Humanities & Social Sciences Communications

ARTICLE

https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05333-6 OPEN

Reimagining de-urbanised madrasa and self-place interaction through the lens of psychogeography

Mohd Muzhafar Idrus[1]✉, Normazla Ahmad Mahir[1], Norhaili Massari[1] & Habibah Ismail[1]

By converging with James Sidaway's emphasis on the psychogeographical tracings between nature and narrative in rural communities, this article explores the lived experiences of de-urbanised Muslim madrasa dwellers as an example. Psychogeography, a creative approach to understanding places that challenges conventional perceptions, serves as the lens through which these narratives are analysed. De-urbanised madrassas, typically situated on the peripheries of urban areas, highlight the relationship between human communities and their ecological surroundings. Traditionally recognised as spaces of worship and Islamic learning, madrassas are sustained by donor generosity. Drawing on personal narratives, this article contends that madrasa dwellers' interactions with these spaces evoke a wide range of emotions, from fear, disorientation and aversion to comfort, safety and well-being, revealing diverse cognitive and mental representations of place. By expanding on this enquiry, the investigation suggests that their experiences may be more accurately understood as a symbolic conceptualisation of space, prompting the development of an alternative framework, the psychogeography of madrasa. By examining these 'on-the-ground' narratives, interpretations and lived experiences of inhabitants in de-urbanised settings, this article challenges conventional (and often oversimplified) depictions of Muslim spaces. Instead, it argues that the psychogeography of the madrasa fosters a panoptic vision, one that informs, permeates and sustains social engagement, cultivating collective interconnectedness and dynamic integration. This perspective stands in sharp contrast to the insular, frequently misrepresented associations of madrassas with violence, offering instead a more inclusive understanding of these spaces as centres of communal harmony and shared humanity.

[1] Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Kampung Baharu Nilai, Malaysia. ✉email: muzhafaridrus@usim.edu.my

Introduction

James Sidaway (2022) presents a compelling argument concerning the influence of psychogeography and literary environments across rural communities. First, he posits that psychogeography offers a valuable framework for examining the lived experiences of marginalised groups, particularly by illuminating their unique interactions with places shaped by sociopolitical forces such as gentrification and displacement. Second, it encourages the amplification of diverse voices, especially those from African American, Asian and postcolonial perspectives, illustrating the intricate layers of identity and belongingness within various environments. Third, psychogeography has the potentials to demonstrate the often fragmented and indeterminate narratives that emerge from these spaces, excavating the details into their lived experiences. Of particular relevance to this article is Sidaway's suggestion concerning investigations that extend beyond the confines of the urban landscape, urging 'further reflection that indicates potential for a broadened field of psychogeography', where 'psychogeographical drifts have moved outside of urban foci' (p. 567). As such, the investigation of de-urbanisation serves not merely as a retreat into rurality, but as a means of generating alternative narratives about the local landscape that resonate on a global scale. As Marina Marengo (2018) argues, by intertwining non-cityscape psychogeography with literature, distinct 'rural' and 'socio-cultural' threads are woven together (p. 15), highlighting the synthesis achieved through 'literature in all of its forms', which encompasses 'novels, autobiographies, folk tales, songs and even audio-visual media' (Fournier, 2018, p. 3). Through this convergence of literary writings and rural psychogeography, a more nuanced and expansive understanding of place and identity emerges, one that transcends the limitations of urban-centric discourse.

Building upon these employments of psychogeography, this article engages with Sidaway's (2022) call to explore the integration of nature and narrative within rural communities. By investigating the 'on-the-ground' stories of a rural community, it offers a cohesive example of psychogeographical experience. Psychogeography, often described as a creative study of space aimed at challenging conventional perceptions (Debord, 2006), involves wandering through spaces to generate 'new ways of seeing, enabling change' (Link, 2016, p. 82). Whether they be travellers, strollers, flâneurs, or wanderers, individuals navigate spaces in their own distinct ways, with each journey, structured or otherwise, yielding a unique narrative. Walking through familiar or unknown streets, accompanied by partners or not, all contributes to the diversity of the strollers' stories. The narratives investigated here were collected from the voices of a Malaysian madrasa community residents at a de-urbanised place, defined as madrassas in non-city landscapes that emphasise ties between people and surrounding natural habitats (Lewis, 2020). Madrassas, commonly known as hubs for lifelong, religious and spiritual education, offer a range of Islamic-inflected courses alongside ventures such as business enterprises (for instance, mineral water production) and peri-urban or rural agriculture (for example, melon plantations). These madrassas are scattered across various Malaysian states and sustained largely by donor generosity. In this investigation, the madrasa houses men and women from diverse cultural backgrounds, many of whom are impoverished. Their reasons for residing at said madrasa vary, and it is precisely this diversity that makes their stories invaluable as part of the psychogeographical tracing between self and place (Idrus et al., 2024). By focusing on the psychogeographical experiences of these rural madrasa dwellers, the article seeks to highlight a 'collective intellectual knowledge of production', rooted in the interaction between the physical environment and human's emotions and experiences (Marengo, 2018, p. 15). Through this lens, the de-urbanised communities' lived experiences within the madrasa are brought to the forefront, contributing to a broader understanding of how spaces, identities and narratives intertwine.

In the pages that follow, this article will firstly be situated within the broader approaches of non-western psychogeographical studies, examining its place among the varied literary traditions that have engaged with these foci. Secondly, this article shall illustrate centrality of personal narratives, both from their textual aspects and contemporary studies that have incorporated them. Following this, it will then turn to the diverse methodologies within psychogeography, with particular focus on flânerie and the figure of the flâneur, emphasising the importance of personal narratives in capturing the experiences of de-urbanised madrasa dwellers to situate the current investigation. Finally, it will present these narratives and engage with key questions concerning the psychogeographical tracing of self and place which might lead us to theorise several key elements of what is termed as the psychogeography of a madrasa. As will be seen later, the psychogeography of the madrasa generally creates a strong sense of connectedness and unity by integrating individuals, encouraging flexibility and inclusion and focusing on a panoptic vision of communal relations. By concentrating on these layered explorations within the context of the rural madrasa, this article aims to unveil profound knowledge as revealed through these narratives that has since been seen and experienced by the inhabitants (Tso, 2020).

