

A STUDY ON MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE TEACHING OF *AKHLĀQ*

Ab. Halim Tamuri
Zulkifli Mohd Yusoff

Introduction

The implementation of the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools since 1987 has been seen as one of the practical attempts to achieve the ideal of the Malaysian National Philosophy of Education. One of the main principles behind the formulation of the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools is the emphasis on noble values during the processes of teaching and learning. Muslim students are taught the Islamic principles of *akhlāq* in the subject of Islamic Education at the primary and secondary school levels. Therefore, Islamic Education in the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools plays a significant role in educating Muslim children; indeed, the subject is considered as one of the core subjects in the curriculum. This is seen as an attempt by the government to educate Muslim students with Islamic knowledge during the schooling period. It is hoped that this subject can provide at least the fundamental knowledge or the basic teachings of Islam (*farḍ al-'ain*) in the areas of *'ibādah*, *'aqīdah* and *akhlāq* as well as the ability to read the *Qur'ān*. Regarding this issue, Zawawi Ahmad states that:

Islamic education in the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools gives comprehensive emphasis on and attention to the strengthening of Islamic faith, the understanding of the Islamic characteristics and way of life, the guidance of good manners and virtuous ethics ... Islamic education emphasises the practical and experiential aspects.¹

Therefore, we may assume that, since all the Muslim students have formally been taught Islamic Education for nearly eleven years, they already have sufficient knowledge of *akhlāq* to practise it in their daily lives.

However, there are several problems regarding the behaviour of Muslim adolescents today. For example, some of them have ignored their fundamental duties as Muslims such as praying and fasting; behave like delinquents inside or outside schools; become interested in the *lepak* culture;² waste time at the snooker centres,

shopping complexes, cyber cafés, entertainment clubs or in the streets; are attracted to un-Islamic entertainment; watch or possess pornographic materials; and are also involved in drug abuse.³ The aim of this article is to present several findings regarding the students' perceptions on the teaching of Islamic Education, particularly the teaching of *akhlāq*, in their schools.

The Concept of *Akhlāq* in Islam

It may be useful to discuss the concept of *akhlāq* from an Islamic perspective. Literally, *akhlāq*, the plural of *khuluq*,⁴ is an Arabic term which is usually associated with human beings' moral and ethical character. Wehr explains *akhlāq* as the character of a person, his/her morals or morality.⁵ *The Mu'jam al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Miṣriyyah* gives meanings such as disposition, temperament, character, nature, morals and manners.⁶ In the early version of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the term *akhlāq* was defined as "the traits of man's moral character".⁷ An English term that may have a similar meaning is ethics.⁸ The term is also described by Mahbulul Islam as ethics or moral character.⁹ Lane has also explained that *akhlāq* is commonly used to signify morals and ethics.¹⁰ Ataullah Siddiqui maintains that "the comparable word for ethics in Islam is *akhlāq*, and this is construed as morality."¹¹

In classical Islam the term *khuluq*, the singular of *akhlāq*, was generally understood as a state of the soul which determines human actions, a state which itself is neither the soul nor the action.¹² For example, Miskawayh defines *khuluq* as "a state of the soul which causes it to perform its actions without thought or deliberation".¹³ Al-Ghazali is of a similar view: "*khuluq* is the firmly established condition of the soul that leads to actions easily without the need of any reflection or deliberation".¹⁴ Nasir Omar explains that character is the internal and hidden state of the soul, while action is its revelation. In other words, good *akhlāq* produces good actions and bad *akhlāq* causes bad actions.¹⁵ He also states that:

The soul is innate, while character is a state of the soul that causes it (the soul) to perform its actions ... For character is the internal and the hidden state of the soul, while action is its outward manifestation. Character is the inward cause, while the action is its outward consequence.¹⁶

Generally, *akhlāq* is regarded as evidence of the perfection of a believer's faith in Allah and His prophet. Al-Attas explains that the affirmation of the heart and mind, *lisān* (tongue) and *'amal* (deed) are prerequisites for the confirmation of faith in Islam.¹⁷ There are several Qur'ānic verses that repeatedly proclaim that faith (*īmān*) is followed by righteous deeds (*'amal ṣālih*). For example, Allah says:

By (the token of) time (through the ages), verily Man is in loss, except such as have faith and do righteous deeds, and (join together) in the mutual teaching of truth and of patience and constancy.¹⁸

And We indeed created man in the best of moulds. Then did We abase him (to be) the lowest of the low, except such as believe and do right deeds: for they shall have a reward unfailing.¹⁹

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) also says:

Righteousness is good morality, and wrongdoing is that which wavers in your hearts and which you dislike people finding out about.²⁰

There is nothing which is heavier upon the Balance than good character.²¹

From the above Qur'ānic passages and *ḥadīth*, we may understand that the faith of a person is not complete without good deeds. In other words, faith and good deeds exist side by side and there is a significant relationship between them. Sayyid Qutb in his commentary on *Sūrah al-'Aṣr* explains that:

Doing what is right is natural fruit of faith and spontaneous activity generated at the same time as the reality of faith settles inside human heart and mind. For faith is a positive and active concept which, once it has pervaded the human conscience, hastens to activate it to the outside world in good deeds.²²

In Islam, belief in Allah and His commands must be followed by appropriate exercises and actions. Syed Ali Ashraf insists that "*īmān* (faith) must be manifested through '*amal* (deeds).'"²³ Lotfi A. Sultan also maintains that "Righteous conduct must follow belief in Allah. Religion, worship, righteousness and all moral teachings are things to be lived, and not objects of lip-praise or lip service."²⁴ M.S. Khan similarly states that "faith (*īmān*) of a Muslim in Allah's command and the teachings of Islam is not enough, and should be backed up by righteous conduct."²⁵

Undoubtedly, there is an integrated relationship between knowledge, faith and action since they complement one another. Khan argues that these three aspects should be considered by all Muslims in their lives: "'*Ilm* [knowledge] is usually considered necessary for *īmān* (faith) and '*amal ṣāliḥ* (virtuous action)'"²⁶ Kamal Hassan also states that:

The Qur'ān teaches that human success and failure, gain and loss in the ultimate sense depend on right faith, right knowledge and right deeds integrated in a harmonious way. Right faith (*īmān*) and right deed ('*amal ṣāliḥ*) are inseparable.²⁷

This is why Sharif Khan claims that "Islamic education will not prepare persons who are good in bookish knowledge but poor in practical life."²⁸ Faith (*īmān*) and the knowledge of ethical principles must not remain in the individuals' intention and mind, but should be manifested in real actions. From the above discussion, we may summarise that *akhlāq* is a set of beliefs, rules and systems regarding the morality of human behaviour and action which determines whether a human's actions are morally right or wrong in Islam.

Methodology of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine secondary school students' perceptions on the teaching of *akhlāq* in their schools. To obtain the data, the researcher used semi-

structured interviews which were conducted on 27 students from several secondary schools. There are several advantages of semi-structured interviews. For example, Drever has discovered that, through semi-structured interviews, the researcher is able to obtain “a variety of information. Even within one interview you could gather factual information about people’s circumstances, collect statements of their preferences and opinions and explore in some depth their experience, motivations and reasoning.”²⁹ During the interviews the participants are also free “to answer more on their own terms than the standardised interview permits, but still provide a greater structure for comparability over that of the focused [or unstructured] interview.”³⁰ Another main advantage of this method is that the interviewee is given a wider opportunity to express his/her views but he/she is still in the context of the main questions and the interest of the research.³¹ The researcher, however, realised that there were several disadvantages of semi-structured interviews. For example, the process of collecting and analysing data consumes a great deal of time and money, there is the possibility of interviewer bias, the unwillingness of the respondent to be interviewed and the lack of his/her anonymity. These weaknesses, however, have been outweighed by its advantages and may be overcome or at least reduced by the researcher through careful preparation, proper training and implementation.

