

CHARACTER EDUCATION IN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Sri Mulyani

ABSTRACT

Character education in Indonesia is a necessity. The increasing crime rate and the various cases of moral deviation signify that the character of majority citizens is at alarming state. Constitutionally, the aim of national education is not only generating skilled and intelligent human, but also noble-characterized human. This is stipulated in the policy guidelines of character education which include 18 characters excel (religious, honest, disciplined, tolerant, and so on). In Islamic perspective the term character education is similar to Akhlak (Islamic ethics) education. The primary sources of character education in Islam are the Qur'an and Hadith; and the Prophet Muhammad SAW as the role model. The recommended method in the application of character education in Islam based on mental-spiritual approach through soul management, habituation, exemplary, and healthy environment which involve three education centers, namely schools, families, and communities.

Keywords: Character, Character Education, Religious Values, Islamic Perspective

Introduction

Character education has been an interesting topic in the last decade in Indonesia. Many seminars and discussions were held to discuss this issue. Some books and journals have also been written. Even, Indonesian ministry of education and Culture has launched a national education-based character education since about six years ago. The reemergence of character education discourse in nowadays context is quite reasonable. Indonesia and other countries in the world are facing unresolved problems in economic, political, social and cultural dimensions caused mostly by the crisis of character.

Character education is believed as one of the ways in responding sosial restlessness happens today. The crisis of moral, sosial and cultural values in our country has tremendous impact on our generation's character. The country leaders and political elites, who should be good role models for the young generation, have been spreading up 'a dangerous virus' to our generation through their ill behaviors. Corruption, collusion and nepotism happen in almost all institutions and all of aspects of society life. Vandalism, street brawls, crimes, consumptive ways of life, dominate news reports in the media today.

In school levels, criminal rate such as students brawls, drug abuses, juvenile delinquency, and early pregnancy highly increased. Besides, students also lack discipline and national values, lose zest in life and have low motivation to be good achievers. From these multifaceted problems the ideas of character education is urgently needed.

This paper tries to contribute to the character education discourses with emphasis on the character education in Islamic perspective.

The Concept of Character

The English word 'character' is derived from the Greek charaktêr, which originally referred to a mark impressed upon a coin (Pala, 2011:24). Later Homiak (2007) argued that 'character' came to mean a distinctive mark by which one thing was distinguished from others, and then primarily to mean the assemblage of qualities that distinguish one individual from another (Pala, 2011:24).

Tilaar (2008) defines characters "as disposition", i.e., a nature of trademark of a person, community or a nation that is recognisable. Meanwhile, Budimansyah (2012) states that character is a relatively stable personal nature of an individual which becomes the basis for his/her standard behavior corresponds to social values and norms (Sardjijo, 2017:3690). The term personal nature indicates personal characteristics implemented in behavior. Thus, it can be stated that character dominantly influence someone's behavior in responding any reality in many area of life either in personal or communal contexts.

Philosophically, the concept of good character is stated by Aristotle as "right conduct – right conduct in relation to other persons and in relation to oneself " (Lickona 1991:50). Lickona said that the character is "a reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way." Then he added, "so conceived Character has three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior" (Lickona,1991: 51). Thus character education is the way to educate the students to have the right conduct to themselves and the others (God, human being and environment).

Substantively character consists of three operational values or value in action, namely moral knowing, moral feeling and moral behavior. Furthermore Lickona elaborated that good character is psychological

process of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good – habit of the mind, habit of the heart and habit of the action. Sardjijo (2017) stated that in the context of Indonesia, however, there is a similarity of meaning among the concept of characters such as moral, ethical, *akhlak*, and manners.

The definition of character education

The definition of character education varies, but has the same substance. David Elkind and Freddy Sweet Ph.D. (cited in Sukardi, 2016:45), defined character education as: "... the deliberate effort to help people understand, care about, and act upon core ethical values. When we think about the kind of character we want for our children, it is clear that we want them to be Able to judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and then do what they believe to be right, even in the face of pressure from without and temptation from within ".