Marriages of psychogeography and literary studies

Before excavating psychogeographical experiences of the madrasa dwellers, it is central to situate discussions surrounding psychogeography, while acknowledging that this discussion does not aim to offer an exhaustive account of the diverse ways in which psychogeographical approaches and literary studies have been investigated. It may be most fitting to begin by considering how psychogeographical tracing at the Malaysian madrasa can be understood through the metanarratives of Sheila Hones's (2022) literary geography: 'literary' refers not only to literary texts but also literary studies, while 'geography' encompasses both the geographies of the lived world and spatial concepts', as well as 'human geography' (p. 1–2). Understood in this way, places hold profound significance, not only in shaping and sustaining individual and collective identities but also in stimulating human behaviour and mental conditionings. As this article shall demonstrate, it becomes essential to explore how places like the madrasa mediate the daily connection between inhabitants and their surroundings, as these environments may serve as a spatial backdrop to their lived experiences.

Literary studies within the non-Western contexts saw the pervasiveness of the psychogeography approach in their concerns of place. Traces of psychogeography across novels, for example, reveal hybrid, multi-faceted and complex layers of theoretical and methodological implications. Hana Bougherira (2020), Nurul Atiqah Amran and Ali Termizi (2020); Amran et al. (2022), for example, employ psychogeography in *God Help the Child*, *Where the Sunrise is Red* and *Sweet Offerings* respectively. Firstly, Bougherira (2020) reveals four predominant themes, namely, motherhood, racism and identity, child abuse and trauma, but the most stimulating point unveiled was the key geographical traces that, in unison, facilitate the main protagonist, Bride, to experience transformation and empowerment at a personal level in her seeking self-worth and personal growth as a female African American. Secondly, in Chan Ling Yap's *Where the Sunrise Is Red*, Amran and Ali Termizi (2020) discuss the struggles of Chinese women in making themselves visible in the society,

taking walking as a way to keep in touch with others while Amran et al. (2022) highlight the transgression by the main protagonist against the 'traditional constraints and expectations', becoming 'an independent woman who resists the gendered spatial division in her private and public domains' (p. 60). Yet, one of the many central points of departure that prompts the birth of this article is when Amran and Ali Termizi (2020) strategically deploy psychogeographical framework to demonstrate a rousing contrast against traditional male flâneur in order to accentuate women's roles which are magnified through the microscopic details of geographical settings while simultaneously undermining gender norms and elevating women's status and participation in public duties during the dark, tumultuous Malaysian histories. Yet, none of these studies emphasise poverty and countryside areas, a focus that otherwise will be undertaken in this article; as one shall see later, the prioritising of contemporary narratives of rural madrasa will be (re)visited.

Poems, another important literary focus, which are incorporated into interrogation using the psychogeographical approach, reveal several depictions about the environment and sociocultural issues (Khaidzir et al., 2021, 2022b). In the investigation about a collection of Malaysian poems (Khaidzir et al., 2022b), it is apparent that their work makes psychogeography as a lens worthwhile and scholarly-appealing because psychogeographical excavation depicts cities' transformation accompanied by varied facets of the depth of emotion and details about the cities' growth and preservation of nature despite urban ruptures on environment, citing pertinent points concerning food as important cultural identity foregrounded by the chaotic sociopolitical moments (referencing the 1969 Malaysian ethnic conflicts) and the ways in which the places as expressed in the poems portray assortments of feelings and emotions, including, but are not limited to wonder, admiration and concern for Kuala Lumpur, reflecting the diverse experiences and perspectives of the poets. By examining a Malaysian poet and her experience as a female flâneur, her various interactions and observations across worldwide cities were captured through psychogeography as an approach (Khaidzir et al., 2021). By revealing empathy and humanity as some of the central insights, the work by Khaidzir and his colleagues interrogate the broader roles of flâneurs both as observers and participants. However, one of the most fascinating insights points to the reflection of the poet's journey to self-discovery and the impact of her surroundings on her identity as a Muslim woman. Another fascinating point of articulation is the stable application of psychogeography that examines participants-as flâneurs in Melaka (Khaidzir et al., 2022a), that stands in stark contrast against normal incorporation of psychogeography and poems. Yet, as much as places are steeped in the consciousness of psychogeography as the main attendant, these studies might have minoritised de-urbanised representations, a focus on rural madrasa in which this article will emphasise. Still, how does psychogeography illuminate the engagement between self and place within the context of non-urban communities?

This article contends that as one sifts through the personal narratives emerging from Malaysian madrasa dwellers, these accounts invariably reveal numerous dimensions of emotion and sensory experiences. Departing from prior work, which often focuses on industrial, bustling cities and empowered female figures, this study instead expands the discourse on psychogeography by foregrounding the rural inhabitants' voices. Their symbolic attachment to and experiences of the countryside are no longer relegated to the periphery but are brought to the forefront, challenging us to rethink notions of self and place. As Ryan, Foote and Azaryahu (2016) argue, the personal narratives of the villagers often serve as a powerful means for expressing their connections to the spaces they inhabit. In the pages that follow, this article aims to diverge from existing explorations by celebrating rural life and its contemporary (re)constructions. This shift places the cohesive experience of de-urbanisation in direct contrast to the mechanised, strenuous demands of cityscapes, a contrast vividly illuminated in the subsequent personal narratives.

Dialectics of environment, dynamics of personal narratives

The following contemporary studies do not assert to provide an exhaustive account of all ways in which personal narratives have been employed and examined. Yet, they may illuminate some ways that encourage researchers to appreciate the profound value these narratives hold. Personal narratives generally commingle interactions, tailored for a specific audience (Bruner, 1991). Viewed from one perspective, research employing such narratives offers a remarkable latitude of interpretation. In environments that stimulate the senses, individuals may feel encouraged to question conventional notions, particularly as studies concerning personal narratives tend to accommodate both overt and latent responses. For example, Eastmond's (2007) exploration of personal narratives reveals how these stories can serve as a means of self-reaffirmation, enabling individuals to contest the overly generalised and dehumanising depictions which are often perpetuated in certain societies. In another example, Bruner (1991) demonstrates that humans principally organise their experiences and recollections of past events in the form of stories. This might accord privilege to personal narratives as sense-making 'instruments'.

Narratives usually do not exist autonomously but require active construction and deliberate articulation. Stories potentially function as tools through which individuals impose order and coherence upon the inherent chaos of reality (Bamberg and McCabe, 1998). By arranging events and actions into sequences that follow a discernible logic, personal narratives are frequently imbued with varied facets of meanings. For instance, research employing personal narratives could not only interpret participants' experiences (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2004; Mascia, 2020) but also craft images of what participants feel and see, serving both external audience and their own introspective purposes (Idrus et al., 2024). Reflecting on the diverse ways in which these studies draw upon personal narratives, this paper advocates for a more contemplative approach. It seeks to reconceptualise personal narratives as ways to converge stories, images and lived experiences, a perspective informed, in part, by the madrasa dwellers' explorations of their environment.

