Safeguarding the Successful Implementation of Character Education in the UAE (Moral Education)

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"To educate a person in mind and not in morals
is to educate a menace to society."
-Theodore Roosevelt

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to look at thoughts on moral education by educational experts in the UAE; the reason behind that why schools need to concentrate on students' moral development. The role of the teachers in the UAE is to guide their students for moral and ethics concepts. The point of views and opinions of the educational experts reveal that moral education should be an important concept of school life. The moral curriculum that implemented in public and private schools in the United Arab Emirates has been developed with great care through cooperation with a group of experts and specialists in the academic and social fields from a country; these efforts have resulted in an advanced curriculum based on learning styles. Modern, interactive and beyond classroom boundaries to include informal, innovative learning. Hence, the moral curriculum must be emphasized on moral development which is closely connected to character education and schools should not neglect their students' moral development.

Key words: moral education, character education, ethics, experts, curriculum.

الغرض من هذا البحث هو إلقاء نظرة على التربية الأخلاقية من قبل خبراء تربويين في الإمارات العربية المتحدة. والسبب وراء ذلك في ضرورة تركيز المدارس على التطور الأخلاقي للطلاب. يتمثل دور المعلمين في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة في توجيه طلابهم نحو المفاهيم الأخلاقية. وتكشف وجهات نظر وآراء الخبراء التربويين أن التربية الأخلاقية يجب أن تكون مفهوما هاما للحياة المدرسية، حيث تم تطوير المنهج الأخلاقي أو التربية الاخلاقية المطبق في المدارس الحكومية والخاصة في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة بعناية كبيرة من خلال التعاون مع مجموعة من الخبراء والمتخصصين في المجالات الأكاديمية والاجتماعية حيث أدت هذه الجهود إلى وجود منهج متقدم يعتمد على أساليب تعلم حديثة تفاعلية تتجاوز حدود الفصول الدراسية لتشمل التعلم غير الرسمي والمبتكر. ومن هنا يجب التأكيد على ان المناهج الأخلاقية ترتبط بالتطور الأخلاقي الذي يرتبط ارتباطا وثيقا بشخصية المتعلم، ويجب ألا تهمل المدارس التطور الأخلاقي لطلابها..

الكلمات المفتاحية: التربية الأخلاقية، التربية الشخصية، الأخلاق، الخبراء، المناهج

Introduction

Since its establishment in 1971, the United Arab Emirates has invested in its human resources; the human being is the focus of all government programs and initiatives. In the same vein, the moral education program is taking place in the midst of the continuous effort of a state.

The United Arab Emirates in preserving the diversity and cohesion of Emirati society between modernity and globalization on the one hand, and the authentic values

On the other hand, the moral education program comes to establish a culture that preserves the characteristics of tolerance and openness that Emirati society has developed over the past few decades, which are respecting the other and preserving the customs traditions, heritage, culture and values of the United Arab Emirates, and taking advantage of moral and good ideals (history, arts, literature, and tales.

The program also aims to care and guide Emirati youth regarding their methods of dealing with the mix of cultures and beliefs found in, preparing them to possess the ability to make morally decision; creating a generation of responsible young people who are aware of their rights and duties.

The United Arab Emirates has also attached great importance to the concept of global citizenship, and this can be referred to in the national agenda of qualification of Emirati school students to engage and excel in the global community.

The moral education program revolves around building the personality of the Emirati school student with the aim of preparing the generation, and contributes positively to the enhancement of life. Thus, the program relies on the rules of logic in order to supplement the student culture with relevant global concepts.

The moral curriculum that implemented in public and private schools has been developed with great care through cooperation with a group of experts and specialists in the academic and social fields from a country; these efforts have resulted in an advanced curriculum based on learning styles. Modern, interactive and beyond classroom boundaries to include informal, innovative learning environments (https://www.moraleducation.ae/ar/what-is-moral-education/.).

