Character-Building in Higher Education: Adult Learners' Perspectives

Nurshuhaida Binti Mohd Shokri,
Hokkaido University, Japan

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Abstract

This paper examines adult learners' perceptions of the importance of cultivating good character at the tertiary level as a means of promoting personal transformation and the holistic development of cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective capacities. It is essential to consider the diverse academic, sociocultural, psychological, and economic challenges encountered by both local and international students in higher education. While such challenges are an inherent aspect of life, individuals vary in their awareness of and preparedness for them. Employing a qualitative approach, this study explores learners' views on the significance of character development in fostering personal growth and transformation through a series of interviews. Thematic analysis will be used to interpret the data, which will be presented descriptively to reflect participants' individual perspectives.

1. Introduction

In recent years, character building has regained prominence as a critical component of holistic education[1]. However, despite its recognised importance, implementation in higher education remains inconsistent, facing significant challenges in design, relevance, and cultural adaptability (Vandenberghe & Costa Prado, 2009). This study explores the perceptions of multicultural adult learners at a national university in Japan regarding a character-building initiative, examining how such programs can be tailored to accommodate diverse cultural and theistic worldviews.

Character education in higher education is often overshadowed by an emphasis on cognitive and career-oriented competencies. Yet, as societies grow increasingly pluralistic, fostering ethical reasoning, resilience, and intercultural sensitivity becomes imperative (Berkovich & Benoliel, 2020). This paper investigates:

1. Adult learners' understanding of character-building—How do they conceptualise its purpose and value?

2. The relevance of sustaining character-building initiatives in higher education—Do learners perceive these programs as meaningful for personal and professional growth?

3. The motivations behind participation—What factors influence adult learners' decisions to engage in character development activities?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to contribute to the discourse on character education by advocating for culturally responsive approaches that resonate with diverse student populations.

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[1] This paper is an extended version of a presentation originally delivered at the Harvard Club of Boston, USA, in August 2024, organized by the London Institute of Skills Development.

2. Theoretical Framework

There are three (3) major skills in learners that are deemed essential to predict success for both local and international students at higher education encompasses cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective skills. "In students' learning orientations, the cognitive attributes include cognitive processing to elaborate and gain new information" (e.g., Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2004).

Meanwhile, some facets of metacognition like students' metacognitive knowledge (MK), metacognitive experiences (ME) manifest vital functions like monitoring and control (Efklides, 2006). Thus, mindful use of metacognitive strategies, such as prediction, planning, monitoring, evaluation and reflection upon one's own conceptions of learning, teaching, and related phenomena enhance students' awareness of their own learning (Van Rossum & Hamer, 2010; Vermunt & Donche, 2017). These elements altogether will build up students' metacognition to accelerate their learning.

Finally, the socio-affective or affective-motivational attributes refer to students' learning motivations, such as mastery goal, extrinsic orientation, ability orientation (Pintrich, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2000), learning purposes, and goals (Vermunt & Donche, 2017). Practically, by having awareness on their learning progression, students are likely to regulate their emotions which prevent them from stress, anxiety and unhealthy behaviours.

Aspired by Martin Luther King Jr., intelligence and character must go hand in hand. Thus, it is high time to revisit the concept of character education so that it is easily blended and embedded in every student's learning experience to enrich their character property from time to time.

Character Building: The Primacy of Spiritual Wealth

As Abu Hurairah R.A. reported, the messenger (PBUH) of Allah SWT said: "Wealth is not in having many possessions. Rather, true wealth is the richness of the soul." (Source: Sahih al-Bukhari 6081 Grade: Muttafaqun Alayhi). Character education has long been a fundamental pursuit alongside academic achievement at every level of learning. Parents, societies, and nations share a

common aspiration: to nurture future generations endowed with moral integrity, intellectual depth, and cultural wisdom—qualities essential for sustaining civilizational legacy and living a purposeful life. The "richness of the soul," as highlighted in the hadith, reflects the spiritual dimension of character cultivated through lifelong learning, practice, and refinement. This innate (*fitrah*) character (Al-Ghazali, 2020; Lang, 2004; Umar Faruq,2006) encompasses:

1. Connection with the Divine, the self, and others.

2. Self-awareness and gratitude.

3. A sense of purpose, righteousness, and inner peace.

Ghaderi et al. (2018) identified four dimensions of spiritual well-being: connections with God, oneself, others, and nature. Similarly, Lickona (2001) posited that moral law is "inscribed on the human heart," discernible through reason and experience. Human beings inherently seek truth, virtue, and ethical exemplars to guide their conduct—a testament to the universality of character development across traditions.

The Concept of Noble Character (*Makarim al-Akhlaq*)

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (c. 570–632 CE) epitomized noble character (*makarim al-akhlaq*), a legacy further expounded by scholars to provide practical frameworks for moral living. Central to this is moral intelligence—the foundation of virtuous behaviour. Al-Ghazali (c. 1058–1111) defined morality as: "A firmly established state of the heart from which actions flow effortlessly, without need for deliberation." This "state of the heart" (Al-Ghazali, 1995) arises from spiritual well-being, rooted in complete submission to divine will. Musharraf Hussain (2009) elaborated that morality is not merely action but the mindset and attitude predisposing one to goodness—an internal compass guiding ethical conduct.

Faith provides a transcendent framework for character through sacred texts, which offer universal principles, motivations, and admonitions. The prophets, chosen despite their human limitations, exemplified these teachings, demonstrating that ideal character is achievable through divine guidance.

The *Quran* (and scriptures in other faiths) delineates objective moral truths, serving as the ultimate criterion for right and wrong. Thus, noble character is not a subjective construct but a divine imperative, harmonizing human conduct with eternal wisdom.

In continuing the exploration of knowledge about character, Bier et.al. (2023), stated that "the character education movement has its roots in the cognitive developmental perspective of psychologist Jean Piaget (1997/1932), as extended by Lawrence Kohlberg (1984) in the 1970s and 1980s". Subsequently, "Kohlberg's work on "moral" development and specifically moral cognition, resulting in a theory of the stages of moral reasoning, inspired a renewed interest in crafting educational systems to contribute to moral and social development among youth" (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). There is a noticeable development of terminology from "moral", "values" to "positive", "pro-social", "social-emotional", and "virtues" (Bier, et.al., 2023). This shows that the research in character education has evolved well to find solutions to rectify social illness and shift the nations towards a positive transformation.

Thomas Lickona (1989), defined "the content of good character as virtue— and virtues as objectively good human qualities that we develop by living in harmony with the natural moral law." He believed that character—and any particular virtue—must also be defined in terms of its essential psychological components: knowing the good (moral knowledge), desiring the good (moral feelings), and doing the good (moral behavior). Hence, "character education is a conscious effort to support individuals in understanding, caring about, and upholding fundamental ethical principles" (Lickona,1989). Later, the term "performance" character was introduced by Lickona & Davidson, (2005) helped further explain the manifestation of excellence in a more pragmatic way. "Performance character is a mastery orientation that consists of those qualities – such as diligence, perseverance, a strong work ethic, a positive attitude, ingenuity, and self-discipline – needed to realize one's potential for excellence in academics, extracurricular activities, the workplace, or any other area" of endeavour (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Hand in hand, moral character is a relational orientation which outlines the qualities, such as integrity, justice, caring, respect, and cooperation – needed for successful interpersonal relationships and ethical behaviours. Moral character moderates our performance goals to honour the interests of others, to ensure that we do not violate moral values and we use ethical means to achieve our performance goals (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

