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Nurturing Moral Values in Primary School

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the nurturing of the moral values in primary schools. Specifically, this study examines the aspiration of value education in Malaysia, teachers' methods of teaching in values and how the pupils apply the values studied. A total of 54 teachers and 152 students participated in this study. This study used both qualitative and quantitative methods. The data obtained from the questionnaire set were analysed by using descriptive statistics whereas theme analysis was used for data obtained from interview sessions. The findings show that moral value education in Malaysia aims to develop the moral values of the pupils in order to face the challenging world. Teachers use different approaches in nurturing moral values at school. However, pupils are less able to internalize and practice the moral values that they have learned. It is suggested that some aspects need to be emphasised in nurturing moral values namely; to provide sufficient time to conduct activities both inside and outside the classroom, and ensuring integration of value aspects in all school activities/ programmes as well as the integration of value aspects in all subjects in school. The findings of the study provide guidance to all stakeholders including teachers on nurturing moral values in school.

Keywords: Nurturing and Internalization of Moral values, Primary School, Moral Education

Introduction

“There should be a shame culture, if Malaysia wants to be in par with developed countries like Japan” stated Prime Minister of Malaysia. He also commented that the Japanese will feel embarrassed if they produce non-quality products meanwhile Malaysians are not ashamed although they have produced non-quality products (Mohamad, 2018). This is among the moral values should be nurtured in pupils since primary schools. However, this value seed should have sown since childhood in every Malaysian family. The foundation of noble personality formation began by practicing respect as well as politeness and courtesy in the family. Moral education and personal formation begin at home where parents are the main agents (Ahmad, cited by Ismail & Jemali, 2015).

At school, Islamic Education and Moral Education are the two subjects that aim to nurture morality and noble values. Among the objectives of Moral Education subject; pupils can appreciate and practice universal moral values for noble characters. However, how far these moral values have been inculcated to pupils? The findings of Othman, Suhid and Rosland (2015) found that in general the pupils’ appreciation values are at moderate level. Pupils’ gratitude, patriotism and respect values are at higher level while the moral values of self-reliance, community spirit and diligence are at lower level. So, it is important to study how the school and teachers play their roles in nurturing good values in greater depth. According to Veugeler (2000) the type of school, school culture, teachers’ personality as well as their experiences have influence in the learning of moral values among the pupils.

Literature Review

Several strategies have been made by the Ministry of Education in the effort to inculcate moral values in school; both formally and informally. Formally, the value education is integrated in all subjects and co-curriculum activities. Meanwhile, informally, value education is embedded in all school activities (Mohd Nordin, 1988). However, according to Straughan (1988 cited by Piang, Wahi & Jamil, 2015) there is a gap between moral reasoning and moral behaviour as the value learned is not implicit in school. Moral reasoning refers to the process of considering the matters which is good, fit or true in a moral situation from the perspectives of individual and others (Hoon, 2015). Piang et al. (2015) expressed that teachers are the most important moral agents in the classroom through their own disciplinary and leadership styles. Their findings also revealed that the teachers who are concerned the way of “caring” contributes to positive climate of class morality. The lack of teachers’ awareness of the moral climate in the classroom will lead to less understanding and appreciation of moral values.

In Malaysia, the goals of nurturing moral values through education among them are; to instil awareness, understanding, confidence and gratitude; cultivating the spirit of loving moral values; respect the love spirit towards noble moral values; respecting kindness and hatred towards bad; form positive and useful attitude towards race and religion as well as while carrying out responsibilities; eliminating negative attitudes in life; conduct trust with dedication; train oneself with discipline; increase yield or productivity and strive to achieve excellence (Curriculum Development Centre, 2005). The findings of Hoon (2015) revealed that the level of literacy values of Form 4 students was 71.9 per cent. The study found that the students’ moral values was at moderate level, except for the “consumer responsibility right, the importance of preserving the environment and the importance of

moral values to oneself”; all are at low level. In the aspect of moral skills, the students are weak in “justice-based action and context-based action”. Besides that, for the aspect of moral values, the students are weak in “universal value” which is a worthwhile act. At the same time, the findings of Veugelers (2000) also showed that the level of appreciation value was moderately high and quite satisfactory. Veugelers suggested that the moral values such as self-reliance, the community spirit and the value of diligence that are relatively low should be given more emphasis. Yusof et al. (2015) however, found that the pupils are lacking faith towards moral values and the moral values are still not fully practiced outside the school.

