Building a Brighter Future: The Crucial Role of Character Education in Malaysia's Education System

Mardiah Hafizah Muhammad Hafizi[1], Nurzatulshima Kamarudin[2], Nursakinah Mohamad Ibrahim[3]

[1,3]Institute for mathematical Research, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia, [2]Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia
Email: nzshima@upm.edu.my, nursakinah1188@gmail.com
Coressponding Author Email: hafizah464@gmail.com

Abstract
As Malaysia continues to develop economically and socially, the nation's education system is pivotal in shaping a future where individuals are not only academically proficient but also imbued with strong moral values. Character education, which focuses on developing virtues such as integrity, responsibility, and empathy, plays a critical role in this vision. This article explores the importance of character education education in Malaysia's changing educational environment. Recognizing the ongoing difficulties faced by the country's education system, such as decreasing aca-demic achievement and social issues. It assesses the current status of character education in Malaysia, emphasiz-ing its inclusion in the national curriculum and the obstacles encountered during its implementation. Drawing on research results and comparisons with neighboring countries like Indonesia, this article identifies critical factors that affect how effective programs for character education are. These encompass a variety of cultural influences, policy structures, family and community engagement, and integration of Islamic principles. By addressing these multifacet-ed challenges and taking advantage of opportunities for cooperation and cultural diversity, Malaysia can effectively incorporate moral education into its schools to nurture morally upright individuals who are equipped to handle today's complexities. Ultimately, prioritizing moral education is crucial for advancing Malaysia's educational system and promoting societal unity while laying a foundation for a more ethically excellent future.
Keywords: Character Education, Malaysian Education, Moral, Values.

Introduction
In today's rapidly changing society, where the line between right and wrong can often be blurred, instilling a strong sense of character in students is essential for their personal growth and success. In Malaysia, the education system is beginning to recognize the importance of character education in shaping the future generation of leaders and citizens. Malaysia aims to raise a better generation yet the country is faced with a major challenge to reform the education system that

balance academic excellence and holistic development. Despite Malaysia's efforts, obstacles still exist when it comes to including character education in the national curriculum. These include addressing cultural diversity, striking a balance between moral and academic development, and integrating modern digital challenges like responsible online behavior. This study explores the significance of character education as a key element in shaping persons with moral integrity who can support a peaceful and morally upright society in addition to academically proficient individuals. Character education is vital because of alarming trends such rising juvenile criminality, bullying, and misuse use of digital platforms. Students are also exposed to moral dilemmas and competing cultural norms because of globalization. Character education is therefore essential to ensuring that the next generation is ready to face these complicated circumstances with resilience and knowledge. The 2027 education reform, which requires character education in all public schools, offers a good chance to review and improve current initiatives.

By investigating the effectiveness and impact of character education on various stakeholders such as students, educators, families, and communities. This study aims to provide insights into how Malaysia can better prepare its youth for future challenges. The significance of this study lies in its potential to influence policy and practice, highlighting the role of education in fostering not only academic success but also good characters for the nation's future.

Current Challenges in Malaysian Education
As a developing country striving to compete on the global stage, despite significant investments and reforms, Malaysia continues to grapple with several challenges in its education system. Recent report from The World Bank highlight concern over Malaysia's education system. They reported that student learning outcomes still fall short behind expectations despite of significant investment in education. While student typically spend 12.5 years in school by age 18, they only learn equivalent to 8.9 years (The World Bank, 2024). This performance is outrun by neighboring countries such as Singapore and Korea, and even Vietnam, which despite its lower-middle income status and lower educational investment, achieves better outcomes. This is an alarming concern for Malaysia to address this issue and ensure that every student has access to high-quality education. It is imperative that Malaysia reassess its approaches to education and consider the adoption of creative teaching techniques and curriculum modifications. This might entail less emphasis on memorization and more on practical knowledge, problem-solving techniques, and critical thinking skills. Improving school facilities and funding teacher preparation programs may also have a big impact on raising student achievement. The ultimate objective should be to provide pupils with the information and abilities they need to prosper in the twenty-first century. Though difficult, the task is undoubtedly doable with coordinated efforts from all parties involved.