To further enrich the multidimensional framework of noble character —beyond moral and performance dimensions—Ritchhart (2001) introduced the concept of intellectual character, defined as a set of dispositions (e.g., curiosity, skepticism, and open-mindedness) that actively shape and motivate intellectual behavior. This aligns with Baehr's (2021) formulation of intellectual character virtues, which include traits such as intellectual courage, honesty, and open-mindedness. It was suggested that cultivating these virtues, alongside critical thinking, represents a vital educational objective (Baehr, 2021). Baehr (2021, Ch. 2; cf. 2015a; Tishman, 2000; Ritchhart, 2002, Ch. 3) identifies three core dimensions of intellectual virtues, illustrated through the example of intellectual humility:

1. Competence – The ability to recognize and acknowledge one's intellectual limitations and errors.

2. Motivation – The willingness to act on this self-awareness.

3. Judgment – The discernment to apply this virtue appropriately across contexts (Baehr, 2023).

These dimensions are particularly salient for adult learners in higher education, as intellectual virtues empower them to navigate their academic journeys with purpose and integrity.

The development of moral character, as emphasized by Lickona (1992), naturally extends to the realm of civic character—a vital component of democratic societies. Civic character represents the intersection between personal morality and public responsibility, where ethical regard for others informs one's role as a citizen. Howard et al. (2004) highlight the interdependent relationship between character education and democratic

citizenship, noting that a functioning democracy requires citizens capable of balancing personal ambitions with collective welfare (Hoge, 2002).

Educational theorists argue that effective citizenship education must be grounded in character development. Berkowitz (2000) maintains that civic character—the embodiment of traits essential for democratic participation—should be deliberately cultivated in educational settings. Branson and Quigley (1998) define these democratic civic dispositions as "the traits of private and public character essential to the maintenance and improvement of constitutional democracy" (p. 11). Gutmann's (1988) concept of democratic humanism further specifies these traits, identifying religious toleration, mutual respect, free inquiry, honesty, and self-discipline as indispensable habits for sustaining self-governance (Gutmann, 1988).

The concept of noble character, rooted in the Prophetic tradition and expounded by scholars like Al-Ghazali, transcends time and culture, offering a divine-anchored framework for ethical living. Modern scholarship —from Kohlberg's moral cognition to Lickona's moral-performance character dichotomy and Baehr's intellectual virtues—demonstrates how character education has evolved to address societal needs through multidimensional approaches. These frameworks collectively emphasize that virtuous character is not static but a dynamic synthesis of moral awareness, civic responsibility, and intellectual humility, cultivated through deliberate practice and spiritual alignment. As research continues to bridge sacred wisdom with contemporary pedagogy, the integration of moral, performance, intellectual, and civic character emerges as a transformative imperative —equipping individuals to navigate complexity with integrity, contribute to collective flourishing, and uphold the universal principles that sustain just societies. Ultimately, character education, whether divinely inspired or empirically validated, remains a cornerstone of human progress, harmonizing individual excellence with the greater good.

Character Building as the Manifestation of Transformative and Lifelong Learning

For adult learners pursuing higher education, the decision to enrol represents a significant commitment—one that requires sacrificing time, resources, and energy in pursuit of personal and professional transformation. These individuals often navigate substantial life changes, whether transitioning from employment to full-time study, advancing from undergraduate to postgraduate programs, or undertaking professional certifications. Such journeys inevitably present challenges, including balancing existing commitments, managing personal goals, sustaining motivation, and aligning expectations. Yet, it is precisely through these challenges that transformative learning emerges.

Transformative learning, as conceptualized by Mezirow (1991, 1995, 1996) and Cranton (1994, 1996), occurs when adult learners critically examine and revise their frames of reference—the complex web of associations, concepts, values, and conditioned responses that shape their worldview. Whether driven by intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, these learners demonstrate remarkable determination to alter their status quo, achieve academic objectives, and attain personal fulfilment. Their perseverance fuels a process of deep self-reflection, enabling them to synthesize past and present experiences into new understandings. This cognitive and emotional restructuring not only clarifies long-standing ambiguities but also simplifies previously unexplored complexities, fostering intellectual and personal growth.

