

The Commencement of Character Education: A Religious Perspective

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KEY WORDS

Andragogic quality,
e-contents,
ADDIE model,
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study, entitled “The Commencement of Character Education: A Religious Perspective” was an exploration of the Quranic and the Biblical text using document analysis. Since the aim of education is to produce virtuous citizens, this phenomenon can be achieved by making the learners’ character strong. This paper explores the elements of character, using the religious text, which are absolutely necessary to be incorporated in the curriculum to make the learners able to come out from the captivity of negativity. The study proved that character education started from the beginning of civilization. The study has overarching significance for future studies in the field of character education and religious studies. This study aims to identify the elements of character from the religious texts. Quranic, Biblical and selected Hadiths’ references were used to identify the elements of character. Several themes emerged from studying the religious texts i.e. negation of arrogant behavior, tolerance, perseverance, integrity, respect, forgiveness, responsibility, courage, kindness, compassion and so on. These identified characters are crucial to be taught to the students in character education which should be inculcated in the main curriculum. This study has implication that there should be an awareness of inculcating favorable characters written in the religious texts to achieve the real purpose of education and as one of the commandments by the Almighty.

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Introduction

Character education is not new, in fact, we can probably date it back at least to Socrates, states McClellan (1999). Teaching for the character is not a new phenomenon, according to the Quranic evidence it can be dated back since the beginning of civilization. The Lord of the lords states in the Holy Quran (Itani, 2012), “We created you, then We shaped you, then We said to the angels, “Bow down before Adam;” so they bowed down, except for Satan; he was not of those who bowed down (The Elevations, al-A’raf: 11, p. 74). He said, “What prevented you from bowing down when I have commanded you?” He said, “I am better than he; You created me from fire, and You created him from mud” (The Elevations: 12, p. 74).He said, “Get down from it! It is not for you to act arrogantly in it. Get out! You are one of the lowly!”(The Elevations: 13, p. 74). The verse confirms that character education started from the very time when the Almighty created the first human being (Adam). The verse conveys a message that we should not act arrogantly rather we should be humble and obedient. Another verse confirms that the Almighty dislikes arrogance, “Without a doubt, God knows what they conceal and what they reveal. He does not like the arrogant” (The Quran, 16:23, Itani, 2012, p. 134). Another verse confirms the above-mentioned statement that pride and arrogance are not likeable to God, “And do not treat people with arrogance, nor walk proudly on earth. God does not love the arrogant showoffs” (The Quran, 31:18, Itani, 2012, p. 213).

Defining of Character Education

Lickona (1991) defines character as a reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way, involving three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior. Doyle (1997) presented the historical framework of character education writing that from the time of the ancient Greek to sometime in the late 19th century, a singular idea obtained: education’s larger purpose was to shape character, to make men (and later, women) better people. Fertman and van Linden (1999) defined character education as formal instruction in honesty, trust, cooperation, respect, responsibility, hope, determination, and loyalty. Josephson launched Character Counts with consensus of thirty scholars to promote what he eventually called the “Six Pillars of Character” (Josephson Institute, 2009). Table 1 presents the list of strengths related to the six pillars of character.

Table 1
Six Pillars of Character by Character Counts

Six Pillars	Strength Related to each Pillar
Trustworthiness	Honest, Reliability, Courage, Integrity, Loyalty
Respect	Tolerance, Courtesy, Consideration, Patience
Responsibility	Diligence, Perseverance, Self-control, Prudence
Caring	Kindness, Compassion, Gratitude, Generosity Forgiveness
Fairness	Cooperation, Open-mindedness
Citizenship	Cooperation, Initiative, Obedience Serving, Teamwork

Literature Review

Before defining the character education, it is inevitable to define character at first. Rooted in the Greek word '*Charakter*', the term character has come to mean the constellation of strengths and weaknesses that form and reveal who we are. Assessing our character means, taking an inventory of our dominant thoughts and actions (Templeton Foundation, 1999). Berkowitz & Bier (2004) define character as a complex set of psychological characteristics, formed in part by growth in cognition that enables a person to act as a moral agent.

Vessels and Boyd (1996) defined character education as strategic instruction that promotes social and personal responsibility and the development of the good character traits and moral virtues that make this possible. According to Plato and Aristotle, the purpose of education was to train good and virtuous citizens (Skinner, 2004). Otten (2000) stated that character education is as old as education itself. According to Ryan (1993), character education is the oldest aim of schools.

Various Conducted Studies on Character Education

The below given studies were conducted in different contexts but their sole aim was to investigate the impact of character education on the learners' behavior and academic achievements. Parker et al. (2010) conducted a comparison study in order to see the effect of character education on the behavior of the learners. Observational data from 12 elementary schools compared control and treatment conditions on classroom disruption, and examined the influences of class size and percentage of students receiving a free or reduced-price lunch (FRL). Results showed a weaker relationship between class size, FRL, and behavior problems within the character education schools than in control schools and that the character education program may have had a stronger influence in schools with a high percentage of students eligible for FRL.

