

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In the attempt to achieve a developed nation status by the year 2020, Malaysia is currently at a critical juncture in relation to human resource development. In achieving the Malaysian 2020 Vision, the general populace needs mental development transformation. Hence, a framework for the development of human resources requires careful planning and proper implementation to ensure the development of a strong, capable and resilient Malaysian future generation. In developing the future nation, erasing the negative influences is becoming a necessary factor in the development process of a quality and integrity human beings, so as to bring human development not only in physical aspects but also the spiritual one (Nazarruddin M. Jali, Maa'rof Redzuan, Asnarul Kahdi A. Samah, & Ismail M. Rashid, 2003). In achieving this goal, a master plan, namely the National Integrity Plan (NIP), was initiated to achieve the goals of 2020 Vision, that is to establish a fully moral and ethical society whose citizens are strong in religious and spiritual values and imbued with the highest ethical standards” (Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, 2004, p.vi). In the first five years, The National Integrity Plan (NIP) has set out to achieve five targets known as Target 2008 (Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, 2004, p.vi):

- a. Effectively reduce corruption, malpractices and abuse of power;
- b. Increase the efficiency of the public delivery system and overcome bureaucratic red tape;
- c. Enhance corporate governance and business ethics;

- d. Strengthen the family institution; and
- e. Improve the quality of life.

The Malaysian government is emphasizing on human development, which can be seen through various machineries, especially Ministry of Unity and Social Development Malaysia, and Ministry of Education Malaysia. The reinforcement of human development strategy and the prevention against negative elements was undertaken and implemented through various programs and policies, such as the National Development Policy of Malaysia, the Philosophy of National Education Malaysia, Prime Agenda and Core Programs of Malaysia, National Social Service and Action Plan for Malaysian Youth Council. Under the Malaysian Population Policy for instance, the main aim is to sustain population growth - to balance between the Malaysian resources and sustainable development. This is in accordance with Government's attempts to turn Malaysia as an industrialized nation and also maintaining quality citizens – in the sense of healthiness, resiliency and stable family. At macro level it demanded a better integration of population within overall development planning processes in general; and at the micro level, strengthening each family unit – which then it will turn as ‘building block’ in quality population development process (Nazarudin M. Jali et al., 2003).

In line with the fourth priority of the NIP, that is to strengthen the Malaysian family, this study attempts to develop an ethical-religious curriculum content for character development module that addresses the Malaysian needs. The curriculum content of such character development program is specifically designed to develop and span noble character among Malaysian youngsters. It is hoped therefore, this study would offer some contributions in the implementation of the ethical and good values in

Malaysian society based on ethical-religious values of each family unit.

