

Crucial Requirements for Children's Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

This paper sheds light on the important and mostly neglected role that parents play in raising their children, namely empowerment through character development, impartment of knowledge and skills. The key objective of this paper is to enhance the understanding of the concept of empowerment of children from the Islamic perspective and the importance of character and values education in today's society. The paper is structured around six core sections describing the role of parents in children's (1) virtues and character formation and development, (2) physical development, (3) emotional development, (4) mental development, (5) intellectual development, and lastly their role in preparing children for the realities of life and death. The focus of this paper is character formation and development. Character development and impartment of knowledge and skills are the three crucial and mandatory requirements for children's empowerment. The paper outlines the ideas underlying character refinement or character education focusing on its meaning, aims, importance, and the role of parents, teachers, and community as character educators. It outlines some of the moral qualities of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as the universal model of all virtues and goodness. This is qualitative research employing descriptive methods with literature review analysis. The primary sources of this paper comprise selected verses from the Qur'an and their exegesis (tafsir) and Hadith, both of which constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims. Its secondary sources consist of books, journals, and other materials. The English translation of the selected verses is based on Abdullah Yusuf Ali's *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* and *The Qur'an: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings* by Saheeh International because of their simplistic and comprehensive language. Due to the multidimensional use of words in the Arabic language, it is difficult to translate them into one specific word, therefore, we have retained the Arabic concepts but given some of their meanings in the brackets. Our main contention in this paper is that: first, knowledge, skills, and values or personality traits need to be combined for a thriving life; second, moral values are of paramount significance to peaceful coexistence and harmony in society. They are critical for sustainable living. Without them, there is no cohesion and solidarity among people. Hence, there is no civilization; third, learning is of little value and with no soul unless core ethical values are added to it. Hence, one of the aims of education is to graduate ethical individuals; fourth, the development of character in children is not just the responsibility of parents and schools, it is also the responsibility of those who come into contact with them; last but not least, character education should be included as a core component of schools' curriculum.

Keywords: character education, physical development, emotional development, mental development, intellectual development

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INTRODUCTION

It takes a lot of hard work and time to raise children of noble character; children who are humble, brave, speak up against injustice, trustworthy, honest, just, merciful and compassionate to all creatures who live on the face of this earth, treat everyone fairly and equally regardless of colour, religion, faith, gender or tribe, portray the high level of tolerance to people of other faiths, show exemplary qualities in handling religious and secular issues using the necessary skills, and are respected by everyone because of their noble qualities. To put it bluntly, children who emulate the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). In the following paragraphs we shall expound the important role virtues play in human life, importance of character refinement in the education and growth of children, and the role of parents in children's (1) virtues and character formation and development, (2) physical development, (3) emotional development, (4) mental development, (5) intellectual development, and also their role in preparing children for the realities of life and death.

PARENTS' ROLE IN THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S VIRTUES AND CHARACTER

Homes, schools and communities are the places where a child's character is developed and moral principles and ethical values that lead to success both for individuals and society are instilled. In view of this, one of the primary roles of parents, teachers and the community is to function as custodians and transmitters of moral virtues. It is essential that they ensure the transmission of these virtues not only by developing moral understanding in the children, but more importantly by inculcating moral values in them through modeling and mentoring, that is, providing them with both visual and verbal examples of what they are expected to do in the social and personal life. The educational psychologist Albert Bandura, who is believed to be the first to recognize observational learning through his Bobo Doll experiment,¹ demonstrated how observational learning, also known as modeling or shaping, affects behaviour: "By observing others one forms rules of behavior, and on future occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action."²

Forming and developing the character through moral education

Character education is necessitated because: first, we are living in a pluralistic society where values appear to be constantly changing and in which children are presented with all kinds of models and exposed to all kinds of opinions about right and wrong,³ i.e., they are increasingly "bombarded with many negative (but also positive) influences"⁴ through various platforms such as television, the internet and peers, and; second, people's actions are "motivated purely by the pursuit of wealth, status, pleasure, power or self-aggrandisement." In other words, wealth or worldly possessions, status and/or pleasure are seen as the greatest source of satisfaction.

¹ Charlotte Nickerson, "Observational Learning in Psychology," November 5, 2023. Available from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/what-is-observational-learning.html> [Accessed 10 April 2023].

² Quoted in Larry Nucci & Darcia Narvaez (eds), *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, second edition, New York and London: Routledge, 2008, p.23.

³ Ibid., p.90.

⁴ Aynur Pala, *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*, vol 3, No 2, 2011, p.23.

Many scholars and policymakers have highlighted the necessity and importance of character building and have therefore called for recognition of character education as a way to a better world.⁵ The following are some of their statements:

In a world where many of the jobs of tomorrow haven't even been invented, where technology is changing our world increasingly rapidly and where people are likely to dip in and out of self-employment, employers are putting an ever-greater premium on character traits such as resilience, persistence, grit, leadership, self-awareness and self-efficacy.⁶

Great learning and superior abilities will be of little value...unless virtue, truth and integrity are added to them — Abigail Adams.⁷

In a broad sense, character education permeates all subjects, wider school activities, and a general school ethos; it cultivates the virtues of character associated with common morality and develops students' understanding of what is excellent in diverse spheres of human endeavour.⁸

Gone are days when schools focused only on academics. Now schools focus on teaching values to students, the overall development (Physical, Mental, Social, Emotional) of the children. They help them to acquire knowledge and skills and learn the art of helping society and communities.⁹

Character building is a key part of an overall approach to education which values scholarship.¹⁰

The way to a better world is more likely to depend on better people than on better principles.¹¹

Character education, a concept that is believed to have its roots in virtues ethics,¹² is likened to a hinge on “which academic excellence, personal achievement, and true citizenship depend.”¹³ Davies et al. maintain that “almost nothing is beyond the scope of character education.”¹⁴

To be more effective, some argue that character education must be a stand-alone subject in schools,¹⁵ while others are of the view that it must include the entire school community and be infused throughout the entire school curriculum.¹⁶

⁵ Lee Jerome and Ben Kisby, *The Rise of Character Education in Britain: Heroes, Dragons and the Myths of Character*, Macmillan: Palgrave, 2019, p.5.