Psychogeography as a lens

Before examining the multilayered experiences drawn from the personal narratives that reimagine the relationship between self and place, it is useful to first consider the research specifics and key concepts. This article firstly centres on the concept of flânerie as a methodological lens for exploring and observing environments. Flâneurs or flâneuses are typically understood as individuals who are acutely sensitive to the subtleties of social dynamics and the various atmospheres that shape specific places (Sidaway, 2022). The practice of flânerie, often characterised by seemingly aimless wandering, becomes a mode of enquiry that transcends ordinary walking and through astute observation and analytical interpretation, flâneurs depict the hidden meanings embedded within spaces (Holloway, 2021). Seen in this way, flâneurs serve as bridges between environment and human consciousness, offering profound insights into sociocultural contexts. They might illuminate the memories tied to places (in this case, the countryside madrasa), embodying the role of inhabitants who discern how spaces shape human thought and behaviour, unlocking the

psychogeographical processes at play, and shedding light on the intricate connection between place and self.

Secondly, psychogeographical approach emphasises the concept of 'drifting', derived from the French term, dérive. This idea refers to one's ability to roam through specific places, absorbing sensory experiences through observing, gathering and interpreting meanings and information in their entirety. When individuals drift into their surroundings, they might engage with particular aspects of the landscape, a process that is central to psychogeography's objective of integrating the mind, behaviour and environment in a seamless harmony. Drifting serves not only as a means of elevating one's awareness of the environment but also encourages individuals to recognise the profound influence that their surroundings exert upon them (Sidaway, 2022). In the context of the present psychogeographical tracing, the rural madrasa dwellers as flâneurs, drifted freely around the madrasa without predetermined direction, an unplanned and organic exploration which is shaped by the socio-cultural and situational contexts in which it occurs (Holloway, 2021), as the following pages will show.

Writing psychogeography, writing madrasa. The madrasa in question, pseudonymised here as madrasa al-Amin to ensure privacy and facilitate reference, is dedicated to both lifelong learning and Islamic instruction. The madrasa, which houses both youth and elderly individuals, is frequented voluntarily or at parental consent. Its attendees mostly come from impoverished or vulnerable backgrounds such as survivors of domestic abuse, financially strained divorced women and elderly persons. Said madrasa combines a diverse array of Quranic studies, including liberal arts and business ventures (fruit plantation and food catering). This incorporation of learning opportunities makes it particularly appealing to seniors, as the madrasa also provides for the poor, elderly and young occupants who have lost their parents and whose conditions rely on public donations or monthly allowances from district and state governments. The madrasa spans ~0.4–0.5 hectares, constructed in a variety of styles; some buildings are brick, while others feature wooden panels and nipa roofs (see Fig. 1).

The buildings are well-lit during the day, though some areas remain shrouded in dim light due to the variable financial support from donors. Featuring two courtyards, one with high ceilings, used mainly for religious activities, and the other expansive and open designated for lifelong learning and food preparation, the madrasa provides space for the congregation to assemble for prayers and religious sermons twice a week, while on other days, they disperse into smaller groups. Men and women generally maintain separate spaces, and seniors are cared for by appointed guardians, under the supervision of the madrasa's leader. Among its inhabitants is a former Buddhist, who spent over 20 years in engineering before reverting to Islam and who, despite familial and social challenges, relinquished his professional life and assets, settling at said madrasa. Similarly, a woman in her late fifties from Mindanao, Philippines, chose to embrace Islam and enrol at said madrasa, seeking to reconcile moral and religious dilemmas.

Accumulation of personal narratives. Following discussions with the madrasa leader, the researchers were granted access for a period of 3 days, accompanied by a research assistant who had an established connection with said madrasa. The first day was designated for acclimatisation so the researchers were acquainted with both the inhabitants and the environment through cordial interactions. The subsequent 2 days were dedicated to collecting personal narratives and following up on these accounts. So, on the first day, informal conversations were used to establish rapport with the madrasa dwellers. The said research assistant, acting as a liaison with the leader, ensured that researchers' intent to conduct psychogeographical tracing and personal narrative collection was clearly communicated, free from any misunderstanding. By the day's end, sixty-seven madrasa inhabitants were recommended by the madrasa leader, and they were informed that a project briefing would take place on the second day.

Fig. 1 Madrasa.

On the second day, personal narratives were gathered from the said rural dwellers regarding their experiences at the madrasa. The research assistant explained the study's aims, including matters involving consent and confidentiality. The dwellers were introduced to the concept of flâneurship as a guiding principle, receiving guidance on engaging with their surroundings through open-mindedness and attentive observation. No specific instructions regarding their routes or the locations they should explore were given. Although the inhabitants were not explicitly labelled as flâneurs, they were encouraged to adopt this role, exploring and interpreting their environment freely. To aid them in recording their narratives, which were to focus on their personal stories and experiences (Creswell, 2007, p. 480), each madrasa

occupant was provided with an A4-sized notebook and keywords to prompt their observations and reflections: observe, notice, collect, analyse, reflect and move (Khaidzir et al., 2022a). As they roamed the madrasa at their own pace, they were encouraged to document their explorations and discoveries (Khaidzir et al., 2022a). After explaining the mechanics of narrative writing and addressing their questions, the madrasa residents signed consent forms, adhering to McNamara's (2009) principles for administering personal narratives. Finally, the dwellers dispersed around the madrasa. After an hour of wandering, they were given 10 min to complete their written reflections, focusing on what they had experienced, how the landscape evoked memories and how the environment shaped their sensory responses, including what they saw, heard, touched and felt during their dérive.

On the third day, the research assistant sought clarifications on certain aspects of the personal narratives to ensure that madrasa inhabitants' intentions were accurately reflected in their accounts. The team concluded the investigation by expressing their gratitude to both the madrasa leader and the participants, and the madrasa leader was further informed that the researchers might reach out again in case something arose during the narrative analysis phase.