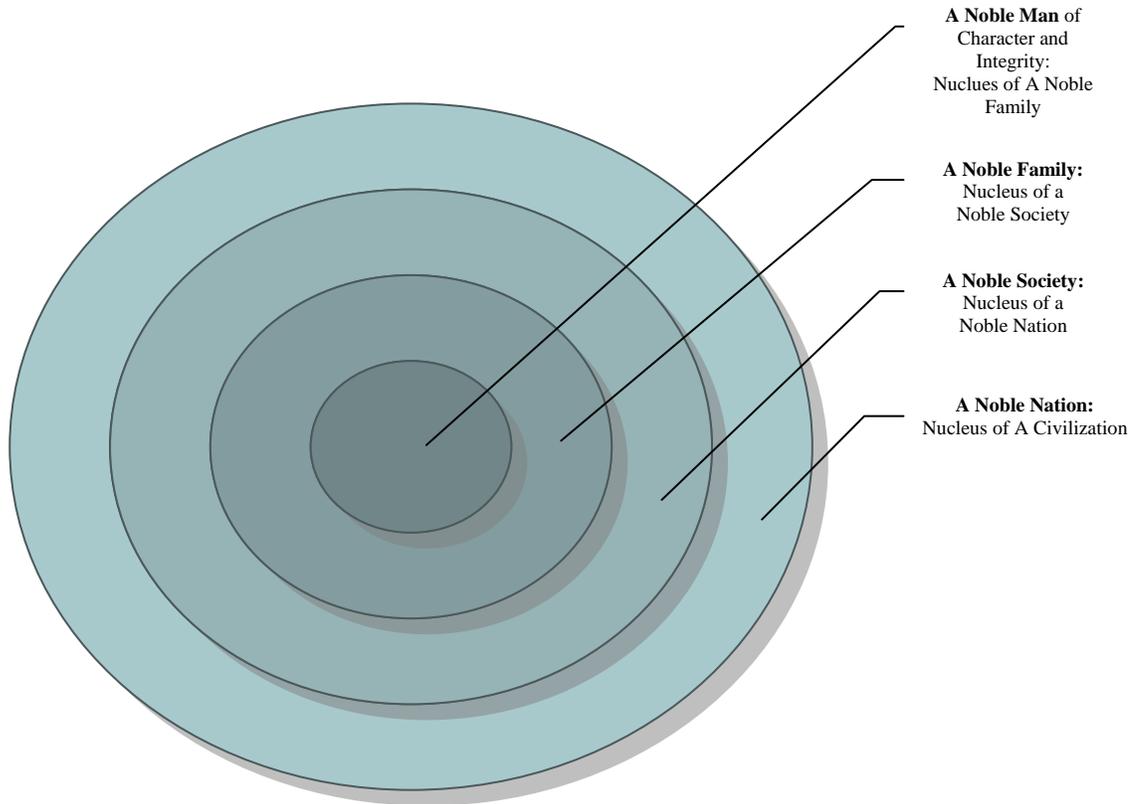


Figure 1. Developing Malaysian Human Capital: Malaysia Nation of Character

Statement of the Problem

Malaysian family has experienced significant changes in response to rapid socio-economic transformation over the last two decades. These changes have drastically reduced its function to effectively providing basic physiological, social and psychological needs for the family members (Rosnah, 1999). This problem is dominating the Malaysian family, especially among the Malay-Muslims. There are

some negative downturn indicators of family institution. One of the key indicators is the increasing of social problems as many studies have proved that family relationship and family conflict were related to social and psychological problems among adolescents (Ganong & Coleman, 1992 in Rosnah, 1999). It was also proven that a high percentage of adolescents in residential treatment homes were from families disrupted by separation or divorce (Glick, 1984 in Rosnah, 1999); and adolescents in single mother households or in conflict-ridden families were more likely to commit delinquent acts (Demo & Acock, 1988 in Rosnah, 1999). In this case, the researcher will highlight the drastic increase in drug abuse and HIV/AIDS in Malaysia as an indicator of the declining family institution.

In Malaysia, a total of 85.6% of HIV patients are aged between 20-30 years old and majority of drug abusers aged between 15-25 years old (Nazarudin M. Jali et al., 2003). In fact it was clearly mentioned in Malaysia's address at the 35th Session of The United Nations Commission on Population and Development on 1-5 April, 2002 at New York declared that the HIV/AIDS is a public health problem in Malaysia. It becomes one of national concern, especially with regard to the spread of HIV/AIDS among young people and to newborns through mother-to-child transmission. Since the first case of AIDS was reported in December 1986, there has been a geometric increase in the number of HIV infections. According to the Malaysian Ministry of Health Report (1994 in Nazarudin M. Jali et al., 2003), there are 8049 reported cases of HIV/AIDS positive victims. However, in 1998, it was reported that a total of 24 236 Malaysians were infected by HIV/AIDS, and a total of 1 160 had died from the disease. Based on the 1998 statistics, 77.2 % of HIV infections were infected by drug abuse, 4.5%

through sexual relations and the rest were still under investigation (Nazarudin M. Jali et al., 2003). From 1995 until 2001, average number of new cases reported annually was 4,716. In 2001, the cumulative number of HIV infections stood at 44,208 with 1,258 cases of AIDS and 934 deaths. The main mode of transmission is intravenous drug use (76.7%), followed by heterosexual transmission (11.2%). HIV infection rate is highest among young adults of the age group 20-39 years while the proportion of women infected with HIV is also increasing. A report by Malaysian Ministry of Health (2002 in Azrul M. Khalib, 2004) on HIV/ AIDS among women in Malaysia stated that 63.9% of HIV/ AIDS cases were transmitted through heterosexual activities and 19.9% were caused by drug abuse. Ironically, more than 50% cases reported involved the Malays (54.8%).