Views about the moral education

A Mandatory Moral Education for all children in the United Arab Emirates have been implemented starting January of 2017. According to the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), led by its Director Dr. Ali Al Nuaimi, the said initiative "aims to promote ethical values among school students as well as noble concepts, such as tolerance, respect and community participation. This will be achieved by developing scientific educational programs and frameworks to ensure the subject is integrated with the national education curriculum" (Emirates News Agency, January 2007). Dr. Al Nuaimi further iterated that the trials of the 21st century necessitated the government, educators, and parents to work together to teach ethics and community values to young people. This is to build an educated and cultured society that is deeply committed to its national identity as well as moral values. Miriam Al Zaabi, a parent who also happens to work as a public school teacher, stated that "adding moral education to classroom education is welcomed and overdue." She added that although the "curriculum has been changed a lot, it was focusing only on getting kids more creative and innovative, and they have forgotten how to respect even each other's innovations" (The National, October 2016).

As it turns out, the aforementioned observation of Al Zaabi is not only valid in the UAE, but in other corners of the globe as well. As a case in point, a scholar in the person of Torie Flournoy England conducted a research to determine the degree to which principals and teachers perceived the importance of character education in California's K-12 public schools. An examination of the quantitative and qualitative data indicated that teachers and principals believe that character education is an important element that must be included in public schools to increase student achievement and facilitate a safe and effective learning environment (England, 2009).

In preparation for the launch of the pilot phase of the Moral Education, Sara Al Suwaidi, the Acting Manager of Curriculum Division of the ADEC has organized a three-day training program for teachers. The training program aimed to enhance the efficiency of the teachers and to ensure that they acquired the necessary knowledge and skills needed for teaching the newly introduced subject (Emirates News Agency, January 2007).

This move is very timely and is actually in conjunction with the research of Mary Maergaret Ruettgers who observed that nearly 60% of education preparation program graduates perceived that their programs inadequately prepared them for the 21st Century Classroom (Levine, 2006 as cited by Ruettgers, 2013). The research further asserts that as societies develop, the knowledge and skills required in order to succeed and compete also changes; some skills and knowledge become more valuable while others become obsolete (Zhao, 2009, as cited by Ruettgers, 2013). Thus, given the novelty of the Moral Education Subject, it is necessary for the teachers to be well-trained in order for the initiative to fully attain its objectives.

Moreover, the training program gave emphasis on the importance of the role and engagement of a parent in educating morals to children. To this end, Sheikh Mohammed quoted that "we look forward to the support of parents…their role is pivotal as they represent the first line in instilling ethics and a positive attitude. Home and family is the cornerstone for raising and educating children" (The National, October 2016).

This statement of Sheikh Mohammed is backed by numerous studies, highlighting the importance of parental involvement in the implementation of effective character education programs. Among them is the study of Nnenna Obianuju Franciamore, who made a phenomenological study on the perceptions of parents with children in a Universal Pre-Kindergarten program concerning character education, with the purpose of describing their lived experiences with character education. She was able to establish that the parents expressed a strong sense of responsibility for their children's development of character and behavior, although they were not always sure how to best foster that development (Franciamore, 2014).

The aforementioned groundwork made by the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) seems to be pointing towards the proper direction. Nonetheless, it leaves the question of what other considerations need to be emphasized in order to ensure that the Moral Education initiative to become truly fruitful. The subsequent discussions outline some of the scholarly studies regarding the successful implementation of character education programs.

Safeguarding the Successful Implementation

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In 2010, Makoto Ishii wrote a dissertation to examine how among all the educational organizations that have been pursuing character education, Sathya Sai Education (located both in Liecester, United Kingdom as well as in India) has proved to be very effective in terms of achieving both academic and character excellence in the students. Ishii's research revealed that the implementation of character education relies immensely on the way the educators lived, whether inside or outside the school environments, with a clear insight of the goal of education as well as life itself. Further, his study shows that to be able to bring out the potentialities in the hearts of students, it is necessary for the teachers themselves to be role models of humanistic values such as love, truth, right conduct, peace, and non-violence in their daily lives (Ishii, M., 2010).

