

Character Education Framework For Multiracial Society In Malaysia

Sakinah, S. (PhD)¹, Alwi, M.Y. (PhD)², Mohd Aderi Che Noh³

^{1,3} Faculty of Human Sciences, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjung Malim, Perak, Malaysia, ² Faculty of Information Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, UiTM Selangor, Malaysia.

¹sakinah.salleh@fsk.upsi.edu.my, ²alwiyunus@uitm.edu.my, ³aderi@fsk.upsi.edu.my

Abstract

This concept paper is about character education framework within the context of multi-racial society in Malaysia. It discussed social development from the perspective of integrated education. In the context of multiracial and multicultural society, character education is needed to address the issue of education from different social settings. As such, within the Malaysian context it is Malay, Chinese and Indian education blended together to develop social cohesive society in Malaysia. The unique aspect of multiracial and multiethnic society in Malaysia where each society inherited its own educational legacy is now bridged by a cohesive character education framework that makes a real Malaysian society though bound by racial element but united through cohesive values. Integrating universal values, and cultures that bind together different ethnics using common language, and approach is an integral part of character education framework.

Keywords: Character education, character building, multiracial society, moral education

1 Introduction:

Education plays an important role to achieve integration among multicultural and multiracial society. Character education is of prime important and a priority to achieve and foster peace and harmony, unity in diversity, positive relationship, dynamic and good personality, balance individual in a multiethnic and multicultural society like Malaysia. It is in fact a great challenge for Malaysia in order to achieve peace and harmonious multiethnic and multicultural relationship from the early formation of Malaysia until today. One of the notions that peace and harmony can be achieved is through education. The challenge is to provide character education that instills unity even in the diverse multiethnic society. Inherited educational legacy of the multiethnic society is not a noble way to be practiced in Malaysia.

Diversity in Malaysia continues to grow. This country is unique in such a way that the character education model requires equal educational opportunity to all races as to create social balance, reducing racial tension and fair treatment. This is reflected in integrated education system which is underway by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia. This is done at every level of education, from primary, secondary, college, and university level. The process of integration in multi-racial and multi-ethnic society involves together citizens of culturally and socially diverse groups, of different racial, ethnic, and religious groups toward a common destiny.

Character education includes a broad range of concepts such as positive school culture, moral education, just communities, caring school communities, social emotional learning, positive youth development, civic education, and service (Pala, 2017). However, to achieve this, embraces all walks of life and races in Malaysia requires strong basic foundation to be relied on. This is critical as to avoid wrong perceptions among races as whether everybody's rights are looked into, clear direction, fair treatment to all. It is in fact a great challenge for Malaysia in order to achieve peace and harmonious multiethnic and multicultural relationship from the early formation of Malaysia until today. One of the notions that peace and harmony can be achieved is through education. The challenge is to provide character education that instills unity even in the diverse multiethnic society. Inherited educational legacy of the multiethnic society is not a noble

way to be practiced in Malaysia. Therefore, the best way is to promote education which encompasses universal value of teaching and learning.

2 Education In Malaysia

Education is a mean to improve social and cultural life. Education that is value based in nature is an approach to achieve a balance development of individual personality and character. This is achieved through training of the spirit, the intellect, the rational self, feelings and senses (Banks, 1997). The development of personality and individual character is more coherent with the demand in the positive relationship with fellow human beings. A balance development of personality will result in a balance approach in a social relationship (Nofal, 1993). A balance approach in social relationship set aside racial factors; race, origin, ethnic values, negative perceptions as determinant and influential in a social integration and relationship.

The debate about whose values to teach will inevitably persist (Elroy, 2003) therefore character education and moral guidance are unavoidable responsibilities to be implemented to the society (Dalton & Crosby 2010). Increasing diversity would help to promote positive human relationships and guide character development and behavior (Dalton & Crosby 2010). Character education and development can contribute to strong character development, this can be done thorough volunteer recruitment and collaborating with others to help foster the relationship among multiracial in the community in order to build partnerships, resolve social issues, and utilizing appropriate resources. As such within the Malaysian context it is Chinese education, Indian education and Malay education. The unique aspect of multicultural and multiethnic society in Malaysia is the fact that each society has inherited its own educational legacy. This educational legacy is derived from different social setting which is culturally and religiously influenced and deeply rooted in each of the ethnic groups. In order to address to each of the issues, it is important to strike a balance methodology and approach in promoting the universal and integrated character education model. The character education model must not be racially biased, embracing only dominant ethnic values, unfair to other ethnics that will result in social disorder in term of achieving peace and harmonious relationship among races and creating imbalance individual generation of the members of Malaysia society (Hashim, 2004).