Life, in many ways, serves as a continuous test of character, presenting individuals with choices that define their trajectories. While decision-making is influenced by numerous factors, knowledge and experiential wisdom (Rathunde, 2010) remain the most reliable guides. As Al-Ghazali posited, knowledge transcends mere information; it is an act of worship, a dialogue of the conscience, and a means of spiritual elevation (Hughes, 2008; Zaini, 2017). This perspective underscores the notion that life itself is an unending educational journey, with each stage demanding distinct knowledge, skills, and adaptive strategies.

Lifelong learning, as an educational paradigm, encompasses all developmental processes from birth to death, aiming to cultivate knowledge, skills, and competencies across contexts (Lengrand, 1989; Maruyama, 2009; Laal, 2012; European Commission, 2002). From childhood to adulthood, individuals acquire expertise—both formally and informally—tailored to their interests and professional needs. Moreover, lifelong learning is institutionalized through policies designed to provide continuous educational opportunities (Boshier, 1988). Yet, amid the pursuit of material and career goals, the cultivation of character remains indispensable. Investing in moral and intellectual virtues harmonizes individual growth with societal well-being, offering stability in an increasingly globalized and complex world.

Ultimately, character building is an iterative, lifelong process that demands resilience, self-awareness, and a growth mindset. It is through transformative learning and sustained self-development that individuals not only achieve personal mastery but also contribute meaningfully to their communities, embodying the ideals of lifelong learning in its truest sense.

3. Methodology

Research design

This study adopts a qualitative approach and is exploratory in nature. The flexible design allows for an in-depth examination of respondents' attitudes, experiences, and intentions (Berg, 2009; Kitzinger, 1995). Additionally, it captures multidimensional perspectives and rich, lived viewpoints on specific issues and phenomena. As Mullen and Reynolds (1978) noted, qualitative methods are particularly valuable for under-researched areas, as they help uncover gaps that survey-based research may overlook.

Participants

The study participants comprised three (3) international and one (1) local postgraduate students enrolled at Hokkaido University, Japan. Purposive sampling was employed to align with the research objectives, ensuring that

all participants met the predetermined selection criteria. Demographic data collected included their enrolled programs, nationalities (Japan, Argentina, China, and South Korea), gender, ancestry, and language proficiency. To protect privacy and ensure confidentiality, the participants' identifying details have been anonymized.

Instrument

Following an in-depth review of literature on character-building, transformative learning, and lifelong learning, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore participants' perceptions of character-building and its relevance in higher education. The interview questions also examined retrospective accounts of how their character was cultivated in the past, as well as the motivations behind their willingness to participate in a campus-based character-building initiative. The collected data were analysed thematically and presented descriptively.

4. Results and Discussions

The study began by examining participants' perceptions and understanding of character building in general. The opening question, "do you understand by the term 'character building'?" encouraged them to share their perspectives based on personal interpretations, prior knowledge, or lived experiences. Their responses are presented below:

Research participant 1: *"Actually... to be honest, I don't have any idea of what it means."*

Research participant 2: *"I think, maybe it's related to... personality and how we solve daily problems... difficulties that happen in our life... like soft skills that help us going through difficult times... that help prevent stress and communicate with others comfortably."*

Research participant 3: *"Experience and coping skills that can allow... us to take care ourselves, health both mental and physical and excel in... career or life goals."*

Research participant 4: *"In my opinion… character building is a learning process of collecting values and practicing them in daily life. It is the knowledge for us to create a peaceful, harmonious environment so that we can live in the best way possible."*

After interviewing all four participants about their understanding of character building (as shown in the previous excerpts), one participant demonstrated limited ability to describe the concept based on personal understanding. This finding reflects an important reality: character building has not been explicitly taught or emphasized in most formal education settings. Pala (2011) observed that an increasing number of young people grow up without firm grounding in core ethical values that shape conscience and moral reasoning. This suggests a concerning lack of internal mechanisms that help individuals distinguish right from wrong, exercise self-control, and consistently choose ethical actions.

