A CASE STUDY ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHARACTER EDUCATION AT SELECTED ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to describe how the Islamic education system at selected HEIs was implemented and contributed to the character education of its students. In total, 9 management level administrators were interviewed, and participated in focus group discussions. Findings suggest that these HEIs adopt the comprehensive approach of character education which is based on Islamic values as its main philosophy. The majority of respondents reported that the educational systems being implemented at the selected HEIs educates and develops students' character by inculcating knowledge, providing supportive conditions, and by giving students the chance to practice the knowledge. Recommendation for future researches and practice is also presented.

Keywords: Character Education, Higher Education Institution, Case Study
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Introduction
Sustainable investment in human capital is a crucial factor toward a sustainable development for a country. This perspective has leveraged education to become the primary determinants of standard of living, employment status and also the economic and industrial development.

Accordingly, one of the ten shifts implemented in the National Higher Education Blueprint 2015-2025 was to create morally sound graduates who are well-rounded and balanced individuals in line with the National Education Philosophy. Hence, higher education institutions in Malaysia face great pressure to impose value in both its teaching and learning activities and also it's' extra-curricular activities. Against this background, research studies which addressed the implementation process to achieve balanced graduates are gaining importance.

Character in Arabic relays to the term khuluq (plural: akhlaq). It is a set of belief, regulation and system related to attitude and moral actions that set a person's actions to be either good or bad (Ab Halim, 2000). Besides family institution, character could be inculcated in the context of nationality, in the context of religion and in the context of society (Darraz, 1987). Prior literatures mentioned positive relationships between character development and education (Berkowitz and Bier, 2005; Elias, 2009). However, most of these studies focused on early and elementary education (such as Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schelinger, 2011; Van Velsor, 2009). In reality, formal education system, in particular, the higher education institutions have taken over the role of family and society in educating the younger generations.

Several studies were conducted at HEIs in Malaysia. The findings pointed out that the level of Islamic practice among students is still very low (Mohd @ Mohamed, 2000) in addition to lack of appreciation of moral values towards the creator (Allah s.w.t.), themselves and the society (Ahmad Diniah, 1995). Similar views were also mentioned in a study on American Muslim youths conducted by Ahmad (2009). Although her study identified the youths as highly religious, only 33.7% of them have explored their ideological beliefs. Regardless of the importance of good character, most scholars have neglected this topic throughout most of the 20th century (Park & Peterson, 2009).

In addition, current articles published also urge the restoration of moral values among youths in Malaysia. One article stressed the need for the government, parents and community to take action ("Restoring moral values", 2017). Another commentary in a local newspaper reflected on the problems among youths in Malaysia such as skipping classes, disobeying teachers, vandalism and bullying others ("Akhlak remaja cerminan masyarakat masa kini", 2017). Thus, the extent of character education being inculcated among Muslim students is still questionable with limited studies. Therefore, the aim of the study was to find out the current implementation of character education at selected Islamic HEIs and also how the implementation contributed towards the building of students' moral values.

Literature Review
Definition and Concepts Character Education
Characters are certain traits in a person which are presented in the form of their behaviour (Jamaluddin, 2013). Muslim scholars (such as al-Farabi, d. 950; Miskawayh, d. 1030; al-Ghazali, d. 1111; Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, d. 1209; al-Tusi, d. 1274; and al-Dawwani, d. 1502) have studied character (Omar, 2003). The focus of character education is to help children and young adults understand their values, care about those values, and then act upon those values (Lickona, 1992). According to Schwartz (2008), true character education encourages students to become independent and dedicated thinkers of moral principles in their lives. However, a person's character is divided into two; the positive character which is a good character and a negative character which is not a good character.

Jamaluddin (2013) listed seven principles to define the character as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Seven principles to define character

Principle	Description
1	Characters include all the characteristics of a person.
2	Character is a trait of how to think, talk and behave.
3	Positive character may be built and negative character can be disposed with the continuous earnestness.
4	Every human being is responsible on his own decision.
5	Character may be established but requires the individual's motivation to push it.
6	Each man's character had been formed during the growing process from childhood to adulthood.
7	Every man should have a positive character. He just needs to strive towards it.

Following the suggestion by Comer (2003) that character is something that students obtain from the way adults in the environment set it up for them, and based on the aforementioned principles in Table 1, it is clear that character could be established over a certain period of time and any individual has the ability to change his/her character. As such, character education should be designed to integrate the combination of direct instruction, demonstration, reinforcement, and various community-building approaches (such as class gatherings, social service gatherings, inter cultural exchange, social-skills training, and interpersonal support) (Huitt & Vessels, 2002) to increase its effectiveness.