⁶ Nicky Morgan, *Taught Not Caught: Educating for 21st Century Character*, Melton: John Catt Educational, 2017. p.14.

⁷ Aynur Pala, *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*, p.23.

⁸ University of Birmingham (The Jubilee Centre for Character & Virtues), “A framework for character education in schools,” August 2017, p.1. Available from <https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/media/news/article/5598/Character-Education-Prioritised-by-Ofsted>. [Accessed 10 April 2023].

⁹ GIIS communications team (Global Indian International School), “Global Indian International School, Importance of teaching values and ethics to primary students,” January 2, 2023. Available from <https://tokyo.globalindianschool.org/blog-details/teaching-values-to-primary-students> [Accessed 15 April 2023].

¹⁰ Lee Jerome and Ben Kisby, *The Rise of Character Education in Britain*, p. 33.

¹¹ Nel Noddings, *Educating Moral People: A caring Alternative to Character Education*, New York: Teachers College Press, 2002, p.1.

¹² Ibid., p.2.

¹³ Kevin Ryan & Karen E. Bohlin, “Building Character in Schools: Practical Ways to Bring Moral Instruction to Life,” 1999. Available from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED423501> [Accessed 17 April 2023].

¹⁴ Nel Noddings, *Educating Moral People: A caring Alternative to Character Education*, p.3.

Character is a term used to describe: “the qualities that distinguish one individual from another”¹⁷ or in other words, “attributes or features that make up and distinguish an individual or groups of individuals;”¹⁸ “the composite of our good habits or virtues and our bad habits or vices;”¹⁹ and last but not least, “someone’s personality,” that is, the way someone thinks, feels and behaves or the mental and moral qualities that distinguish or define a person. Character is classified into two: good and bad. A good character is defined as “the psychological characteristics of an individual that both motivate and enable him or her to do the right thing.”²⁰ A bad character, on the other hand, refers to what inclines a person towards negative, unlawful or immoral behaviour.

Al-Ghazali defined character as “an inward disposition that causes one to incline towards praiseworthy (or blameworthy) inward traits and praiseworthy (or blameworthy) outward actions.”²¹ When coined with morality, i.e., moral character, the concept is defined as “an individual’s disposition to think, feel, and behave in an ethical versus unethical manner.”²²

We can infer from the above definitions that: first, a person’s character is fundamental in determining one’s life choices, that is, what actions he/she performs, what types of relationships they form and what direction they go in life; second, character is not what a person does but it is what makes a person behave as he or she does. A person’s character impacts his or her actions and so is the vice versa, meaning one’s actions impact one’s character.

Character education emphasizes the inculcation of virtues and values in children, meaning the “moral dispositions that guide (their) thinking, feeling and action,” rather than the obedience of a prescriptive principle or rule.²³ Hence, it is different from virtues ethics. In simple terms, it may be defined as “cultivating virtue in formal education;”²⁴ the process of “developing virtues—good habits and dispositions which lead students to responsible and mature adulthood;”²⁵ “the process of learning common attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that are important for people to have as responsible citizens;”²⁶ “the teaching of principles and standards of living that are taught in a systemic way so that students of all ages can understand and incorporate into their daily

¹⁵ Lee Jerome and Ben Kisby, *The Rise of Character Education in Britain*, p. 33.

¹⁶ Aynur Pala, *International journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*, p.27; Larry Nucci & Darcia Narvaez (eds), *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, p.93.

¹⁷ Aynur Pala, *International journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*, vol 3, No 2, 2011, p.24.

¹⁸ W. Stephen Parker, “The Importance of Character Education for All Ages,” August 17, 2021. Available from <https://www.teachhub.com/professional-development/2021/08/the-importance-of-character-education-for-all-ages/> [Accessed 27 August 2023].

¹⁹ Kevin Ryan & Karen E. Bohlin, “Building Character in Schools: Practical Ways to Bring Moral Instruction to Life,” p. 9.

²⁰ Marvin W. Berkowitz, “The Centrality of Character Education for Creating and Sustaining a Just World.” In *Rethinking Education on a Changing Planet*, Washington: Island Press, January 2017, p.84. Available from www.EarthEd.info [Accessed 16 November 2023].

²¹ M. Umaruddin, *Ethical philosophy of Ghazālī*, Delhi (India): Adam Publishers & Distributors, 1996, p. 196

²² Taya R. Cohen & Lily Morse, “Moral character: What it is and what it does,” in *Research in Organizational Behavior*, volume 34, 2014, pp 43-61. Available from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0191308514000070> [Accessed 05 May 2023].

²³ Amparo Merino, Much More than Knowledge: Virtue Ethics and Character Education for Degrowth, Conference Paper (September 2018), p.3. Available from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328202053> [Accessed 09 June 2023].

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Larry P. Nucci & Darcia Narvaez (eds), *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, p.90.

²⁶ Michigan State University, Character education. Available from https://www.canr.msu.edu/character_education/ [Accessed 11 July 2023].

lives.”²⁷ Here are some examples of traits that embody a good character or the virtues a moral character comprises: compassion, cooperation, generosity, empathy, truthfulness, loyalty, love, advice, gentleness, humility, modesty, tenderness, forgiveness, perseverance, patience, selflessness, compassion, affection, collaboration, caring, gratitude, togetherness, mutual respect, collaboration, honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility, integrity, courage, justice, social intelligence or the capacity to know oneself and to know others, self-discipline and self-control or the ability to control one's emotions and desires, and so on.