Of the sixty-seven personal narratives collected, only fifty were deemed eligible for analysis. Seventeen were excluded due to issues such as illegible handwriting, irrelevant content, or incomplete responses. The researchers proceeded with multiple readings of the eligible narratives (McNamara, 2009), rewriting the stories using the framework proposed by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002). This framework entails identifying key elements within the narratives, marking [S] for settings, [C] for characters, [A] for actions, [P] for problems and [R] for resolutions. Specifically, under this framework (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002, p. 335), 'settings' are referred to as 'context, environment, conditions, place, time and locale', while 'characters' symbolised interactions with the madrasa, including 'style and patterns' concerning issues they observed. 'Problems' and 'actions' represented the stages of events that prompted reflection, linking past experiences to present ones by considering 'questions to be answered or phenomena to be explained' and 'feelings, intentions and actions'. 'Resolution' depicted 'turning points' in the madrasa residents' stories. For example, 'many find it difficult to accept his apologies (if and only if he apologises)' represents 'resolution', while 'the loss of forests is widespread' signifies the 'problem'. 'This somewhat triangular land could have been humbler and peaceable, and it should not reflect other unsafe areas' could be symbolised as 'action' and 'madrasa fountain' can be understood as 'setting' while 'we' could be categorised as 'characters'. The themes drawn are: (1) personal stories concerning their exploration with the madrasa in general, (2) specific memories that the madrasa environment generates and how these might be helpful or problematic, and (3) how what they touch, see, and feel change their perspectives about the madrasa. In the following pages, these themes are elaborated upon in conjunction with psychogeographical perspectives due to limitation of space.

However, as an approach, personal narratives often face challenges, particularly concerning reliability and validity. The limitations might arise from the difficulty in generating quantifiable corpus due to the subjective nature of the narratives and the potential for interpretive ambiguity. While such biases are common in qualitative research, scholars agree that personal narratives still hold value as they capture subjective truths (Ryan, 2017), and we addressed some ways that mitigated researcher's presence and interpretive biases. First, as highlighted earlier, it was the research assistant who sought consent, clarification and provided prompts because the research assistant could de-emphasise and soften some hierarchy and power-related gaps (status, age and gender) that might have influenced participants' responses. The research assistant in question was trained for more than 18 h and given briefing and instructions on how to answer questions asked by the participants (St Croix and Doherty, 2024). Second, to guard against interpretive bias in the handling of prompts, member checks were also conducted to ensure that the researchers' interpretations of the narratives faithfully reflected the participants' intended meanings (Piaw, 2020). Additionally, two peer debriefers lent their scholarly insights: one an expert in postcolonial literature, and the other holding a doctorate in English literature. Both possess over a decade of teaching experience in the field of literature and they are deeply versed in the interplay between personal narratives and psychogeography. Due to space constraints, only eight of these narratives have been selected for discussions in this article.

Reimagining de-urbanised madrasa: a psychogeographical perspective

The first narrative is by Ema, a 35-year-old divorced woman who arrived in the madrasa following unmet promises and responsibilities by her former husband. Ema, who enjoys contributing to the madrasa's cleaning and gastronomic duties, writes the following account:

> Our leader may be visionary. He wants to keep our madrasa exceptionally peaceful. In the beginning, he only had one wooden hut, then, as time passed by, so many people arrived here and he has made this space much more meaningful than it is just for learning. So many people have bought the fish that is reared here, more chicken was sold and more rambutans were picked up. At the request of passers-by and the state council, he provided caterers only on Sundays.

The use of retrospection and introspection allows madrasa dwellers like Ema to prioritise the centrality of a past fragment and its relation to the existing place. By using words such as 'wooden hut' and 'more meaningful' to demonstrate somewhat the unassumingly modest beginnings of the madrasa, the unofficial goal here is probably to capture the importance of evolution in her preliminary sketch of said madrasa's trajectory. The selection of details, particularly, the madrasa's poignant revelatory, peri goods and agricultural produce, suggests to the reader that the madrasa dwellers grow together with nature; where there is a presence of soil maturity, there is abundance of fruit ripeness; when fertile growth flourishes, it draws a throng of visitors who are irresistibly drawn to its allure. Seen in one way, Ema's account of the madrasa's landscape might well illustrate that there is no concern regarding the madrasa lagging behind in the competition for survival; the growing relationship between human and nature, Ema writes, remodels the madrasa 'into a synchronic universe wherein present and past aligned to ensure historical continuity' (Tso, 2020, p. 9).

Ahmad, who just turned 29 years old, arrived at madrasa al-Amin to advance his Quran memorisation techniques. He articulated the following narrative:

> Our prayer hall here was attended by hundreds and hundreds of visitors and learners; my fellow dwellers can attest to the presence of many high scorers whose exam records made them eligible for credit transfer at so many colleges and universities. So, it is here in the prayer hall where the news broke about my friend, Amir, who received his first-class degree in culinary arts and a small amount of money from the leader when he video-called us showing his degree certificate.

Celebrations and glorious events mark the centrality of a madrasa as one of the most preferred places to accord one's esteemed accomplishments. Ahmad perceives the madrasa by way of the prayer hall as a place that propels one towards lifelong rewards, expressed through the employment of 'high achievers', 'first-class degrees' and 'degree certificate'. On the one hand, the said madrasa, as Ahmad writes, has evoked deep emotions concerning one's professional achievements within its walls and beyond. On the other hand, success attained at the madrasa which, in many respects, translates to success elsewhere, has cemented the institution's ability to fuel a nostalgic individualism, a sentiment integral to said madrasa's enduring reputation. In this way, as Debord (2006) argues, the madrasa might have served as an influence on Ahmad's emotions, and on any circumstance or behaviour that appears to generate the same spirit of accomplishments. By reconciling the triumph associated with mainstream education vis-à-vis 'credit transfer', Ahmad's experiences with said madrasa 'explore the nexus between the human psyche and the geographical environment' (Löffler, 2017, p. 42).

A 45-year-old cable worker, Bashir, who divided his schedule between his work and the madrasa's education, writes the following:

> During the madrasa's welcome week, the leader told us that he loved this comparatively rich and fruitful land, with its sun-baked, runny soil. The *mimbar* (minbar) is circularly decorated with small, raised windows that link the porches and the madrasa courtyard. The rambutan and melon trees down there, next to the plantation are tangled, heavy and dense. This area, close to half a hectare in size, also accommodates many animals, including chickens and cows. I can relate to the space, especially the courtyard connected to the office; it makes me feel at peace, enlightened, refined and ardent. I could easily sit in this square-based hall, with its small gable windows, allowing me to commit to sincere, fervent, and obligatory prayer.