In addition, the term character has been defined in numerous contexts. This scenario has created frequent confusion as researchers in character education do not agree on a common definition of character education. In general, there are two main perspectives that denote the scope of character education; the traditionalists' perspective and the constructivists' perspective. The traditionalists emphasize the development of virtue through social learning processes (Arthur, 2008). Meanwhile, the constructivists focus on the social and moral judgments of students (Colby, 2008). Although most literatures elaborated on curriculum structures or instructions to enhance character education in institutions, but the present study focused on students' character education following the way of the Quran. The research employs the approach as suggested by Berkowitz (1995) which was cited by many other scholars (such as Huitt, 2000; Bauer, 1991; Berkowitz, 2005). This approach assumes that the best way in implementing character education is through lifestyle integration.

Methodology
Data gathering is crucial in research. According to Leedy & Ormrod (2005), a research methodology is the general approach that a researcher takes in order to carrying out the research project. The research uses a case study approach to research design in order to explore the implementation of character education at nine Islamic higher education institutions in Malaysia. This approach was chosen because it provides the means to make sense of experience, perception, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour in any given cultural context (Clissett, 2008).
A purposeful sampling strategy was used. The specific purposeful sampling strategy that was used was criterion sampling. Criterion sampling involves searching for individuals who meet a certain criterion. The use of criterion sampling gave greater quality assurance of the study (Patton, 2002). In this study, two main criterions were selected; first was that participants

selected as informants had to have worked at the selected institutions for over five years and the second criterion was that the selected informants were members of the management boards which had at least three years of experience in handling the students' affairs division.

Consequently, the guiding research objective of the qualitative approach is to obtain the database regarding the students' character education and discover emergent themes along with their relationships (Merriam, 2009). Accordingly, Stringer (2007) recommends that the number and type of individuals participating in the research should be explicitly identified. Thus, the total number of participants who was involved in this research was 12; in-depth interviews (n = 3 and labelled as R1 to R3) and focus group (n = 9 and labelled as R4 to R12). The individuals provided their views and experiences about character education at the selected higher education institutions. One limitation in the sampling procedure was that the researcher could only gain access to those that stated they were interested in being interviewed.

Reliability refers to the degree to which a procedure gives consistent results. According to Cohen et al. (2007), in qualitative research, reliability can be regarded as a fit between what the researcher record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched. Cohen continues that researcher should address validity and reliability using different instruments. Triangulation is used in this research. Thus, the researcher also collected review of relevant documents from the informants. This includes list of student programmes, academic and extra-curricular calendars, brochures, web pages and reports. These documents formed secondary sources and provided a standard with which the collected primary data results were compared. In this research, data collected through in-depth interviews was triangulated with data from focus group and also data from document review and vice versa.

Analysis
The presented findings are translated results of the main interviews findings with the respondents.

Interviewer: How is character education being implemented at your institution?
R1 responded: Among the implementation strategies are conducting programs such as "Minggu Haluan Siswa" or orientation week for new students, Dhuha and Maghrib lectures and the added value uncalculated through the lecturers good behavior during their lecture. Apart from that there are also several programs that are organized on weekends and every Monday especially for students to improve themselves. Tarbiyah (for students) is also continuously delivered in collaboration with the Student Affairs Division.

R4 responded: We organize leadership courses, create a grouping program for all students, at least once a week (for night activities), hold a gotong-royong program once a month to clean the hostel, host a prestigious hostel contest, as a monthly contest, conduct a tour program to other institutions of higher learning. Sometimes, we conduct friendly programs involving both students and lecturers, hold monthly gatherings, prepare complaints and suggestions forms, use group WhatsApp for students voicing problems and suggestions for improvement, enhancing student associations. I term of motivation, we conduct "tazkirah" programs for all students, along with motivational programs such as camping, mountain climbing and other activities.

R6 responded: We believe the embedding of character education should be done in the students' lifestyle itself. Thus, we include character education in the teaching and learning activities by providing examples that reflect good character or moral values. We also make sure

that the teachers or lecturers are well-behaved and give good expression to the students. The students are also required to attend any activities at the mosque.

Interviewer: How does the implementation stated contributed towards the building of students' moral values?
R3 responded: The students' personality is changed towards being a student who follows the current rules and demands. Every movement is restricted by the "Syariah" and students must comply with every law set so that this implementation will continuously happen even if they are out of the institution.

R5 responded: We get good reviews from industries or companies regarding the students' attitude or behaviour after their industrial attachment. If the students conduct voluntary activities through the student associations, the institutions also continuously received great feedbacks regarding their attitudes and actions. This shows that the institutions are doing a great job at instilling the students' character.

Discussion
The researcher discusses the findings in the context of the following:

(1)   The philosophy of character education implemented at the HEIs

Most of the individuals involved in the study have an Islamic understanding of character as being associated with psychological states, traits, or attitudes of a person which have inculcated and developed into behaviour. Accordingly, the responses proposed that the HEIs had supported the development of students' character based on Islamic values. All the interviewed respondents confirm the importance of character education and agreed that the philosophy of character education being inculcated was in line with the Islamic educational philosophy. Consequently, the philosophy was also in line with the vision and mission of the HEIs which is to restore Islamic education for the sustainability of the society.