The challenges in character education in Malaysia are multifaceted. The goals of Malaysia's current educational system are not entirely met, particularly in producing people who have strong moral convictions, leading to an increase in negative behaviors among the youth. Trends like an increase in young people engaging in violent crimes, bullying, and other misbehavior are clear indicators of this (Hussin, 2007). The rise of digital citizenship as a new form of literacy further complicates this issue, necessitating the integration of character education to teach responsible online behavior. Character education can help children learn how to use the internet securely and responsibly by teaching them about the ethical ramifications of their digital footprints and encouraging polite online interactions. Malaysia places a strong emphasis on the role that education plays in assisting students in becoming capable adults who possess both ethical

principles and intellectual capacity. Globalization has negatively impacted pupils by causing conflicts between cultures and moral quandaries. This emphasizes how character education based on national ideals is essential to overcoming these challenges (Khoirina et al., 2022). It becomes imperative to address a variety of concerns to carry out character education programs effectively. Moreover, as technology develops, ethical issues like equitable access to resources become more important. To make sure that new technology is used as efficiently as possible, educational technologists need to improve their capacity for strategic planning and visionary leadership (Mayes et al., 2015). Thus, integrating character education into Malaysia's national curriculum has the potential to improve academic learning as well as prepare the next generation for morally complex and socially conscious decision-making. As Malaysia moves closer to being a more progressive, inclusive, and industrially competitive country, this all-encompassing strategy is crucial

Understanding Character Education
Character education is a multifaceted concept that remains subject to diverse interpretations among experts in the field. Experts in the field still have different ideas about its exact meaning. Character education broadly infuses every subject, encompasses all school activities, and shapes the overall school culture (The Jubilee Centre, 2017). It nurtures the virtues of character tied to universal moral principles and enhances students' comprehension of excellence across various fields of human activity. It should be more than just a subject and should be integrated to their surroundings like classrooms, schools and families (The Jubilee Centre, 2017). At its core, character consist of personal trait and dispositions that influence moral emotion, motivation and conduct. Aderi & Noh (2020) emphasize that character education develops essential values, attitudes, and skills like respect, leadership, and resilience. This holistic approach integrates civic, moral, and performance elements to prepare students for the next generation for successful careers, academic achievement, employability, and active citizenship (Aderi & Noh, 2020).

Aim of character education is to cultivate practical wisdom or good sense, enabling the ability to make intelligent choices among various alternatives. According to The Jubilee Centre (2017), the goal of character education is for should focus on defining the type of individuals they aim to develop, explaining the philosophy behind their approach, and setting clear ethical standards for students and teachers. Schools should model these virtues, provide opportunities for students to grow into thoughtful and mature individuals, and prepare them not only for academic tests but also real-life challenges. The development of character occurs through being "caught, taught, and sought" (The Jubilee Centre, 2017). Positive examples set by the school community, educational experiences that enrich students with essential skills and knowledge, and opportunities for students to develop and refine their character all play crucial roles. Key elements of character education include community, role-modeling, and exposure.

In Malaysia, character education is provided directly through subjects such as Islamic Education for Muslim students and Moral Education for non-Muslim students, reflecting the country's diverse cultural and religious landscape (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2020). These subjects, along with Civic Education, are integrated into the education system driven by national policies emphasizing holistic student development (MOHE, 2013). However, there is a compelling case for integrating character education across the entire school curriculum and experience rather than treating it as a stand-alone subject. This comprehensive approach ensures that character development is infused into every facet of school life, leading to a more holistic learning

environment. By incorporating teachings on character development into various courses and school activities, students can regularly apply these values in diverse contexts, fostering virtues such as honesty, empathy, and perseverance in their daily lives. This all-encompassing strategy seeks to profoundly impact future generations' ethical thinking and education.

Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing Character Education in Malaysia
The successful integration of character education into Malaysia's education system necessitates a deep understanding of the multifaceted challenges and opportunities that influence educational outcomes. By analyzing key factors such as individual characteristics, family support, community involvement, resources from private institutions, and government policies, stakeholders can develop strategies that are both effective and culturally relevant. The challenges in implementing character education in Malaysia stem from various factors. While character education has been a mandatory lesson in Malaysian schools since the 1980s, hindrances like human resource problems, lack of facilities, and insufficient family support hinder its effective implementation in primary schools (Donesia et al., 2023) (Zin et al., 2022). Additionally, the success of character education is influenced by internal and external factors, including student, household, school, and community environments [4]. Overcoming these challenges requires addressing issues such as internet access, parental cooperation, teacher's technological skills, and the need for a sustainable evaluation system for character education programs in schools.

