# AN ETHICAL ASPECT OF CHARACTER BUILDING: IBN SINA'S PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

*Character building is an important step in projecting man as a role model in doing good. The human capital, borne of the character building, plays a leading role in making Malaysia a superior nation in the future. Character building without specific guidance makes a society develop without the roles and functions that make it clearly identifiable. The confusion over the functioning of its existence results in waste from the point of use of the human capital itself. In Islam, character building is emphasized from childhood. The purpose of this study is to form a character building concept based on the perspective of a Muslim scholar, Ibn Sina (980-1037). In order to achieve the objectives outlined, the study uses qualitative method and content analysis. The findings show that character building of ethic from the early stage, according to Ibn Sina, is very important to human beings.*

**Keywords:** Ethic, Character, Moral, Education, Ibn Sina.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is capable of preserving and transmitting the basic values of a society, and it can also be a source of confusion in the society. Education can also help the growth of personality; sowing and maintaining the identity of an individual. The scope of education is said to reflect the attitudes and tendencies of a society. Likewise, education is the most important element in the process of growth and maturity of one who can produce a successful and noble generation. Education is very important in strengthening all the pure values within each individual (Zakaria et al., 2012). Education is a human necessity; it plays a major role in shaping and building characters, whether characters as educators or characters as students. Surah Aal 'Imran, verse 79 emphasizes on the creation of great individuals who produce a generation that loves knowledge and learning, and upholds goodness. The importance of this study lies in illustrating the importance of education in character building (Laelatul, 2017). Al-Abrasyi (1969) said that one of the goals of education is to form a character or personality that is oriented to one's virtue. He also said that character education (morals) should be the main content in every area of learning. Existing characters should be raised and formulated with the purpose of each subject. The interest and talent of the students will need to be seen in a solid unity that can be

developed as much as possible, thus helping the success of the students in the future. Teaching should be directed towards the development and establishment of competencies that are often based on the interests and talents of the students (Syaefuddin, 2005). Thus, the main objective of this study is to showcase the concept of character building from as observed by Ibn Sina (1982), for the benefit and guidance of humanity. It is also show Ibn Sina's depiction that character building of ethic from the early stage is of utmost importance in human's daily endeavours.

## Concept of Character and its Relation with Ethic Education

The word "*character*" is from the Greek word "*charassein*", which means 'to engrave or carve'. Building characters is like carving on gems or hard metal surfaces (John & Hassan, 2006; Lorens, 2005). From there, character understanding develops with a special sign or behavior pattern (individual pattern of behavior, his moral development). Character is literally derived from the Latin "*Character*", which, among others, means "*habits*", "*psychiatric traits*", "*personality*" and/or "*morality*". In a sense, character is characterized as human nature in general (Soetyono & Mardi, 2018). Humans have many properties that depend on their life factors. Hill (2005) defines character as something that determines the way a person thinks and acts and becomes motivated to do something. Character is defined as characteristic of personality that distinguishes one from another. Thus, individuals with good morals are described as individuals who successfully unite their psychological, emotional and moral behavior (Rahman, 1999). In Islam, society was built on the fundamental disciplines of learning the al-Quran character (Omar et al., 2014; Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia, 2014) and the main source of morality is the revelation from Allah S.W.T, the Qur'an and Hadith. Both provide *manhaj* (clear and steady methods) in building and preserving human morality. Since the Qur'an and Hadith are the two main sources in Islam, both should be briefly described (Khairuldin, 2016).

*"Ethics"* means; first, referring to knowledge of moral or moral principles, secondly, referring to the principle of moral (or *akhlaq*) or moral values that became a guidance towards an individual or a group such as association, occupation and others (Fauzi & Hasrul, 2017). The word "*education*", in Malay, is conceived from the root word "*guard*", "*maintain*" and "*teach*". It is also synonymous to teaching, training, lessons, guidance, care and guiding individual (Zakaria et al., 2012). In English, it is said to be derived from the two-word of Latin origin, namely "*e'ex*" and "*ducereduc*" meaning "*lead*" (Simpson & Weiner, 1989), which can be defined as gathering information into oneself to form talents (Abdullah, 1995). In Arabic, there are several words used to refer to education, and among the frequently used words are "*tarbiyah*", "*ta'lim*", and "*ta'dib*" (Rosnani, 2006; Al-Attas 1979). Halsted (2004) said the three words mean education; *tarbiyah* comes from the basic word "*rabb*" (nurturing, caring or leading), referring to the development process of individual potential, caring or educating for a comfortable and mature situation, *ta'lim* comes from the connotation "*alima*" (knowing, telling, seeing, observing, assuming), referring to the process of conveying or receiving knowledge that is normally found through training, instruction, guidance or other forms of teaching, *ta'dib* comes from the word "*aduba*" (refined, disciplined and cultured), referring to the process of character building and the teaching of essential principles for community life, which includes understanding and accepting the most fundamental principle of justice (Halsted, 2004; Al-Attas 1979). According to al-Attas, the word *ta'dib* is more precise as it has a more specific meaning to describe the process of human education than the word *tarbiyyah* which has broader meanings of animals. It also emphasizes physical education compared to mental and spiritual development

(Al-Attas, 1992; Rosnani, 2006). The argument was further reinforced by the sayings of the Prophet, where he used the word *ta'dib* to refer to the education and training he received from Allah S.W.T (Zakaria et al., 2012).