In addition, the Islamic educational philosophy emphasizes on habit formation, skill and personality as well as Islamic way of life (Ab Halim, 2000). In addition, Mohd Yusof, Ismail, Jawiah, Lilia, Zakaria, Ahmad Munawar, Ab Halim, Ibrahim Abu, Abrar, Shamsul Shah, Siti Maheran Ismail @ Ibrahim and Noor Atiqah Abd Rahman (2011) also pointed out that the main objective of Islamic education is the emphasis on practicing the knowledge of Islam in developing loyal and pious individuals who obey his/her creator. The objective is aligned based on the concepts of faith, devotion, and good deeds. These three concepts are concerned with holistic relations to produce a balance among four types of relations; the relation between man and his creator, the relation among humans, the relation between humans, animals and environment and finally, the relation between man and himself. All these practices will then be intertwined in the implementation of character education.

Table 2: Themes and subthemes of the study

Themes	Subthemes
Knowledge	Formal curriculum & visual display of character
Conditional	Culture of the institutions, rules and regulation of the institutions & events and ceremonies of the institutions.
Practices	Peer discussions and cooperative learning, mosque as the heart of daily activities & extracurricular activities, lifestyle & social activities.

(2) The implementation of character education

The next process is to map the implementation of character education at the selected higher education institutions. Data from the interviews suggest that the HEIs adopts a comprehensive approach of character education based on Islamic values as their philosophy, its vision, mission, and basic principles of character. The final results reframed around three main themes: knowledge; conditional; and practices. These three main thematic areas reflecting what emerged from the fieldwork supported the theory of character development that involves cognition, affect, as well as action to form habit (Ahmed, 1970; Ryan and Lickona, 1992).

The first theme involves formal curriculum. Although there is no specific program designed exclusively on character education, the respondents suggest that many subjects were designed with an aim of educating character such as Islamic theology, Qur'an, Hadith, and Fiqh. This is a common scenario in Islamic HEIs as the nature of Islamic HEIs is to integrate formal and Islamic educational system within an Islamic lifestyle system. Other methods of character education are reflected from how and what values the educators share with students within the curriculum of the subject. As such, math and science subjects could be implemented with a focus on the scientific facts and figures while preserving the integrity of character education through in class discussions and activities that employs Islamic concepts.

In term of visual display of character, research showed that character education delivered by in-house educators were more effective than that which is delivered by outside experts (Berkowitz, Bier, & Schaefer, 2003). Since educating is a moral act (Schwartz, 2008), therefore, students' attitudes are mainly affected by the character education strategies either being communicated or not being communicated in their overall education process. Schwartz (2007) have used words such as "fairness and caring" in describing the understanding that teaching is a moral act reflecting an educators' character.

The second theme evolved around the culture of the institutions. Educators' characters and values cannot be separated from their instructional skills (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008). The authors also stressed that values are ingrained in the institution life style through communications between educators, administrators and students According to Elias (2009), it is impossible for institutions to function without respect, responsibility, honesty, trust, positive relationships, caring, justice, integrity, and good citizenship (Elias, 2009). Therefore, the culture of the institutions has strong influence on students' character either intentionally or unintentionally. Accordingly, the conditional factors inculcated at the Islamic HEIs such as the embedded culture, rules, and regulations, and events and ceremonies were also mentioned as significant methods to increase supportive character education among students.

The third theme which progressed around peer discussions and cooperative learning were found to be important strategies in addition to the current teaching and learning instructions. The respondents stated entrepreneurship programs, training and industrial linkages with outside organizations, extracurricular activities and the use of mosque as the centre of students' daily activities as factors that enhance practice. Additionally, research had shown that inclusion was the most common form for adult role models (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). Therefore, students will acquire additional "hidden curriculum" just by observing how other people treat each other (Berkowitz & Schwartz, 2004).

Conclusion

The study described how Islamic education system was implemented and contributed to the character education. Knowledge, conditional, and practices emerged as three main themes. All these themes also supported the theory of character development. Although, Islamic education is very important in the teaching process to separate what is useful and what is damaging (Salasiah et al., 2014), research has shown that there is a gap between the idea of implementing character education and the actual action of doing of it. Furthermore, the emergence of the idea does not happen instantly, but is part of a long process of concern over phenomena that develops in the society.

Finally, this study proposes to impose a coherent character education among all Islamic HEIs to induce standardization. In a climate of academic accountability, the connection of character education and students achievement becomes increasingly vital. Accordingly, Durlak et al. (2011) argued that emotions and feelings derived from character education have significant effect on student habits and academic achievement. Thus, level of consciousness in integrating character education must be enhanced. Since academic achievement, social and emotional learning all contribute toward characteristics of future society, thus, the value of character education should also be established. Else, the society will be at lost, or worse, the quality of the future Muslims would be destroyed.

Acknowledgements

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