It is clear from the fore-gone that: firstly, character education is a broad concept; broad in meaning and scope, and has various goals and aims, and; secondly, schools should be committed to core ethical values; they should lay great emphasis on instilling positive character traits in children. There is a famous saying by Billy Graham that “When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, all is lost.”²⁸ According to this statement, the character of a person is the most precious thing. It is far more valuable than his or her wealth (material possessions) and health. For instance, “the inner peace and relaxation that one achieves from giving/helping others cannot be compared to materialistic happiness.”

Aims of character education

After unpacking what character and character education are, we now turn our attention to what character education aims to achieve. The following are among its aims:

- i. To help students to: (1) develop important human qualities such as justice (fulfilment of duties which they owe to themselves and others (Allah, fellow men, animals and the environment) or respect of the rights of others), diligence, patience (bearing present evils with equanimity), perseverance (continuance in the accomplishment of good works in spite of the difficulties attendant upon them), compassion, respect and courage; (2) understand the importance of virtues.²⁹
- ii. To promote character development through the exploration of ethical issues across the curriculum.³⁰
- iii. To develop: (1) a positive and moral climate by engaging the participation of students, teachers and staff, parents and communities;³¹ (2) a strong and resilient character. People with strong and resilient character stand up for their values, “make moral judgments about the rightness or wrongness of specific actions,”³² display self-discipline, have a strong sense of responsibility, are able to act with integrity, honesty and loyalty, etc.
- iv. To teach young people and adults: (1) how to solve conflicts fairly, create safer schools that are freer of intimidation, fear, and violence, and are more conducive to learning;³³ (2) the principles of how they can become successful and productive citizens;³⁴ and (3) how to engage in, care about, and act on core

²⁷ W. Stephen Parker, “The Importance of Character Education for All Ages,” August 17, 2021. Available from <https://www.teachhub.com/professional-development/2021/08/the-importance-of-character-education-for-all-ages/> [Accessed 27 August 2023].

²⁸ Brainy Quote, “Billy Graham Quotes.” Available from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/billy_graham_161989 [Accessed 13 November 2023].

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Aynur Pala, *International journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*, p.26.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Larry P. Nucci & Darcia Narvaez (eds), *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, p.25.

³³ Aynur Pala, *International journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*, p.26.

³⁴ Ibid.

ethical values such as respect, justice, citizenship, fairness and responsibility for self and others in school and as part of a larger community.³⁵

- v. To cultivate minds and nurture hearts.³⁶
- vi. To create: (1) a learning environment underpinned with love and kindness, (2) an integrated culture of character that supports and challenges students and adults to strive for excellence,³⁷ and schools where children feel safe because they are in an atmosphere that values respect, responsibility and compassion—not because a guard or metal detector is posted at the door.³⁸
- vii. To ensure that “the traditions, customs, and values of a civilization are passed down from generation to generation,” or in other words, to maintain the continuity of society and human (and non-human) well-being: “Society’s future depends upon the character of its youth and how that will manifest when they become adult citizens.”³⁹
- viii. To shape the nature of the children.⁴⁰
- ix. To lay a foundation for children’s future.
- x. To provide ground rules for life (do’s and don’ts) for adults and young people.”⁴¹
- xi. To have high standards and expectations for ethical behaviour.⁴²
- xii. To help children and youth become: (1) conscious of the right thing to do, (2) committed to doing the right thing, and (3) competent in doing the right thing.⁴³
- xiii. To contribute to better families, better communities, and a better society and world.⁴⁴
- xiv. To know the moral order or “the ethical principles that should regulate [one’s] conduct and help [one] to detect moral good and evil”⁴⁵ and “the correct way of acting within this order.”⁴⁶
- xv. To guide young people and adults in their “struggle with the imperfection of [their] nature: limitations of [their] intellect, weakness of [their] will, and submission to emotions;”⁴⁷ or simply put, to guide conscience (moral sense) or enhance intelligence so that they act in a virtuous way, that is, in accordance with right reason, change ourselves for the better (self-change) and develop self-control or self-regulation (avoid undesirable behaviours).
- xvi. To transform the way children perceive themselves, their fellow humans and the world around them.
- xvii. To help young people to know their purpose in life.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Aynur Pala, *International journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*, p.26. For the definitions of justice, patience and perseverance see Piotr T. Nowakowski, *Virtues and their role in education*, March 2015, pp.11-12. Available from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322056367> [Accessed 20 August 2023].

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Aynur Pala, *International journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*, vol 3, No 2, 2011, p.26. For the definitions of justice, patience and perseverance see Piotr T. Nowakowski, *Virtues and their role in education*, March 2015, pp.11-12. Available from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322056367> [Accessed 20 August 2023].

³⁹ Marvin W. Berkowitz, “The Centrality of Character Education for Creating and Sustaining a Just World”. In *Rethinking Education on a Changing Planet*, January 2017, p.84. Available from www.EarthEd.info [Accessed 16 November 2023].

⁴⁰ Marvin W. Berkowitz, “The Centrality of Character Education for Creating and Sustaining a Just World.” In *Rethinking Education on a Changing Planet*, January 2017, p.89. Available from www.EarthEd.info [Accessed 16 November 2023].

⁴¹ Michigan State University, “Character education.” Available from https://www.canr.msu.edu/character_education/ [Accessed 16 November 2023].

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Yael Kidron, “What Is Character Education?” Available from <https://www.scu.edu/character/> [Accessed September 10, 2023].

⁴⁵ Piotr T. Nowakowski, “Virtues and their role in education,” March 2015, p.8. Available from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322056367> [Accessed 20 August 2023].