The research of Ishii corroborates with the statement fo Alun Yurath, the Head Master of Brighton College, who iterated that teachers are role models for the next generation, investing time and effort in ensuring that every child is a proactive and responsible member of the wider community in which they live (The National, October 2016).

Meanwhile, the article entitled "Character Education for the 21st Century: What Should Students Learn?" discusses several focal points as well as strategies to ensure the successful conduct of Character Education. Accordingly, the paper states that character education is about the acquisition and strengthening of virtues, values and the capacity to make wise choices for a well-rounded society (Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015). The paper enumerates the following as the broad aims of character education:

- To build a foundation for lifelong learning;

- To support successful relationships at home, in the community, and in the workplace; and

- To develop the personal values and virtues for sustainable participation in a globalized world.

More importantly, the Center for Curriculum Redesign was able to come up with a Character Framework coming from inputs from more than five hundred teachers from around the world, and from their research emerged six essential qualities: mindfulness, curiosity, courage, resilience, ethics, and leadership.

The first essential quality, Mindfulness, can be defined as the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experiences moment by moment. Research suggests that mindfulness training can enhance attention and focus, and improve memory, self-acceptance, self-management skills, and self-understanding (Kabat-Zinn, 1990 as cited by the Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015). The CCR asserts that it is very important that the person who is teaching mindfulness also practices it in his own life, otherwise the authenticity and effectiveness is likely to be lost. Mindfulness can be taught to children with exercises emphasizing awareness of the environment, exercises that focus on awareness of the body's movement, and exercises on meditation on the breath, Mindfulness may be assessed through self-report questionnaires, especially those that encourage people to reflect on themselves and their experiences (Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015).

The second essential quality, Curiosity, is defined as an innate love of learning and of knowledge, without the lure of any profit. Curiosity may be conceived of as a drive (comparable to thirst or hunger) due to organisms trying to minimize the unpleasantness of uncertainty (Lowenstein, 1994, as cited by Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015). According to the information-Gap Theory, curiosity is the feeling resulting from paying attention to a gap in knowledge between what one knows and what one wants to know (Lowenstein, 1994). The Interest/Deprivation Theory, meanwhile, combines the ideas from the curiosity models with the neuroscience of desire and reward, and claims that both induction of a positive sensation of interest and reduction of a negative sensation of uncertainty are involved in curiosity (Litman, 2005 as cited by the Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015). Curiosity can be taught to students by challenging their existing mental models and orienting them toward a gap in their knowledge such as presenting contradictions, or by inquiry-based learning and problem-based learning (Pluck and Johnson, 2011 as cited by Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015).

The third essential quality is that of Courage, which can be thought of as an ability to act despite fear or uncertainty, in risky situations or when we are feeling vulnerable (Brown, 2012 as cited by Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015). Albeit, it is important to distinguish morally courageous acts from foolhardiness or thrill-seeking, which describe risk taking as mere adrenaline boosts that puts oneself or others in danger with general disregard (Konter, 2012, as cited by Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015). One author proposes four tactics in order to encourage risk taking among students, and therefore develop courage:

1. Serve as role models of risk takers themselves;

2. Celebrate mistakes as opportunities to learn;

3. Structure grading policies that forgive mistakes and encourage revision; and

4. Discuss narratives about mistakes that resulted in successful outcomes (Loui, 2006, as cited by Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015).

Courage may be measured by assessing levels of altruism and the propensity to take risks, in order to determine ethical orientations among employees towards morally courageous actions. In addition, courage may also be measured in the area of sports psychology. Courage is sports is evaluated using a five-factor measurement scale that assesses: (1) determination to push towards a goal despite boundaries, (2) mastery as a source of self-confidence, (3) assertiveness to expend a high amount of energy, (4) venturesome as a way to cope with fear, and (5) sacrifice behavior related to altruistic risk-taking (Konter, 2012, as cited by Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015).