Another definition states that character education is a system of planting the character values of the school community, which includes knowledge, awareness or volition, and actions to implement those values. Character education can be defined as "the deliberate use of all dimensions of school life to foster optimal character development" (Sukardi, 2016:45). The dimension of school life means all component of education in school such as curriculum, school management, learning and assessment, subject management, co-curricular activities, and environment that should be involved.

Ratna Megawangi (2004:95; Kesuma, et al, 2011: 5) on the other hand, stated that character education is efforts to educate children in order to take informed decisions and to practice it in their daily lives, so that they can make a positive contribution to the environment.

Of the definition above it can be concluded that character education is efforts to produce generation with noble character, who know, understand, and implement moral or ethical values in life about what is right and wrong, or what is the proper behavior in responding various circumstances in daily life.

Specifically the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Indonesian people stipulated the policy guidelines of character education which include 18 characters excel (Puskur Ministry of Education, 2010; Sahrudin 2012 cited in Sukardi 2016:45-46), they are: 1) religious, attitudes and behaviors are obedient in carrying out the teachings of their religion, tolerant implementation of worship of other religions, and live in harmony with other religions; 2) honest, behavior based on an attempt to make himself as someone who is always trustworthy in word, act, and work; 3) tolerance, attitudes and actions that respect differences in religion, race, ethnicity, opinions, attitudes, and actions of others who differ from him; 4) discipline, actions that demonstrate orderly behavior and comply with the various rules and regulations; 5) hard worker, actions that demonstrate behavior of hard work and determination to achieve something with a fine in accordance with the rules and regulations; 6) creative, think and do something to generate new method or result of something that has been owned; 7) independent, attitudes and behaviors that are not easy to depend on others in completing tasks; 8) democratic, way of thinking, being, and acting the same rights and obligations judging himself and others; 9) curiosity, attitudes and actions are always working to find more depth and breadth than something learned, seen, and heard; 10) the spirit of nationality, how to think, act, and sound that puts the interests of the nation above self-interest and group; 11) love motherland, how to think, act, and

sound that puts the interests of the nation above self-interest and group; 12) rewarding achievement, the attitudes and actions that encourage him to produce something useful for society, and recognize and respect the success of others; 13) friendly/ communicative, the attitudes and actions that encourage him to produce something useful for society, and recognize and respect the success of others; 14) love peace, the attitudes and actions that encourage him to produce something useful for society, and recognize and respect the success of others; 15) joy of reading, habits take time to read the various readings that give virtue to him; 16) environmental care, attitudes and actions are always working to prevent damage to the surrounding natural environment, and to develop measures to improve the natural damage that has occurred; 17) social concern, attitudes and actions have always wanted to help other people and communities in need; and 18) responsibility, attitudes and behavior of a person to perform the duties and obligations, he should do, the self, the community, the environment (natural, sosial and cultural), country and god almighty.

The History of Character education (Western Context)

In France Kant, Comte, and Renouvier were renowned for their modern and enlightened philosophies of individuals and education. Kant, and later Renouvier expected religious morality in education (Stock-Morton, 1988 cited in Watz 2011:35). However, the inclusion of morality in the atmosphere of formal education implemented in the time of French philosopher Charles Renouvier around 19th century.

Renouvier felt that it was the duty of French society to include moral components within education in order to battle a “weakening sense of duty” that youth were experiencing, a loss of “justice,” “equality,” “reciprocity,”

“rights,” and “respect” (Stock-Morton, 1988:85). Similar to the concern of modern character education today, at that time many students committed improper behaviors and did not achieve desirable academic achievement. Renouvier was appalled at the lack of morals in French education and felt that students should learn throughout their educational careers not only how to make moral decisions, but also should be educated as to the obligations that they held to participate in an ethical manner in French society (Stock-Morton, 1988-86).

