

# **An Investigation on the Perspectives of Parents on the Impact of the Western Teachers' Values and Cultures on Developing their Children's Character and Morality**

**Salam Omar**

PhD, Abu Dhabi University, UAE

Salikhaled@hotmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the Western teachers' values and cultures on the Emirati students' character and morality in the international schools that implement the British curriculum from the Emirati parents' point of view. As this study followed a mixed method approach, a total of forty nine parents answered the questionnaire of the study in the quantitative part. While in the qualitative section, ten Emirati parents were interviewed in semi structured interviews to get deeper insights. Quantitative data suggested that the majority of parents believed that parents are the best teachers of character (mean of 1.55) and social skills are more important for their children than academic skills (mean of 1.73).

The qualitative data revealed that the UAE national students are influenced by the values and the cultures of their Western teachers in various ways. According to the Emirati parents, Western teachers who act as role models for their children have influenced their children positively as well as negatively. The results also demonstrated that there is an immense gap in the Western teachers' knowledge about the UAE culture as their Western values and cultures are different from those in the UAE; therefore, this situation needs to be underlined to ensure that the Western teachers' teaching and practices do not contradict what the Emirati students are expected to learn.

**KEYWORDS:** character, character education, Western teachers, values, culture

## Introduction

Schools usually aim at providing students with good education, improving their academic success and having less behavior issues. Character education can be used as an effective tool to achieve those targets. It is worth noting that before defining character education, one should realize that it can be referred to, in different terms, such as moral reasoning, moral values education, religious education, civic education and the teaching of virtues. Conversely, it can be seen that educators and parents believe that it is crucial to educate children to adhere to the morals and values of their societies. Henceforth, one of the most important aims of schools is to develop children's character, intellectually and morally through values-based atmosphere in order to be good moral members in their communities.

The current mixed methods study explored the opinions of the Emirati parents on the effect of the Western teachers' perspectives and cultures on the Emirati students' morality and character development. Basically, there exists a large percentage of Emirati children attending international schools that follow different international curricula, mixing with a variety of students from different backgrounds, different nationalities and different cultures. In addition, they are taught by Western teachers coming from various Western countries who are grounded in their own values and cultures. As a result of this situation, many questions begin to emerge that need to be answered;

- a) Are the Emirati students in the international schools, directed by Western people, getting the right moral education and guidance?
- b) What kind of values do the Western teachers teach them?
- c) Do the Western teachers' backgrounds and cultures influence the UAE youth's morality?
- d) To what extent do they influence the UAE children? Are the Western teachers' effects positive or negative?
- e) Do these teachers have sufficient awareness of the UAE culture, heritage and values?
- f) Are all Western teachers good role models to be followed by the UAE national students?

The UAE leaders believe that education is a fundamental element for economic and social development; therefore, attention has been drawn to all issues related to education, mainly the students. On the other hand, as previously mentioned, the Arab's perspectives on the Western culture vary from one to another, including the UAE society in which some of them encourage the Western cultures' influence in general

and see it as a tool for development while others consider it as a threat to their own country's values, heritage and culture (Mrabet 2000).

Currently, Emirati parents increasingly opt for international private schools, due to their good reputation. Moreover, fluency in English language is highly appreciated as it is one of the UAE market requirements as it is mainly the language of communication in most places of work. In international schools, teachers from the West are the majority with a small number of Arab teachers are hired to only teach three core subjects. All the rest of the subjects are directed toward the type of curriculum that schools follow. On the converse side, Emiratis are keen on raising their children in an Islamic Arabic school environment which unfortunately is not provided by most of the international schools. Interestingly, the Islamic Arabic values in the international schools are only taught through the three core subjects and the rest of other subjects are taught in English and directed toward the British curriculum.

### **The Role of Parents in Character/Moral Education**

Although a teacher's significant role in character education is paramount, the parents' role is not of less importance. According to Henson (2001), "parents and teachers are united, but their roles are disjointed in the development of character" (p. 50). Since the number of children with behavioral problems and other attitude issues continues to be on the rise, character education is becoming a necessity (Brannon 2008, 59). However, the most profound effect on children's character comes firstly from their families. Most of the disruptive behaviors such as bullying are affected or caused by the students' family background, economic circumstances and lack of parental guidance (Barton 2004; Haycock 2006). Berkowitz and Bier (2005), emphasized that in order to develop the personality of a child, the role of his parents should be effective. It is believed that the major influence on children's characters comes from the family and the surrounding environment including, social, behavioral, moral and even academic development (Berkowitz & Grych 1998; Lickona 1983). It can be seen that children develop their character through living in a loving and caring family that teaches them the core values, for example, the meaning of love through experiencing different types of love that they experience within their families.