Bashir's apparent discernment of the leader's deep affection for the madrasa, rooted in its 'rich and fruitful land', seems to imply that for the madrasa to flourish, its significance might better be measured against the very depth of the natural world that nurtures its 'trees' and 'animals'. On one level, in intertwining his reflections regarding the importance of 'soil', 'courtyard' and 'hall', Bashir's narrative grants access to the space, inviting us to imagine the narrative world where benevolence resides within the sacred space. On another level, the vast and boundless madrasa becomes the locus where all heartfelt submission to God converges, transforming the madrasa into an axis emphasising distinctive and enshrined vision of Islam. This encounter between nature and the divine, which courses through Bashir's mind in series of associations, materialises into familiar flashbacks that resonate deeply with other madrasa dwellers like him. Bashir's writing, thus, mirrors what Tso (2020) argues; nature is intrinsic to society and, by extension, the world. Since society represents 'nature in' its 'civilised form', (p. 17) and the world comprises the collective of societies, the laws of nature must inevitably prevail within any society, and in any part of the world, including said madrasa.

Marina, a volunteer, who lived 10 min away from madrasa al-Amin shares the following story:

> In the pristine, old-growth and perhaps austere environment of the madrasa, one can find a sense of divine. Different from what the news told us; our madrasa has become a benchmark for several poultry businesses. Striving for excellence, everyone is dedicated to it, guided by the leader who has both the skills and knowledge necessary for success. Our madrasa, though surrounded by ample, lush, and largely unspoilt trees, provides us with adequate, portable, all-weather shelters not just for learning but also for socialising. Our ceaseless and fervent worship practices continue, often in quiet and unspoken ways. The shape of this hall accommodates many of us, most of whom come from difficult and fractured environments.

Marina reveals the potent and advantageous nature of the madrasa, emphasising phrases such as 'benchmark for several poultry businesses' and 'ample, lush and largely unspoilt trees' and suggesting complex debtor-creditor dynamics. On the one hand, the madrasa dwellers appear indebted to the 'shelters', particularly the 'hall', which stands as a graceful and remarkable structure, even for those described as 'broken'. On the other hand, the flourishing natural surroundings enhance the madrasa's reputation, lending further credit to a place generally regarded as a 'benchmark' for other business enterprises. Thus, in contrast to news writings that depict Muslim spaces as violent, Marina defamiliarises 'controlled perceptions of the impoverished' (Tso, 2020, p. 21), rejecting 'various ideologies' regarding de-urbanised madrassas (Fournier, 2018, p. 2).

Razeef, a 34-year-old university student, was a part-timer at madrasa al-Amin, teaching Islamic worldview on weekends. Razeef could not help but notice the beauty of this privilege-wrought madrasa:

> This madrasa which I stepped into is wild and thick with some tall trees, but this remarkable Allah's creation is nothing without Allah's divine intervention and blessings. The madrasa, madrasa buildings and roads are lined up with trees, and in some places, the trees provide the escape from blistering heat with their dusky chills. We move our pace in recitation of the holy Quran and daily routines according to the movements of these trees, mostly when the trees sway to shield us from hot weather.

As Razeef writes, the madrasa confers a sense of privilege upon him through 'divine intervention', 'blessings' and 'shield', expressions that imbue the madrasa with an aura of immaterial knowledge, shaping the reader's perception of it as a space of benevolence uniting its dwellers with nature. On one level, Razeef envisions that the madrasa's tranquil spirit is unlikely to be disrupted by external forces, for its serene beauty invites wonder from readers and visitors alike, especially those unaccustomed to its panoramic and soulful charm. On another level, perhaps only dwellers like Razeef provide access to the true essence of the madrasa's landscape, shaped by a profound connection between place and the sense of space, embodying the emotional and affective bonds (Karmakar, 2025). Razeef, therefore, suggests that the stability of the madrasa's representation stems from the enduring constancy of its landscape, which (re)colours one's perception and (re)shapes how individuals project themselves into it. Razeef perceives the madrasa as an unblemished façade that should not be compromised for its inhabitants, including himself and believes it should be prioritised as a faith-centred environment above all else.

Kadeer, at the time of the investigation, was a former 50-year-old government servant, who had accumulated a range of diplomatic and foreign affairs roles. Kadeer experiences the following emotions at said madrasa:

> My favourite time to spend in the madrasa courtyard, away from the distractions of the busy city life, is between 7:00 and 7:15 am, when the air is filled with a gentle breeze coupled with the sight of a spectacular sunrise, framed by

> the vast, nearly boundless soft green leaves. This brings a real sense of calm and repose to the mind. During this time, I do my memorisation and call my mum, just to hear her voice. It feels as though the landscape surrounding the madrasa is forgiving and it always attunes to our needs. At this moment, it is so peaceful and I am delighted to share how the landscape may reveal why we are so drawn to this strange yet beautiful rural setting. The serenity offered by the madrasa landscape even seems to cool down the ablution water—and perhaps the filtered water too!

The clusters of soul-nourishing expressions, 'gentle breeze', 'spectacular sunrise', 'boundless soft green leaves' and 'a sense of calm and repose to the mind', along with madrasa dwellers like Kadeer who memorises the Quran, seem to reinforce the harmonious activities of the madrasa's inhabitants, subtly drawing attention to how the rural setting shapes their shared responses. These lexical choices invite reflection on the way this particular location not only affects the more tangible elements such as the 'ablution water' and 'filtered water', but also underscores the significance of the dense trees and nature as one of the madrasa's many cohesive spaces. More importantly, it encourages him to forge a connection between the external influences of the 'rural setting' and the internal vitality drawn from the 'peaceful' and 'serene' environment. The natural elements, trees and fresh air, thus elevate the wanderer's experience, serving as an inalienable 'gift' in the creation of psychogeography of self and place.

Zakeeya was a former food catering owner. Because her children were all grown, the 51-year-old widow contributes to the madrasa's food preparation. Zakeeya has the following to say in her personal narrative:

> This madrasa is situated near a mountainous area, but unfortunately, the region has been subjected to repeated logging, leaving the soil too fragile to walk on. The land has become loose, swampy and spongy, making it unlikely for grass to grow. This now poses significant inconvenience. If you compare the land to how it was 10 years ago, probably the difference is clear; it was at least pleasant before, though not particularly striking.