In relation to drug abuse, the Malaysian Medical Association (2002 in Azrul M. Khalib, 2004) reported that there were around 22, 008 drug addicts in Malaysia: consisting of 11 477 (52.15%) were new addicts and 10, 531 were the repeat addicts. 99% of them were males between 20-24 years and mostly were Malays, followed by Chinese, Indians and foreigners. The raised question is that why the Malays (Muslims) are the most affected group? An interesting analysis was presented by al-Roubaie (2004) suggested that rapid socio-economic transformation of the Malays from rural to urban areas has created a different set of worldviews and lifestyles; and transformation of cultural products, ideas, materialism, media exposure and tourism that penetrated deeply into the local Malay society. This Western influence and global orientation transformed into the Malay way of life. Unfortunately, the Malays (at a macro-level) are not yet ready to face this ill and global challenge (al-Roubaie, 2004).

What are the underlying factors of current social problems in Malaysia? One of them is the problem of drug abuse, since it is one of the symptoms as well as the roots of other social illnesses, including HIV/AIDS cases. In fact, the Inspector-General of Malaysian Police himself had revealed that increasing number of students caught in drug-related offences had quadrupled since three years ago: 59 cases in 2003 jump to 225 cases in the year 2005 (*New Straits Time*, April 3, 2006). Ministry of Education Malaysia (1983 in Nazarudin et al., 2003) have studied and discovered 13 main factors that give rise to drug abuse activities among the Malaysian students as follows:

1. Desire to know drugs and to try it.
2. Ignorance of the true danger of each type of drug.
3. Peer influence.
4. Belief that drug will help the desire to forget a problem encountered.
5. Not using free time on matters that are beneficial.
6. No control of desires and feelings of the heart.
7. Broken homes.
8. Desire for a more affluent life style.
9. Disturbed personality.
10. Having plenty of pocket money or money to spend.
11. Protesting and anti-social behavior.
12. Wanting attention.
13. Inability to adapt to the surroundings.

In a nutshell, the above factors indicate the internal crises of character at an individual level. The two factors: a) as outlined in item 3: peer influence; and b) as in item 7: broken homes, in the researcher's view, are the main external factors which reinforce the individual crises of character.

Hence, a strategic approach has been initiated by the Malaysian Government to strengthen family institution of the nation to prepare the foundation of character - that

will be the social foundation of the good citizens. The role of family in facing the challenge of modernity and human development was highlighted by the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamed (NPFDB, 2005, p.1):

When a country develops, the first casualty will be the family institutions. We have seen how this problem is now playing in the developed Western countries and how their societies are riddled with crimes. We can emulate their successful development, but we must hold fast to our own values and our appreciation for our families.

Efforts towards upgrading quality of life and strengthening positive values and attitude forms part of Malaysia's national agenda. It has been implemented under The Eight Malaysian Plan (2001-2005) through various government agencies. The Family Development Programs, organized by the National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB), which operates under Ministry of Unity and Social Development is one of the most important tools to plant positive values in building up the individual's potentials; to maintain the quality of family life; and finally, for quality of human resources and development (Nazaruddin M. Jali et al., 2003). Since the year 2002, this Ministry has been promoting Malaysia as a Nation of Character (MNOC) – a way to spread positive values in the Malaysian family institutions (MNOC, 2002). Under National Population and Family Development Board's planning for the year 2006, MNOC project will be given the utmost priority (NPFDB, 2005). Focus of this campaign is to strengthen individual's character as early as childhood, that will eventually protect the child from any evil influence. However, there is a lack of character development modules in current parent education programs. Researcher viewed that teaching of ethics and values should be emphasized in much earlier age, since character formation normally takes place before one's puberty or pre-adolescence. Nonetheless, the character building modules available today pay more attention to the 'storm and stress' adolescence age group. At this

adolescent stage, the 'character' has generally bypassed this formation period. In our preliminary findings, character formation should be the main focus during the childhood period, particularly during the age of discernment (*mumayyiz*) when they start to discern the good from the bad, and the possible from the impossible.