A research team from the University of Minnesota designed the *Community Voices and Character Education Project* and collaborated with

educators across Minnesota. The schools involved in the program saw some improvement, and results included: 50% of staff respondents perceived improved discipline policies, between 30% and 40% of staff respondents reported improved student and teacher attitudes toward the school, increased sense of community and school pride, wider community involvement, and decreased student classroom misbehavior. Suspensions decreased, ranging from 8% to 23% improvement, detentions decreased, ranging from 8% to 33% improvement, misbehaviors decreased, ranging from 17% to 54% improvement and absenteeism decreased, ranging from 7% to 17% improvement (Narvaez, et al., 2004).

The Oregon Department of Education also conducted a character initiative from 1999–2003. It involved 33 schools in 6 school districts. Each district developed its own character education program and implemented it according to its specific needs. The districts experienced a decrease in disciplinary referrals, ranging from 31% to 62% improvement over 5 years.

The Georgia Department of Education implemented a character education program 1999-2002. Its implementation in the Rome High School showed positive results, despite their student population increasing by 17%. From 1997-1999, one year prior and the first year of implementation, Rome High School saw a 27% decrease in acts of violence and/or aggressive behavior, and 22% decrease in out-of-school suspensions. From 1999-2000, they reported another 48% decrease in acts of violence and/or aggressive behavior, and a 17% decline in out-of-school suspensions.

Research Questions

1. What is the religious perspective on the commencement of Character Education?
2. What are the religious perspectives on the commencement of Character Education through the Qur'an, Bible and Hadiths?

Methodology

People's values, virtues, dispositions, and attitudes can be explored in a number of ways. They are traceable by analyzing documents (Van Brummelen, 1994), by observing behavior in real life setting (Dunn & Brown, 1991), or laboratories (Hay et al., 1991) by asking people questions, e.g. scenario interviews (Kohlberg, 1984) or by a wide range survey (Halman, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to identify the elements and commencement of character education using the religious texts. The study was done using the documents analysis technique. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires

that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The Quran and the Bible were analyzed to figure out the elements of character. The collection of Hadith was also consulted to understand the importance of character education.

Religious Perspective on Character Education

This section describes the elements of character depicted in the Holy Quran, the Hadith and the Bible. The verses which deal with the elements of character have been given considerable importance in this section.

The term '*khuluq*' or character appears in several places in the Quran, such as in the verse "And You (Muhammad) are of a great moral character" (The Quran 68:4; Itani, 2012, p. 301). We have cited in this Quran for mankind every ideal that they may take heed (The Quran, 39:27; Itani, 2012). The teachings of Holy Quran confirm the importance of character education. "God instructs you to give back things entrusted to you to their owners. And when you judge between people; judge with justice. God's instructions to you are excellent. God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing" (The Quran, 4:58; Itani, 2012, p. 42).

Justice

The Holy Quran teaches us to do justice, it is stated, "O you who believe! Be upright to God, witnessing with justice, and let not the hatred of a certain people prevent you from acting justly. Adhere to justice, for that is nearer to piety, and fear God. God is informed of what you do" (The Quran, 5:8; Itani, 2012, p. 52). "If two groups of believers fight each other, reconcile between them. But if one group aggresses against the other, fight the aggressing group until it complies with God's command. Once it has complied, reconcile between them with justice, and be equitable. God loves the equitable" (The Quran, 49:9; Itani, 2012, p. 271).

Patience

The teachings of Quran support the concept of patience, "O you who believe! Seek help through patience and prayers. God is with the steadfast" (The Quran, 2:153; Itani, 2012, p. 12). "O you who believe! Be patient, and advocate patience, and be united, and revere God, so that you may thrive" (The Quran, 3:200; Itani, 2012, p. 37). "And what will explain to you what the ascent is? (The Quran, 90:12). The freeing of a slave (90:13) or the feeding on a day of hunger (90:14), an orphan near of kin (90:15) or a destitute in the dust (90:16). Then he becomes of those who believe and advise one another to patience, and advise one another to kindness (90:17). These are the people of happiness (90:18; Itani, 2012, p. 323). "By time (103:1) The human being is in loss (103:2), Except those who believe, and

do good works, and encourage truth, and recommend patience” (The Quran, 103:3; Itani, 2012, p. 327).