The student’s interview schedules had thirteen main questions. The main focuses of the questions in the interview schedule were on the concepts of *akhlāq*, the processes of teaching and learning, the school environment and the internal and external factors that might influence the students’ application of *akhlāq*. During the pilot study, the interview schedule was refined and revised by the researcher on the basis of the participants’ feedback and suggestions to improve validity and reliability. Before conducting the interview, the researcher put forward a clear statement of confidentiality and asked for honesty before answering questions to ensure the anonymity of participants and the validity of the information gathered.³²

The data from the interviews were manually analysed by the researcher. The researcher had to carefully listen to every conversation which had been recorded although this process would take a lot of time.³³ Drever recommends the use of selective or partial transcription in analysing the data from semi-structured interviews. The ability to preserve a lot of important information and minimize the cost and time for transcribing and reading the transcripts are the main advantages of the selective transcription method.³⁴ The researcher classified the data into relevant ideas, themes, categories or patterns based on a qualitative approach. After that, the data were carefully transcribed and analyzed. It may be useful to note that the data and transcriptions were also validated by four of his colleagues. Finally, after analysing all the data, the researcher summarised the findings and drew conclusions.

Findings and Discussion

The respondents of the study were 27 Muslim students selected from 21 secondary schools in the states of Selangor and Negeri Sembilan. By gender, they were almost similarly distributed: 14 were males and 13 were females. In terms of home location, 9 of the participants came from urban areas while 18 of them were living in rural areas. All the students were above 15 years of age. In terms of educational background, 16 of the participants studied in national secondary schools, 3 in technical secondary schools and the rest in religious secondary schools. A breakdown

by stream shows that 11 of the participants came from the science stream, 9 from the non-science stream, 3 were studying in the technical/vocational stream and 4 in the religious stream.

From the data of the interviews, we may divide the students' definitions of *akhlāq* into two main categories. The definitions of the majority of students of "a person who has *akhlāq*" were based on several important concepts in Islam, such as belief in Allah, avoiding sinful things, doing what is commanded and avoiding what is prohibited by Allah (s.w.t.). At the same time, they also emphasised the importance of performing righteous deeds and good actions. Student K,³⁵ for example, defined a person who has *akhlāq* as:

A person who follows all the commands of Allah and does what have been directed and avoids what have been prohibited.

Another example is the definition given by Student S, who stated that:

A person who has *akhlāq* is a person who has good characteristics, is not against the commands which have been ordered, has a high level of *akhlāq* and who also has belief in Allah (s.w.t.).

There were seven students who gave definitions which were not directly related to Islamic aspects, but merely focused on the implementation of noble behaviours and good actions. For instance, Student A perceived a person who has *akhlāq* as:

... a person who has courtesy and self-vision, respects other people and has good manners.

According to Student O, a person who has *akhlāq* is

... a person who has principles in his/her life and also practises good values in all things.

However, two of the students suggested that the meaning of a person who has *akhlāq* should include all people. As given by Student I, a person who has *akhlāq* is:

A person who has good ethics, personality, clothes, behaviour and also practices noble values, people who do not consider these things bad, not only for Muslims, but all peoples.

Student Z explained that persons who have *akhlāq* should have a good personality where:

their characteristics and behaviours are praised and respected, [and they are] not necessarily Muslims.

From these definitions we may understand that there are various categories of the students' definitions of "a person who has *akhlāq*". The findings from the

interviews suggest that most of the students tended to align their definitions with the main principles of Islam. They also emphasised that the implementation of good deeds and righteous actions must be based on Islamic ethical principles. Thus, it seems that most of the students also perceived that any Muslim will be recognised as a person who has good *akhlāq* if he/she is able to put the Islamic knowledge into action.

As discussed above, the knowledge of *akhlāq* should not only remain in the heart or as a theoretical or ideal concept, but should be implemented and practised in our lives. Therefore, the researcher asked the students whether or not the teaching of *akhlāq* in Islamic Education explained how to practice or exercise the Islamic principles of *akhlāq* which have been outlined in the syllabus.

Generally, the findings from the interviews showed that all students felt that their religious teachers had clearly explained how to practice the principles of *akhlāq*. Most of them, i.e. 21 students, were satisfied with the teaching since they believed that their teachers could demonstrate relevant and show good examples of *akhlāq* to them. They observed that their teachers had provided sufficient clarification regarding the principles of *akhlāq* during the lesson. Hence, they understood how to implement the knowledge of *akhlāq* that had been learnt. Some of the students also stated that their religious teachers were very receptive: they listened to the students' ideas or questions and tried to understand the problems they faced. From the findings, we may understand that these students felt that they received sufficient explanation on how to practice the Islamic principles of *akhlāq* from their teachers during lessons.