As discussed earlier, the concept of character - comprising both mental and moral attributes - can be adapted to various contexts and personal development frameworks. However, this study argues that character education should be systematically introduced across all educational stages - from early childhood through primary, secondary, tertiary education, and into lifelong learning programs. The study then explored participants' perceptions on the relevance of character building at the tertiary level through the question: "Do you think character building is relevant to you as an adult learner?" This question aimed to assess their attitudes toward the importance of character development during their current life stage. Their responses are presented below:

Research participant 1: *(After reflecting through her childhood memories on how she learnt values or ethics, she attempted to answer based on her past experiences).*

> **"** I think... maybe or maybe not. Character-building has been taught at school to small kids... I remember the teacher taught us to respect and treat our parents and family well. She also mentioned that we must show undivided support and loyalty to our country… and another thing…

to work hard to enter university and get a job. My country has a very competitive culture in education and the workplace. After recalling these... This character building is related to values and self-worth, I think it's very relevant to me now, even if I'm old now... because I need some things to help me reduce my stress, anxiety and anger while working on my PhD and living as a postgraduate student here.

Research participant 2: *Yes! It's important to me. I think knowledge about character building should be learned even at my age because problems in daily life come in a different scenarios and changes in our society today has rapidly happened in our surroundings. That's why we need to find solutions to cure these issues.*

Research participant 3: *Yes, definitely! For me, educating myself is essential, as it enables me to safeguard my mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. This knowledge helps remind me to practice self-care and manifest my life aspirations.*

Research participant 4: *Yes! I agree! That character building is relevant to me as an adult because life gives us many challenges, but we can choose to find ways to overcome them and choose to be kind and polite towards others while pursuing our life motivations.*

All participants unanimously affirmed the relevance of character building in their lives, citing its potential to address "problems in daily life" and "life challenges." Their responses highlighted key benefits including problem-solving capabilities ("find solutions"), self-improvement ("to educate myself"), and resilience ("find ways to overcome difficulties"). Additionally, they emphasized contemporary needs such as adapting to "rapid changes in society," developing "values and self-worth," practicing "self-care," and making informed decisions ("making choices") as crucial reasons for character development at their current life stage.

This relevance is particularly evident in higher education contexts, where students commonly face significant challenges including academic goal uncertainty, skill deficiencies, difficulties in social and intellectual

integration, low educational commitment, and academic integrity issues (Tinto, 1993). As Compas et al. (2014) emphasize, developing coping strategies for stressful events and emotional regulation skills constitutes fundamental aspects of maturation from childhood through adulthood. These findings support the lifelong learning paradigm, demonstrating the enduring value of character development throughout one's educational journey and beyond.

Discussion

The study also examined participants' sources of information that shaped their perceptions of character building's contemporary relevance. Through the follow-up question, "What sources informed your understanding of character building?", the researcher explored the foundational resources contributing to their knowledge base. Table 1 presents their responses, which reflect their experiential knowledge, core values, and cultural capital (conceptual frameworks) - findings that align with several theoretical perspectives discussed earlier.

Table 1: Mapping the Existing Frame of References with Related Theories

Research Participant	Follow-up Question: Sources of inspiration	Mechanisms Profile (Theories & Types of Character)
1	From sudden realization (self-reflection) and own thinking (autonomous thinking)	Transformative Learning Spiritual Character Performance Character Intellectual Character
2	From personal experiences (experiential wisdom) and therapy sessions (support system)	Transformative Learning Moral Character Performance Character Intellectual Character
3	From self-reflection, Migration, Supportive circle/system	Transformative Learning Metacognitive skills Affective-motivational Spiritual Character Performance Character Intellectual Character

4	From grandmother (deep-rooted cultural capital) Struggles, Past Experiences (Experiential wisdom)	Lifelong Learning Transformative Learning Affective-motivational Moral Character Performance Character Intellectual Character

By exploring participants' core values and personal perspectives through both retrospective self-reflection and phenomenological analysis of lived experiences, this study revealed insightful alignments between their intentions, reasons, and decisions to participate in the university's character-building project.