Objectives of the Research

In line with the above vision, the researcher would like to propose that a curriculum for children's character development be included as one of the components for parent education early intervention program in Malaysia. According to Karoly et al. (1998) early intervention refers to formal attempts by agents outside the family to maintain or improve the quality of life of youngsters, starting from the prenatal period until schooling (Charlesworth, 2004). It usually operates under public health programs; regulations on child care quality; subsidies for child care expenses; home visits and parenting classes. Bruder and Dunst (1999/2000) suggested that early intervention might also occur in natural environment - in the family and community settings (Charlesworth, 2004), instead of the pre-structured activities. Natural settings include daily routines, play, entertainment, family or community rituals and celebration and socialization experiences (Charlesworth, 2004). It is the values behind child-rearing practices and the interactive context in which they are encountered that indirectly intervened children's character development. In this case, family is the first agent for socialization process which is crucial for individual's development of character and culture (Hutcheon, n.d. in Charlesworth, 2004). For instance, children who were brought up in dysfunctional families or broken homes mostly demonstrate a different value system and character traits as compared to children from intact families.

Therefore, in relation to the pre-structured early intervention programs, the researcher

proposes: ‘Children’s Character Development in Parenting’ to be the main theme of this research. It aims to:

1. Identify the objectives and the curriculum content of character education that focuses on children’s character development outlined by Ibn Miskawayh and al-Ghazali.
2. Propose a curriculum content for children’s character development as one of the components in parent education program for the Malay-Muslims in Malaysia (since they are the most affected ethnic group statistically).
3. Evaluate the proposed curriculum content for children’s character development.

Research Questions

The research is divided into two phases in order to address the following three Research Questions:

Phase One:

RQ 1: What are the objectives and curriculum content for children’s character development proposed by Ibn Miskawayh and al-Ghazali?

In Phase One, the first Research Question (RQ) is further divided into two sub-research questions:

SRQ 1: What are the objectives and curriculum content for children’s character development proposed by Ibn Miskawayh in *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq wa Tathīr al-A‘rāq*?

SRQ 2: What are the objectives and curriculum content for children’s character development proposed by al-Ghazali in *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*?

Phase Two:

1. What is participants’ evaluation of the proposed curriculum content for children’s character development?
2. What is the proposed curriculum content for children’s character development module?

Rationale of the Study

'Shaping' process is the most crucial stage in the formation of children's character development. The process of 'shaping' during character formation stage begins relatively at the age of discernment (*mumayyiz*) until puberty (*bāligh*). Therefore, a curriculum for children's character development is basically indispensable for parents and teachers to understand this process. The element of 'character' (*khuluq*) essentially undergoes its formative period during childhood. It is the reason why the researcher is focusing on character development of children (not adult). At the age of puberty, the character of a child is supposed to be well-developed in order to shoulder the Religious Trust (*Amana*) of Accountability (*Taklīf*).

In this case, the texts of Ibn Miskawayh and al-Ghazali have been chosen due to their authority and contribution in the study of character (*al-akhlāq*). On top of that, the specific analysis of children's character formation and development have been extensively deliberated in the two selected texts: *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* and *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*.

Significance of the Research

In the process of transforming Malaysia to a developed nation and industrialized country by the year 2020 the Malaysian government is currently facing tremendous challenges in human development. One of the most critical challenges of 2020 Vision is to create a moral and ethical society with strong religious and spiritual values (Nazaruddin M. Jali et al., 2003). However, the escalating cases of social ills including drug abuse, HIV/AIDS infections, juvenile delinquency, crimes etc. have hampered the progress of human development in Malaysia. The most affected group is the Malay youths who are supposed to be the successors of the Malaysian political leadership. Therefore strategic efforts have been made to overcome the social crises. One of the strategies is to strengthen the family institution which has been

deteriorating, especially among the Malays due to the urbanization process. One of the initiatives taken by the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development Malaysia is to promote Malaysia as a Nation of Character (MNOc). It is planned to strengthen the Malaysian family institution through early intervention parent education programs. The campaign signifies the role of parents as the first moral educators, who set the first social foundation for an ethical and virtuous life. They are the one who set the foundation for character development of the next generation.