However, there were six students, i.e. students D, G, I, N, Q and V, who were not satisfied with the teachers' explanations. They found that sometimes they had difficulties in understanding some of the principles of *akhlāq* which had been taught to them. The students claimed that, due to time constraints, their teachers were only able to give brief clarification on some topics in the textbooks or syllabus. Misunderstanding might also be caused by the students, who themselves admitted that they were sometimes reluctant to ask their teachers questions although they realised that they had problems during the lesson. For instance, Student U claimed that the students' personal weaknesses, laziness and lack of motivation, were the reasons why some students were reluctant to ask for further explanations from their teachers. As a result, some students might not have a proper understanding regarding the Islamic principles of *akhlāq* and they were consequently unable to practise them correctly.

During the interviews, the students were also asked whether they were ready or prepared to implement the knowledge of *akhlāq* that had been learnt at their schools. All the students said that they were ready and prepared to implement the knowledge that had been taught to them, except in one case. In this case, the student admitted that he did not practise the knowledge of *akhlāq* that he had learnt because he was still uncertain and not confident that he could regularly implement the principles of *akhlāq* in his daily life.

These findings suggest that most of the students who were interviewed were aware of the importance of putting into practice all the knowledge of *akhlāq* that had been learnt in Islamic Education lessons. It seems that most of them intended to practise the knowledge of *akhlāq* in their daily lives. We may understand that in general the students understood that knowledge of *akhlāq* should not merely remain in the human mind, but must be manifested in their deeds and actions.

Generally, every teacher plays a significant role in developing the students' *akhlāq* during the processes of teaching and learning of all subjects of the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools; this is even more so in the subject of Islamic Education. During the interviews, the students were asked to explain their perceptions of the role of religious teachers. From the interviews, it is clear that all the students believed that religious teachers have several other responsibilities at school besides teaching and providing the students with knowledge of Islam. The majority of the students, i.e. 23 students, insisted that a religious teacher should be an exemplar or a role model to his/her students. In other words, the teacher should be able to demonstrate and teach good examples to them. The students also believed that they would be encouraged to observe or follow the examples shown by their teachers. For example, Student H said:

The *akhlāq* of a teacher will be followed and become an example to the students.

Student D insisted that:

Before a teacher could educate his/her students, he/she should firstly correct or improve him/herself.

In fact, the students said that they would criticise or condemn their teachers if the teachers were unable to become good models for them. The weaknesses of *akhlāq* among the teachers would discourage the students from respecting their teachers and lead them to ignore their advice. For example, a student stated that:

If a teacher is excellent in his/her teaching but lacks *akhlāq*, the students will not respect him/her.

Furthermore, 19 students expressed the view that every religious teacher should be able to interact or communicate with his/her students. The students felt that teachers were really honoured and appreciated if they could talk and exchange ideas with them. Based on their experience, the students believed that this was the suitable approach to understanding their problems and giving advice to them. In addition, the students hoped that other teachers could also teach and inculcate the sacred values of *akhlāq* in the processes of teaching and learning other subjects of the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools. There were also five students who considered their religious teachers as "second parents", since they received knowledge, advice and examples from them. For example, Student V explained that:

The teachers have significant roles in developing the students' *akhlāq* because in a day, the students spend more of their time at school. They (the students) would usually go out again in the afternoon, after returning home from school. They rarely have time with their parents. So, the teachers, who have become their second parents, have significant roles since they regularly observe the students at school.

The above findings seem to show that all the participants believed that their teachers, particularly the religious teachers, are responsible not only for providing knowledge but also for developing the students' *akhlāq*. The students also wanted their religious teachers to make all attempts at building good relations with them and to try to understand their problems. It seems that the religious teachers had made significant contributions to the development of students' *akhlāq*.