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

The Islamic perspective of character

The Arabic term for the moral character of a person is *Khulq*. It is a wide concept that includes a person's dealings with Allah, fellow humans, animals and environment (nature). It also covers a person's attitude, reasoning, transactions and speech etiquette. With respect to Allah, good character means treating Allah with respect, putting one's trust in Him, filling one's heart with awe and love for Him, and appreciating Him for the numerous bounties that He has given us right from the time when we were a "drop of fluid" in our mothers' wombs. Good character with people means being just, merciful, forgiving, kind and patient in one's interactions with them. Good character with animals means being compassionate to them, and lastly, good character with nature means to preserve it; to protect it from harmful human activities. Nature is the source of the food we eat, the water we drink and irrigate our crops with, and the air we breathe. Hence, its preservation is necessary to ensure the survival of humans and other species.

It is assumed that future morality is likely to be worse than present morality. Hence, it is essential for the parents to care about the world they are leaving to their children and therefore to ensure that their children get proper education about morality and ethics – that is, "the society's accepted principles of right conduct that enable people to live cooperatively," or the principles and standards that guide and influence the way in which a person behaves – so that they are able to define what is proper, correct, important, beautiful, worthwhile, or desirable, and make the right choices. Resultantly, they are able to stay in control of themselves; they are able to lead a disciplined life, meaning a life governed by a set of rules and regulations which are to be followed while performing any task or activity.

Besides providing children with adequate moral education, parents have the duty to impart, portray, demonstrate and model good behaviour, supervise their children and provide a healthy living environment. It is worth noting here that parents are the primary teachers and discipliners of their children. They are always watched by their children; they pick up on their good and bad qualities. They are "mirrors, reflecting images of what happens around them."⁴⁸ This is why it is said, "If you want to fix kids' behavior, first, take a look in the mirror and fix your "self"⁴⁹; "Kids don't subscribe to the do as I say, not as I do, way of thinking. They do what they see. Their behaviors, combined with similar genetic qualities, may have you looking at a miniature version of your "self;"⁵⁰ "Children learn how to behave and respond to others by observing how their parent(s) and/or caregivers interact with other people."⁵¹

The environment has a direct impact on a child's character development. Therefore, one of the responsibilities of parents is to pay attention to the environment in which their children grow up. They must create a moral climate, that is, "an educational world in which it is both desirable and possible to be good."⁵² Lack of self-

⁴⁸ The Urban Child Institute, "Children Reflect Parental Behavior," October 5, 2011. Available from <http://www.urbanchildinstitute.org/articles/editorials/children-reflect-parental-behavior> [Accessed 10 August 2023].

⁴⁹ Nicole Akers, "How Kids Are Perfect Mirrors of their Parents: Take a look at your "self"," March 12, 2020. Available from <https://medium.com/publishous/how-kids-are-perfect-mirrors-of-their-parents-77c2643ad77d> [Accessed 10 August 2023].

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Kendra Cherry, "How Observational Learning Affects Behavior," March 14, 2023). Available from <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-observational-learning-2795402> [Accessed 11 August 2023].

⁵² Larry Nucci & Darcia Narvaez (eds), *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, p. 168.

discipline among children is partly due to the environment in which they are raised and partly due to the parents' lack of nurturing qualities; their reluctance to devote time and energy to the task of character education.

Discipline is not only good for children to stay in control of themselves and lead a disciplined life, but it is also a necessary condition of human survival and flourishing, and a requirement for the children to successfully navigate challenges and temptations in life. Good character is the foundation of healthy relationships. Hence, a child who is not disciplined is a nuisance to the society; he or she lacks social skills that are important for getting well with others such as cooperation, empathy and patience.

In order to have good moral character, children must be able not only to distinguish the difference between “good and bad” or “right and wrong” (or to know the standards of “good and wrong”), but they should also know the consequence for an action. For example, when they know that the consequence for an action is punishment, they will refrain from doing it knowing that it is wrong, and when they know that the consequence for an action is appreciation, they will perform it knowing that it is right. Here it has to be noted that the ability to anticipate the consequences of one's own actions is one of the necessary conditions for ethical behaviour. Other conditions are: the ability to make value judgments, and the ability to choose between alternative courses of action,⁵³ or the best choices that contribute to the common good of all.

The need for ethics or moral principles has been highlighted in many Hadith (sayings) of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) including the following: “Verily, I have only been sent to perfect righteous character;”⁵⁴ “The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) never used bad language neither a *Fahish* nor a *Mutafahish*.” He used to say, “The best amongst you are those who have the best manners and character;”⁵⁵ “The most complete of the believers in faith, is the one with the best character among them. And the best of you are those who are best to your women,”⁵⁶ and “There is nothing heavier than good character put in the scale of a believer on the Day of Resurrection.”⁵⁷ From these Hadith it is understood that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was sent to incorporate character attributes into society, the main goal of practicing Islam is *taqarrub ila'llah* (to get closer to Allah) and *ibtigha'a mardhati'llah* (to seek Allah's pleasure) through moral virtue traits such as compassion, generosity, keeping promises, self-control, patience, kindness (to people and animals), forgiveness, charity, honesty, justice, equality, modesty, decency, politeness, respecting parents and elders, keeping promises, cleanliness, tolerance, empathy, responsibility and integrity.

As highlighted above, moral virtue traits or positive attributes of character are needed for any society to function in a healthy and productive manner. They are the practical guidelines to interact with others and

⁵³ Francisco J. Ayala, “The difference of being human: Morality,” May 5, 2010. Available from <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.0914616107> [Accessed 05 August 2023].