The emergence of character education in America was brought by some individuals who had been influential in their education concerns, such as Benjamin Franklin, Horace Mann, and William McGuffey. Franklin, Mann, and McGuffey were all involved in the legislation and foundation of public education in early America and each of them also had strong ties, and significant positions, within post-secondary institutions (Watz, 2011:37).

Benjamin Franklin, the founding father of America who had a great influence on various aspect on American life promoted the need to teach morality in public school. Franklin similarly to Horace Mann, the next individual who greatly influenced the character of students in American education, believed that students must be given opportunities to practice morality in the classroom. Both Franklin and Mann believed that through moral instruction, character would be developed and that there would be important benefits beyond the development of character alone including such aspects as better behavior in the classroom and that students would achieve higher academic performance (Watz, 2011:38).

Furthermore, Horace Mann stressed that students would benefit greatly from an education of character in all facets of the school environment that focused upon “the principles of piety, justice and a sacred

regard to truth, love of their country, humanity and universal benevolence, sobriety, industry, frugality, chastity, moderation and temperance, and those other virtues, which are the ornament of human society” (Downs, 1974, cited in Watz, 2011:38). Mann classified the instruction of character education in public schools into two main keys. The first key is the teacher that should exemplify moral behaviors on regular basis. The second, he suggested various strategies for teacher to accomplish the development of character in students.

Later, the terminology of character education is reintroduced by Thomas Lickona who wrote a book entitled *The Return of Character Education* and then followed his book, *Educating for Character: How Our School Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*, in early 1900's.

Character education in Indonesia

Historically, the father of national education Ki Hajar stated that “education is efforts to advance the growth of students’ character, intellect and physical fitness. All of those aspects cannot be separated and should be integrated for the sake of our children’s future life”. Later, the concept was coined by the first Indonesian President Soekarno in the idea of character building which is stated in his speech entitled *nation and character building*.

More recently, the constitution of Indonesian national educational system 2003 article 1 clearly states that one of the national education objectives is to improve students’ potential in term of their intellect, personality and behavior. It is also stipulated Indonesia’s long term national development plan (2005-2025), that education should be managed to achieve the ultimate goal namely the strong national characters, national competitiveness, highly valued behavior, and morality in accordance with

the values inherently contained within Pancasila (The five principles). The values include: believing in the Almighty one God, acting in highly valued behaviors, being tolerant, applying cooperativeness, being patriotic, being dynamic, and having scientific and technological awareness (Winataputra, 2010).

Character Education and Religious faith

Lickona in his book *Educating for Character*, argues that moral education should pay attention to three elements, namely moral understanding, moral feeling, and moral action. The three are inter-related (Budiningsih, 2004: 6). Specifically for Indonesian people the role of religious faith is an important element in addition to those of three. Budiningsih (2004) stressed that there is strong correlation between good/higher morality with religious faith or existential belief. adapting this view it can be said that the internalization of moral values and character in the learning should pay attention to four things, namely understanding or comprehension of the noble character, feelings/ appreciation of the meaning of noble characters, actions/ practices that reflect the behavior of noble character, and internalization -the value of faith as the foundation of the character changes (Sukardi,2016:46).

People who have faith for example a Muslim believes that God really do exist. Muslim believe that Allah sees, hears and knows whatever they do and will ask for their responsibility of all his good or bad deeds in this world. Muslims believe in life after death, the Day of Judgment, the torments of hell for evils or sinful deeds and the rewards of heaven for good deeds. Therefore the true believers have better self-control on their deeds that prevent them from committing disgraceful acts and encourage them to do good things which give birth to noble character.

Character Education in Islam

Islamic values are the source of concept of character education. The concept of character education is derived from two main sources of Islamic teaching namely the Qur'an and Hadith. There are a lot of verses in Qur'an that stress the importance of noble character formation for human. Similarly many hadiths teach and describe how excellent character should be built. Further explanation about the concept of character education in Islam was developed by some Muslim scholars such as al Gazali and Miskawayh through their religious works on Islamic morality.