Charity and Kindness

The teachings of Almighty also confirm the concept of charity and kindness which is without any doubt related with generosity. It is stated, “There is no good in much of their private counsels, except for him who advocates charity, or kindness, or reconciliation between people. Whoever does that, seeking God’s approval, We will give him a great compensation” (The Quran, 4:114; Itani, 2012, p. 47). “The charitable men and charitable women, who have loaned God a loan of righteousness—it will be multiplied for them, and for them is a generous reward” (The Quran, 57:18; Itani, 2012, p. 287).

Truth

The concept of truth and negation of falsehood is also attested by the teachings of Holy Quran, “And do not mix truth with falsehood, and do not conceal the truth while you know” (The Quran, 2:42; Itani, 2012, p. 3). “O People of the Book! Why do you confound the truth with falsehood, and knowingly conceal the truth?” (The Quran, 3:71; Itani, 2012, p. 28). It is further stated that, “God will say, this is a Day when the truthful will benefit from their truthfulness.” They will have Gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they will remain forever. God is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him. That is the great attainment (The Quran, 6:119; Itani, 2012, p. 61).

Courage and Integrity

The Quranic teachings attest the concept of courage and integrity while neglect the concept of dispute or violence, And obey God and His Messenger, and do not dispute, lest you falter and lose your courage. And be steadfast. God is with the steadfast (The Quran, 8:46; Itani, 2012, p. 89). “O messengers, eat of the good things, and act with integrity. I am aware of what you do (The Quran, 23:51; Itani, 2012, p. 176). “And who is better in speech than someone who calls to God, and acts with integrity, and says, I am of those who submit”? (The Quran, 42:33; Itani, 2012, p. 251). “The Day when He gathers you for the Day of Gathering that is the Day of Mutual Exchange. Whoever believes in God and acts with integrity, He will remit his misdeeds, and will admit him into gardens beneath which rivers flow, to dwell there in forever. That is the supreme achievement” (The Quran, 64:9; Itani, 2012, p. 296).

Respect

Almighty's teachings also confirm the concept of respect, "Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him, and that you be good to your parents. If either of them or both of them reach old age with you, do not say to them a word of disrespect, nor scold them, but say to them kind words" (The Quran, 17:23; Itani, 2012, p. 141).

Responsibility

The concept of responsibility is further attested by The Holy Quran, "O you who believe! You are responsible for your own souls. He who has strayed cannot harm you if you are guided. To God is your return, all of you, and He will inform you of what you used to do" (The Quran, 5:105; Itani, 2012, p. 60).

Gratitude

We also encounter the concept of gratitude in The Holy Quran, as stated, "We have entrusted the human being with the care of his parents. His mother carried him through hardship upon hardship, weaning him in two years. So, give thanks to Me, and to your parents. To Me is the destination (The Quran, 31:14; Itani, 2012, p. 213). "If you disbelieve, God is independent of you, yet He does not approve in gratitude on the part of His servants. And if you are thankful, He will approve that in you. No bearer of burden can bear the burden of another. Then to your Lord is your return; and He will inform you of what you used to do. He is aware of what the hearts contain (The Quran, 39:7; Itani, 2012, p. 240). "And it is He who made the sea to serve you, that you may eat from it tender meat, and extract from it ornaments that you wear. And you see the ships plowing through it, as you seek His bounties, so that you may give thanks" (The Quran, 16:14; Itani, 2012, p. 133).

Love and Compassion

We also encounter the concept of compassion, love and generosity in The Holy Quran, as stated, "And of His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, so that you may find tranquility in them; and He planted love and compassion between you. In this are the signs for people who reflect" (The Quran, 30:21; Itani, 2012, p. 210). "If you divorce them before you have touched them, but after you had set the dowry for them, give them half of what you specified—unless they forego the right, or the one in whose hand is the marriage contract foregoes it. But to forego is nearer to piety. And do not forget generosity between one another. God is seeing of everything you do" (The Quran, 2:237; Itani, 2012, p. 19).

Forgiveness

The teachings of Holy Quran also attest the concept of forgiveness, as stated, “Race towards forgiveness from your Lord; and a Garden as vast as the heavens and the earth; prepared for those who believe in God and His messengers. That is the grace of God; He bestows it on whomever He wills. God is the Possessor of Immense Grace” (The Quran, 57:21; Itani, 2012, p. 287). Whoever commits evil, or wrongs his soul, then implores God for forgiveness, will find God Forgiving and Merciful (The Quran, 4:110; Itani, 2012, p. 46).

Fairness

The concept of fairness and the negation of corruption are also there in The Holy Quran, “O my people! Give full measure and full weight, in all fairness, and do not cheat the people out of their rights, and do not spread corruption in the land” (The Quran, 11:85; Itani 2012, p. 113). “And recall when Moses prayed for water for his people. We said, “Strike the rock with your staff.” Thereupon twelve springs gushed out from it, and each tribe recognized its drinking-place. “Eat and drink from God’s provision, and do not corrupt the earth with disobedience” (The Quran, 2:60; Itani, 2012, p. 4).