One of the main challenges in implementing character education in Malaysia arises from the diversity of its population, where different ethnic groups hold varying values and expectation from the education system (Donesia et al., 2023). To address this, an adaptable and inclusive approach is crucial, respecting and integrating the multitude of cultural norms and values present in Malaysian society. Studies have highlighted the importance of exploring cultural character values within specific communities. Recognizing these diverse cultural influences necessitates robust policy frameworks that can effectively support such a multifaceted approach to character education. Effective policy-making in Malaysia is crucial for the success of character education initiatives in schools. The government's policies have a significant impact on the propagation and implementation of character education. Policies should encompass adequate funding, curriculum development, teacher training, and assessment methodologies to support character education effectively (Sirat, 2025). Furthermore, policies must be flexible to allow schools the autonomy to tailor programs to suit the unique demographics of students and meet the specific needs of local communities (Zin et al., 2022).

Family support plays a crucial role in determining the success of character education as it complements the values taught at school (Pimpalkar, 2023). Students are more likely to internalize and practice the virtues taught at school when these values are echoed and reinforced at home. Varying levels of parental involvement, influenced by economic, educational, or cultural factors, can impact the consistency and effectiveness of character education initiatives. Engaging parents and communities through workshops, seminars, and school events is crucial to bridge this gap and ensure a collaboration between the education system and families in nurturing virtues in students. By involving parents actively, character education can be reinforced both at home and in school, leading to a more comprehensive and impactful development of students' moral values and behavior.

Community involvement plays a crucial role in character education programs, especially when schools establish strong connections with local communities. By engaging parents, local leaders, businesses, and organizations, schools can create supportive learning environments that enhance character development (Ariani et al., 2022; Isroani, 2022). These collaborations provide opportunities for students to practice ethical behavior in real-world contexts, reinforcing the value of moral principles. When schools and communities work together, they can instill important values such as integrity, nationalism, independence, and mutual respect among students, contributing significantly to the overall character-building process. Such partnerships between schools and local stakeholders are essential for fostering a positive environment where students can learn, grow, and internalize ethical values effectively.

The Islamic perspective on character education in Malaysia is deeply intertwined with the country's predominantly Muslim population (Asildo, 2022; Sidek et al., 2023). Islamic educational principles emphasize holistic development, including moral and spiritual aspects, aligning well with the goals of character education (Sirait, 2023). The Quran serves as a fundamental reference for morality, guiding attitudes and behaviors, highlighting the significance of Islamic teachings in shaping character (Sarwadi & Nashihin, 2023). Understanding these religious and cultural nuances is crucial for developing effective and culturally respectful character education programs in Malaysia, considering the moral and spiritual dimensions emphasized in Islamic education. By integrating Islamic values into character education, Malaysia can create programs that cater to the holistic development of students in alignment with Islamic principles.

Significance of the Study
This study holds significant value for multiple stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, students, and community. For educators, it provides insights into how character education can be effectively integrated across different subjects and school activities, improving students' overall development. By applying these strategies, educators can create a classroom environment that prioritizes academic success alongside the reinforcement of moral principles. For policymakers, the research serves as a crucial resource to guide future educational reforms. The findings offer a detailed analysis of the current state of character education in Malaysia, suggesting pathways for improvement. The study highlights how important it is to have policies that help students continuously develop their moral and intellectual capacities. Parents and communities, who are crucial in sustaining the values taught in schools, can also benefit from the study. Engaging families and communities in the character-building process ensures a unified approach to student development, fostering moral values that extend beyond the classroom. Finally, students reap the greatest benefits. By addressing the challenges of modern life, such as digital literacy and ethical decision-making, this study equips students with the moral strength needed to thrive in both personal and professional realms.

