Enhancing Adolescents’ Prosocial attitudes and Prosocial behaviors through the implementation of a Research based comprehensive Character Education programme

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Abstract: The objective of the current study was to design an effective Character education programme by creating workable classroom strategies encompassing the Cognitive, Emotional and Behavioral aspects of Character Development, and to investigate the effectiveness of the constructed intervention programme on various dimensions of Prosocial Attitudes and behaviors of female Adolescent students belonging to Matriculation schools. The final sample comprised of 80 adolescent girls belonging to eleventh standard, of which 40 were ascribed to the experimental group and 40 served as the control group. The Experimental group was then subjected to the Character Education Intervention programme for a period of three months. The final post test scores were compared to observe significant differences, thereby evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention programme. Results indicate students showing significant improvements from the pre-test to the post test in their Pro-social attitudes, by practicing a range of prosocial values and in their Pro-social behaviors, by increasingly engaging in ethical behaviors.

I. INTRODUCTION

Character education is an inclusive term embracing all aspects of how schools, related social institutions and parents can support the positive character development of children and adults. The term character includes the emotional, intellectual and moral qualities of a person or group as well as the demonstration of these qualities in prosocial behavior. Relevant virtues include honesty, justice and fairness, trustworthiness, responsibility, respect, altruism, patience, perseverance, appreciation of diversity, and courage. The related development of moral reasoning, problem solving and interpersonal skills, a work ethic, empathy, and self-reflection is recognized as essential for optimal character development. For a school to foster character development, it must provide a positive social environment, characterized by leadership; collegiality; a learning orientation among faculty, and ties among school, home and community.

School-based Character education programs are activities and experiences organized by a provider for the purpose of fostering positive character development and the associated core ethical values in students. Character is the complex set of psychological characteristics that enable an individual to act as a moral agent. It is multifaceted and psychological. It relates to moral functioning. (Berkowitz, 1997).

According to Divya Prasad, (VIMHANS's Vidyasagar Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences, New Delhi 2004) adolescents today exhibit high-risk behaviour, such as using drugs, drunk driving, stealing money or forging signatures, and indulge in a lot of meaningless sexual relationships. A growing number of schools today conduct various value education programs that are addressed to rising problems of the modern society. These programs concentrate on the development of the children, young adults etc. focusing on areas like happiness, humility, cooperation, honesty, simplicity, love, unity, peace etc.

According to CEP’s Character Education Partnership eleven principles, effective character education schools promote core ethical values as the basis of good character, define character comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior, promote core values intentionally and proactively through all parts of school life are caring communities; give students opportunities for moral action; have meaningful and challenging academic curriculums that respect learners; develop students’ intrinsic motivation; have professionals who exemplify core values and maintain a moral Community, require moral leadership from educators and students, recruit parents and community members as full partners and evaluate school character, student character, and acknowledge adults as character educators.

A. Character development and behavioral outcomes

Within the field of character education, core values are typically understood as having cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. That is, students are expected to understand what the values mean (e.g., be able to...
reason about them), care about them (e.g., internalize them as enduring dispositions), and enact them in their behavior. Understanding values begins with the Students’ ability to recognize values and how they may affect people and actions in different situations, their understanding of ethical dilemmas, and their ability to make critical judgments about their own and other people’s behavior in different situations. It encompasses all outcome variables that center on knowledge or reasoning about any relevant aspect of character or the values and behavior associated with it.

Good character is associated with desired outcomes such as school success, leadership, tolerance, kindness, altruism, the valuing of diversity, and the ability to delay gratification (Scales et al., 2000). In addition, it is associated with reduced problems such as substance use, alcohol abuse, smoking, violence, teenage pregnancy, depression, and suicidal ideation.

The scheme of the present investigation was to clearly define character education after exploring different domains of character. Such as: moral reasoning/values, classroom/school climate, empathy, self-esteem, locus of control, social skills, and prosocial and altruistic behavior. The present study is based on Lickona’s (1991) tripartite model of character (moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior). Character so conceived has three interrelated parts: ‘Moral knowing’, ‘Moral feeling’, and ‘Moral behavior’. Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good.

