

SELF-CONTROL AND ITS IMPLICATIONS TOWARDS ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

(Kawalan Kendiri Dan Implikasi Terhadap Pencapaian Akademik)

* Siti Syuhada Abd Rahman¹, Suhaily Md Shamsudin¹

¹Department of Economics and Management
Faculty of Management and Muamalah
International Islamic University College Selangor (KUIS)
43000 Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia.

*Corresponding author's email: sitiesyuhada@kuis.edu.my

Article History:

Submit: 6 March 2017

Accepted: 7 July 2017

Revised: 19 December 2017

Published: 28 December 2017

Attarbawiy: Malaysian Online Journal of Education

Vol. 1, No. 2 (2017), 68-72

Abstrak

Motivasi pembelajaran dalam kalangan pelajar memainkan peranan yang penting dalam pencapaian akademik mereka. Berkait rapat dengan motivasi adalah konsep kawalan sendiri iaitu kepayaan pelajar untuk memantau dan mengawal tingkah laku mereka sendiri. Pelajar yang mempunyai kawalan sendiri dapat memberi tumpuan kepada matlamat jangka panjang dan membuat pilihan yang lebih baik yang berkaitan dengan penglibatan akademik. Kertas kerja konsep ini bertujuan untuk meneroka konsep kawalan sendiri menurut Islam yang dapat menggalakkan motivasi pelajar seterusnya meningkatkan tingkah laku dan prestasi mereka ke arah kecemerlangan akademik. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa tahap kawalan diri adalah berkaitan dengan tahap keimanan individu. Pelajar yang mempunyai tahap kawalan sendiri mutmainna mempunyai daya spiritual yang tinggi, justeru mempunyai kemampuan dan kepayaan untuk mengawal tingkah laku mereka ke arah kecemerlangan akademik.

Kata Kunci: kawalan sendiri, kecemerlangan akademik, perspektif Islam.

Abstract

Student motivation and engagement play an important role in learning and academic achievement. Closely related to motivation is self-discipline, the ability of students to monitor and control their own behaviors. Students who are highly self-disciplined may be able to better focus on long-term goals and make better choices related to academic engagement. This concept paper aims to explore the concept of self-control that can be applied to promote students' motivation thus increase their behaviour and performance towards academic excellence. Specifically, it aims to examine the human level of existence from the Islamic perspective. Findings from this study suggest that the extent of self-control and the level of human existence are related to individual' level of religiosity. Students that have mutmainna level of existence have high spiritual conscientiousness thus have the capability and capacity to control their behaviour towards academic excellence.

Keywords: self-control, academic achievement, Islamic perspective

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Self-control is conceived as a core feature of an individual that leads to success and happiness in life. People who control or regulate their desires, behaviors, performance and responses, achieve better in various domains than others.

Self-control is defined as a person's ability to control emotions, behaviour, and impulses. It refers to the individual decision or the ability to delay immediate gratification of desires in order to reach larger alternative goals (Myers, 2010). The definition takes into consideration obstacles of the realities of life faced by individuals in this current dynamic and challenging world. Self-control also has been referred to as self-regulation, self-discipline, and willpower, among other names (Duckworth & Kern, 2011).

Many researches indicate positive significant relationship between self-control and academic performance (Nora Honken, 2016; Job, Veronika, Friese, Malte, Bernecker, Katharina, 2015; Duckworth, A., & Seligman, M., 2005; Dan Laitsch, 2016). Indeed, there are substantial amount of attention given by researchers to the survey and evaluation of theories related to self-control and academic performance. However, many of them do not relate self-control concept from Islamic perspective.

This paper discusses on the concept and nature of self-control that impact students' academic performance. Next, this paper comprehends the concept of self-control from Islamic perspective by examining the concept of human level of existence. This paper concludes with several managerial implications that could be deliberated by individual students, society, parents and organizations in order to increase students' academic performance as well as work ethics. This study is a library-oriented research. Thus, it relies primarily on secondary data sources such as literatures from various publications, books, journals, and from the internet. The study has been structured in the light of the research objectives.