The educational value is an essential element to build a person's. However, the definitions of values that are acceptable to all communities are still disputed and are a value conflict. Therefore, the children will evaluate something independently and according to their way of thinking. The theory of value approaches to forming a person's character is still an endless issue when the definition of value to be followed is not clearly stated and aligned according to the individual. In Malaysia, education is based on the National Education Philosophy. It emphasizes on balanced development, encompassing aspects of knowledge, emotion, physical and spiritual. This is in line with Vision 2020 to develop the country, according to its own mould (Hasmah, 2000).

**Ibn Sina's Perspective**

Ibn Sina, known in Europe as Avicenna, is considered *"the greatest Muslim thinker and the last of the Muslim philosopher in the East"* (Ali, 1973). He was born to a Persian family on 23 August 980AD in a village called Afshanah in Kharmaisan district, Bukhara (Pouya et al., 2012; Usaybi'ah, 1965). Throughout his life, he immersed himself into acquiring various disciplines of knowledge. He started studying Qur'an since childhood, and later studied many fields such as philosophy, geometry, mathematics, Islamic jurisprudence, logic, medicine and many others. In the history of education, Ibn Sina was guided by his own father, Abdullah and other teachers selected by his family. His family had discussions on various fields of knowledge on daily basis (Ali, 1973). Abu AbduLlah al-Natili taught Ibn Sina (1982) the philosophy of Greek, logic, geometry, metaphysics and pure science. At the age of eighteen (18), he had completed his studies in all fields of knowledge and was now matured (Afnan, 1958). Rosenthal said he was *"devoted to ethics and economics, and the regimen of the household, which comprises the master of the family, his wife, children and servants"* (Rosenthal, 1968).

Throughout his life he was involved in philosophy and produced about 276 writings (Hasan, 1934), including books, comments, treatises, essays in philosophy and various other fields (Idris, 2000). Afnan said: *"there are many good minor treatises attributed to Ibn Sina not all of which are authentic"*. One of these, the authenticity of which has been reasonably established, is titled the Book of Politics (*Kitab al-Siyasah*) (Afnan, 1958). According to Rosenthal (1968), this writing *"is devoted to ethics and economics, and the regimen of the household, which comprises the master of the family, his wife, children and servants".* Ibn Sina has put greater responsibility on the shoulders of parents to enhance their children's education. Before talking about this issue in more details, he emphasized the element of choosing the good name for the children first. This means that there are certain psychological benefits and implications for choosing names. Ibn Sina may have absorbed into the system of thinking some important ideas of Islamic teachings that clearly state the selection of good names. Islam strongly emphasizes the selection of good names (Idris, 2000).

Moral education is one of the aspects of his education system and philosophy. Ibn Sina maintains that education begins after the completion of breastfeeding (*al-Radaa'ah*), and in the early stage of this education begins with morality. Ibn Sina uses the term *ta'dib* to explain the importance of moral education at this stage, not *ta'lim* or *tarbiyah*. The rationale for *ta'dib* here refers to a more defensive nature; that is, before the child is faced with bad behavior and bad

inclination (Idris, 2000). This certainly happens in the context of social relations with peers and others. In this context, Ibn Sina states that usually the child is quickly influenced by bad forms of morals or bad habits. He adds that they also do not know about the values and the differences between good and bad and do not know how to avoid them. Hence, it is more beneficial to them to always be away from all these forms. This is the defensive approach pointed out by Ibn Sina in this early stage (Afnan, 1958).

The general spectrum of Ibn Sina's education policy is to build a better human through integrated education covering morality, religion, mental and emotional strength (Hasan, 1934). He emphasizes on the level of education below 10 years. At this stage, parents need to play their roles and responsibilities completely (Idris, 2000). The parents are responsible for educating children all the time. Ibn Sina emphasizes on a very young stage, after the completion of the breastfeeding process (*al-Radaa'ah*). The type of education here is morality. According to him, this is important before the child is exposed to external values which may be bad and the child usually cannot resist the influence. They are still unable to distinguish between good and bad things. Therefore, moral education was determined by Ibn Sina in the early stages as the basis of life. The ultimate goal is to have happiness in the family (Hasan, 1934).

## CONCLUSION

Character education is based on the Quran and Sunnah, the combination of both aspects, which is to embed a certain character and create awareness that educators and students are able to build their special characters during their life. Ibn Sina emphasizes on the element of choosing names for children first. Children must be given good names by their parents. There are certain psychological benefits and implications for choosing names. In the early stage, moral education should begin after the completion of breastfeeding, and he uses the term *ta'dib* to explain the importance of moral education at this stage. Ibn Sina's perspective on education is to build a better human through integrated education covering morality, religion, mental and emotional strength. He emphasizes on the level of education below 10 years. At this stage, parents need to play their roles and responsibilities completely for educating children all the time. This is important before the child is exposed to external values which may be bad and they are still unable to distinguish between good and bad things. For building a good character, moral education was determined by Ibn Sina in the early stages as the basis of life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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