### **Methodology**

This study followed a mixed method approach in which the quantitative findings support the ideas of the qualitative part as they explain figures and implications that are produced quantitatively.

## The Settings

Since the main aim of this research is to investigate the influence of Western teachers' cultures on Emirati students' character development from the perspectives of the Emirati parents, three British Schools in Abu Dhabi were sampled to collect the data required for this study. The targeted schools were K-12 schools, including kindergarten to grade twelve. The schools selected are broadly homogeneous as in addition to the local students; 60% of students were from different nationalities such as, American, British, Asian, French, Canadian and German.

## The research instrument

The data of the mixed method study was collected from a variety of sources including, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews for 49 Emirati parents who have children in the international schools implementing the British curriculum.

## The Parent's Questionnaire (CEQ-P)

To determine the perceptions of parents towards the development of their children's character, a written questionnaire was developed. This questionnaire is called the Character Education Questionnaire Parent (CEQ-P). This questionnaire was adapted from Mathison (1998), the (School as a Caring Community Profile (SCCP) developed by T. Lickona and M. Davidson (2003) and research by Milson and Mehlig (2003). CEQ-P contained 26 statements and a four point Likert Scale was used: important =1; somewhat important=2; not important=3; not sure=4.

The questionnaire investigated various components such as:

- What character traits the parents viewed as most important.
- The parents' perceptions of CE in their children's school. Parental support for the character and moral development of their children.
- The parents' perceptions of their children's teacher's efficacy in teaching and modelling the right character.

A consent form was provided to the participants to sign before answering the questionnaire's questions. The questionnaire was translated into Arabic to make it easier for the participant who did not understand English and to avoid any possible misconstruction.

## Semi Structured Interviews:

The researcher interviewed 10 parents in semi structured interviews and asked them about their opinions with regards to the effects of the Western teachers' backgrounds and cultures on their children's character and morality.

## Data Analysis and Findings

*Parents:* As concerned parents who participated in this survey, the gender distribution was fairly balanced with females accounting for 51% and males accounting for 49% as seen in Table 1

**Table 1: Gender (parents)**

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	24	49%
Female	25	51%
Total	49	100.0

A significant majority of parents who participated in this study speak Arabic at home (87.8%) with only 12.8 per cent of them speaking English (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Language Spoken at Home**

Language	Frequency	Percent
Arabic	43	87.8
English	6	12.2
Total	49	100.0

Most of the parents who participated in this questionnaire were either mother or father representing 91.8 percent of all participants. Step mothers and fathers accounted for just 6.1 percent of parents who participated in the survey as in Table 3.

**Table 3: Parent Student Relationship**

Relationship	Frequency	Percent
Mother/Father	45	91.8
Stepmother/Stepfather	3	6.1
Other	1	2.0
Total	49	100.0

**Table 4: Level of Parent’s Education**

Level of education	Frequency	Percent
Less than High school	7	14.3
High school	11	22.4
College degree	26	53.1
Masters	3	6.1
Others	2	4.1
Total	49	100.0

In terms of parent’s education, the majority of parents had at least a college degree. This represented 53.1 percent of all participants. Parents with only high school level of education accounted for 22.4 per cent as seen in Table 4.

One of the sub-questions for this study was to evaluate Emirati parents’ perception of the influence of Western teachers. Incidentally, this paper evaluated the extent to which parents considered character traits to be important to their children, their role in character education, what they consider to be the role of teachers’ in students’ character education, and the role of the larger environment in the in the education of character.

In the second part of the questionnaire, parents were asked to respond to a number of statements on a 5 point Likert scale. Items 14 and 15 were recorded to make these positive. Principal Components Factor Analysis with an oblimin rotation revealed 2 factors accounting for 56.27% of the total variance. The loadings of the items are shown in Table 5. Reliability analyses were performed on the items as shown in the above table. An initial Cronbach alpha of 0.39 was obtained on the “Me” scale. Items 17, 26, 10 and 13 were removed to obtain an alpha of 0.64. The remaining items were summed to create a scale called “Me”. An initial Cronbach alpha of 0.29 was obtained in the school scale. Items 25 and 22 were removed to obtain an alpha of 0.62. The remaining items were summed to create a scale called “School”.