The fourth essential quality is Resilience, which can be thought of as an ability or set of abilities that allow one to overcome obstacles. Moreover, resilience is a dynamic process consisting of a multitude of factors which all influence whether or not someone will succeed in the face of adversity (Luthar, 2000 as cited by cited by Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015). Resilience has been linked to three factors, namely: caring relationships, a communication of high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful involvement and participation. It has been

suggested that the greatest opportunity for the reinforcement of these key principles is on the classroom level, for it has been shown that when children feel supported in the classroom, there is a greater likelihood that they will engage with the material being taught and with their peers (Slavin, 1991, as cited by Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015). There is evidence that teachers are already effective in identifying resilient students in their classes, and there is an ongoing effort to develop more structured assessment methods. One such method focuses on six separate domains to be assessed for each child, namely: security, education, friendship, talents and interests, positive values and social competencies (Wessel, 2002, as cited by Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015).

The fifth essential quality is that of Ethics, which pertains to characteristics such as humaneness, kindness, respect, justice, equity, fairness, compassion, and the like. Ethics as a teachable quality is informed in large part by the literature on moral development, pioneered by Jean Piaget and John Dewey, and expanded by Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan (Kohlberg, 1981 as cited by Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015). One way by which students can be taught autonomy with ethical decisions is through democratic schools, in which students are responsible for collectively making decisions that affect the entire community. This responsibility engages them in an age-appropriate yet important roles requiring ethical conduct (Kohlberg, 1981 as cited by Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015).

Lastly, the sixth essential quality is Leadership, defined as a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change. This relational model of leadership includes dimensions of being inclusive, empowering, purposeful, ethical, and process oriented (Komives, 2006 as cited by Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015). Leadership should be taught to all students, not only those who are identified as gifted, because true leadership grows out of group processes. Therefore, a focus on the process of leadership, and using examples of leadership along with discussions around these experiences will allow students to make sense of how groups function and build up the relevant capacities themselves. Students must also be encouraged to take positions of leadership within their communities (Eich, 2008 as cited by Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015).

Still on the issue of moral education, a study done by Fink and Geller discusses why it is essential to integrate the Common core with Character Education, and how it can be done. In a nutshell, the 21st Century Global Skills, which are at the heart of the Common core, are an upgrade and reflect a move toward the teaching and learning strategies necessary to reach today's students (Fink and Geller, 2016). The authors note that while excellent, the common core standards are not excellent enough because they lack focus and intentionality about educating children on Moral and Performance character, as well as socioemotional skills for students to be ready for the worlds of college and career. In the words of both the authors:

"Academic achievement alone is just one side of the tapestry. The other side is character development, and the rich constellation of core ethical and civic values and socioemotional skills that weave and thread throughout it as well. In the tapestry of education, there are many threads. The one that connects them all is students' socioemotional and character development, or moral and performance character" (Fink and Geller, 2016).

In summary, the successful implementation of character education in the UAE requires a holistic approach where both schools and parents are involved. As schools tries their best to train and prepare teachers to be qualified educators of character both in instruction and content, the parents must also be made to recognize their role in instilling ethics and a positive attitude to their children. The engagement of the two shall provide a synergistic effect in educating the right morals and character to students.

Further, it is recommended that character education, as an education program, must include six essential elements, namely: mindfulness, curiosity, courage, resilience, ethics, and leadership. Though taught formally, these elements must be practiced informally, to allow students to grasp the concepts better.

Furthermore, teachers should not only be well versed with instructions, content, and evaluation. More importantly, they should also be emulators of the morals they are teaching. As one adage says,

"The mediocre teacher tells,

The good teacher explains,

The superior teacher demonstrates,

The great teacher inspires".

In this connection, it is recommended for schools to implement strict screening standards to ensure that their teachers reflect not only the most sterling of qualifications of, but also the highest standards of character.