Table 2: The Frequency Table of Research Participants' Intentions, Reasons and Characters in Need

Themes (intention and reason)	*RP1	RP2	RP3	RP4	Type of Character in Demand
To bring back my old better self	X				Spiritual character
To develop positive / good characters		X		X	Moral character
To change from negative to positive state	X	X			Moral character
To improve myself	X	X	X	X	Spiritual character
To improve current life situations	X	X	X	X	Performance character
To be motivated	X		X	X	Performance character
To be calm	X		X	X	Spiritual character
To stay focused (study)	X		X		Intellectual character
To help others				X	Civic character

Similar approach to what the therapist suggested		X			External guidance

*RP: Research Participant

Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of intentions and reasons reported during interviews, thematically organized for analysis. The table outlines various intentions/reasons for character development, their prevalence across four research participants (RP1–RP4), and the corresponding types of character in demand. Below is a structured analysis:

1. Dominant Themes

Most Common Intentions:

a) "*To improve myself*" and "*To improve current life situations*" (marked by all respondents) and "*To be motivated*" (RP1, RP3, RP4) are the most frequently cited reasons, indicating a strong desire for personal growth and self-enhancement.

b) "*To develop positive/good characters*" (RP2, RP4) and "*To change from negative to positive state*" (RP1, RP2) highlight a focus on moral transformation and self-betterment.

Less Common but Notable Themes:

a) "*To help others*" (only RP4) suggests civic-mindedness is a less universal but still present motivator.

b) "*Similar approach to what the therapist suggested*" (only RP1) implies external guidance (e.g., therapy) influences character development for some.

2. Character Types in Demand

a) Spiritual Character (e.g., inner peace, mindfulness) is a highly sought-after character type, aligning with themes such as "*To be calm*," "*To bring back my old better self*" and "*To improve myself*."

b) Performance Character (e.g., resilience, motivation) is prominent, connecting to motivations like "*To be motivated*" and "*To improve current life situations*" especially for extrinsic goals like self-determination and life satisfaction index.

c) Moral Character (e.g., ethical behaviour) is closely tied to aspirations like "*developing good characters*" and "*changing from negative to positive.*"

d) Intellectual Character (e.g., focus) appears in while Civic Character (e.g., altruism) is linked only to "*To help others.*"

The analyses reveal distinct yet interconnected character traits that participants aim to develop, each tied to specific motivations and goals. Spiritual character—encompassing inner peace, mindfulness, and purpose—emerges as particularly salient, resonating with themes such as "*To be calm*" "*To bring back my old better self*" and "*To improve myself*". These reflections emphasize a profound yearning for emotional equilibrium and self-actualization. The construct's foundation in self-awareness represents a transformative quality that serves dual functions: as personal enlightenment and divine guidance, ultimately shaping ethical discernment and practical wisdom. This conceptualization finds support in both Islamic epistemology and contemporary psychology - aligning with Al-Ghazali's (2013) concept of *Niyya* (intentionality) as the heart's orientation toward benefit, while paralleling cognitive theories that frame intentions as self-regulatory mechanisms driving action (Triandis, 1980; Sheeran & Webb, 2016).

Performance character, including traits like resilience, motivation, and self-discipline, dominates themes such as "*To be motivated*" and "*To improve current life situations*," reveal goal priorities (Unsworth et al., 2014) tied to participants' roles as postgraduate students. These priorities underscore the need for performance character (e.g., resilience, structured intention), where affective-motivation (Pintrich, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2000) predicts regulated learning—a pursuit Aristotle deemed essential for rational flourishing (Manikandan, 2013).