II. RELATED STUDIES

Vishalache Balakrishnan (2009) explored teaching moral education in secondary schools using real-life dilemmas and alternate methods of teaching moral education in Malaysian schools. The study discovered how adolescents approach moral situations and how they go about resolving moral problems. Findings showed that students were concerned about moral values and those issues not covered in the moral education curriculum. The analysis also showed that students’ moral choices were influenced by parents, culture, religion, collaboration and friendship within a strong core-based approach. The study suggested that including students’ ‘voices’ in the moral education curriculum might better engage their interest, whilst at the same time contributing to their inter-cultural tolerance.

Lickona and Davidson (2005) conducted a two-year study on high school Character Education, with findings indicating teachers and students perceiving performance character and moral character to be meaningful categories when reflecting on their experience of schooling.

Sanjana Mehta and David Whitebread (2004) carried out a study using Philosophy for Children as an intervention technique to enhance children’s socio-moral reasoning and behavior in 50 students (including 26 boys and 24 girls) aged 12-13 years from grade 7 of an urban school in Southern India. Analysis of this data was carried out in the cognitive, social, and emotional domains to determine efficacy of the programme separately in relation to each area and the transfer of these skills to children’s day-to-day life. The analysis revealed that the programme most positively influenced the social and emotional domains. Gender differences also emerged in relation to some of the outcomes.

Carlo and Gustavo (2010) examined the short-term longitudinal relations among perspective taking, sympathy, prosocial moral reasoning, prosocial behaviors, and aggression in adolescents were examined. Participants were 489 students in public and private schools from predominantly middle-class families in Valencia, Spain. Students completed measures of perspective taking, sympathy, prosocial moral reasoning, prosocial behaviors, and aggressive behaviors. Overall, structural equation modeling analyses showed that moral reasoning and emotions were interrelated and predicted both prosocial behaviors and aggression.

Tina Malti et al., (2009) investigated the role of children’s moral motivation and sympathy in prosocial behavior. This study measured other-reported prosocial behavior and self- and other-reported sympathy. Moral motivation was assessed by emotion attributions and moral reasoning following hypothetical transgressions in a representative longitudinal sample of Swiss 6-year-old children (N = 1,273). Prosocial behavior increased with increasing sympathy, especially if children displayed low moral motivation. Moral motivation and sympathy were also independently related to prosocial behavior.

Gregory Alice M et al., (2009) examined reports of prosocial behavior in a large longitudinal family study of 1160 adolescent twin pairs (aged between 13 and 19 years). Prosocial behavior was assessed at two time points by self-report and at the second time point using additional parent-ratings using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997). Adolescent females were reported to be significantly more prosocial than males.

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL CORRELATES OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN THE PRESENT STUDY

A. Prosocial behavior

Prosocial behavior refers to "voluntary actions that are intended to help or benefit another individual or group of individuals" (Eisenberg and Mussen 1989). This definition refers to consequences of a doer's actions rather than the motivations behind those actions. These behaviors include a broad range of activities:
sharing, comforting, rescuing, and helping. Prosocial behavior refers to a pattern of activity, whereas, altruism is the motivation to help others out of pure regard for their needs rather than how the action will benefit oneself. According to Riley, San Juan, Klinkner and Ramminger, 2008 prosocial behavior is “voluntary behavior intended to benefit another person” Kidron and Fleischman (2006) suggest that pro-social behavior are voluntary actions that are intended to help or benefit another individual or group of individuals, and include things such as: sharing, comforting, rescuing, and helping.

“The term prosocial behavior means positive actions that benefit others, prompted by empathy, moral values, and a sense of personal responsibility rather than a desire for personal gain. Research on child development suggests that one of the most effective ways in which schools can encourage prosocial behavior is through schoolwide programs designed to teach and model social skills.”

Pro-social attitudes

An attitude can be defined as a positive or negative evaluation of people, objects, event, activities, ideas, or just about anything in your environment (Zimbardo et al., 1999). All attitudes take a stance, positive or negative, but they can vary in intensity. Attitudes form from our experiences (or observing experiences) and serve to guide our future behavior. Social psychologists examine attitudes in terms of three components: cognitive, (This is the mental component, consisting of beliefs and perceptions.) Affective – (This is the emotional component.) Behavioral (This is the action component; more specifically, it consists of the predisposition to act a certain way toward the attitude object.).

IV. METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the present investigation are as follows:

1. To design an effective Character education programme by creating workable strategies encompassing the Cognitive, Emotional and Behavioral aspects of Character Development.