**Table 5: PCA loading of items onto two factors (parents)**

Factor 1 “Me”	Factor 2 “School”
6. Parents are the most important teachers for character development	11. I leave the moral education of my children to the Islamic Studies teacher.

7. I believe social skills are more important than academic skills	14. My children are having trouble getting along with other children.
8. I teach my children to respect all people.	15. My children often get into fights with other children.
9. I tell my children, "If someone hits you, you may hit them back."	22. The teachers in this school model the character traits (like respect and caring) they want the children to learn.
10. My family sits together to eat dinner and talk three or more times each week	23. When I walk into my children's school, it feels inviting and safe.
12. I think children imitate what they see on television.	24. Teachers in this school seem to like each other and help each other.
13. I am able to control my children's behavior	25. Teachers in this school show respect for the parents.
16. I encourage my children to be tough. I think it is important.	
17. I sometimes spank my children for bad behavior.	
18. I model the character traits I want my children to have.	
19. I believe children need character education in school.	
20. I think learning about good character (such as respect and responsibility) will improve my children's grades.	
21. Parents participated (or would likely) participate in character education training activities.	
26. I volunteer at my children's school.	

## Preference of Traits

The extent to which parents considered the importance of certain traits to their children were evaluated. The following Likert scale was used to calibrate responses: 1-Important, 2- Somehow important, 3-Not important, 4-Not Sure.

Table 6 below shows the extent to which parents considered the above character traits to be important. As expected, a majority of the parents considered most of the above character traits as either very important or important (with means of 1.2 or less). There were several exceptions though with character traits such as caring (with means of 1.10), integrity (with means of 1.24), hope (with means of 1.18) and justice with means of 1.12) registering as 'not important' and or 'not sure' by a small minority of parents.

**Table 6: The importance of traits according to parent**

	Mean	SD
Caring	1.10	0.368
Empathy	1.20	0.41
Honesty	1.00	0.00
Kindness	1.22	0.42
Perseverance	1.08	0.28
Respect	1.00	0.00
Humility	1.06	0.24
Citizenship	1.04	0.20
Fairness	1.00	0.00
Integrity	1.24	0.66
Love	1.102	0.31
Self-control	1.18	0.39
Obedience	1.08	0.28
Courage	1.10	0.31
Hope	1.18	0.63
Justice	1.12	0.60
Loyalty	1.8	0.28
Responsibility	1.04	0.20
Tolerance	1.08	0.28
Trustworthy	1.08	0.28

## Parents and Character Education

Table 6 below displays how parents perceive their role in the process of character education. The questionnaire was coded as follows: 1-Important, 2-Somewhat Important, 3-Not Important, 4- Unsure; therefore, the lower the mean the higher the level of parental agreement to the statement and the extent to which it is considered

important. The majority of parents were of the opinion that: parents are the best teachers of character (mean of 1.55), social skills are more important than academic skills (1.73). Majority of them also teach their children how to respect their peers and adults. With regards to other variables, there was generally a moderate level of agreement and attachment of importance. Families converging together in the family house was moderate at (1.94); similarly, ability to control children's behavior (1.88) and teachers being able to model character generally received average agreement from parents. The majority of parents disagreed with the idea that they taught children how to revenge (2.90). The same was also recorded for variables such as: children having trouble with other children (2.61) and children getting into fights (3.10). Similarly, majority of parents also disagreed with the notion that they taught their children to be threatening (3.06) or even smacked their children (2.59). They also disagreed with the idea of leaving the teaching of morality only for Islamic studies (2.92) as in Table 7.

**Table 7: Parents Character education**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Parents are most important teachers of character	1.55	0.50
Social skills more important than academic	1.73	0.91
Teach children respect	1.65	0.48
If anyone hits you hit him back	2.90	1.04
Family sits together to eat	1.94	0.77
Leave moral to Islamic studies	2.92	0.84
Children imitate television	1.79	1.15
Able to control children behavior	1.88	1.18
Children have trouble with others	2.61	1.15
Children get into fights	3.10	1.08
Encourage children to be tough	3.06	0.97
Spank children	2.59	1.31
I model character	1.69	0.80
Children need character education	1.80	0.96
Character educ. Improves grades	1.46	0.50

Parents participate in character training	1.41	0.50
Teachers model good character	1.91	1.75
Children school feels safe and inviting	1.63	0.93
Teachers like each other	1.51	0.87
Teachers show respect for parents	1.41	0.50
I volunteer at my child's school	1.88	1.42

## The Interviews

Ten parents of students studying in the three sample schools were interviewed to investigate their perceptions on the Western teachers' impact on their children's morality. The interviewees' responses and perspectives were classified into three categories; parents' perceptions on the school's effectiveness, their perception of the teachers' role in developing their children's character and their role as parents in enhancing their children's morality and good character.