Not the least, as an institution, the schools must provide a lot of opportunities for students to test and practice lessons of morals and character. Thus, character education must be imbedded in the very culture the school aspires for. Sound empirical evidence indicated that character education will be most successful when its implementation is accompanied by intentional and ongoing school wide efforts to:

- Create a positive school culture and climate that includes high-quality teaching and learning, environment, sense of community, and staff leadership;
- Develop an ethical learning community based on norms of respect, responsibility and excellence;
- Emphasize moral and performance character in all subject areas;
- Educate for democratic citizenship. Weave ethical and civic values through every aspect of school life, including the academic curriculum, co-curricular activities, staff modeling, and all human relationships; and
- Prioritize prevention by focusing on socioemotional learning, civic virtues, and broad character development (Fink and Geller, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study has a qualitative nature. This method looks at thoughts and opinions of the experts in the field of education based on their point of views interviewed in The NATIONAL newspaper UAE ", and aims to help researchers "gain insight into the concepts of moral education in the UAE ", and describe the perceptions and reactions of these participants. V.Vijaya &M.Milacahpaul (2018) mentioned that moral education needs to be imbibed among youngers by parents in terms of respecting fellow human beings, environment, plants, and animals etc. Therefore, a holistic approach needs to be adopted in imparting moral education to the students.

Participants

The study is included educational experts who work in the field of education and they had been interviewed by National newspaper September 2017 to set their thoughts and opinions about teaching moral education subject at UAE. Various thoughts and opinions have been received.

Data collection tool

The information presented in this paper is purely a secondary data collected from several sources of information such as National newspaper, websites, research paper, and other types of articles.

RESULTS

Head teachers across the UAE believe staffs need to be given specialised training to teach moral education classes in schools. Moral education was introduced in private and government schools in September 2017, but educators believe more needs to be done for it to be successfully integrated into the curriculum.

At a meeting of more than 180 school principals from Dubai and the Northern Emirates, school leaders called for a concerted effort to be made to hire staff to specifically teach moral education. Moral education lessons were introduced to instil tolerance, community spirit and compassion in pupils.

New UAE education policy will have morals and ethics at its heart

Hard work and good timekeeping: how the UAE's moral education drive aims to improve society. Moral education taught in UAE schools for the first time textbooks and there are no exams.

Few teachers have been trained on the subject, providing moral guidance to young minds is shared by a variety of educators, not all of whom are equipped for the role.

The topic was put in the spotlight during the first day of the Principals'

Nargish Khambhatta, principal of Gems Modern Academy in Dubai, said planning lessons on moral education is not suitable for every teacher. "Some of the content of the curriculum is heavy and dry like financial literacy. It's not everyone's cup of tea to teach financial literacy," Ms Khambhatta said. "Not every teacher is equipped to teach civic sense and Islamic culture. "Training for teachers and identifying the right teachers for the right topic are very essential. We need extra training for these teachers."

At present, existing teachers at schools are taking moral education classes. The school head explained that another challenge is the fact that parents are still to "buy in" to the importance of moral education. "We need to involve parents in the teaching process to help them buy in to the idea. Schools should have projects that are interesting to them."

Mohamed Al Neaimi, director of educational affairs at the Crown Prince's Court, said schools had a positive attitude to incorporating moral education into the curriculum, though he admitted there were some teething problems as it remains a relatively new subject. "Unlike other subjects where you are taught to be tested, here there are no tests. There is no pass or fail," he said. The moral education curriculum focuses on character development, morality, cultural studies, civic studies and community.

For Sheela George, principal of ASPAM Indian International School in Sharjah, it is crucial that a committee is established to develop a moral education strategy, as is the case with core subjects. She, however, does not believes that schools need a recruitment drive, but can train existing staff to teach the subject. "We can train teachers in financial literacy, entrepreneurship skills, civic sense," she said, encouraging schools to share successful practices. "We do have training sessions for teachers, but we need more of these," she said.