Conclusion
As Malaysia charts its educational trajectory, character education emerges as a cornerstone of holistic development. By integrating ethical values into every aspect of schooling, Malaysia can nurture a generation of morally upright individuals equipped to navigate life's complexities with integrity and resilience. Embracing character education not only enriches academic pursuits but also cultivates a society grounded in ethical excellence and social cohesion. As such, prioritizing character education is paramount in crafting a brighter future for Malaysia's educational

landscape and society at large. In conclusion, the challenges of implementing character education in Malaysia are matched by significant opportunities. By considering the diverse needs of its population, actively involving families and communities, and aligning with cultural and religious values, Malaysia can effectively integrate character education into its schools. This holistic approach will equip students with the necessary skills and values to face the challenges of the modern world while contributing positively to society. The future of Malaysia significantly hinges on its ability to nurture well-rounded individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also morally grounded. Integrating character education within the educational framework represents a proactive approach to achieving a harmonious and prosperous society. While challenges remain, the strategic incorporation of character education can transform educational practices in Malaysia, creating a brighter future through the cultivation of good character.

References

Aderi, M., & Noh, C. (2020). Character Education Framework For Multiracial Society In Malaysia Character Educatıon Framework For Multiracial Socıety In Malaysıa. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, *29*(8), 4035–4041.

Ariani, F., Ulfatin, N., Supriyanto, A., & Arifin, I. (2022). Implementing Online Integrated Character Education and Parental Engagement in Local Cultural Values Cultivation. *European Journal of Educational Research*, *11*(3), 1699–1714.

Asildo, N. Z. S. D. (2022). *An Overview of Akhlak and Moral Concepts and Their Relevance to Moral Education in Malaysia*. *12*(4), 101–116. https://doi.org/10.5296/jpag.v12i4S.20574

Donesia, E. A., Widodo, P., Juni, H., Saragih, R., & Suwarno, P. (2023). *National Character Development And Character Education In Schools Malaysia*. *38*(2), 502–506.

Hussin, N. (2007). Juvenile Delinquency in Malaysia: Legal Framework and Prospects for Reforms. *IIUM Law Journal*, *15*(March 2005), 20–23.

Isroani, F. (2022). *Strengthening Character Education Through Holistic Learning Values*. *10*(2), 289–306.

Khoirina, N. J., Al-majiid, F. H., Great, K. A., & Semarang, U. N. (2022). *Pancasila Character Education for Millennials in Higher Education : The Future Challenges for Indonesia in Global Perspective*. *4*(1).

Mayes, R., Natividad, G., & Spector, J. M. (2015). Challenges for Educational Technologists in the 21st Century. *Education Sciences*, 221–237. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci5030221

Pimpalkar, N. T. (2023). Character Building in ECCD. *International Journal for Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology*, *11*(May).

Sarwadi, & Nashihin, H. (2023). Character Education between The Western Context and Islamic perpective. *AL HIKMAH: JOURNAL OF EDUCATION*, *4*(1), 1–12.

Sidek, L., Taat, M. S., Shariff, S., Sidek, L., Taat, M. S., & Shariff, S. (2023). *Islamic Education in Malaysia : Concept , Philosophy and Objectives Islamic Education in Malaysia : Concept , Philosophy and Objectives*. *1*(1), 1527–1533. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i1/16697

Sirait, I. (2023). *Character Education in Islamic Education at Madrasah School Level*. *4*(1), 5–8. https://doi.org/10.37251/jpaii.v4i1.643

Sirat, M. (2025). *Comment on " Transforming Malaysia ' s Higher Education : Policies and Progress "*. *2023*, 263–264. https://doi.org/10.1111/aepr.12423

The Jubilee Centre. (2017). For character education in schools. *The Jubilee Centre for Character & Values*. https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-

education/Framework for Character Education.pdf

The World Bank, W. (2024). *Bending Bamboo Shoots : Strengthening Foundational Skills* (Issue April).

Zin, S. A. M., Hamzah, I. S., Sarifin, M. R., Ramli, A. F., & Zain, M. F. M. (2022). Character Education based on the Application of the National Education Philosophy to the Formation of Leadership among Students. *International Journal of Education, Philosophy and Counselling (IJEPC)*, *7*(47), 563–577. https://doi.org/10.35631/IJEPC.747045