It is the researcher's view that Malaysia as a Nation of Character (MNOc) should not be a mere slogan. Undoubtedly it requires comprehensive planning and committed implementation. The planning should be based on a good foundation and theoretical framework that suits the Malaysian diversified religious and cultural backgrounds. It necessitates an established model of early intervention parent education program that proactively focuses on character formation and development. It is hoped therefore, this study will finally offer a guideline for respective organizations to design a curriculum content for children's character development, aimed at producing good human being. It is also hoped that such a curriculum will ultimately serve the Malaysian needs, especially the Malay-Muslims who are in dire need of guidance in facing the challenge of modernity, identity crisis and the conflict of character.

Besides that, this study will contribute to a new field of knowledge. As far as the study of 'character' is concerned, there is a dearth of research in this field. In the first place, the subject itself as an interdisciplinary topic of discussion is somehow 'missing' from the existing studies of psychology and human development. Many psychologists believe that the idea of moral character has been so thoroughly discredited that it barely deserves discussion. Mischel (1976 in Emler, 2005, p. 412) concluded:

The data on self-control and moral behavior do not support the existence of a unitary,

intrapsychic moral agency like the superego nor do they support a unitary trait of conscience and honesty.

This view continues to find strong support (Emler, 2005). Though psychologists towards the end of 19th century started to think seriously about the forces underlying moral behavior, the concept of moral character had all but vanished from the psychological literature by the middle of 20th century. They prefer the social psychological explanations of behavior rather than the individual stable moral traits (Emler, 2005). It is also under the prevailing influence of positivism that psychologists are “obsessionally neurotic” on the questions of scientific method (Hearnshaw, 1987) until they fail to define the meaning of ‘personality’ (Hjalle & Ziegler, 1992) and fail to determine the measurement of moral character (Williams, 2000). The demise of character education is attributed partly to the growing role of standardized achievement testing that advocates “what gets tested is what gets taught.” As a result, character education has been relegated to the sidelines since it could not be easily assessed and any attempt of its assessment would spark great controversy (Williams, 2000).

Furthermore under the influence of ethical relativism, character education has been “out of loop” in higher education. Why? It is because moral and character development has been considered private matters (Williams, 2000). According to the Chairman of Character Education Partnership, McDonnell (1998), it is not surprising that the formal character education has been largely absent from the public schools in US for over the last thirty to forty years (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). The field of education has been dominated by the utilitarian philosophy, focusing on developing the most competitive skilled workers in world market. Obviously in the field of human development, the discussion on character is also undermined due to the complex nature of human being. In fact it is unmistakable evidence that modern scientific disciplines do not have any single widely accepted theory of human development even after thousand of years

contemplating on this issue (Hughes & Noppe, 1985).

However, in response to the declining state of moral affairs in western countries, especially in US, character education has been called for a great demand. The emergence of character education is a reactionary approach against the frightening statistics of their social epidemic. In fact, the character education movement has become one of the fastest growing reforms in the field of education in the 21st century (Williams, 2000). Based on the current statistics of social ills in Malaysia, it will not be surprising that in coming decades our nation will witness the similar trend of social epidemic. In fact, it is statistically proven that the Malay-Muslims are the groups who are mostly affected by crises of character though currently some of them occupy a central position in the Malaysian political leadership.