The value education in Malaysia has been practiced since early childhood education. Similarly to other countries such as Korea, Japan, US and UK. In the classroom, children are exposed to moral values such as diligence, responsibility, affection and others through learning activities with teachers (Yusoff, 2014). Suh and Traiger (1999) stated that education can help the formation of moral values related to social life among the children. Children are taught the correct way of praying in classroom so that they can make it as their daily life practice (Yusoff, 2014).

At the primary and secondary levels, the students are taught to pursue the moral values embedded in the value education through teaching activities in the classroom as well as within the school area. For example, the students are taught the respect and tolerate values in school. Students are trained to respect teachers and to obey teachers’ instructions despite to also respecting their friends. In school, students are exposed to charity work and daily assignments in the classroom such as throwing the trash, wiping windows, sweeping and keeping the classroom clean. Despite the similarities, however, how the value education in schools of each country creates difference in terms of effectiveness (Ghani, et al., 2014).

In Malaysia, the objective of education is to develop individual potential in a comprehensive and integrated way in order to produce a balanced and harmonious human in terms of intellect, spiritual, emotional and physical based on trust and obedience towards God (Ministry of Education, 2012). While in Korea, the education system aimed at providing basic knowledge, instilling the moral values and skills in students for national development. Not only that, the education system in Korea also promotes awareness among students in order to create a sense of pride towards nation (Mohamed Yusoff, Misrom & Hamid, 2016). This shows that the educational objectives in Malaysia and Korea have similarities in which spiritual aspect is given a special emphasis in the human resource or human values development.

In Japan, value education is taught through the subject of moral education. Moral education was introduced and taught for students in order to maintain social moral values. Moral education in Japan also is embedded in various fields such as history, culture and social context that refer to the impact from their religious practice. The significant difference between value education in Malaysia and Japan is based on the moral education assessment skills (Lazim, 2005). In Malaysia, moral education is assessed as summative assessment where students learn moral values by simply memorizing the theory for examination purpose only, but not in practice. Assessment is done by viewing at the examination results. Meanwhile in Japan a formative assessment is conducted. Moral education which is practiced in Japan is more to daily activities that are done practically in order to cultivate

moral values among the students. For example, students are asked to clean the classroom together to foster cooperation between the classmates (Lazim, 2005).

Islamic education is a subject that is given emphasis since the beginning of independence as the majority of the people in Malaya at that time (now Malaysia) consist of Malay ethnics who are Muslims by religion (Sahad & Saari, 2011). Two more subjects related to moral are Moral Education and Civic and Citizenship Education. Both subjects were introduced later than the Islamic Education. After conducting a number of studies–these subjects were later included in Malaysian education curriculum (Bandu, Ahmad, & Awang, 2016).

Moral Education in Malaysia is a subject that is devoted to non-Muslim students at primary and secondary schools. According to Balakrishnan (2010), this subject goes hand in hand with Islamic Education where Muslim and non-Muslim students will split classes during the two lessons takes place. Similar study also asserted that the main focus of Moral Education is to create a Malaysian society that can live together peacefully and harmoniously.

In 1988 the Education Syllabus was introduced in order to create a good society through the application of moral values that are relevant to all races in Malaysia. However the content of the lesson which includes moral values should always be relevant to current issue and situation of the society. This is because the way of life and culture of the society are changing according to the passage of time (Ahmad, 1998).

According to the Ministry of Education (2000) report, a total of 36 values are taught repeatedly from form 1 to form 5. Although the values and topics taught for the entire form 1 to 5 are same but their content varies for each form according to the students' maturity level. When the form is increasing then the seriousness of issues discussed are also increased (Ministry of Education, 2000). This is also in line with Kohlberg's moral development theory which divides the levels according to with the age increases of the students. The teaching of values is not only taught specifically in Moral Education, Civic and Citizenship Education and Islamic Education but also across the curriculum or embedded in other subjects. This approach is not new in KSSR and KSSM but it has been introduced since KBSR and KBSM (Ahmad, 1998).