⁵⁴ Imam Malik ibn Anas, *Al-Muwatta' of Imam Malik bin Anas: The First Formulation of Islamic Law*, translated by Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley, Norwich: Diwan Press, 2014, Book 47 (Good character), Hadith 8., p.678. Grade: *Sahih* (authentic) according to Ibn Abdul Barr.

⁵⁵ Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhari, *The Translation of The Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari*, translated by Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 1997, kitab al-Manaqib (virtues and merits of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his companions), bab sifat al-Nabiyyi salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam (chapter on the description of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him)), Hadith 3559.

⁵⁶ Muhammad ibn 'Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Jami' Al-Tirmidhi*, vol.2, translated by Abu Khaliyl, Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 2007, abwab al-Radha' (The chapters on suckling), bab ma ja'a fi haqqi al-Mar'at 'ala zawjiha (Chapter on what has been related about a woman's rights over her husband), Hadith 1162, pp.530-531. Grade: *Hasan* (Good) according to Darussalam.

⁵⁷ Abu Dawud, Sulayman ibn al-Ash'ath al-Sijistani, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Volume 5, translated by Nasiruddin al-Khattab, kitab al-Adab (General Behaviour), bab fi husni al-Khulq (Chapter: regarding good character), Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 2008, Hadith 4799. Grade: *Sahih* (Authentic) according to Al-Albani,

maintain relationships and collaboration with them. According to Hassan, “having good manners is an essential skill for anyone who wants to live in harmony with the people of this world.”⁵⁸ Good manners or good deeds create friendship and eliminate enmity: “Good and evil cannot be equal. Respond ‘to evil’ with what is best, then the one you are in a feud with will be like a close friend” (The Qur’an, 41:34). Embodied moral actions are the core aspect of human excellence that allow people of different races, religions and ethnicities to live in peace and harmony.

In addition to the above-mentioned, moral virtue traits are central to healthy and successful relationships, namely the relationship between man and God (Allah) or the bond with Allah, interpersonal relationship, human-animal relationship and humans and the natural environment relationship. Furthermore, they (moral virtue traits) are the means by which a believer is “able to conquer a whole country without any army, ammunition or material provisions.” Therefore, the role of parents involves investing time, money and effort in their children’s character development, that is, inculcating in them the dispositions of good character. This entails: first, teaching them moral values and cultural awareness (diversity and inclusivity) in early years. Basically, teaching moral values entails instilling positive behaviour in children and helping them understand the consequences of their actions. Teaching cultural awareness involves broadening children’s perspectives on cultural diversity or the differences in people’s attitudes and values. Consequently, they are able to live together in a sustainable way. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning),

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things) (The Qur’an, 49:13).

Therefore, it is imperative for children to not only understand cultural differences, but also to experience, accept and appreciate the differences. The question that arises here is, why is it imperative to know others? Knowing others or mutual understanding is a crucial skill that provides an opportunity for collaboration, sharing of ideas and peaceful cultural coexistence or living in harmony with others who are different from us. The ability to live or work alongside people from different backgrounds is a sign of intellectual and emotional maturity. Luis Ricciardi writes, “when people from different backgrounds work together, they bring different perspectives and experiences, which can lead to innovative ideas and solutions. In addition, working in a diverse environment helps to break down stereotypes and fosters understanding and empathy among coworkers.” The stability and advancement of society is dependent on the peaceful coexistence and respect of all people.

Knowing others requires, among others, good communication, great listening skills or responsive listening, respect for others’ values or recognizing differences and understanding their significance, and appreciating the contributions of others. Human beings differ in their physical or social qualities, yet they have shared history, values and a shared goal or collective purpose. Their shared goal is mutual happiness (*al-Sa’adah*) or success (*Al-Falah*) which can only be achieved through cooperation, that is, in conquest of nature (control over the objects of environment or transformation of the natural environment) and knowledge sharing. Allah says, “And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty” (The Qur’an, 5:2). In this verse Allah urges human beings to

⁵⁸ Farooq Hassan, “Islamic Perspective of Effective Communication in the Era of Globalization,” *Burjis*: Vol 8, Issue 1. January-June, 2021, p.5.

cooperate in *al-Birr* (righteousness/commitment to core values and ethical standards/doing good, such as restoring broken relationships, forgiving instead of retaliating, etc.) and *al-Taḳwa* (avoiding sins, combatting evil acts, preventing or breaking cycles of evil) at all levels, namely local, regional, national and international. In other words, they are requested to collaborate to achieve noble goals, such as preservation, protection and promotion of human values, cultural development, promotion of welfare of all people, security and happiness, social relationships and engagement with others, and emotional and physical well-being; to form alliances to address and surmount problems and challenges, and to secure justice for those whose rights have been violated. Local, regional, national and international cooperation are vital to achieving victory, strength, happiness, and glory in this world and the Hereafter; they are forbidden from collaborating with each other for illegal affairs or establishing alliances to oppress people and attack them or covering up evil. In summary, it can be said that collaboration with diverse people or teams in righteousness (*Al-Birr*) and piety (*Al-Taḳwa*) is the foundation on which healthy human relationships are built. Collaboration is implied in some other Qur'anic concepts, such as *Ummatun Wahidah* and *Ikhwah*. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning),

And verily this Brotherhood of yours is a single Brotherhood, and I am your Lord and Cherisher. therefore, fear Me (The Qur'an, 21:92).

The Believers are but a single Brotherhood: So, make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and fear Allah, that ye may receive Mercy (The Qur'an, 49:10).

It is worth noting that, in Islam happiness and success are associated with fulfilment of duties (*Amanat* or *Wajibat*) that we have toward: (1) our Creator (Allah), namely to believe in His *Wahdaniyyah* (Oneness), obey His commands and maintain a constant connection to Him (uphold Him in every place we go, everything we say, every activity we perform and everything that we think), (2) ourselves, such as self-empowerment or self-development and self-respect, (3) fellow humans, for example, to treat them the way we would like to be treated and to correct them when they are wrong (4) animals and the environment or the natural world (the Earth), e.g., by protecting (guarding or conserving) the Earth instead of exhausting its natural resources.