2. To investigate the effectiveness of the constructed intervention programme on various dimensions of Prosocial Attitudes and behaviors of female Adolescent students.

Given that a growing body of research on character education is suggesting this relatively recent practice of teaching Ethics and Morality in a framework entirely different from the usual “indoctrination” or “drilling” on values, the present investigation has adopted a directional hypotheses to validate and support findings of previous breakthrough studies (Sherblom, Stephen A (2006), relationship between school climate and math, reading achievement 2006, C.S. Seshadri – concept of moral education 2006, Thomas Lickona and Davidson-smart (2005) and good high schools). Based on the few of the above studies and considering the objectives of the present investigation, the following directional hypotheses were formulated:

1. The Character Education Intervention programme will bring about a significant improvement between Pre-test and Post-test scores of the experimental group on the following variables:
   a) Pro-social Attitudes
   b) Pro-social Behavior

2. There will be a significant difference between the Post test scores of the experimental and the control group on the following variables:
   a) Pro-social Attitudes
   b) Pro-social Behavior

V. DEVISING CLASSROOM STRATEGIES FOR THE CHARACTER EDUCATION PLAN

An Extensive review pertaining to planning effective moral education programs in schools in India shows a dearth of scientific research in this field. The current study proposes a developmental model for moral character education based on previous research studies that signify the psychological and developmental factors of cognitive and moral development in adolescents.

The following pedagogical elements for developing and implementing an effective character education programme were identified.

1. Direct teaching strategies
2. Interactive-learning sessions
3. Family participation
4. Faculty development/improvement programs
5. Students’ community activities.

Based on Lickona and Davidson’s (2006) model for helping high school students to develop both performance character and moral character and Narvaez, (2006) model of Integrative Ethical Education model, the current research outlines an innovative, intentional, holistic, empirically derived approach to Moral Character Education for adolescents in Indian schools, that are devised as simple do-able everyday classroom and school strategies.

After an indepth understanding of the developmental and psychological aspects of adolescent moral behaviors, the researcher devised classroom strategies that would be simple enough for students to carry out, at
the same time instill prosocial attitudes that would eventually lead to prosocial behaviors in school as well as at home.

**Sample and processes**

The present investigation adopted an Experimental design, described as “pre post experimental control group design”. Four classes of eleventh standard students comprising of 120 girls from the matriculation school were randomly selected and then subjected to systematic sampling. The final sample consisted of 80 Adolescent girls belonging to the Science group of eleventh standard. The groups’ age ranged from 16 to 17 years. Of the 80 Adolescent girls 40 were assigned to the experimental group and 40 were assigned to the control group. The Experimental group was then subjected to the Character Education Intervention programme for a period of three months. After the intervention programme both the groups were assessed on different dependent variables. The final post test scores were compared to observe significant differences, thereby evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention programme. Primarily the data was collected using the Character in Action survey questionnaires (M.L.Davidson and V.T.Khmelkov (2006)) from the selected target population through the survey method. The pro-social attitude scale in the survey indicated the degree to which students believed that they lived out a range of pro-social values; and the pro-social behavior scale measured students’ ethical behaviors. The data obtained was tabulated for further statistical analysis using the SPSS II version. To study the comparison of the mean scores of the experimental and the control groups on the stated variables, independent sample “t” tests were used and The Paired Samples “t” Test was computed to compare the means of two or more variables.

**VI. DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAMME**

The intervention programme was intended to provide a holistic approach to Character development and encompass the Cognitive, Emotional and Behavioral aspects of adolescent moral life. The intervention programme was implemented for a period of three months and thirty sessions, each session being conducted for an hour during the weekdays. Each session was carefully constructed so that the activities and training covered all three dimensions of Character Development. Every session was timed and responses from participants were collected after each activity. Parents were given handouts to facilitate an understanding of the moral development from a psychological perspective as well as paring guidelines on building character.

The following definitions are in keeping with the present study.

**Character education** is defined as “the deliberate efforts by schools, families, and communities, to help young people understand, care about, and act upon core ethical values” (Lickona, 1996), further elaborating character as having three interrelated parts: moral knowing(cognitive), moral feeling,(emotional) and moral action(behavioral )— knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good. Character education is described as “any deliberate approach by which school personnel, often in conjunction with parents and community members, … help children and youth become caring, principled, and responsible” (Williams, 2000).