The term 'character' has the same meaning as 'akhlak' in Islam. *Akhlak* is the most important aspect in Islam. Prophet Muhammad said in a hadith "I was sent to perfect moral glory" (Narrated by Ahmad). The hadith reflect that the main mission of the coming of Prophet Muhammad SAW is to perfecting human's morality (noble character). It can be affirmed that character education is the mission of Islam itself.

Akhlak, according to Ibn Miskawayh and Ghazali, is a character that appears it acts immediately (spontaneously) without requiring consideration and thought. That is the good deeds that occur spontaneously reflect the better character of a person. Conversely, bad deeds are also a reflection of poor character that is in the person (Sukardi, 2016:50). Meanwhile, Abu Bakr Jabir Al Jazairy defined *Ahlak* as a form of psychic embedded in humans soul, which gives rise to good and evil deeds, another Islamic scholar Ibrahim Anis said that *Akhlak* is a trait embedded in the soul from which arises unconscious good or evil deeds. (Sardjijo, 2015:3691).

In Islam, the main reference or the model of the excellent character is the Prophet Muhammad SAW himself. Prophet is well known for his noble character even before he was appointed as the Messenger. In the Qur'an

Surah al-Qalam verse 4th Allah praised the noble character of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Allah says that means: "And verily thou (Muhammad) has great character."

In history, the excellent character of Prophet Muhammad was captured through his daily life's behaviors. Prophet is known as an honest, trustworthy, polite, kind, friendly, gentle, generous, love of neighbor, have a helper spirit, and so on. The greatness of his character was not only felt by his followers, or his friends but also his enemy and other religious adherers, Christianity and Judaism. It can be said that Prophet Muhammad is the role model for character education in Islam who his life becomes iconic example of moral values proved historically and empirically. As stated by A'ishah RA which means, "The character of the prophet is the Quran". So the Prophet was actually a walking Qur'an. The overall character of the noble Prophet SAW is the real embodiment of the concept of the Qur'an (Sukardi 2016:51).

The Methods of Islamic Character Education

'Athiyah al-Brasyi (2003:116-118), an Islamic education expert, argues that there are three methods of moral education in Islam. The *first* is education directly by using the instructions, guidance, advice, and mention the benefits and dangers of something. In giving advice teachers or parents can use the form of words of wisdom.

The Second is indirect moral education (teach moral education indirectly), by way of suggestion. The suggestion is given directly through dictated poems which contain wisdom to children, or any literary works which contain good moral values. *The Third* is take advantage of the trends and traits of the children who tend to model or imitate the sayings and actions of the people associated closely with them, for example the teachers.

Therefore Muslim philosophers expects every teacher decorated with a good moral, noble, and avoid any disgraceful acts, since teachers are one of the role models for students.

On the other hand, Quraish Shihab (cited in Sukardi, 2016) suggests four practical steps in shaping character. *The First*, managing the soul. One of the ways in managing the soul is by doing same practices. For example Prophet Muhammad, pressed stone in his stomach that screams decreased appetite. Abu Bakr, the Prophet's companions, had slipped a small rock on the side of the mouth so diligently to think before you speak. *The Second*, habituation. That means making good deeds as habits or built good habits. It can be started with hard efforts to push oneself on certain activities that lead him/her into good things/good behavior. For example to build generous character someone have to habituate himself to care with others by giving or sharing food to the needy persons regularly.

Third, exemplary or modeling. One of the best ways to teach something is by giving example or modeling, since people are more interested in seeing the actions than listening to the words. Modeling is necessary to teach abstract values which is difficult to be understood. By this way, the abstract concept is explained by using concrete and sensory imaginary. *Fourth*, healthy environment. There is a proverb says "environment shapes you". Environment has a tremendous influence in shaping character. In nowadays life creating healthy environment would be much more challenging. However, healthy environment can be started from the smallest community that is family. Giving good moral education earlier and habituate good deeds among the family members are some recommendations.