Allah says, "You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the Praise of Allah" (The Qur'an, 33:21). It is evident from this verse that character education requires a role model. The phrase *Insan Kamil* or *Al-Insan Al-Kamil*, literally "the complete person," refers to a virtuous person. In Islamic theology, the phrase is used to describe a person who has reached perfection, in which case it refers to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). He was the virtuous exemplar we should follow; "he possessed the best and noblest of characteristics, in each of which he attained the ultimate degree". Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): "And indeed, you are of a great moral character" (The Qur'an, 68:4). Al-Sa'di writes, he was "blessed with perfect reasoning, mature thinking and concise speech which was the best that pens could record and people could write down. That is true bliss in this world."⁵⁹ He adds, his bliss in the hereafter is described in the precedent verse "And indeed, for you is a reward uninterrupted" (The Qur'an, 68:3), meaning "ongoing and eternal." This reward is given to him because of his "righteous deeds" and "sublime character."⁶⁰ It has been reported that his character mirrored the Qur'an, which literally means he was the embodiment of the teachings

⁵⁹ Abdur-Rahman Nasir Al-Sa'di, *Tafsir Al-Sa'di*, Juzu' (chapter) 29, vol.5, translated by Nasiruddin al-Khattab, Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House (IIPH), p. 178.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.178.

of the Qur'an. He adhered to its limits, followed its etiquette, paid heed to its lessons and parables, pondered its meanings and recited it properly. Among his unique characteristics that are worth mentioning are the following:

He was easy-going and gentle, and was close to people. He would accept the invitation of anyone who invited him, meet the need of anyone who asked him for help, and respond kindly to anyone who asked of him, never turning anyone away empty-handed.

If his Companions suggested something to him, he would agree with them and go along with them, provided that there were no *Shar'i* reservations concerning it. If he wanted to decide about a matter, he would not make a decision concerning it without their involvement; rather he would consult them and seek their advice.

He would show appreciation to those among them who did good and forgive those who caused offence. He never sat and talked to anyone without showing the best behaviour and attitude towards him; he would never frown at him or speak harshly to him, and he never stopped being cheerful with him; he would not take him to task for slips of the tongue, and he would overlook anything he showed of roughness; rather he would treat him extremely kindly and show great forbearance towards him.⁶¹

Nurturing and developing children's character is the most important task not only in parenting, but also in the world and it is also the hardest. It is basically about directing children to behave in accordance with the Qur'an. What is worthy of note herein is that children of good character are *Muttaqun* (God-conscious or God-fearing) and *Salihun* (act aright), meaning they stand firm in the values they hold, they are honest with others, self-disciplined, show gratitude for the good things, appreciate others, tolerant, make informed judgements and refrain from behaviours and activities that do not align with Islamic or human values, they are not easily distracted by temptation. They are compassionate to others, meaning they treat them with kindness and do not hurt anyone, they are honest and sincere, humble, fair to everyone, respectful to others, they keep promises and tell the truth, etc.

PARENTS' ROLE IN CHILDREN'S PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Physical strength is required in the fulfilment of *Al-Takalif Al-Shar'iyah* (religious obligations) as indicated in the following verse: "O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy" (The Qur'an, 2:168); and "O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid, and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess" (The Qur'an, 7:31).

A child's physical development refers to the advancements of motor skills, namely the muscle movements used in his or her everyday life and the growth and development of the brain in early childhood. The key to physical development is proper nutrition, exercise and medical care, among others. The growth in the ability of children to use their bodies and physical skills is important for cognitive development, that is, the ability to think and reason, and the exploration of the world around them, namely the physical environment. To build the body's strength to stay healthy, Islam encourages healthy eating or good diet, physical sports and rest.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.179.

Hence, parents must make sure these needs are met. Physical wellbeing can be described as a vehicle to attaining not only intellectual wellness but also spiritual and emotional wellbeing.

PARENTS' ROLE IN CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Children's emotional development put simply is children's ability to monitor and manage their feelings and emotions effectively (self-regulation). It is key to mental and physical health and social relationships. Among the factors that influence emotional development are the family environment, family upbringing, parent-child attachment and parents' marital quality. The availability of parents for children to ask questions and talk about their concerns, developing relations with others, encouraging children to engage in activities that help them self-regulate and equipping children with the knowledge of the impact of emotion on the body and mind and emotional management skills are among the effective ways to manage emotions. Part of emotional management skills involves understanding one's own emotional state and regulating one's feelings while one is in an emotional situation.

PARENTS' ROLE IN CHILDREN'S MENTAL DEVELOPMENT

Raising a mentally healthy child is a responsibility that parents must give utmost importance to because of the following compelling reasons: firstly, development of the mind is "the most important development in early childhood."⁶² Everything children do and are capable of is determined by their mental condition, that is, their beliefs, values and desires. Beliefs are opinions and convictions that we hold as being true with or without proof. Values are "individual beliefs that motivate (a person) to act one way or another." They serve as a guide for one's behaviour. Secondly, children's mental health or soundness of the mind is an integral part of their overall health and well-being. Studies have shown that mental health and physical health are interdependent, meaning without the soundness of mind one's overall health and well-being are not achieved. Unhealthy mind can lead to anxiety and sadness. Studies have also shown that there is an inverse relationship between mental health and happiness. Hence, without soundness of the mind happiness is not attained. Thirdly, mental health helps determine how children handle the stresses of life, relate to others and make choices. In Islam, there is no *Taklif* (subjection to Islamic law or the obligation to undertake any form of religious duty) without mental soundness or development. Therefore, Islam has stressed the need for preservation of the mind and regards paying attention to one's mental well-being as a form of *'ibadah* or an act of devotion to Allah.