Therefore, the best education model that fits into the needs and requirement of the unique multiethnic society in Malaysia must be value based in nature. It means education that propagates universal value or shared value in teaching and learning, for example trustworthiness, respect, unity, understanding, helping each other etc (Downey & Kelly, 1986). Education in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society must take into consideration the notion that each society has different set of societal values and cultural values. This is normally deeply rooted in each of the social setting. It is inevitable that education model in Malaysia must accept the core fact of embracing and accepting multi ethnic and diversity of the social demography of different society. By accepting this notion, it is an acceptable view that no race is left behind in education. In order to address to each of the issues, it is important to strike a balance methodology and approach in promoting the universal and integrated education model.

The education model must not be racially biased, embracing only dominant ethnic values, unfair to other ethnics that will result in social disorder in term of achieving peace and harmonious relationship among races and creating imbalance individual generation of the members of Malaysia society (Salleh, 2018). Therefore, the best education model that fits into the needs and requirement of the unique multiethnic society in Malaysia must be value based in nature. It means education that propagates universal value or shared value in teaching and learning, for example trustworthiness, respect, unity, understanding, helping each other etc.

3 The Framework of Character Education Model

The word character is associated with positive behaviors or values, such as truthfulness and fairness (Elroy, 2003), which constitutes good values, wanting to obtain those values, and then acting on them to perform good deeds (Lickona, 1993) such as kindness, compassion, justice perseverance and work ethic. Character education can be a bridge to develop values, attitudes, skills and behaviours which include respect, leadership, motivation, resilience, self-control, self-confidence, social and emotional skills, and communication skills. It is also described as related to 'civic', 'moral' and 'performance' which is very important to prepare the new generation in building their career, boost academic attainment, employability and ability to engage in society as active citizens'.

Lickona (1993) states that "down through history, education has always had two great goals: to help people become smart and to help them become good" (p. 8). The purpose of education has been to enhance the mind, to discover greater things, and to leave the world better for those who follow. Character education can be a central to the culture, values and vision in schools. Parents are a child's first and most significant shapers of character. If parents do their job well, by high school a young person will know, care about, and practice a set of core values--such as honesty, patience, and compassion (Schwartz, 2000). In the context of multiracial and multicultural society, character education is needed to address the issue of education from different social settings. In Malaysia, since Islam by nature is a universal religion that tolerates multiethnic and multicultural society, in this case; Islamic education can be used as a model. More so with its educational approaches. However, the character education model that fit in the multiethnic and multicultural society in Malaysia must take into consideration several factors to be achieved, namely; (a) aim of education at achieving national unity. (b) understanding of different racial setting and perspective, (c) finding common denominator and (d) identifying the ultimate aim of education in multiracial and multicultural society.

Primarily, education can play an important part in assimilating people to a new social setting. Learning from a teacher should not be like "the transferring of the content of a basket to another basket or other baskets". Hassan Langgulgung (1989) has mentioned that, "... it is crucial, in this, as in other domains, to avoid two errors: blind copying of the West and an outright rejection of everything Western. We should acquire Western science and technology selectively, creatively, and critically." By integrating character education itself that fulfill all requirements in all sectors of society. To achieve integration through character education in a multiracial and diverse cultural society is a great challenge because of the several factors such as (Salleh, 2018); diverse society, different ethnic groups, different culture, different language, different religion and different values.

Due to the fact that diverse multiracial and multicultural society have different values; language, life norms, culture, common understanding, setting, etc, the greatest challenge is to overcome all those barriers and close the gaps as to promote unity in diversity not only represented in day to day life but deeply rooted in the heart of the Malaysian people which is more permanent and long lasting. This is part of the ultimate part of the nation building. It is also important to note that Malaysia is a young country which gained her independence since 1957 even though it has a long standing history since 15th century. Colonialization has indeed set a very huge gap in inter-ethnic relationship in Malaysia. Since independence, the prime objective of the Malaysian government is nation building. One of the approaches of nation building is through education. The motive behind the education policy of the Malaysian government is strengthening the racial relationship, achieving unity, closing the gaps of racial imbalances in social setting, relationship, economic achievement, political, freedom of speech, ethnic rights and many others. This is achieved by integrating the education approach. Therefore, integration is closely related to nation building.