2.0 SELF-CONTROL AND LEVEL OF EXISTENCE IN ISLAM

Most religions including Islam believe in the necessity of self-control. Indeed, strength of religious beliefs can enhance self-control in individual students. The Glorious Quran says:

“And as for him who fears to stand in the presence of his Lord (Allah) and forbids his own soul from its whims and caprices then surely Paradise is the abode.”

(Qur'an 79: 40 - 41)

The five fundamentals of Islam revolve around self-control. For instance, in terms of pray, one of the reasons we pray five times a day is to gain discipline. We fast in the month of Ramadan to “learn self-restraint”, and we perform Hajj, partly, to practice endurance.

"Guard strictly the Salah, especially the middle Salah. And stand before Allah with obedience."

(Quran 2:238)

“O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous.”

(Qur'an 2:183)

“The knolls of Safa and Marwah are among the rites decreed by God. Anyone who observes Hajj or `Umrah commits no error by traversing the distance between them. If one volunteers more righteous works, then God is Appreciative, Omniscient”

(Quran 2:158)

Islam believes that when individuals practise self-control, they will try their best to transform their soul for good things and the best part is to get closer to Allah. If this state of self-control can be achieved they will be able to physically and mentally adept to face the challenges of life. Findings from many studies indicate that individuals that have self-control tend to have high levels of job satisfaction and performance and cope better in stressful situations than individuals that lack self-control (Yousef, D. A., 2000).

In the context of Islam, there are four psychological levels of existence. They are sawala, ammara, lawama, and mutmainna. At each particular level, a person exhibits beliefs, values, attitudes and

behaviours corresponding to that stage. A person might progress to a higher level when conditions changed. The Quran (12:53, 75:2, 89:27-30) specifies and details the levels of existence. The *Quran*, too, clarifies not only the circumstances that shape the evolution and existence of each level, but also the conditions that induce changes and progress.

“And I do not acquit myself. Indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except those upon which my Lord has mercy. Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving and Merciful”.

(Qur’an 12:53)

“And I swear by the reproaching soul [to the certainty of resurrection]”.

(Qur’an, 75:2)

[To the righteous it will be said], "O reassured soul, Return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing [to Him], And enter among My [righteous] servants. And enter My Paradise."

(Qur’an, 89:27-30)

- a) Sawala (a passion for temptations) is the first level. At this level, a person’s soul prompts him to follow only his desires. He will always in state of resistance and ignorance from any forms of enlightenment. He is able to distinguish between good and bad, but lacks the capacity to integrate his needs with the surroundings. This is because his focus is on pursuing self-interest.
- b) Ammara (the prone-to-evil psyche) is the second level. At this level, a person is aware that his soul induces him to do bad things and yet offers no resistance to it. A person at this stage is weak spiritually. In this context, a person is inclined intentionally and, perhaps contrary to self-interest, to engage in wrongdoing. Nevertheless, a person at this stage is willing to confess mistakes especially when he understands that conditions are no longer satisfying his self-pursuit.
- c) Lawama (self-reproachment) is the third level. At this level, a person is conscious of evil. He continuously struggle between good and evil and seeks to repent whenever involves in bad conduct. In addition, a person at this level pursues to control self, sensitive to moral and ethical standards, tries to resist selfish pursuits, and considers what happens to him a consequence of his own choices.
- d) Mutmainna (the righteous) is the fourth level and it is the optimal level in human development. A person at this level has conscious mind that is perfectly in tune with good deeds. A person is a responsible and committed being and through intellectual and social involvement attains perfection, satisfaction, and spiritual fulfilment. At this level, a person is always determined and displays no uncertainty in his choices in life (Syed, J., & A.J. (2010).

Hence, if an individual lacks self-control, he is succumbing to the sawala and ammara; if he is behaving Islamically, he is fighting the evil impulses of the sawala and ammara, thus responds to the directions of the lawama and the mutmainna. So, what will govern his work behaviour and the interaction among these four levels of existence is his level of taqwa or piety.

Therefore, it can be summarized that the extent of self-control and the level of human existence are related to individual’s level of religiosity. In turn, the level of religiosity will determine whether an individual will behave in accordance with Islamic principles or not (Ali, A. J., 2009).