## Summary of the Findings

The research question aimed at the parents' perceptions on the influence of the teachers from the West on their children's morality and character development. Forty parents agreed that they have the biggest role in developing their children's character; this opinion supports the quantitative result which showed that most of them supported the opinion that parents are the best teachers of character (mean of 1.55). Parents were in congruence that teachers' values and background have a major influence on students' morality and character development. Furthermore, they expressed their discontent of the fact that their children are gradually westernized as a result of the teachers' impact; therefore, for the parents, some of the teachers from the West could not be considered the right role models for their children.

## A Thematic Discussion of the Major Findings

A thematic discussion of the research findings was conducted to explore the perspectives of the Emirati parents on the impact of the Western teachers on the Emirati children in the international schools.

◦ *Emirati Parents Perceptions of the Influence of the Western Teachers on Children's Character*

The discussion of the findings pertinent to parents' perspectives was addressed from two aspects; the first one is the positive effect resulted from the positive influence of the Western teachers' values on their children and the second is the negative influence. Through answering the parents' questionnaires, the question that stated that, "teachers are able to model character" generally received an average agreement from parents. On the other hand, findings of the analyses of the interviews showed that three parents expressed their satisfaction toward the Western teachers' positive effect on their children. They believed that their children had gained good values and morals as a result of their influence; such as respect, responsibility, and self-discipline, which are highly required in any society. Therefore, they became better individuals with superior qualities.

On the other hand, seven participants were unhappy with the Western teachers being their children's role models because their perception was that these teachers had different values and dissimilar cultures to what they have in the UAE. These parents were very adamant and simply believed that teachers from the West could not understand that the local Emirati culture since it is different from the Western culture. This finding is supported by Ladson-Billings' (1994) study in which this author found that teachers who do not have cultural awareness usually deal with all students as if they are all the same, ignoring their cultural differences, so they do not consider cultural sensitivity as an important component of their job as teachers.

◦ *Parents' Role in Students' Moral /Character-Building*

In terms of the parents' role in helping their children build and develop good character, the results of the study revealed that the way of living is changing gradually; therefore, most of the parents do not spend enough time with their children. Due to the fact that parents are busy in their work, they do not sit down as a family to eat with their children family more than two to three times a week. This situation indicates that the time that parents provide their children with guidance and supervision is inadequate. In this study, findings gleaned from the analyzed data revealed that children spend a lot of time watching television (TV) and playing computer games instead of spending their time with parents. This, unfortunately, leads to a discord between children and families. Parents should pay additional consideration to this important matter and they should not forget that they are the first educators and the first role models of their children; hence, they have to spend ample time with their children to provide

guidance and supervision. The findings of the parents' questionnaires revealed that 41 parents believe that they are the best teachers of character, with a mean of (1.55), as they believe that social skills are more important than academic skills (1.73). Similarly, it was also revealed that the parents' ability to control their children's behavior is moderate at (1.87). Conversely, there seems to be a contradiction between what the teachers said and what the parents said. Teachers claimed that for cultural reasons, parents teach their children to hit back if they are struck, while 44 of parents disagreed with the idea that they teach children revenge, at (2.90).

Findings of the study also revealed that the parents were unhappy with the fact that they sometimes feel completely ignored from their children's schools; therefore, they cannot be involved in their children's school's activities. Taking into consideration the importance of having a solid relationship between teachers and parents, schools should discuss issues related to children's development with the parents. Schools and parents should draw a shared vision of working on certain ethical values collectively, to help students reinforce positive character. In fact, there is an agreement among all of them that these schools do not provide them with adequate opportunities to be involved in school's activities that help in fostering positive character among their children; they believe that the problem of the lack of communication between the school and the parents can be solved if schools pay enough attention to translating the school's letters and news into Arabic.

### **Implications for Practice**

Parents believe that not all teachers from the West can act as good role models for their children. Therefore, they have suggested that teachers should receive continuous induction and orientation on the Emirati culture, so their acts do not contradict the UAE values. There is a lack of parental involvement in their children's school life. Thus, parents' should be more engaged in activities arranged for their children. They should cooperate with the teachers to promote children's character in a positive way.

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