Family plays a very important role in Islamic character education. In Islam, religious values should be taught and internalized by parents since in the earlier age of the children. Family is the foremost institution in which children begin life. In any civilization in the world, family occupies an important position for the life of the individual. In the family there is warmth, intimacy, love, and affection. Then the family is an institution for the land very fertile seedbed noble values that can shape a person's character (Sukardi, 2016:52).

The ideal concept of character education certainly involves the synergy of all components of society, namely individual, family, community, government and the media. The primary role of the government is in the formulation and implementation of relevant policies on character education. Although, The Ministry of Education and Culture (kemendikbud) and the Ministry of religious Affairs (Kemenag) have stipulated some policies related to character education, the portion of attention to touch the substances need to improve –not only focus on syllabus and lesson plans but also on learning concepts in the classroom and the intensive training of character education for the teachers.

On the other hand the role of community is not less important. The involvement of community and religious leaders is extremely needed in creating conducive environment and applying noble character socially. Religious lectures can be given in many creative ways that possibly touch the society. Community and religious leaders should be the example or model of good character in the community.

The last is the media. The media has tremendous effect in shaping characters. Unfortunately, the majority of current media develop uneducated content that promote materialistic and capitalistic paradigm.

Herein, parental guidance is needed to select proper and educated contents for children. Besides, the government control on the media content which potentially seed bad characters is also required.

Conclusion

Character degradation in Indonesia has reached an alarming state. Therefore, character education becomes a necessity which cannot be a negotiable. Indonesia is a religious nation where Islam as the majority religion has actually provided a very rich concept of character education. In addition, Islam also has a role model who is recognized universally, possibly to be proved historically and empirically.

The concept of character education can only be implemented nationally through the involvement of all stakeholders of this country, starting from individual, family, community, formal education institutions up to the highest state level. Strategic, firm and touching to substances policy is critical to improve the quality of nations' character. Not less important the commitment and synergy of all components in this country is extremely required to reach the goal of character education.

REFERENCES

- Al-Abrasyi, Muhammad 'Atiyah. *Prinsip-prinsip Dasar Pendidikan Islam*, terj. Abdullah
- Zaky al-Kaaf. 2003. from original title *At-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyah*. Bandung: Pustaka Setia.
- Budiningsih, C. Asri. *Pembelajaran Moral: Berpijak pada Karakteristik Siswa dan Budayanya*. 2004. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta.
- Lickona, Thomas. 1991. *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect an Responsibility*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Lickona, Thomas. 2000. Character Education: The Heart of School Reform. *Religion & Education*, 27(1), 58-64.
- Megawangi, Ratna. 2004. *Pendidikan Karakter: Solusi yang Tepat untuk Membangun Bangsa*. Bogor: Indonesia Heritage Foundation.
- Pala, Aynur. 2011. The Need for Character education. *International Journal of Sciences and Humanity Studies*. Vol 3, No 2, 2011 ISSN: 1309-8063 (Online)
- Puskur Depdiknas. 2010. *Bahan Pelatihan Penguatan Metodologi Pembelajaran Berdasarkan Nilai-nilai Budaya untuk Membentuk Daya Saing dan Karakter Bangsa*. Jakarta: Pusat Kurikulum Departemen Pendidikan Nasional.
- Sardjijo. 2017. Character Education through Good Harmony Activities in School. *The International Journal of Sosial Sciences and Humanities Invention* 4(7): 3690-3694.
- Shihab, M. Quraish. 2011. *Membumikan Alquran Jilid 2: Memfungsikan Wahyu dalam Kehidupan*. Bandung: Mizan.

- Sukardi, Ismail. 2016. Character Education Based on Religious Values: an Islamic Perspective. *Ta'dib: Journal of Islamic Education* Volume 21, Number 1, June 2016.
- Watz, Michael. 2011. An Historical Analysis of Character education. *Journal of Inquiry & Action in Education*, 4(2), 2011.
- Winataputra, U.S. 2010. *Implementasi Kebijakan Nasional Pembangunan Karakter Bangsa melalui Pendidikan Karakter. Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*. Juli 2010.