Obedience

The Holy Quran teaches us to be obedient and beware us from disobedience, “Your Lord knows best what is in your minds. If you are righteous—He is forgiving to the obedient (The Quran, 17:25; Itani, 2012, p. 142). “O my father, do not worship the devil. The devil is disobedient to the Most Gracious” (The Quran, 19:44; Itani, 2012, p. 155).

Tolerance

The Holy Quran includes the concept of tolerance or endurance as, “Peace be upon you, because you endured patiently. How excellent is the Final Home (The Quran, 13:24; Itani, 2012, p. 124). “As for those who retaliate after being wronged, there is no blame on them (42:41). Blame lies on those who wrong people, and commit aggression in the land without right. These will have a painful punishment (42:42). But whoever endures patiently and forgives—that is a sign of real resolve (The Quran, 42:43; Itani, 2012, p. 255).

Unity

The concept of unity is also encouraged in The Holy Quran. “And hold fast to the rope of God, altogether, and do not become divided. And remember God’s blessings upon you; how you were enemies, and He

reconciled your hearts, and by His grace you became brethren. And you were on the brink of a pit of fire, and He saved you from it. God thus clarifies His revelations for you, so that you may be guided” (The Quran, 3:103; Itani, 2012, p. 31).

Hadith and Character Education

The collection of Hadith also confirms the importance of character development. Narrated 'Abdullah bin 'Amr, The Prophet (PBUH) said, “Whoever has the following four (characteristics) will be a pure hypocrite, and whoever has one of the following four characteristics will have one characteristic of hypocrisy unless and until he gives it up. Whenever he is entrusted, he betrays (proves dishonest). Whenever he speaks, he tells a lie. Whenever he makes a covenant, he proves treacherous. Whenever he quarrels, he behaves in a very imprudent, evil and insulting manner (Sahih Al-Bukhari, V.1, H. 34, Khan, 1997, pp. 71-72).

Narrated Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari(RA): The Prophet (PBUH)said, “He who has a slave-girl and teaches her good manners and educates her and then manumits and marries her, will get a double reward; and any slave who observes Allah’s Right and his master’s right will get a double reward” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, V. 3, H. 2547, Khan, 1997, p. 416).

Narrated 'Abdullāh bin 'Amr: Allah's Messenger (PBUH) was neither a *Fahish* (one who talks evil) nor a *Mutafahhish* (one who conveys evil talk). He used to say, “The most beloved to me amongst you is the one who has the best character and manners” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, V.5, H. 3759, Khan, 1997, p. 71).

The Holy Bible and Character Education

The teachings of Holy Bible also emphasize on the concepts of character education. “And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him” (Deuteronomy 1:16; The Holy Bible, 2013, p. 253). “To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice (Proverbs 21:3). An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin” (Proverb 21:4, p. 833). “Finally, brethren, what so ever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, what so ever things are lovely, what so ever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8, p. 1492).

Character education supports the ideas of tolerance, patience respect and mercy towards others. This phenomenon is further attested by The Holy Bible. As stated in The Bible, “Blessed are the “merciful”: for they shall obtain mercy (Matthew 5:7). Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8). Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the

children of God (Matthew 5:9). Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10)" (The Holy Bible, King James Version, 2013, p. 1192).

Findings and Conclusion

The results of this study have implications for those involved in curriculum and instructional development at the state level. The study provides an explicit account of the elements of character and their reference in the religious texts i.e. honesty, fairness, tolerance, truth, justice, patience, kindness, courage, respect, responsibility, forgiveness and so on. It also confirms that the character education started from the very time when the Almighty created the first human being (Adam), thus verifying that we must be good moral agents. The purpose of using the religious texts for character formation is that the Almighty has sent down the religious texts for the guidance of mankind and to make the people come out from ignorance into light that's why the incorporation of religious texts in the curriculum can have implications on the character formation of learners. The need of time is to incorporate the stories or themes of religious texts into the mainstream curriculum in order to develop the character of learners, the premier purpose of education. We need to change the problematic situation which we are facing in our society and schools. This situation can be changed by offering effective character education curriculum as White and Warfa (2011) state that educating students on character and values changed the climate of the school.

Character education has the potential to change the mindset and behavior of the learners, "Schools utilizing character education noted behavior management in the classroom decrease from 66% to 18%" (p.13). In order to attain a peaceful society, the character of its subjects matters a lot. In a peaceful society, it will be hardly possible to have subjects who believe in filicide fashion or massacre mode. The findings of the study suggest that the content should be developed in such a way through which learners' character development could be ensured. For the accomplishment of this task the government and curriculum wing must take robust steps in this direction.

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