In general, the interviews which were conducted with 27 students provided useful information regarding the students' perceptions on the teaching and learning of *akhlāq* at their schools. During the interviews all the students were asked whether they felt satisfied with the teaching of *akhlāq* in Islamic Education (Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools). It was hoped that additional information regarding the teaching and learning of *akhlāq* could be obtained from the students. From the interviews, it was found that the majority of students were satisfied with the present methods of teaching and learning of *akhlāq*. This was due to a number of reasons. Based on their personal observations, most of the students felt that they could follow the teaching of *akhlāq* during the lesson.

Furthermore, there were some students who felt satisfied with the teaching and learning of *akhlāq* at their schools since they believed that there was a positive environment as well as religious activities in their schools that could encourage and assist them to exercise the knowledge of *akhlāq* that had been learnt. From the students' understanding, it seems that the positive school environment and religious activities also have a significant contribution to the processes of teaching and learning *akhlāq*.

The students' positive perceptions of their religious teachers also had a significant effect on their perceptions towards the teaching and learning of *akhlāq*. The existence of positive attitudes among the religious teachers was another reason why the students felt satisfied with the teaching and learning of *akhlāq*. Some of the students observed that their religious teachers were always willing or likely to give their advice or assistance if they faced any difficulty or problems during or even after the lesson. One student felt satisfied with the teaching and learning of *akhlāq* in Islamic education because of the good examples and attitudes demonstrated by his religious teacher. The student said that:

Only *ustaz* (religious teacher) can teach us *akhlāq* ... *Ustaz* is a very good [example] to be followed.

However, the study also reveals that there were five students who were dissatisfied with the teaching of *akhlāq* at their schools. There were several reasons given by the students for this. One of the main reasons for the dissatisfaction among the students was related to the teaching methods used by some religious teachers. The students observed that there were some teachers who merely used textbooks during the lesson and the scope of their teaching were usually restricted to the use of these textbooks. For example, Student R criticised the teaching methods used by his religious teacher. He stated that:

Every time he entered [the classroom to teach], he just opened the textbook ... he only read (the textbook).

Student N also claimed that his teacher did not try to relate the contents of the lesson of *akhlāq* to contemporary issues:

The contents of the teaching of *akhlāq* were insufficiently explained.
They should be related with contemporary issues.

The study reveals that some of the students felt that teachers sometimes did not sufficiently clarify the contents of the lesson. A student claimed that:

Sometimes, I felt dissatisfied because immediately after a brief lecture, we were asked to write down the main points. So, we didn't really understand the notes and what was explained (by the teacher).

Insufficient time for the lesson of *akhlāq* is also another reason why some students felt disappointed. The students discovered that they did not have sufficient opportunities to ask questions during the lesson and they even faced difficulties when asking questions outside the classroom. Student L, for example, stated that:

Since there were many students, not all of us had the chance to ask questions. Sometimes, we did not have any chance at all. The teacher could not entertain our questions outside the classroom since she had other classes to attend. So, we did not have the time to ask questions to her ... So, we felt dissatisfied.

Moreover, there was a student who stated that she felt dissatisfied with the teaching and learning of *akhlāq* because of her teacher's unapproachable attitude. She stated that:

When we wanted to ask questions to the teacher outside the classroom, sometimes the teacher said 'Why didn't you ask in the class?' ... How could we ask questions during the lesson since we would be scolded! (if we do that).

During the interviews, the students were also asked to identify any major problems they faced during the teaching of *akhlāq*. Based on the students' answers in the interviews, it was found that the majority of students claimed that they did not face difficulties in the teaching and learning of *akhlāq*. The majority of students said that they could follow and understand the teaching of *akhlāq* given by their religious teachers. In general, most of the students were satisfied with the approaches and methods that were used by the teachers during the lesson. Moreover, the students stated that the majority of religious teachers could provide suitable and sufficient explanation regarding the Islamic principles of *akhlāq*.

However, there were six of the interviewed students who claimed that they experienced several problems during the teaching and learning of *akhlāq*. They gave several examples of the difficulties. Five of the students said that sometimes they were unable to understand the contents of the lesson since they did not receive adequate or clear explanations from their teachers. In addition, one student

felt that his religious teacher failed to recognize the differences of academic ability among his students. Thus, inadequate explanation from the teachers was one of the problems faced by the students during the teaching and learning of *akhlāq*.