Zara Harrington, principal of Safa British School in Dubai, said schools need strong leadership and good teachers are key.

"I think there has to be enough freedom for schools to adapt the subject," Ms Harrington said. "You have to have really strong leadership and very good teachers to implement it. Without that, no matter what the curriculum states it won't be successful," she said.

Maryam Obeid Al Gharbi, principal of Al Ameer for Boys in Umm Al Quwain, said the biggest hurdle is encouraging pupils and schools alike to embrace change.

"To convince them is difficult sometimes. Give schools a chance to present noteworthy examples so that they have a chance to share their success stories," she said. The moral education programme aims to ensure pupils are responsible and engaged citizens. The moral education course works to build character of pupils, instills an ethical outlook, fosters community feel, and brings pupils closer to their culture.

The programme has four main pillars which include character and morality, individual and community, civic studies and cultural studies.

Pupils in public and private schools receive 45 minutes of moral education every week.

The course was initiated by Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

The pilot scheme was trialed in 19 schools in January 2017, and moral education was implemented for grades one to nine in all schools across the country in September 2017.(National newspaper 2017).

Moral education was introduced in private and government schools in September 2017, but educators believe more needs to be done for it to be successfully integrated into the curriculum. At a meeting of school principals from Dubai and the Northern Emirates, school leaders called for a concerted effort to be made to hire staff to specifically teach moral education. Moral education lessons were introduced to instil tolerance,

community spirit and compassion in pupils, and new UAE education policy will have morals and ethics at its heart; hard work, and good timekeeping: how the UAE's moral education drive aims to improve society. Moral education taught in the UAE schools; few teachers have been trained on the subject, providing moral guidance to young minds is shared by a variety of educators, not all of whom are equipped for the role (The National newspaper, 2017).

Moral education is closely connected to character education and schools should not ignore their students' moral development. The two concepts resemble each other in needs many ways and sometimes one has replaced the other one in terms of names as they seem almost identical; educational institutions should assist students during their journey to find their moral selves laden with values. Thus, moral education to be considered seriously by schools (Silay,Nur,2017).

DISCUSSION

Increasing students' involvement in activities will help to connect with their interests and needs; supporting learners in making their own decisions and giving them chances to make their own choices.

The results showed that the majority of educational experts thought embedded that there was a direct relationship between moral education learning and skills from different development areas needed to be improved for participation and learning to take place. Some teacher, on the other hand, believed that all development areas needed to be fostered for participation and learning to take place; motivation will help learners to express their feeling through learning moral education.

The personality and moral curriculum revolves around developing the individual characteristics of each student and entrenching human principles, honesty, forgiveness, flexibility, persistence, determination and perseverance.

The curriculum is designed to enhance the values of mutual respect among students, and to accept differences with others; including personal and morality, how to be fair, how to be tolerant and respectful; the knowledge side highlights the importance of integrating it through many channels, social media, books, etc. ; concentrating on social initiatives (project management, initiatives such as volunteering, innovation, community service, interaction and cooperation.

For civil studies, cultural studies, affection, fairness, interest, honesty, tolerance, respect for difference, perseverance, perseverance, equality, justice, consideration for the feelings of others, and peace cooperation; Public responsibility, hard work, perseverance, compassion, empathy for others, personal and moral values, respect and tolerance in society

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Within the scope of teaching moral education, teachers should exchange their ideas about developing the concept of moral education.
- The teachers should be focused on creative skills for teaching moral.
- Involving the students in activities such as discussion, practice, and Role play "Application and practice, modeling, telling story, oral history are important in the participation process during teaching the subject of moral education".

The training program of moral education should provide the teachers with skills and knowledge; involve them in appropriate learning experiences.

In conclusion, the successful implementation of a character education can be safeguarded by intentionally integrating character education throughout the curriculum, and by embedding a positive school culture participated in by students, teachers, and by parents.

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