Thus, it is the researcher's belief that Malaysians should be more proactive in handling this issue. In Malaysian multi-religious context, we need an alternative framework to fulfill the need of the local. Specifically, in relation to the Malay-Muslims, they need an alternative framework of treatment based on the ethical-religious 'Worldview of Islam.' This research is therefore, an attempt to offer an alternative framework of character education for the Malay-Muslims, since statistically they are the most affected group. The proposed framework will be a foundation for designing curriculum content for children's character development programs in Malaysia. The curriculum content is gathered from renowned Sunnite Muslims scholars who are well-known for their remarkable contribution and prolific writings in the field of ethics. In this case, the researcher opts for Ibn Miskawayh and al-Ghazali due to their acknowledged indisputable authority in the field of Muslim Ethics. Accordingly, it is a humble contribution of the researcher to design a curriculum content for children's character development based on literary contributions of Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030) and al-Ghazali (d. 1111) whose works have

been significantly flourishing and continuously enriching Greco-Arabic-Latin inter-civilizational legacy of knowledge triumphant.

Limitation

Any curriculum design will commonly involve important elements: objectives; curriculum content; methodology and evaluation aspect. However, due to the limited scope and timeframe, this study will only focus on objectives and content of the curriculum. In fact, the two classical Arabic texts, namely, *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* of Ibn Miskawayh and *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* of al-Ghazali deal mainly with objectives and contents of character education. Since scope of the study is children's character development, the textual content analysis will be limited to both Muslim scholars' discourses on Ethics (*al-Khuluq*) in the second chapter of *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* and in the second chapter of the third volume of *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. It is also limited to Ibn Miskawayh and al-Ghazali as such, due to the fact that they similarly deliberated a specific chapter on children's character education.

Besides, the Curriculum Evaluation model is also limited to Stake's Countenance Model of Evaluation since it provides a specific model to evaluate a curriculum at its formative stage. Therefore, it is more practical and feasible for the curriculum evaluation technique at this stage.

Definitions

There are several important terms in this study which necessitate clear definitions:

Character: Character (*Khuluq*) refers to the established state or quality of the soul which executes actions that easily proceed without any thought or deliberation. Character Formation refers to the process of which character is formed and shaped, this critical stage begins from weaning until puberty.

Curriculum: Curriculum refers to the comprehensive learning experiences including four basic ingredients of education: the aims and objectives, the content, its methodology and the evaluation aspects. In this study, we will be mainly focusing on the objective and the content of the curriculum.

Discernment: Age of discernment (*tamyīz*) refers to the stage where a child starts to discern good and bad; as well as possibility and impossibility.

Puberty: Age of puberty (*bāligh*) refers to the stage where a child attains his or her physical (sexual) maturity by onset of menstruation in girls and first ejaculation in boys. In Islam, it is the end of childhood since religious accountability (*taklīf*) begins at this stage.

Parenting: Parenting in this study, includes both informal child upbringing practice and formal parent education programs organized by respective organizations. The focus of parenting here is on the content of parent education programs that focuses on character formation and development of children's upbringing.

Arabic Terms:

Adab-Ta'dīb: *Adab* refers to content of education i.e. disciplining physical and inner self, encompassing the four realms of an individual life: words, deeds, belief and intention.

Ta'dīb refers to the process of education i.e. process of disciplining physical and inner self which involves acquisition of knowledge and transformation of one's character to possess good character trait (*husn al-khuluq*).

Akhlāq: *Khuluq* or *Akhlāq* refers to 'character', i.e., the established state or quality of the soul which executes actions that easily proceed without any thought or deliberation.

Fitra: *Fitra* refers to basic natural disposition, of which a child is naturally born in a balanced

state of the soul. The child is innocent and virtuous, but parents are the one who expose them towards impurity and sin.

I'tidāl: *I'tidāl* (balance) refers to the equilibrium or balanced character traits when the four faculties of the soul: faculty of knowledge (*quwwa al 'ilm*), faculty of anger (*quwwa al-ghadab*), faculty of desire (*quwwa al-shahwa*) and faculty of justice (*quwwa al-'adl*) remain balanced and mutually harmonious.

Taklīf: *Taklīf* (accountability) refers to religious responsibility and accountability that begins since puberty. One is accountable for any of his intention, belief, word or deed.

Bāligh: The onset of puberty which refers to the beginning of maturity and *taklīf* (religious accountability) for Muslims. The sign of puberty begins with menstruation for girls and wet dreams for boys.