Unlike the rest of the madrasa dwellers, Zakeeya scrutinises the image of the misalliance between the current and past renderings of the madrasa. The visions of the madrasa, as Zakeeya experiences, are imbued with connotations of abandonment and at times, utter destruction. Through phrases such as 'too fragile', 'swampy' and 'inconvenience', Zakeeya may be foregrounding a sense of discomfort, eroding the uniformity of the landscape. This ultimately brings us to two pertinent viewpoints. First, Zakeeya appears to project her blame against the land situated close to the madrasa as it severs the resourced ecology (Karmakar, 2025), highlighting the rupture in the landscape's continuity and the dissonance wrought by land neglect, which, in turn, fosters a sense of dereliction. Second, 'the consequence of the territorial transformations', as Zakeeya crucially highlights, 'was that the inherited environmental legacy may no longer be passed down, sustained, or perpetuated' (Marengo, 2018, p. 25). By focusing on the shifting nature of the land, Zakeeya's memories and experiences alert readers to the fact that the adjacent, forsaken land seems to tarnish the reputation of the madrasa itself, diminishing the palimpsestic depth of the land, an area long left uncared for and thus stripped of its once layered significance.

Finally, we are introduced to Naomee, a 47-year-old single mother, who writes the following narrative:

> Our madrasa is truly beautiful. The rambutans and melons growing near the dome porch are delightful, thriving perfectly as we avoid sourcing food from big companies or big markets. I can't speak for others, but my madrasa boasts stunning landscapes, and those who have the opportunity to be here can enjoy these views while working on their Quran recitation, Fiqh and other courses. I mean, who wouldn't appreciate working in such a serene environment? Newspaper reports on madrassas are harsh and unwelcoming, and no one would want to be here. But look at these fruits, mashallah, their roots nourish madrasa land, contributing to its sustainability and purity.

Naomee's choice of details, focusing on specific elements of the madrasa such as 'dome porch', 'rambutans', 'melons' and the 'serene environment', suggests that she enjoys and makes connection with the madrasa's environment. However, her wariness of exploitation by 'big companies', and her efforts to highlight the abundance of 'fruits' and calming 'roots' reveal the mindful strategies of a perceptive madrasa inhabitant who observe stark contrast between what is said out there and what she feels concerning the said rural madrasa. Unlike 'newspaper reports', Naomee invites readers to share this idyllic vision of the madrasa, hoping they, too, will be drawn into its tranquillity and peace, drawing strength from the madrasa as a sacred place and using 'dome porch' to symbolise protection, an enduring shelter for inhabitants like herself. Her attentive and insightful observations clearly reveal the madrasa structure as more than a mere comfort or amenity; it is a halcyon, almost transcendental, building. By granting us access to her reflections on the madrasa, Naomee reimagines it as 'a unifying core radiating through all' inhabitants, drawing them together as 'one seamless entity', where the essence of the place becomes an immanent inheritance, something intangible yet palpable to all insiders (Tso, 2020, p. 62). In this way, Naomee's writing constructs a de-urbanised 'place, where factual descriptions of reality are enriched with subjective interpretations, creating spaces in-between' (Löffler, 2017, p. 35).

Conclusion

Due to the lack of de-urbanised psychogeography studies in Malaysia, no scholar to date has investigated in any real depth the rural psychogeographical tracings using personal narratives. This is to say that Malaysian de-urbanised psychogeography, an imaginative exploration between non-city landscapes and human connection that encourages individuals to shoehorn fresh perspectives, has been 'sanitised', particularly those that employ personal narratives. One could justifiably ask whether these personal psychogeographical accounts presented in this article constitute adequate data for generalisation, or whether the summary one reaches in this conclusion might have been altered had one used different categories of fiction and narratives to advance a countryside psychogeographical focus. There is no easy answer to such questions. The personal narratives chosen here illustrate some clear and compelling examples of non-urban madrasa dwellers that present some similarities and differences with existing studies in the intersection of literary and psychogeography. Firstly, this investigation bears a resemblance with Holloway (2021), Idrus et al. (2024), Martin (2021) and Zhao (2022)'s investigations in the way the narratives draw upon placeness to investigate opportunities to defy and change mainstream perception and emotions, challenging perspectives concerning memories, home, and attachments. Secondly, the analysis of this study might share a similar outcome with the subtle degradations of the landscape as well as the decline of industry and economy (see, for example, Cooper, 2020). Cognizant of these points, this article is compelled to further accentuate its connections with personal narratives, theoretical contribution, and discourses on rural studies and non-urban psychogeography, including recommendations for future work.

The dwellers who recount their experiences with madrasa al-Amin place broader emphasis on personal narratives. Firstly, by recontextualising Hiitola and Vähä-Savo's (2021) framework emphasising personal narratives, writing about the inhabitants' ways of reimagining the self and place sets them against official writings about madrasa situated in said village areas, exalting rural areas and (re)constructing alternative knowledge. These personal narratives are frequently shaped by their emotional and intellectual responses to varied facets of the surrounding environment. That is, in expressing their words, meanings and experiences in relation to the madrasa, they situate themselves within geographical contexts that encompass the physical features of the location, whether it be the madrasa itself or its surrounding areas. These reflections are often attuned to individual aspects of design or the madrasa's dual role as both a home and workplace. Secondly, by reading each narrative, one can observe how depictions of the occupants' relationships with the madrasa's structures and natural environment mirror de-urbanised consumers and commodities. This means that the psychogeographical tracings excavated in this investigation might generate the necessary private articulations related to those issues important to rural, individual and communal longevity (Kaufman, 2018). It is this very goal of personal narratives that has encouraged some of said madrasa's goers to view the madrasa in a rousing contrast than the ones presented to them in an authoritative manner.