The cross-curriculum elements need to be practiced by all teachers including teachers of other subject as teachers are considered as an important factor in the formation of student's character. So value education should be implemented continuously regardless of the subject taught. Cross-curriculum element that is related to moral values consist of three aspects namely spirituality, humanity and citizenship which are taught in all subjects for the purpose of students understanding and awareness on the importance of the value element (Curriculum Development Department, 2015). The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 has put a strong emphasis on the aspect of value by incorporating it as one of the 11 shifts for the transformation of education system in Malaysia. The incorporation is for the purpose of producing people who appreciate moral values by strengthening Islamic Education and Moral Education subject ~~by~~ and therefore form unity among the Malaysians. This clearly shows that government's effort has always been committed in nurturing moral values among the students since the beginning of independence to future aspirations of education (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Suggestions for Improving Content and Implementation of the Value Education

As the result of the lack of focus on the development of students holistically as set out in the National Education Philosophy (Mahmood, 2008) and coupled with their implementation which is not serious because the school has put emphasis on students' academic achievement only (K. Hamzah, 2011) has triggered disciplinary problems among school students. This misconception has led the public to point fingers towards the school as though the teachers did not play their roles to the optimum in shaping the students' character in school. In relating with teachers' competency, Sidek, Mohamed, and Yunos (2011) emphasize that teachers play an important role in shaping students' personality by enhancing the understanding and the practice of moral values among students as education is the foundation to human character development.

This result found to be consistent with the findings of Yahya, Mohamed, Abdullah (2007) who revealed that teachers were responsible for the formation of a positive school culture; and this in turned is linked to the product of a school. The findings of this study is similar to the findings of Abu Hassan, Hamzah and Awang (2014) that found that the process of nurturing moral values among teachers has relevance to the knowledge they have possessed where knowledge of the curriculum and the moral values pedagogy is a prerequisite in the process of applying such moral values. The findings are also in line with the study of Othman and Suhid (2010) which stated that it is the responsibility to apply moral values effectively so that students can be formed into a society that is high morally, socially and spiritually.

Therefore, as a step of improvement, all teachers need to play an important role in nurturing moral values in students and such matters are not limited only to Islamic Education teachers, Moral Education teachers as well as Civic and Citizenship Education teachers but covers all the subject teachers. This proposal is in line with Arifin and Dan's statement (cited by Mohd Zaidin, 2015) who expressed that; in applying values, integrity in all aspects of education is vital in order to produce a holistic individual in terms of intellect and character aspects. Integrity will ensure that the values in all subjects are not taught in isolation. Hence, as a step of improvement, moral values need to be integrated and incorporated into the teaching and learning process to ensure that students not only excel in the lessons but also become useful and well-mannered. The attitude of some administrators of educational institute as well as teachers who are only concerned with academic excellence should be rectified where the aspect of human development and application of moral values should be given full attention in order to produce outstanding and highly respected students. In lieu to that, Ab. Halim Tamuri (cited by Mohamad, Suradin & Khamisan, 2008) found that still many teachers who are unable to inculcate moral values during teaching and learning process takes place.

Hence, the learning contents of Islamic Education, Moral Education and the elements of civic need to be strengthened. Community service elements should be prerequisites for students to graduate. The Islamic Education Curriculum will increase the participation of Malay students as well as the understanding of core values and basic Islamic and other religions philosophy. For non-Muslim students, Moral Education will share and apply an understanding the value of all religions in Malaysia. In addition, school culture must also be strengthened to ensure that an individual life with good manners and moral values can be spread in a school environment. Experience at school also needs to be extended in the community and with environment (Mat Som & Syed Ali, 2016).

In addition to academic approach, the parents have the absolute responsibility in shaping the attitudes and the behaviour of children while at home. Well-mannered children at home will guarantee a lesser disciplinary problems in schools. Most of the parents have not optimum knowledge in parenting where the knowledge and experience associated with children development directly affecting parents' attitudes (Daud, 2004) in dealing with their children. Parental main responsibility is to give love to ensure happiness of their children in their lives in this world and the hereafter. The proposal was also supported by the study of Bedu et al. (2008) who claimed that family institutions play an important role in integrating the religion element into children values development. According to him, religion is an important factor and needs to be dealt with in a human life. Teens will be less afflicted with unethical things if they have solid foundation of religion.

All of these suggestions are consistent with the Moral Developmental Theory by Kohlberg (1971). This theory divides three major stages of moral development namely Pre-Conventional, Conventional and Post Conventional. Each level divided into two other levels. Pre-Conventional Levels have rating of Punishment and Compliance Orientation and Personalised Retirement Orientation rate; whereas Conventional level is divided into Orientation of Interpersonal Capability and the Regularity and Legal Orientation levels. The final stage, Post Conventional level also has two stages namely the Orientation of the Contract of Social Security as well as the Universal Orientation of the Universal Principles (de Freitas, Kovaleski, Boeing & de Oliveira, 2006). Based on this theory, the emphasis is given on teachers and parents to identify their students' or children's moral level and then help them to achieve a higher moral level. When they are able to reach a higher level then it is certain that the noble character can be revealed and become daily practice.