Meanwhile, moral character—rooted in integrity, empathy, and ethical decision-making—features prominently in intentions like "*To develop positive/good characters*" and "*To change from negative to positive*,". This aligns with Kohlberg's (1984) stages of moral development, which emphasize progressive ethical reasoning, and Rest's (1986) four-component model of moral behavior. The findings particularly support the need for structured ethical guidance through either Bandura's (1977) social learning approaches (mentorship) or Nucci's (2001) dilemma-based moral discussions.

Intellectual character, tied to focus and critical thinking, appears in goals like "*To stay focused*," suggesting a need for cognitive self-mastery techniques, while the less prevalent but equally significant civic character, linked solely to "*To help others,*" underscores the value of altruism and social responsibility, potentially nurtured through service-learning initiatives. Crucially, these traits are not isolated; participants often sought to cultivate multiple dimensions simultaneously, as seen in how self-improvement spans spiritual, performance, and moral growth. When nurtured, these traits reduce anxiety and foster resilience, echoing philosophical traditions that tie virtues like moral character to social harmony.

Notably, RP2's outlier intention ("*Similar approach to what the therapist suggested*") introduces external influences, such as vested interest (Conner & Norman, 2022), suggesting experiential methods may strengthen commitment to change. Collectively, these findings advocate for cultivating performance character through cognitive-metacognitive strategies and spiritual character through grounding practices (e.g., rituals, mindfulness). The latter, though intangible, stabilizes individuals by connecting them to a higher purpose, manifesting in righteous actions. Thus, integrating skill-building with spiritual-moral development offers a holistic path to thriving amid academic and life challenges.

The findings advocate for integrated educational approaches that combine: (1) contemplative practices (journaling, meditation) for spiritual growth; (2) cognitive-metacognitive strategies for performance character; and (3) ethical mentoring for moral development. This tripartite model

acknowledges that true transformation occurs when individuals ground skill-building in purposeful awareness (*Niyya*) and moral clarity - what Islamic tradition terms "righteous mindset, speech and actions." Ultimately, the study positions character education as a holistic endeavour that must address the spiritual-performative-moral nexus to support flourishing in academic and life domains.

5. Conclusion

This paper explored adult learners' perceptions of character-building and its relevance within a higher education context, examining their opinions, experiences, and motivations for participating in a campus-based character-building project. It identified the underlying strengths and moderators shaping their intentions, while also elucidating three foundational learning strategies—cognitive, metacognitive, and affective-motivation/socio-affective—as critical to academic advancement and intellectual growth.

When consistently applied, these strategies become habitual, further complementing the development of key character dimensions: spiritual, moral, performance, intellectual, and civic. Like muscles, these character traits require deliberate exercise and integration into daily life. By systematically cultivating each virtue, individuals can gradually transform their personal growth and achieve holistic success.

The qualitative study, though small-scale, yielded diverse and insightful perspectives on character-building's relevance in adulthood. Participants' cultural backgrounds and theistic worldviews highlighted the need for inclusive, religio-culturally sensitive interventions (Vandenberghe & Costa Prado, 2009). Their demonstrated willingness to improve their characters offers valuable direction for integrating character education into the study of adult learning (i. e. andragogy). However, further research is needed to investigate:

1. The long-term effects of newly developed character traits (the elements of character vs. the foundation of the person);

2. Mechanisms to sustain the fundamental framework of the human person, while character traits influence diminishes; and

3. Determinants of hindrances to accumulating character traits could inform the creation of optimal environments—whether in higher education, schools, or homes—for effective personality development.

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7. Short biography

Nurshuhaida Mohd Shokri is a PhD candidate at Hokkaido University, Japan, specializing in character education in higher education. Her research explores experiential, transformative, and lifelong learning approaches for adult learners. She holds a Master's in Science (TESL) from Universiti Putra Malaysia and has published on topics including experiential learning and innovative pedagogy. Her work aims to advance ethical development and holistic education for adult learners.

Email: nurshuhaidamohdshokri@gmail.com