The cognitive exercises were built mainly to facilitate moral knowledge and moral awareness among students following which moral reasoning and ethical decision making were the focus. To encourage students to a better understanding of what character traits and ethical values are in simple noncomplex ways. Eliciting behavioral definitions from students rather than dictating the meaning to them promotes critical thinking and reasoning which leads to better habit formation of the values learnt. Emotion plays a critical role in motivating people to act in good character, hence after establishing moral meaning and application of reasoning skills, the emotional dimension of character education was dealt with. Establish an awareness and understanding of the range of positive and negative emotions in human beings. Better equipped with this knowledge, it was essential to understand how to regulate emotion to gain better control and not feel overwhelmed. The emotional dimension of character education also requires this understanding to show helpful behaviors at school or home. The behavioral dimension of character education sought to provide avenues to help students act upon core ethical values. The objective being encouraging students to engage in moral action in everyday situations at home and in school. Undoubtedly, an effective Character Education provides students with opportunities for moral action. In the principled as in the intellectual domain, students are practical learners; they learn best by doing. To nurture good character, they need several and diverse chances to apply principles such as empathy, responsibility, and equality in everyday communications and discussions in addition to community service. By grappling with real life challenges, how to divide the labor in a cooperative learning group, how to reach consensus in a class meeting, how to reduce fights on the playground, how to carry out a service learning project and reflecting on these experiences, students develop practical understanding of the requirements of cooperating with others and giving of oneself. Through repeated experiences that cause them to consider their moral beliefs, students develop and practice the skills and behavioral habits that make up the action side of character.
VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CHARACTER EDUCATION INTERVENTION ON STUDENTS’ CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT.

Table 1: Results of Paired sample t-test for pre and post test values of Students’ Pro-social attitudes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-variable of character development</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>t’</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Pro-social attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39.95</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.707</td>
<td>.586</td>
<td>23.229</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48.23</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2.597</td>
<td>.411</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Paired Sample t-test was conducted to compare scores before and after intervention. There was a significant difference in the scores for the Pre test (M=39.95, SD=3.707) and Post test (M=48.23, SD=2.597) conditions. From the above table it can be seen that a significant difference was found with the students scoring higher on Prosocial attitudes in the post test compared to the pretest, with the t score = 23.229, being significant at the 0.01 level.

These results suggest that when the group was subjected to Character Education intervention programme their scores on Prosocial attitudes increased in believing that they live out a range of pro-social values. Thus the hypothesis that “The Character Education Intervention programme will bring about a significant improvement between Pre test and post- test scores of the experimental group on Pro-social Attitudes” is accepted.

Table 2: Results of Paired sample t-test for pre and post test values of Students’ Pro-social behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-variable of character development</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>t’</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b. Pro-social behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.63</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.152</td>
<td>.498</td>
<td>22.583</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36.25</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.622</td>
<td>.573</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table it was seen that a significant difference exists between the Pre test (M=26.63, SD=3.152) and the Post test (M=36.25, SD=3.622) conditions. The results indicate that this difference was significant at the 0.01 level (t=22.583).

It can be inferred that when the students were subjected to the character education intervention programme the scores on their Pro-social behavior increased. Thus the hypothesis that “The Character Education Intervention programme will bring about a significant improvement between Pre test and post- test scores of the experimental group on Pro-social behavior” is accepted.

VIII. COMPARISON OF THE POST TEST SCORES OF STUDENTS’ CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN THE EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUP

Table 3: Results of independent sample t-test for experimental and control group values of Pro-social attitude.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-variable of character development</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>t’</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Pro-social attitude</td>
<td>experimental</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>48.23</td>
<td>2.597</td>
<td>.411</td>
<td>9.883</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38.30</td>
<td>5.797</td>
<td>.917</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An independent t test was conducted comparing the scores of the experimental and control groups. A significant difference was found (t=9.883) at the 0.01 level, with the experimental group scoring higher (M=48.23, SD=2.597) than the control group(M=38.30, SD=5.797) on Pro-social attitude. It could be inferred from the above table that the experimental group which was given the character education intervention programme had a higher score on Pro-social attitude, indicating a higher degree in believing that they live out a range of pro-social values compared to the control group which was not subjected to the character education intervention programme. Thus the hypothesis that “There will be a significant difference between the post test scores of the experimental and the control group on Pro-social attitude” is accepted.