Integrating character education should take into account the aspects of the historical, political, religious and cultural setting of a society in Malaysia. In a multiracial and multicultural society, education is used as a

tool to achieve unity. The government of Malaysia has introduced New Secondary School Curriculum (KBSR) and Integrated Curriculum for Primary School (KBSM) that was implemented fully in 1989. These are among the few initiatives undertaken as to promote integrated education approach in Malaysia. One of the principles was emphasizing on values. It was closely related with the National Education Philosophy that it aims to produce a “good man“ who is also a good Malaysian Citizen. To further narrowing the gap of the multiracial and multicultural society in Malaysia, the government again introduces the new plan “National Education Blueprint 2006-2010”. The main objective of the blueprint is to foster unity, which includes the strengthening of national schools. The objectives are; nation building, developing human capital, strengthening national schools, bridging the rural/urban education gap, improving the teaching profession and accelerating excellence at educational institutions. All the above initiatives whether it is infrastructure, strategic changes, policy improvements, quality improvements, are all means to achieve the integrated education policy in line with the National Education Philosophy.

4 The Framework of Character Education

a) The Culture

Culture is people’s values, language, religion, ideas, artistic expression, patterns of social and interpersonal relationships and ways of perceiving, behaving and thinking. Culture is also learned, shared, transmitted values, beliefs, norms and life ways of group which generally intergenerational and influence one’s thinking and action modes. Subjectively, culture is comprised of a meaning system. Its beliefs, values and explanatory cognitive frameworks that are communicated both verbally and nonverbally. Objectively, culture dictates how and why we behave certain ways in a social setting.

b) The Value

Value is like knowledge, coherent within a framework of culture and ideology. It is a major determinant of a society’s sense of identity and cultural continuity. In other words, to sustain our identity and culture it highly depends on how we maintain and nurture our value within individual society. In a complex society, where a multiplicity of ethnic and social groups co-exist within single society, each with their own conception of identity, belief and values, shared culture and values must exist.

How we identify accepted values within multi-ethnic society? The development of sense relationship and coherence between these groups to form a single society may be dependent upon their adherence to a set of common or “core” values. In this sense, values derived their validity from actual choices and decision which individual makes. It is restructuring of personal experience in such a way as to affirm what individual finds of value. The structure and method of education must help to sustain the traditional value of society. It should also promote value which sustain and further the growth of the human spirit and contribute to the achievement of human dignity.

The concept of value or axiology refers to the concept of knowledge. Knowledge contains value laden and value free. The purpose of value is to strengthen the core motive and objective of one’s existence in this world, as this lead to the submission to the Creator and realization of the Creator. This understanding creates deeply rooted life philosophy that guides mankind to live harmoniously with others on earth, to love and help each other and to achieve the blessing of his Creator. Furthermore, it creates universal values like respect to old person, justice, fairness, humbleness, tolerance, loves each other, and recognizes each other and so on. These universal values ironically do not contradict to each other. As a matter of fact, it is important to have and instill universal value as it pronounces common denominators in racial relationship in multiethnic and multiracial society. Hence, instilling universal values in Malaysia education is critical as to ensure the success of education philosophy and nation building.

Value based education enables individuals to achieve social mobility by attaining their highest potential, individual capacity each according to their ability. This is done based on merit where performance and individual achievement is based on more universal factors of merit and evaluation which is fair and nonbiased but with prior fair and opportunity given at any given time. This does not mean to exclude low performer, neither to create gap between the poor and the rich. Rather it promotes an opportunity of chances for attaining fullest potential of individual capability at every level of society.

c) The Methods Of Character Education

Character Education that is value based in nature is an approach to achieve a balance development of individual personality and character regardless of races and ethnic. This is achieved through training of the spirit, the intellect, the rational self, feelings and senses. The development of personality and individual character is more coherent with the demand in the positive relationship with his fellow human beings. A balance development of personality will result in a balance approach in a social relationship. A balance approach in social relationship set aside racial factors; race, origin, ethnic values, negative perceptions as determinant and influential in a social integration and relationship. For instance, a Malay can befriend, communicate, and do things together with a Chinese or Indian without much problems.

Character education that is value based approach promotes the creative impulse in man to rule himself and universe by understanding the laws of nature and harnessing its force, and not opposing them and coming into conflict with them. This is primarily important as individual must realize the very purpose and the ultimate duty of himself towards the nature, universe and environment. Individual will have self-control and be responsible towards his action. This value creation is judgmental to his/her action in relation to nature and other mankind. As a result, more positive relationship between man and nature will be in existence, more so positive relationship man with other fellow human being. For instance, he/she will appreciate the role of universe and nature in man's life, as such environmental policy with regard to 'clean river' campaign, preserve the forest will be more respected and obeyed. Therefore, we will have more clean river and more clean supply of water.