Another problem during the lesson was the lack of interest among the students themselves. There were three students who admitted that sometimes they did not give their attention to the lesson since they were bored with it and even slept during it. Based on their responses, it was found that ineffective teaching methods used by some religious teachers and personal weaknesses among the students themselves, such as laziness and lack of motivation, were the reasons why they were uninterested in the lesson of *akhlāq*. This problem was also compounded by negative attitudes among the teachers themselves. For example, there was a student who observed that his teacher sometimes failed to answer questions from the students during the lesson. These are some examples of problems faced by the students during lessons on *akhlāq*.

In the interviews, the students were specifically asked about their perceptions on religious activities which were conducted at their schools. Generally, all the students believed that the religious activities at their schools gave a lot of benefit to them, especially in the context of their *akhlāq*. More than half of the students, i.e. 14 students, who were interviewed said they felt satisfied with the existing religious activities and programmes at their school. However, they also suggested that the regularity of religious activities in their schools could be increased.

There were 11 students who stated that they felt dissatisfied with the regularity of religious activities at their schools. They felt that the religious activities at their school such as talks, religious classes, forums, religious camping, daily *tadhkirah*, and Islamic shows and entertainment, were insufficient. The students from some schools stated that the religious activities were occasionally conducted in their schools. For example, two students from the national secondary schools, i.e. Students C and F, claimed that the religious activities were only conducted once or twice a year at their schools. As a result, they had very few opportunities or chances to attend these religious programmes.

There were two students who were unable to give their comments on religious activities at their schools. This was because the students, i.e. Students A and Q both from the national secondary schools, claimed that they did not attend any religious activities which had been conducted at their schools. From the above findings, we may understand that not all the students, especially those who were in the national secondary schools, could attend the school's religious programmes.

School regulations are another important aspect which is related to the teaching of *akhlāq* at school. From the interviews all the students agreed that the existing school regulations were important since they significantly contributed to the development of students' *akhlāq*. Basically, all the students understood and accepted the positive function of school regulations in the development of their *akhlāq*. From the interviews, it was found that the majority of students (22 students) said that they were satisfied with the implementation of present school regulations. Based on their observation and personal experience, no major negative elements or weaknesses were identified by them; they felt that the existing regulations were adequate for the development of their personality.

Generally, the students also believed that the existing school regulations could

develop their discipline, build their personality, control them from doing bad things, reduce disciplinary problems as well as educate them for their own future. Despite the strictness of some parts of the school regulations, the students realised the significance of school regulations to their *akhlāq*. Student E explained:

From my point of view, the strict school regulations will guard the students' *akhlāq* and make them responsible for themselves. The strict and appropriate regulations are definitely good. Without discipline, it is impossible for a person to excel. Without discipline, there will be no progress in life.

Sometimes, the problems in the implementation of school regulations were caused by the negative attitudes and misunderstanding among the students. For example, Student AA stated that:

Actually, there were disputes between school regulations and students' behaviours which were basically caused by the students' misunderstanding.

This is why a few students intentionally disregarded or opposed the school regulations by having untidy or improper appearance, not doing their homework, coming late to school and playing truancy and smoking. It seems that the problems here were caused not by the school regulations or teacher, but by the unwillingness or ignorance of the students who refused to comply with the regulations which were introduced by the schools.

However, there were some students who were dissatisfied with the existing school regulations at their schools. Five students claimed that there were some aspects of the regulations which were very strict. The students also stated that some teachers in their schools were too rigid in enforcing the school regulations and sometimes they were also quick to execute the disciplinary actions against the students. Therefore, the students urged that teachers should investigate and try to understand the students' real problems before taking any action against them. As argued by Student D:

Despite of the strictness of the school regulations, there should be flexibility and discretion. It was because sometimes we often made mistakes unintentionally.