The following are critical components of maintaining good mental health: Quality sleep or getting enough rest, mindfulness (e.g., to be mindful of Allah and to be aware of the consequences of mental illness), hygiene, relaxation or taking time off when needed, leisure and recreation activities, social connection (face-to-face communication and virtual social network), staying active, creativity, staying hydrated, physical activity e.g., exercising, avoiding drugs and alcohol, building connection with Allah (performing Salat five times a day and reciting *dhikr* or calling upon Allah), seeking help from a mental health provider, a good family environment (open communication, love, support, care and making one feel valued and esteemed), taking care of physical health and knowledge of how to handle stress or the ability to manage one's feelings and deal with difficulties.

⁶² Janet Wilde Astington & Margaret J. Edward, *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*, "The Development of Theory of Mind in Early Childhood," August 2010. Available from <https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/pdf/expert/social-cognition/according-experts/development-theory-mind-early-childhood> [Accessed September 22, 2023].

In addition to the above-mentioned, it is worth mentioning that: firstly, one of the objectives of the *Shari'ah* is to preserve the purity and soundness of human mind or to protect it from anything that harms it. This is done through commands (*Al-Wajibat*) and prohibitions (*Al-Nawahi*). For example, Allah has commanded every human being to establish *Al-Salat* (the prayer) for His remembrance (The Qur'an, 20:14) and emphasized that there is peace, calmness, tranquillity, comfort or satisfaction of heart in the remembrance and contemplation of Him (The Qur'an, 13:28). He has prohibited all intoxicants, whether they are in liquid or solid form, whether their quantity is large or small, not only because they cloud the mind, intellect, the faculty of thinking or consciousness of a person, but also because they bring about a number of harms and troubles. They have been described as *Umm Al-Khaba'ith* (The fountainhead of evils), *Umm Al-Fawahish* (The origin of all sorts of atrocities), *Akbar Al-Kaba'ir* (The most heinous of major sins), *Ra'su kulli khati'a* (The head of all errors and lapses), *Miftahu kulli Sharr* (The key to all evils and mischief). The Qur'anic concept for intoxicants is *Khamr* which means "to conceal" or "put a veil" on the mind such that it does not function properly. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning),

They ask you concerning wine (*Khamr*) and gambling, say: "In them is great sin, and some profit, for men; but [the harm of] the sin is greater than the profit" (The Qur'an, 2:219).

O you who believe! Intoxicants (*Khamr*) and gambling, (dedication of) stones, and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination, of Satan's handwork: eschew such (abomination), that you may prosper. Satan's plan is (but) to excite enmity and hatred between you, with intoxicants and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allah, and from prayer: will you not then abstain? (The Qur'an, 5:90, 91).

It is worth bearing in mind that consciousness is an indispensable requirement for the remembrance of Allah as indicated in this verse: "O you who believe! Approach not prayers with a mind befogged, until ye can understand all that ye say" (The Qur'an, 4:43). Here it is understood that some Muslims used to stand up to perform *Salat* while still under the influence of alcohol and so they made mistakes in their recitations and could not understand the meaning of what they were reading. It is on this basis, among others, that all intoxicants were banned.

It should also be borne in mind that *Dhikru'llah* (remembrance of Allah) is a comprehensive concept. It encompasses of *Iman* (strong faith in Allah), *Dhikr* (constant mention of Allah), *Tawakkul* (total trust in Allah), *Inabah* (returning to Allah or returning from heedlessness to heedfulness), *Tawbah* (repentance to Allah), *Do'a* or *Isti'anah* (supplication or asking help from Allah), etc.

PARENTS' ROLE IN CHILDREN'S INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Intellectual or cognitive development is about "the growth of a child's mental abilities" including the ability to explore and learn, reason and reflect, confidently face problems, challenges and obstacles, solve problems effectively, think rightly, critically and creatively, make informed decisions and sound judgements, and recall facts. Part of the responsibilities of the parents is to create a rich learning environment for their children; i.e., an environment that enhances their intellectual development and improves their mental abilities; one that exposes them to new ideas and perspectives especially through reading and reflection. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

Recite in the name of your Lord who created. Created man from a clinging substance. Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous. Who taught by the pen. Taught man that which he knew not (The Qur'an, 96: 1-5).

Do they not contemplate within themselves? Allah has not created the heavens and the earth and what is between them except in truth and for a specified term. And indeed, many of the people, in the meeting with their Lord, are disbelievers (The Qur'an, 30:8).

Reading has been found to have a positive impact on intellectual abilities and it has also been described as “the key to success and knowledge accumulation.” It is one of the means to the reduction Reading “can also reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, which can have a negative impact on intellectual abilities.”⁶³ Therefore, parents should make their children understand importance of reading.

Reflection is the key to discovery of the reality of Allah's existence and to understanding the wisdom behind the creation of mankind and the universe. It allows a person to distinguish between what is good and evil, as well as what is beneficial and harmful, beautiful and ugly.

PARENTS' ROLE IN PREPARING CHILDREN FOR THE REALITIES OF LIFE AND DEATH

Parents are duty-bound to guide their children to: firstly, the understanding of the reality of life so that they do not fall for its temporary enjoyments and; secondly, the purpose of life so that they live according to it. This includes the understanding of the purpose and meaning behind their days so that they do not waste them. There are so many Qur'anic chapters and Hadith in which the importance of time has been emphasized. For example, Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

By (the Token of) Time (through the ages). Verily Man is in loss. Except such as have Faith, and do righteous deeds, and (join together) in the mutual teaching of Truth, and of Patience and Constancy (The Qur'an, 103:1-3).

