

Chapter 6

Life Skills in University Curricula: Preparing Graduates to Thrive in the 4th Industrial Revolution

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ABSTRACT

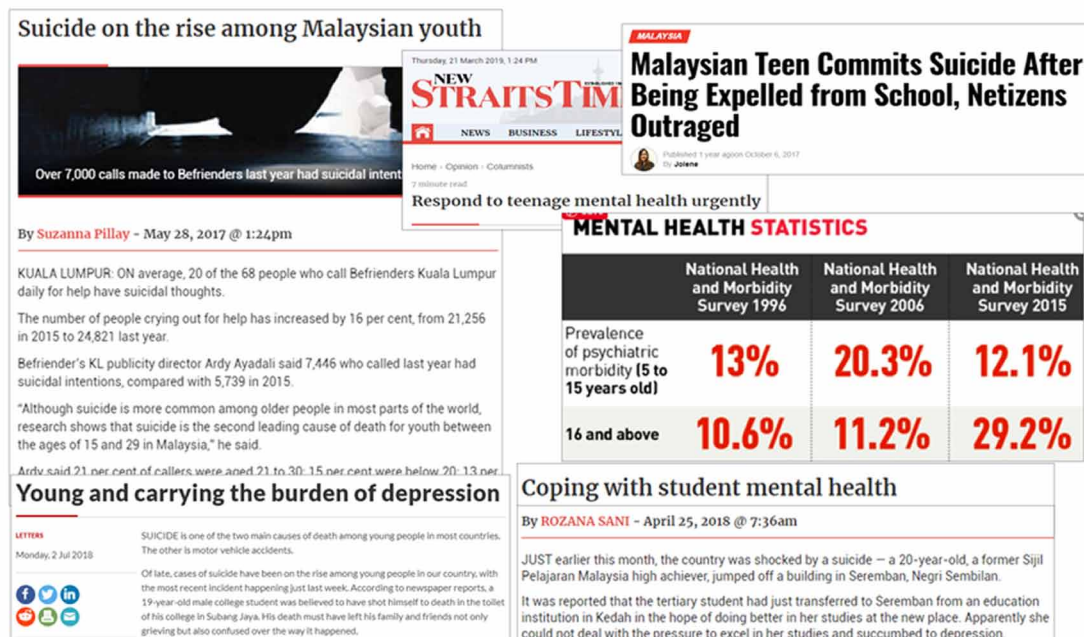
Recognizing that emotional intelligence (EI) skills are vital in supporting students' personal and professional success, two Life Skills modules have been embedded as compulsory Life Skills Programme for all first-year students in the Taylor's Curriculum Framework. This is in response to the Fourth Industrial Revolution where the rapid advancement of technologies requires more human skills than ever before in job employment. Also, students entering universities face huge challenges in their transition, and the inability to cope will result in stress and mental health issues. This chapter describes the development and implementation of an experiential learning approach for a set of Life Skills courses. Commentary from students yielded important insights into their learning where 87% of students found the programme beneficial for their personal and social development. The findings highlight that universities can make conscious decisions to embed affective attributes in their curriculum to enhance student's overall wellbeing.

BACKGROUND

I was once easily provoked by the littlest things. It may have been a car swerving into my lane or a simple conversation gone wrong. I struggled with my emotions constantly and allowed them to rule over me. Too often, I would react rather than respond to situations. This programme has helped me to discard anger from my life. (LS 1)

Many young people like Life Skills Student 1 (LS 1) who are entering universities face considerable challenges in their lives. They commonly experience stress due to factors such as academic expectations, independent living away from home, uncertainties about future careers and, forming relationships. Stress is one of the causes of mental health problems that afflict young people which can result in anxiety, depression, insomnia and even suicide. A recent national survey showed that “Malaysian teens are critically suffering from mental health problems with one in five suffering from depression (18.3%), two in five anxiety (39.7%), and one in ten stress (9.6%)” (www.nst.com.my, 2019). The numbers of suicides or attempted suicides among college and university students have been increasing at an alarming rate in the past decade. Additionally, students in higher education institutions experience mental health problems at a greater rate than peers who are not students (Lee and Syaid, 2017). Adaptation to university life requires a range of social and emotional skills and failure to master these skills can result in poor academic performance or attrition from higher education. Figure 1 shows some newspaper excerpts of suicide cases and mental health issues involving youth.

Figure 1. Excerpts of newspaper articles on suicide and mental health among youth in Malaysia



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