Another negative element also related to the school regulations that the students identified was their weak, and often inconsistent, enforcement. For example, the inflexibility of certain parts of the regulations was seen by student M as a negative element in her school. She felt that certain aspects of regulations in her school were too strict:

There were certain aspects of the school regulations which were extremely strict. For example, we were asked to wear sandals/wooden clogs in the school toilets. If we used our shoes in the toilet, the shoes would be seized and burned.

A mild form of discrimination against students was also noted. According to Student Z, some of the teachers obviously favoured certain students, particularly the school prefects. Thus, the inconsistency in the enforcement of school regulations among the teachers was seen by the students as a negative element in their school.

The students also felt dissatisfied because there were several weaknesses in the implementation of the school regulations. For example, disagreement among the teachers themselves in implementing school rules was the reason why Student F was dissatisfied with the school regulations in her school. She stated that:

Sometimes, it was caused by the teachers' mistakes/weaknesses. When we did some things wrong, some of the teachers did not bother ... However, the others would become angry [and] they started to shout at all students. There were some teachers who disregarded or overlooked [the students' discipline]. The teachers themselves were inconsistent in implementing the school regulations.

Another example of weakness was the lack of meeting and co-operation among the teachers and school prefects. This problem was raised by Student W who made a complaint regarding the lack of co-ordination in the implementation of the school regulations in his school. This was the personal experience of the student, where he was also directly involved in the enforcement of school regulations since he was a school prefect.

During the interview, every student was also asked to identify any element that could influence the students' *akhlāq* positively or negatively. All the students had identified several positive elements which existed at their schools. In general, the students acknowledged that the presence of religious and co-curricular activities, the enforcement of school regulations, teachers' attitudes and the school environment were the positive elements that significantly contributed to the development of students' *akhlāq*.

For example, the majority of the students felt that religious activities, such as lectures, circle discussions, seminars, competitions, forums, motivation camps, daily *tadhkirah*, and religious classes could promote a positive environment at school as well as encourage religious consciousness among the students. The introduction of school regulations was also seen as an important factor that could contribute to the development of the students' *akhlāq*. The students believed that the school regulations could educate and encourage them to become good human beings as well as prevent them from being badly behaved.

Nevertheless, there were also several negative elements in the school that could obstruct the development of students' *akhlāq*. The majority of the students (22 students) who were interviewed claimed that the obvious negative element in their schools were the unsound attitudes and improper behaviour shown by some of their own deviant peers. In general, there were several types of negative behaviour which were identified by the students. Examples of these are forming cliques; damaging school property; displaying aggressive behaviour; disturbing and quarrelling with their friends; opposing, ignoring, mocking and sometimes attacking their teachers; smoking; stealing; ignoring or overlooking the importance of education; playing truancy; running away from school and hostel and exposing their *'awrah* (part of the body that should be kept covered for modesty). Although only a few students were

involved in these activities, some students were afraid that these negative attitudes could directly or indirectly influence other students. In fact, a student stated that sometimes he was apprehensive about the students who had a bad attitude. Student A claimed that:

Many bad students had very negative behaviour. I was afraid to mix with them.

There were more serious cases in some schools. Student N, for example, stated that:

Most of the Fifth Form students behaved badly. They liked to do bad things such as bullying other pupils, threatening them and asking money from them.

The above findings show that most of the students criticised the bad behaviour displayed by a few of their colleagues; these were seen as the significant negative elements that could obstruct the development of students' *akhlāq*.

Another negative element which could obstruct the development of students' *akhlāq* was the teachers' improper behaviour. This issue was raised by 10 students who felt dissatisfied with the behaviour shown by a few teachers at their schools. As revealed by the students, there were some teachers who took inappropriate disciplinary actions against the students such as scolding and embarrassing the students publicly. Some of them also displayed a negative attitude towards the students: they were reluctant to answer questions asked by them, rejected the students' opinions, said unkind things, exhibited lack of co-operation and smoked in front of the students. Student F claimed that:

There were few teachers who had ill-feeling towards their students. So, we felt insulted. Although it was a small mistake, it would spread to everybody.

In addition, Student I stated that:

There were some teachers who could not co-operate with other teachers. When we sat together with these teachers, they would say bad things about other teachers. It was not a good thing!