d) The Curriculum

Character education that is value based education approach focuses on the development and implementation of curriculum education that embraces universal values. The big question is how value assumption related to the curriculum? Curriculum needs to be changed according to the dynamic nature of environment. Curriculum designed must promote and focus on: social tolerance values, fair and justice of personal development regardless of class, more tolerance generation and equal access to education, universal curriculum and subjects. The curriculum ought to be able to connect whatever is learned to contemporary situation and to other subjects taught. The integration of all components that is best offered in religious and modern curriculum that will instill more moral and ethical values is necessary. This is done through a uniform curriculum for all schools in the system. At the same time common level of standardized approach while recognizing the different setting of environment is needed as to response to the dynamic nature of the environment. The act of instilling the universal values of education is done by focusing on several factors such as: a) having a common medium of instruction, b) attending the same school which enable pupil of diverse races to meet and interact, c) providing equal opportunity and access of learning, c) formulate and initiate a change strategy that reforms the total school environment:- language and dialect of the school, d) school policy and politics, e) learning styles of the school, and school staff's in terms of attitudes and action must be given prior attention.

e) Method Of Teaching And Textbook

The method of teaching student must be flexible and dynamic. It must address and recognize the differences

of capability, background, understanding, capacity, family history of the students. It must not necessarily an exam oriented approach as this will neglect tremendous potential in those students who are not familiar or embracing exam type of learning but coping well with non-exam type of learning. In term of reference and text book, it is important to note that access to information is one of the major factor that hinder the process of learning in an individual students especially the have not. Moreover, there must be a realization that increasing the supply of quality textbooks and instructional materials and upgrading the content is an important steps to be undertaken all the time. Upgrading the content is also critical as to response to the dynamic nature of environmental and social changes. However, if the content already covers the universal aspect of the specific teaching syllabus, it is already enough. The only changes and updating to be made is to ensure that specific focus is given to add value from time to time in order to improve the content of the subject matter. For example the English textbook for standard 3, has the information about the races and the variety of culture and norms in Malaysia. This can instill the student with the value of respect to other culture. Below are some examples on the value based component that can be added in every single subject offered to the students in primary, secondary, college or even university level.

f) Language

Language is the factor of identity and very much an identity for nation building (heart and soul of a nation). Character education is integrated into every lesson. For example, the language to communicate and interact in the society. An integrated and value based education must introduce all languages that met all races such as Bahasa Melayu, Arabic, Chinese and Tamil to all National Secondary Schools. For the sake of integration all races can study their own language but Bahasa Melayu must be recognized, used and learned as the official language or as medium of interaction. Value added content that reflects the positive value of racial relationship as sample for case study, conversational examples, and exercises can be used in the textbook. Reference to articles can be used as sample of study that can give value to student for example the danger of drug addiction, the way of respect the eldest.

g) The Teachers

Role of teachers can be enhanced further in character education. Teachers must be exposed to teaching skills that embrace universal values in teaching and learning. Clear objectives and purpose of education must always be the main focus in teachers training. Teacher must be well verse with the philosophy of teaching. It must be here in the heart of every teacher. Internalization of the philosophy of integrated education is a must. It is important because, the success of value based education that integrates and encompasses multiethnic and multi-cultural relationship depends heavily on them. Teachers are the role models that will apply all the good values to the students. All teachers must know how to integrate all the values while teaching the student. Former Education director-general Tan Sri Murad Mohd Nor (1974-1985) has put teachers on top of the list of priorities. "The most important part in the implementation of any plan is the teachers. However good the plan, it will be of no use if the teachers do not implement it well".

h) The Assesment

The assessment of the student must not focus merely on the exam result but other consideration must be given such as behavior and the attitude of the students. If the assessment focuses merely on exam result, it will reflect in the student's perspective and understanding that exam result is the sole important criteria of success and nothing else. If this understanding is promoted all the time, we will at the end of the day produce successful but imbalance students lacking in moral and ethical values. Therefore, there must be a consensus of understanding among teachers, policy makers that the criteria of success are not only high score in exam result but also in the attitude and behavior of the students. Focus must be given into two aspects of education, result and attitude. For instance, school current practice is to give report to parents of academic

but also the report of the rule of learning.

5 Conclusion

It is a positive way to promote and focus on universal values. Character education with universal values will promote positive atmosphere in racial relationship without jeopardizing and scarifying ethnic based culture and values as universal values are not in conflict with each other or other values except those values that go against the norms and good practices. However, it is also important to note that continuous and dynamic approach to add value to character education model must be done by all parties. Continuous effort must be carried to ensure factors for the success of this approach; teachers, syllabus, curriculum are improved from times to times. More and more focus should be on the human capital; teachers as they form the biggest role in delivering and ensuring the objectives and goals are achieved.

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