From these verses it is understood that: firstly, time valuable. Therefore, it should be filled with pursuits that are meaningful. Secondly, the time that is not spent in doing good deeds is time wasted. The same is true with the time that is spent in doing something bad. Thirdly, a waste of time is a waste of one's life. Once it is gone, it can never be recovered. Therefore, it is important to use one's time wisely and productively.

In the following verse Allah mentions that he has made the resemblance of this world to rainwater: “And present to them the example of the life of this world, [its being] like rain which We send down from the sky, and the vegetation of the earth mingles with it and [then] it becomes dry remnants, scattered by the winds. And Allah is ever, over all things, Perfect in Ability” (The Qur'an, 18:45). Among the reasons for the resemblance are: firstly, water does not settle, rather it is always in motion as a liquid that flows. Similarly, this world never settles upon one state; it is passing away, along with its desires. Secondly, water disappears (eventually, it flows away or evaporates); it does not remain on the surface of the earth. Similarly, this world will not remain (it will

⁶³ Tanveer Hussain, “The Power of Intellect: How to Unlock Your Potential and Succeed Beyond Your Wildest Dreams,” April 25, 2023. Available from <https://tanveerntu.medium.com/the-power-of-intellect-how-to-unlock-your-potential-and-succeed-beyond-your-wildest-dreams-81a21f51d9f> [Accessed October 12, 2023].

come to an end one day). Thirdly, no one enters the water and does not get wet. Similarly, no one enters this world and be safe from its trials and calamities.

Understanding the purpose of life requires (1) understanding who Allah is, and who we are, and our relationship with Allah, and (2) knowing the ground rules to be followed in life, i.e., statements of values and guidelines which were revealed by Allah to help individuals and communities to decide how to act or how to live.

Reading the Qur'an in a language that we understand is a journey that we take to understand the reality of life and the purpose of our existence. Hence, one cannot understand the reality of life and the purpose of human existence until one makes that journey. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that the Qur'an is taught to children at a very early age.

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning), "Then did you think that We created you without purpose and that to Us you would not be returned (for account)?" (The Qur'an, 23:115). From this verse, it is clear that life has a purpose other than play and enjoyment. The reality of life and its purpose are mentioned in the following verses (interpretation of the meaning):

Know that the life of this world is but amusement and diversion and adornment and boasting to one another and competition in increase of wealth and children - like the example of a rain whose [resulting] plant growth pleases the tillers; then it dries and you see it turned yellow; then it becomes [scattered] debris. And in the Hereafter is severe punishment and forgiveness from Allah and approval. And what is the worldly life except the enjoyment of delusion (The Qur'an, 57:20).

And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me. No Sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me (The Qur'an, 51:56).

From the latter verse, it is clear that, firstly, the creation of jinn and humans is for the purpose of *'Ibadatu'llah* (servitude to Allah). Literally, *'Ibadah* means obedience, humility, loyalty, etc. Broadly speaking, it is worship of Allah alone without associating any partner with Him, or submission, devotion and obedience to Allah by doing that which He has commanded and avoiding that which He has forbidden - whether saying, or actions, outward and inward - whilst loving Him, fearing Him and putting one's hopes in Him.

Here it is worth noting that: firstly, worship of Allah alone without associating any partner with Him is a fulfilment of mankind's oath that was taken before their birth. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning),

When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam – from their loins – their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): "Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?" They said: "Yea! We do testify!" (This), lest ye should say on the Day of Judgment: "Of this we were never mindful" (The Qur'an, 7:172).

Secondly, Allah is Self-Sufficient and Independent of all His creation, meaning He does not need anyone's help. However, jinn, mankind and the rest of creation are in need of Him in every condition and circumstance. He is their creator and sustainer. He says (interpretation of the meaning): "O mankind, you are those in need of Allah, while Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy" (The Qur'an, 35:15).

CONCLUSION

One of the most striking issues in the study of character, morality and ethics is the purpose at which education should aim. This article has thrown light on the importance and aims of character education. It can be deduced from the foregoing that: first, moral values and good character are at the core of Islamic teachings. Second, schools, colleges and universities are not just institutions where knowledge and skills are offered, they are also the places where children's moral characters are developed: "Higher education institutions should assist students during their journey to find their moral selves laden with values;"⁶⁴ "universities (as well as schools and colleges) [should] go beyond their focus on the minds and hands of students; they should work on their hearts also."⁶⁵ Third, whether character education should be taught as a stand-alone subject or be incorporated into the entire school curriculum remains a subject of debate. Fourth, the aim of character education is not just to know what is right and wrong, good and bad, or virtue and vice, but to be become good. Fifth, parents and teachers are the most important moral educators of children. Therefore, their primary responsibility is to instil the appropriate values. They should raise children who are courageous, honest, responsible to their actions and behaviours, cooperative, perform supererogatory acts, that is, acts that go above and beyond the call of duty, treat others the way you would like to be treated, always put others' needs before their own and gave their lives in the service of their religion (Islam), nation and humanity. Additionally, they should teach them to avoid bad attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, such as collusion (talking about people behind their back) and elitism (assuming oneself to be better than others), and not to deploy virtues to support immoral ends. It is claimed that when virtues are used to support immoral ends they become vices.⁶⁶

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⁶⁴ Nur Silay, "A Study of Moral Education and its Relationship with Character Education," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, January 2014, p.358. Available from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271104538_A_Study_of_Moral_Education_and_its_Relationship_with_Character_Educatio

⁶⁵ Amparo Merino, *Much More than Knowledge: Virtue Ethics and Character Education for Degrowth*, p.4.

⁶⁶ Lee Jerome and Ben Kisby, *The Rise of Character Education in Britain*, p. 15.

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