Bearing the centrality of personal narratives, several aspects of de-urbanised psychogeography of madrasa might be theorised. First, it is, thus, posited that impoverished individuals at said rural madrasa who have made connections with the madrasa landscape possess unique and distinct narratives concerning their psychogeographical experiences. As a result of their interactions with the madrasa landscape, their psychogeographical paths may illustrate the ways in which said madrasa serves not merely as a physical space but as a complex environment that reconfigures their perceptions and lived realities. The connections established between the madrasa's inhabitants and their surroundings might have revised their understanding of identity, community and belonging, thus providing them with rich, varied facets of experiences that mirror their socio-economic status and cultural heritage. Second, in comparison to conventional and often dangerous depictions of Muslim spaces, de-urbanised psychogeography of the madrasa places a synchronised emphasis on fostering, permeating and preserving social engagements for a shared vision of interconnectedness, all in pursuit of a dynamic principle of integration. That is, this component nurtures a collective vision of linkages that transcends mere physical presence, allowing for the cultivation of a meaningful and purposeful integration within the madrasa community. This bears a rousing contrast against the narrowly entrenched and often sensationalised depictions of violence within Muslim spaces. Finally, despite the hardships and harsh realities generally associated with impoverished communities in rural areas, de-urbanised psychogeography by the marginals at the madrasa reveals not only their perseverance in complying with established divine, sacred paths but also their willingness to seize the opportunity to reimagine their surroundings. They offer fresh, imaginative sketches of their own sociocultural trajectories, weaving new narratives amidst the constraints of their environment. Their experiences and insights might call for a re-evaluation of the dominant narratives that often overlook the rich complexity of life in rural madrassas, highlighting the potential for transformation, growth and communal strength in the face of adversity.

The theory, de-urbanised psychogeography of madrasa, contributes to several aspects. Firstly, it is, of course, imperative to say that theorising de-urbanised psychogeography of the madrasa means that this theorisation is provisional and partial. This is to say, while this article has somewhat generated refreshing insights about madrassas, the stories vis-à-vis personal narratives might only be confined to madrassas situated in de-urbanised areas; to be more specific, the positing of psychogeography of madrassas might not offer wider generalisability beyond the ones located in Peninsular Malaysia. This means that subsequent work involving psychogeographical drifts combining urban and non-urban areas becomes all the more urgent since this paper's theoretical contribution might make use of the stark contrast yielded through this very comparative psychogeographical tracing. Secondly, the psychogeography of madrassas posited in this article can be articulated further by combining personal narratives and literary media (including novels and short stories about madrassas). This is to say that the combination of various literary texts may illustrate a sharp distinction since literary work are generally accompanied by either authority-defined ideology (Idrus et al., 2020) or everyday-defined identities (Idrus et al., 2016). By considering these alternatives, the theoretical contribution involving madrasa psychogeographical depictions could trace and shape different emotions and behaviours, offering varied facets of caution, advice and guidance at different madrassas.

This investigation is one of the many that has expanded on the discourse of rural studies and non-urban psychogeography. Firstly, contemporary studies involving psychogeography of urban-ness and cityscape are de-emphasised, opening up the possibility for these narratives to free themselves from colluding with writings of the ruling class about rural dwellers and madrassas. Because de-urbanised psychogeographical tracings are generally excluded from direct participation in mainstream humanities even though they are the very medium which obligates humans' consents and dissents, this investigation broadens the rural studies and non-urban psychogeography discourses by not only granting readers a view of the madrasa and its surroundings through the eyes of dwellers in a countryside, but also covertly criticising the lack of care to the preservation of natural environment. These narratives by de-urbanised madrasa dwellers recognise that they are not solely defined by their geography that might place them on the fringes of cities and work instead to resist these constraints. The deference to the hailing calls by madrassas for environment preservation in rural areas by positioning themselves as de-urbanised inhabitants can be seen as their attempts to present pertinent roles of non-urban psychogeography not just as observations, but also as inspirations and constructions of spatial practices of rural places. Therefore, although narratives concerning countryside residents (in this case, madrasa inhabitants) have generally been sanitised in the Malaysian literary 'scene', they are in fact central to problematising the city-rural dichotomy. To look through the lens of psychogeography is to accentuate the gaps between what we know and what we are told to believe concerning de-urbanised madrasa residents. It is useful to recall the compelling words of Sidaway (2022) as he asks for a re-learning of psychogeography which might irrevocably change one's view of the varied facets of psychogeography. He draws attention to an alternative version of psychogeography when he says that 'the margins, centres, encounters and constraints prioritised demand further reflection and indicate potential for a broadened field of psychogeography within human geography that engages a varied range of sites, orientations and protagonists. At the same time, psychogeographical drifts have moved outside of urban foci' (p. 564). By doing so, this article might assert its rightful place in the conversation, challenging the dominance of city-centric narratives and opening a space for the rural experience to be fully acknowledged.

Finally, two central areas might better be considered for prospective research. Firstly, there is an opportunity to incorporate differing text types sourced from online articles, newspaper columns, magazine issues and blogs that provide depictions of psychogeography in non-urban areas. By combining various text genres, exposure to varied facets of narrative patterns can be presented. Secondly, prospective investigations might better focus on theorising de-urbanised psychogeography concerning miscellaneous religious places such as temples, synagogues and churches. Through incorporating diverse places of faith, generalisability of the study can be enhanced. Therefore, these two pivotal suggestions generate insights that are worthwhile as they are contextualised within broader religious and narrative conditions.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study. If data availability requestors are persistent to know more about the study, the Government of Malaysia must be contacted in writing because the Government of Malaysia funds this study and that the privacy of the participants might be compromised.