Methodology

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The use of qualitative method in the study is to enable a comprehensive explanation on the social situation or activity from the perspective of the respondents who took part in the study (Gay, Mills and Arasian, 2006). This study aims to explore teacher's view on teaching and students' appreciation values. Qualitative data analysis is the process of finding and arranging interviews transcripts according to the themes that have been determined according to each research question and are carried out continuously until the data becomes saturated. The quantitative method uses the questionnaire set to obtain more amounts higher volume of inputs and scope as well as a wide range of respondents. This study involved teachers and students from several schools. A total of 152 pupils were involved in this study, whereas, a total of 15 teachers were selected to be interviewed, and the other 39 teachers were selected to answer the questionnaire. Teachers who involved in this study were from Moral Education and Islamic Education background.

The Findings

The Values Emphasised by the Teachers

Values that are given more emphasis by the teachers during the teaching of Moral Education and Islamic Education are; responsibility, respectful and helpful values, followed by the value of cooperation and courtesy. Teachers are more concerned with the value of responsibility as they hope that their students are aware of their responsibilities towards school, family and society rather than being selfish. By understanding their responsibilities, the students will try their best to practice other moral values. Peng (cited by Mohd Zaidin, 2015) said, having respect values among the students is

one of the moral values that need to be applied. In addition, the value of tolerance is also important to ensure understanding, respect the rights and freedom. Hence, responsibility and respecting values should be the ultimate goal of applying moral values in shaping students' noble character.

Teaching Method of the Teachers

Interview with teacher respondents found that among the methods they used were group activity, acting, storytelling, video presentation, simulation activity as well as explanation from the teachers. It can be concluded that the teaching method that is widely used by the teachers is in the form of group activity. The second method that is widely used by the teachers is in class acting. This is followed by video presentation, simulation activity and explanation approach. The finding of this question was supported by the study of Mohd Ariff Albakri et al. (2001) where they think that in-classroom activities help teaching and learning process. When we viewed at the method that was widely used, the group activity which takes place in the classroom appear to be most popular. Teachers are seen to use various teaching methods in the effort to pursuit moral values in order to create excellent student character.

Understanding, Appreciating and Evaluating Values by Pupils

Based on the interview data, most teachers think that the moral values taught can be understood, practiced and appreciated, for example through the practice of greeting the teachers. This practice not only practiced in the school but also outside the school compound. With this, the teachers ensure the appreciation values are taught in everyday life.

In addition, teachers also observe that there are students who like to help friends, teachers and family members in various situations. For example, some students helping their peers in understanding difficult subjects, helping teachers by bringing books and stuffs, helping family members at home and so on. It also assures the teachers that the students embrace the moral values taught in their everyday life. Furthermore, they practice the value of gratefulness by thanking the people when they get help from them, especially their friends or family members. This makes the teachers to feel confident that the moral values taught can be understood and practiced by the students either at school and at home.

Besides that, teachers also observe that the students are committed in practising the value of physical and environmental cleanliness. This can be proven through the collecting garbage activity at school or in the classroom. There are also teachers who said that students have appreciated the values of gratefulness and thankfulness in their daily life. For example, they recite prayers before consuming the food as a sign of gratitude and thanking God for giving them food. Some thank the canteen workers after buying food. Overall, the moral values taught by the teachers are fully applied by the students themselves.

Students' Perceptions

From the perspectives of the pupils, it is found that the whole items of self-development values are on a high scale (mean=4.13, SD=0.068). However, the values for patience, considerate of other's feelings and thrifty can still be further reinforced. Family values that need to be further reinforced are "degree of politeness during oral conversation with family members" and "a sense of pride with own tradition and inherited ancestry".

Suggestions for Improvement to Ensuring the Appreciation Values

Based on the Interview findings, various types of ideas have been suggested by teachers for improvements in ensuring the values are well understood, practiced and appreciated so that no disciplinary problem takes place or happens in school and in daily life. There are various programmes are to be held to give awareness for the students in schools so that the target values can be practiced.