Table 4: Results of independent sample t-test for experimental and control group values of Pro-social behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-variable of character development</th>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>t’</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b. Pro-social behavior</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36.25</td>
<td>3.622</td>
<td>.573</td>
<td>12.711</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25.60</td>
<td>3.868</td>
<td>.612</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be seen from the above table that a significant difference was found \( t=12.711 \) at the 0.01 level, with the experimental group scoring higher (\( M=36.25, SD=3.622 \)) than the control group (\( M=25.60, SD=3.868 \)) on Pro-social behavior. It could be inferred from the above table that the experimental group which was given the character education intervention programme had a higher score on Pro-social behavior in terms of ethical behavior compared to the control group which was not subjected to the character education intervention programme.

Thus the hypothesis that “There will be a significant difference between the post test scores of the experimental and the control group on Pro-social behavior” is accepted.

**Discussion:** Considering the growing concern over the apparent increase of inappropriate behaviors commonly associated with adolescents, with a lack of a firm set of values and academic disaffection, it becomes worthwhile to investigate alternative approaches to the age-old system of rewards and punishments. The present investigation explored the effectiveness of character education through the critical lens of moral development theories emphasizing on the social as well as cognitive domains of Adolescent growth. The study focused on developing moral and performance character in Indian schools. As ethical training and moral education in schools are treated with a casual attitude, this investigation was an attempt to stress that character education is an ongoing process where schools need to focus on the intentional teaching of character by giving significance to all the three domains of adolescent moral development (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral). From the results presented in tables 1 to 14, it could be inferred that students who received the intervention have shown an increase in the degree to which they believe they live out a range of pro-social values (pro-social attitudes). The character education programme featured a comprehensive approach which delineated a structured intervention to foster the cognitive, emotional, and moral domain of adolescent girls, while the cognitive thinking exercises were built to facilitate moral knowledge and moral awareness in students. These classroom exercises promoted critical thinking about values, stressing the connection between the moral value and its corresponding behaviors.

The results of the present investigation are in line with numerous studies reporting the importance of school-based character education programmes to foster moral behaviors in adolescents. Eisenberg et al. (1995) reported that adolescents' cognitive development lays the groundwork for moral reasoning, honesty, and pro-social behaviors such as helping, volunteering or caring for others. Jimmylea Gail and Berryhill (2003) compared two groups of students and teachers in Arkansas schools to evaluate the effect of a school-wide character education program on the behavior of students, on the culture/climate and on the implementation of eleven principles of character. There found measurable differences in the observed assessment of peer behavior in students in PAR schools (school-wide character education implementation) and NONPAR schools (no school-wide character education implementation). There also found measurable differences in teacher observed assessment of the culture/climate and the practice of eleven principles of character in PAR and NONPAR schools. Students learn to value what is in their knowledge base; they will also more deeply esteem what they critically and creatively think about. These two components influence what students are willing to commit to, what they are willing to set goals for, what they are willing to plan for and put energy towards accomplishing. As students make these commitments and plans, it adds to their knowledge base and strengthens their thinking skills and values. These three components then influence the final component, overt behavior.

**IX. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Values education in India has taken place from time immemorial, but often by means of those informal structures of learning by which everyone everywhere is nurtured into specific cultural attitudes about right and wrong, good and evil.

While the Indian system of education is mostly characterized by didactic teaching, more of individual than group work, heavy emphasis on academic achievement as measured entirely by tests and exams, there is little room for critical thinking, moral reasoning and ethical training. Although autonomy is valued in individuals, schools rarely inculcate this trait in their students, where unquestioning obedience to authority is considered the essential feature of a good student. Thus the present research provided an evidence based study for school educators and policy makers who are closely involved in the making of school curricula with respect to moral education. It is important to acknowledge the science of character education as an essential enterprise if academic leaders seek to develop the overall personality of the student in ways that promote empathic understanding, personal responsibility and engagement in prosocial behaviors. With the combined efforts of school management, faculty and parents, the character education in students will develop their moral personalities, essential for building healthy societies/nations.

**REFERENCES**