Received: 1 October 2024; Accepted: 10 June 2025;
Published online: 05 July 2025

References

Amran NA, Ali Termizi A, Talif R, Awang ME (2022) Reconstructing the gendered spaces using psychogeography in Chan Ling Yap's sweet offerings. J Lang Comm 9(1):60–79. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-jxZ7ccZ1cUHL68CbfCqduAoxsNNtWCR/view
Amran NA, Ali Termizi A (2020) The visible flâneuse in Chan Ling Yap's Where the Sunrise is Red. 3L SEA J Eng Lang Stud 26(2):81–93. https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2020-2602-06
Bamberg MGW, McCabe A (1998) Editorial. Nar Inq 8(1):iii–v
Bougherira H (2020) Reconstructing identity through voyages in/out in Toni Morrison's god help the child: a psychogeographical analysis. Arab W Eng J Trans Lit Stud 4(2):263–275. https://doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol4no2.20
Bruner J (1991) The narrative construction of reality. Crit Inq 18(1):1–21
Cooper D (2020) Contemporary British place writing: towards a definition. In: Edensor T, Kalandies A, Kothari U (eds) The Routledge handbook of place, 1st edn. Routledge, Abingdon, p 634–643
Creswell JW (2007) Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches. Sage, Thousand Oaks
Czarniawska-Joerges B (2004) Narratives in social science research. Sage, Thousand Oaks
Debord G (2006) Situationist international anthology (trans: Knabb K). Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley
Eastmond M (2007) Stories as lived experience: narratives in forced migration research. J Ref Stud 20(2):248–264
Fournier M (ed) (2018) Rural writing: geographical imaginary and expression of a new regionality. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Berkeley
Hiitola J, Vähä-Savo V (2021) Genres of departure: forced migrants' family separation and personal narratives. Nord J Mig Res 11(3):235–249
Holloway P (2021) Walking in imaginary shoes: psychogeographic approaches for fiction writing. Writ Pract 7(7):74–89. https://www.nawe.co.uk/DB/wip-editions/editions/vol.-7.html
Hones S (2022) Literary geography. Routledge, Abingdon
Idrus MM, Hashim RH, Mohd Mydin R (2016) Globalization, re-discovery of the Malay 'local,' and popular TV fiction through audience narratives. 3L SEA J Eng Lang Stud 22(2):31–48. https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2016-2202-03
Idrus MM, Hashim RH, Mohd Mydin R (2020) Postcolonial civic identity and youth (dis)organizing the environment: A growth into citizenship analysis. GEMA J Lang Stud 20(2):133–147. https://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2020-2002-08
Idrus MM, Ahmad Mahir N, Ismail H, Jaafar N (2024) Tahfiz psychogeography of the marginals: Reimagining self and place through narratives. 3L SEA J Eng Lang Stud 30(4):60–73. https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2024-3004-05
Karmakar G (2025) Dams, development and disposability: eco-anxiety, precarity and submerging voices in Na. D'souza's *Dweepa*. Humanit Soc Sci Commun 12(44):1–9
Kaufman DR (2018) Social science, narratives and feminist practice. Nashim J Jew Wom Stud Gen Iss 32:11–22
Khaidzir MFS, Hashim RS, Md Yusof N (2021) Nor Faridah's wanderings as female flâneur in the art of naming. GEMA J Lang Stud 21(3):140–153. https://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2021-2103-08
Khaidzir MFS, Hashim RS, Md Yusof N (2022a) Psychogeographical experience between the self and the place. J Nusa Stud 7(1):243–263. https://doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol7iss1pp243-263
Khaidzir MFS, Hashim RS, Md Yusof N (2022b) A psychogeographical tracing of place attachment in selected poems of Kuala Lumpur. 3L SEA J Eng Lang Stud 28(1):181–198. https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2022-2801-13
Lewis TE (2020) Cities gone wild. Post Sc Edu 2:597–600
Link A (2016) Psychogeography's legacy in From Hell and Watchmen. Eur Com Art 9(2):79–99. https://doi.org/10.3167/eca.2016.090205
Löffler C (2017) Walking in the city urban experience and literary psychogeography in eighteenth-century London. J. B. Metzler, Giessen
Marengo M (2018) From the rural "terroir" to the "neorural" novel: the contradictions and complementarities between popular and high literature in contemporary France. In: Fournier M (ed) Rural writing: geographical imaginary and expression of a new regionality. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, p 14–28
Martin HE (2021) Marking space: a literary psychogeography of the practice of a nurse artist. Dissertation, Victoria University of Wellington
Mascia R (2020) Complications of the climate change narrative within the lives of climate refugees: Slow causality and apocalyptic themes. Cons: J Sus Dev 22:31–38
McNamara C (2009) General guidelines for conducting interviews. http://managementhelp.org/businessresearch/interviews.htm. Accessed 20 Sept 2024
Ollerenshaw JA, Creswell JW (2002) Narrative research: a comparison of two restorying data analysis approaches. Qual Inq 8:329–347
Piaw CY (2020) Mastering research methods. McGraw-Hill Education, New York
Ryan M (2017) Narrative. In: Szeman I, Blacker S, Sully J (eds) A companion to critical and cultural theory. Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken, p 517 – 530
Ryan M, Foote K, Azaryahu M (2016) Narrating space/spatializing narratives: where narrative theory and geography meet. The Ohio State University Press, Columbus
Sidaway JD (2022) Psychogeography: walking through strategy, nature and narrative. Prog Hum Geog 46(2):549–574. https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325211017212
St Croix TD, Doherty L(2024) 'Capturing the magic:' grassroots perspectives on evaluating open youth work. J Youth Stud 27(4):486–502
Tso A (2020) The literary psychogeography of London: otherworlds of Alan Moore, Peter Ackroyd, and Iain Sinclair. Springer International Publishing, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham
Zhao Q (2022) I am here, yet somewhere else: a psychogeographic navigation through grief, loss and memory. Dissertation, University of Arts, Crafts and Design

Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) of Malaysia under the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS/1/2023/SSI10/USIM/02/1).

Author contributions

M.I. wrote and edited the journal article, following the completion of research. Prior to writing the journal article, M.I. was involved in drawing the parameters of the study. N.A.M. wrote and edited the journal article, following the completion of research. Prior to writing the journal article, N.A.M. was involved in drawing the parameters of the study. N.M. wrote and edited the journal article, following the completion of research. Prior to writing the journal article, N.M. was involved in drawing the parameters of the study. H.I. wrote and edited the journal article, following the completion of research. Prior to writing the journal article, H.I. was involved in drawing the parameters of the study.

Ethical approval

The ethical approval was obtained from the authors' institutional ethics committee, the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM/JKEP/2020-86) on April 16, 2020. The scope of the ethical approval included, type of research project, research field, research clusters, levels of research (either at university, national, or international levels), research areas, expected output, research objectives, conceptual framework, research methodology, procedures, informed consent, and the names and background of investigators. The procedures used in this study adhere to the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki and the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia.

Informed consent

Participants were assured both, through the study's briefing by the research assistant and in writing, concerning clear and detailed information about the study's objectives, procedures, participants' rights, and the voluntary nature of participation, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences, and that their anonymity

and confidentiality would be strictly protected with no personally identifiable information being collected. On June 12, 2024, each participant gave their written consent and confirmation to participate in the study by placing their written signature and contact number (in case the participants' writings about the madrasa were unclear). Specifically, the scope of the written informed consent form recorded participants' understandings about the study, participants' acknowledgments of the research assistant's explanation during the said briefing by the research assistant, particularly in terms of the purpose of the study, the set-up of the study, participants' understandings and acknowledgments of the research assistants' supply of adequate information about the study concerning protection of personal information, the use of collected data solely for research purposes, permission to publish anonymised findings, participants' understandings and acknowledgments about participants' rights to know about the study information from the research assistant, participants' understandings and acknowledgments that they were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without facing consequences, and finally, participants' agreement to participate in the study. The informed consent form was done as specified and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Additional information

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to Mohd Muzhafar Idrus.