Overall, in this interview we found that the role of parents is vital in giving input on the value of home-based practice. The school must hold an Open Day together with the parents to discuss various problems related to students. In addition, giving rewards as impetus in order to apply moral values and giving priority to Moral Education itself will have a great impact on students in daily life. Overall, teachers suggested that:

- a. The following activities are to be conducted: visits, community services, competitions, community service, out-of-school activities, lectures and moral based programmes.
- b. Students know about the rational of value education, which taught values' positive and negative impacts, assessing students' attitude value, giving students the opportunity to apply value in real situations, ensuring these subjects are aligned with core subjects and giving exposure to students the effect of getting involved in chronic problems.
- c. The Value education becomes the mandatory subject and there is an examination value.
- d. The Value education is taught across curriculum, making education a core subject value and improves the value education textbooks.

Discussion and Conclusion

In teachers' point of view, the responsibility values is among the most important values to be embedded in the students' moral value. Kohlberg's Theory, Frued Theory and Piaget's Theory have stated that; besides parents, children themselves will understand the moral values by associating with people around them in their daily life. Teachers are the one who met the students most often besides their parents. So teachers have the responsibility to nurture moral values to their students. As teachers, it is necessary to carry out their responsibility based on the National Education Philosophy. This national education philosophy provide a guidance in -building a human resource with variety of good values and one of them is sense of responsible not only to themselves, but also towards the community, religion and country. With this reasoning, no wonders the teachers are given more emphasis on the responsibility values either formally; in teaching and learning process, or informally by influencing them by through effective communication and through attributing behaviours; which may directly affect students spiritually and psychologically (Piang et al., 2015).

Based on the National Education Philosophy, the objective of education in Malaysia is to develop people who are not only having the ability to achieve their own well-being, but also contribute to the harmony and prosperity of the nation. Thus, it is important that students to be exposed to other noble values so that the goals of national education philosophy can be achieved. In addition, instead of teaching Moral Education and Islamic Education, teachers also need to ensure that the moral values are embedded through their teaching and learning process. This means that the nurturing of values does not only focussed on Moral Education or Islamic Education alone (Hashim, 2000; Ahmad & Hoon, 1997). Although there are recent studies showing that some subjects such as Mathematics

and Science are difficult to embed moral values through teaching and learning process, yet teachers' concern on this matter may give positive impact on value building (Othman & Suhid, 2010).

According to Jasmi, Ibrahim, and Ilias (2012) most teachers are effective in practicing teaching methods with examples in the classroom. Using many examples, analogies, metaphors and parables, teachers not only get the attention, but also make the presentation easier to understand. Especially if the examples, metaphors and parables are clear, interesting and relevant to life experiences. Providing examples are the most popular activity and are mostly conducted in the classroom. Adding acting from the examples given; makes the values education becoming more effective to the students. Apart of the findings, group approach in conducting activates ensures that each member cooperates without losing the contribution of each individual (Salleh, Ariffin, & Daia, 2001).

The findings also show students tend to show a higher level of appreciation value practices than other good values. The finding is supported by the findings of Kasa et al. (1996). However, this finding contradict with Al-Hooli & Al-Shammari (2009) who found that only a few pupils show high level of appreciation value. Appreciation value is important as it can influence one's attitude and action (Abd. Rashid, 2001). Othman and Suhid (2010) stated that the application of good values to pupils in the teaching and learning process is fundamental to the enhancement of student discipline, moral and good values.

Based on the findings of the study, educators are encouraged to do further improvements to increase the mastery of good values practices among students. Among them are:

- a. Value subjects are becoming core subjects.
- b. The programmes related to good values should be implemented in schools and provide students with the opportunity to learn good values in real situations. The cultivating of values in students does not only take place in the Moral Education lesson but should also be practised in all subjects taught in the classroom. Malaysia can emulate the value nurturing process in school from Japan.
- c. Teachers need to improve their teaching methods so that it becomes more interesting and effective, so that students understand why they are learning values. All teachers are to be given special training on how to inculcate values among the pupils. Teachers should also be exemplary model for the students.
- d. Support from all parties including the school and parents are essential for every programme organised by the school to give impact and achieve the target goals. The findings of the study will also help the Malaysian Education Ministry in developing educational policies in providing a more appropriate programme for teachers in teaching good values to pupils.
- e. Parents must pay attention to value education at home, as the continuity of what the students' have learned at school.

This study can be improved by widening the scope of the sample involved and also involves all the good values suggested in the education system. By using good values from other subjects, further studies will be carried out and will provide more comprehensive outcome. With that, improvement measures can be done more efficiently and effectively. Finally, the study of good values can be conducted continuously from time to time to strengthening the existing teaching and educating the moral values.

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