discourse be held at all levels of the academic personnel and students. This will ensure that the IIUM communities understand the concept of, not only, the Comprehensive Excellence but the other components of Triple ICE, and have the right attitudes to achieve and attain them.

Further recommendations for improving the achievement of **Comprehensive Excellence are as follows:**

1. Since it is going to be a very long process, the IIUM authorities need to set the long-term goals and timeframe for the mission of Triple ICE specifically pertaining to Comprehensive Excellence.
2. Each component of Triple ICE (especially Comprehensive Excellence) needs to have measurable milestones or criterion for monitoring purposes.
3. Periodical review to the curricula of all offered courses should be carried out so as to ensure that it can further enhance the achievement of the mission, specifically the Comprehensive Excellence.
4. Aggressive improvement of the subjects offered by IIUM syllabi to serve the purpose of practical real-life that should be comparable to international standards.
5. Serious improvement measures to the means, tools, and techniques of realizing Comprehensive Excellence.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

1. Other samples or respondents such as the academic and non-academic staff to obtain findings that are more comprehensive.
2. Using experimental research and ethnographic research to get in-depth findings on how Triple ICE is actually attained in the classroom.
3. The present research with other samples and population of IIUM students such as the involvement of other Kulliyahs, centers, and institutes in all of the IIUM campuses.

For future and further study, other sample for instance from the academic and non-academic staff would give a different angle of perceptions on comprehensive excellence of students. A different research methodology from the present study might prove to be in-depth findings on the attainment of IIUM Triple ICE. The involvement of other Kulliyahs, Centers and Institutes in all IIUM campus would be a gain of more insights on the understandings and manifestation of comprehensive excellence.

**Conclusion**

To plan the route of study would be the optimal achievement in the attainment of comprehensive excellence for students during their duration in IIUM. This would be the answer for IIUM graduates in their quest for knowledge and education (in order) to be a better person equipped with appropriate skills to serve the *ummah*, the community, the society and the country.

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**Table 1** Sample Selection of Students for the In-depth Individual Interview

| Participants | Gender | Education | Age | Nationality     | Course               | Status                  |
|--------------|--------|-----------|-----|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Pilot        | Male   | B.A       | 23  | Malaysian       | Psychology           | Full time               |
| P1           | Male   | B.A       | 23  | Malaysian       | Psychology           | Full time               |
| P2           | Male   | M.L       | 27  | Malaysian       | Law                  | Full time               |
| P3           | Male   | Ph.D      | >30 | Malaysian       | ICT<br>(by research) | Full time               |
| P4           | Female | Ph.D      | >30 | Non - Malaysian | EDU                  | Full time               |
| P5           | Female | Ph.D      | >30 | Malaysian       | EDU                  | Part time<br>(1st year) |



**Table 2 Summary of Understanding on Comprehensive Excellence (CE) Perceived by Participants**

| Concepts of Comprehensive Excellence (CE)                    | Details   | Perceptions of Students (Discourse Unit) |                             |                           |
|--|---|--|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
|  |   | Undergraduate                            | Master                      | Ph.D.                     |
| 1. The Definition of CE                                      | The Complete Encompassing Towards Students' Development Excellent in Every Angle Survival in the Global World | (1U:15-20)                               | (2M:16)                     | (3P: 4)                   |
| 2. Difficulties to Achieve CE                                | (1) External Factors Curriculum   | (1U:21-26)                               |                             |                           |
|  | Rules and Regulations   | (1U:27-28)                               | (2M: 39-40)                 |                           |
|  | Imbalance Facility  | (1U:29-30)                               |                             |                           |
|  | Insufficient Facility   | (1U:29-30), (1U:33-34)                   | (2M: 27-28)                 |                           |
|  | Unequal Facility  | (1U:32-34)                               |                             |                           |
|  | Out-dated Facilities: Computers, Soft-wares, and Textbooks  |  |                             | (3P:71-76)                |
|  | The (Main) Library Ineffective System   | (1U:35-36)<br>(1U:37-38)                 | (2M: 27-28)                 | (3P:71-76)<br>(3P:77-79)  |
|  | (2) Internal factors Adjustment Problem for International Student Low Self-Esteem                             | (1U:39-40)                               |                             | (P3:20-26)                |
| 3. Supporting Factors to Achieve CE                          | Frontier of Islamic Environment   |  | (2M:21-24),<br>(2M:25-26)   |                           |
|  | Female Equals to Male: Gender Issue   |  |                             | (3P:85-92),<br>(3P:93-96) |
|  | Full Facilities Option of:  |  | (2M: 29-30)                 |                           |
|  | (1) Library: Source of Knowledge  |  |                             |                           |
|  | (2) Mahallah/Hostel: Privacy and Convenient   |  | (2M: 35-37)                 | (3P:46)                   |
|  | (3) Sports and Recreation: Enough and Ok  |  | (2M: 31-32)                 |                           |
|  | (4) Food: Reasonable Price  |  | (2M:33-34)                  |                           |
|  | (5) Friends: Peers' Assistance (as Second Opinion)  |  | (2M: 48-49)                 |                           |
|  | (6) Feed yourself as an Active Learners: An Intellectual Demanding Learner                                    |  | (2M: 54-57)                 | (3P:53-58),<br>(3P:67-80) |
| (7) Find the Real World: The Advantage of Practical          | (1U:41-44)  |  |                             |                           |
| (8) Fulfill Knowledge: The Role of Lecturers and Supervisors |   | (2M: 50-51)                              |                             |                           |
|  | Physical environment  | (P3:31-34).                              | (2M: 21-22)                 | (P3:35-36)<br>(3P:29-30)  |
| 4. How to Overcome the Difficulties                          | Struggle as Self-Discipline   |  |                             |                           |
|  | Critical Thinking: Take Only the Good Things and Leave the Bad Things   |  | (2M: 39-40),<br>(2M: 45-46) |                           |
|  | Self-Benchmarking: Motivation toward Success  |  | (2M: 58-65)                 |                           |
| 5. Suggestions: Toward CE                                    | Get Down From the Ivory Tower, and Look At the Reality.   | (U1: 45-46),<br>(U1: 53-54)              |                             |                           |
|  | Student-Centered Approach (es)  | (U1:47-48)                               |                             |                           |
|  | Rules and Regulations: Their Effective Implementation   |  | (2M: 52-53)                 |                           |
| 6. Contributions toward CE                                   | Personalize   |  |                             | (3P:103-108)              |
|  | Adaptation into the Real World "Just Make Simple Thing (in order) to Make Big Thing Happens"                  | (U1:49-52)                               | (2M: 66-71)                 |                           |