Student L gave another example:

The teachers sometimes gave or taught bad examples such as lying. Sometimes, they said that they wanted to attend [our class], but they did not. Then, if they came, after a lengthy waiting, they nagged and became angry. There were two or three teachers (who had this bad attitude).

Student Q also criticised the attitudes of a few teachers in his schools. He stated:

In my view, many of the teachers did not respect the students. Their comments (towards students) did not have any basis. They liked to make bad statements (about students) in public. The problem is that we are still young and we can get upset easily. They (teachers) had always expressed their criticisms/comments (about us) blindly and publicly. It hurt our feelings.

During the interviews, the researcher also tried to obtain further information from the students regarding the influence of several external factors, such as mass-media, peers, community and entertainment centres on their *akhlāq* and personality. The students were asked to specify the main factors that could affect the development of their *akhlāq* negatively. It was found that there were six students who claimed that external negative factors did not affect their *akhlāq* and daily activities. These students claimed that, as far as they were concerned, they could refrain from doing bad things and that they were able to protect themselves from the influence of negative external factors.

However, the majority of the students (21 students) had identified several factors that could negatively influence their *akhlāq* and personality. There were 18 students who stated that the problem of *akhlāq* among the students was largely caused by their own peers or friends from outside schools. This was because they had close relations with their friends and they felt that their friends and peers could fully understand their desires as youngsters. For example, Student G stated that:

My peers are very important to me. They have strong influence on us to do certain things because we are very close to them, and they also understand our interests.

Some of the students also felt more comfortable with their friends since they had similar interests. Student L, for example, acknowledged that:

I pick my friends. Since we are teenagers, we are more interested in enjoyable or leisurely things.

These findings seem to show that most of the students were aware of the negative influence of their deviant friends on their *akhlāq*. They knew that their deviant peers could incite them to bad activities as well as preventing them from doing good things.

Moreover, there were 9 students who claimed that certain parts of the mass-media, particularly television and entertainment magazines, had negative effects on their *akhlāq*. For instance, the students said that some of the artists and celebrities who appeared on television programmes or in magazines were wearing sensuous dresses and demonstrated improper actions or behaviour. They also noticed that most of the entertainment magazines displayed un-Islamic pictures, behaviours and life styles. Some of the students realised that the programmes on television could sometimes delay them in fulfilling their religious duties. Student O admitted that:

I like to watch Chinese soap operas from 7.00pm to 8.00pm. So, I am always late for the Maghrib prayer.

This is why a student said that she was dissatisfied with the mass media:

Concerning the mass media today, I don't understand why it inclines to the negative direction. It doesn't implement its real functions.

Thus, the students believed that the presence of negative elements in the mass media could disturb the development of their *akhlāq*. Another negative factor that could influence the students' *akhlāq* was the existence of entertainment centres, such as video games centres, karaoke and snooker centres, cyber cafes and cinemas. The students found that these entertainment centres could attract and incite them and their colleagues to do negative things, such as playing truancy and smoking.

Conclusion

In general, the findings show that most of the students defined *akhlāq* in accordance with the main principles and teachings of Islam. They also emphasised that the implementation of good deeds and righteous actions must be based on Islamic ethical principles. They believed that there is a significant and integrated relationship between the knowledge of *akhlāq* and their actions in their daily lives. Most of the students were also satisfied with the processes of teaching and learning of *akhlāq* as well as the roles played by their religious teachers in their schools and they did not face major difficulties during the lesson. The ability to follow the lesson as well as the teachers' positive attitudes and examples were the other main reasons for their satisfaction with the lesson. However, there were two major issues raised by some students which had left them dissatisfied. These were unattractive teaching methods and insufficient time. Despite the few weaknesses in terms of the implementation and enforcement of school regulations, most of the students agreed that school activities, religious activities and school regulations had significant contributions to the development of their *akhlāq*. Generally, religious activities, co-curricular activities, school regulations, teachers' positive attitudes and behaviours and a positive school environment were the major factors that had a positive influence on the students' *akhlāq*. On the other hand, there were several major factors that had a negative effect on the *akhlāq* of the students, i.e. the unsound influence of peers, whether inside or outside the school, negative attitudes among some teachers and inappropriate content in the mass media.

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