3.0 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is absolutely true that students themselves need to have high self-control in order to attain academic excellence. However, assistance and guidance from people that are close to them is vital. Parents, mentors, and educators plays important role in shaping and nurturing the self-control culture among students. With regards to that, this study has several implications. Firstly, students who have self-control and in *mutmainna* level of existence have the capability and capacity to control their behaviour towards academic excellence. In addition, they have high spiritual conscientiousness and are excellent servants of God. Thus, they are able to study and perform under stressful conditions. They will do their work as usual and their motivation level will not be affected.

Secondly, students who are at the *lawama* level appear to have lower level of self-control as compared to those who are at *mutmainna* level. However, they are still in control since they believe whatever happens to them is the result of their own choices. They will always struggle to control their academic behaviour since their soul is always prone to the state of flux either towards good or evil as their spiritual needs are not yet completely internalized. They can be motivated if supportive or participative style of leadership in use in dealing with them. Parents/mentor/lecturers need to show concern on them, be supportive, listen to their problems and involve them in whatever decision that might affect them.

Thirdly, students who are at the *sawala* and *ammara* level have low level of self-control. Among the two levels, *sawala* is the worst. Students who are at these levels will find difficulty in managing academic behaviour and easily de-motivated. They cannot perform under crisis and stressful condition. This is because they consistently want to pursue their self-interest due to their low level of spiritual maturity. In order to motivate them, strict external control mechanisms need to be in place. This includes frequent monitoring and supervision by parents/mentor/lecturer, tight organizational rules, policy and procedures, and others.

According to Ibrahim Badr Shehab (2016), a Muslim individual who commits himself to following Allah's commands and prohibitions, will maintain a relatively constant level of performance, in all situations and in conformity with defined performance benchmarks, to an acceptable extent. On the other hand, the performance level of a non-Muslim, or an uncommitted Muslim, would tend to fluctuate according to the kind of incentives offered, the extent to which those incentives are irresistible, or to how strict he may be monitored. If, for some reason or another, that individual was denied incentives, or if he escaped monitoring, his effort would be reduced to its minimum levels.

This suggests that those individuals who are in *mutmainna* and *lawama* level of human existence (*mutmainna* is the best level) fall in the first category since they have high spiritual maturity, whereby those who are in *sawala* and *ammara* level fall in the second category as described by Ibrahim Badr Shehab. They would be easily de-motivated since they are prone to extrinsic factors rather than intrinsic motivation.

Fourthly, in order to boost up students' motivation for academic excellence, apart from relying on individual students' self-control, there is also a need for the existence of an effective and efficient extrinsic formal control system. This is because students are also human beings who occasionally make mistakes and who are unfortunately subject to weaknesses (Ibrahim Badr Shehab, 2016). Therefore, parents/mentor/educators need to study, review, design, and develop various methods and strategies that are of course non-monetary, which meet students' need. It is especially true that different individual have different behaviour, life perspective, and level of existence. Thus, such diversity must be recognized.

Fifthly, it is good if parents can include their children (at their early age) in self-control training intervention that combine cognitive as well as spiritual related training in order to create and enhance their children's self-control as well as spiritual maturity level. For that, programs such as congregational prayer, usrah/religious talk, motivation, and Emotional-Spiritual Quotient programs are highly recommended. Moreover, it is vital for parents to practise *management by example*, by showing high moral conduct and good behaviour as Muslim so that their children will be inspired and motivated to follow such good behaviour. Furthermore, parents need to focus on motivating children by using intrinsic motivation (which work best at all times) compared to extrinsic motivation.

Finally, self-control intervention and training should not be one-off. It must be conducted in continuous basis. There is evidence that self-control can be improved (Nora Honken, 2016). Moffitt and colleagues (2011) recommend self-control training in early childhood and then again in adolescence, based on the belief that the longer you wait to improve self-control the harder it is to change. Parents play an important role in creating and nurturing self-control culture among children when they are still young. However, once children have entered school/universities, educators take part in order to help students towards their academic excellence. In many school/universities nowadays, there are many programs held such as mentoring and peer-to-peer counselling that can help in making sure that students are in their right direction towards achieving their excellence.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, self-control is not the only determinant for academic success. Some other psychological constructs such as intelligence, motivation, self-efficacy, commitment to school, and self-regulation are also important factors ensuring high performance. Therefore, future research can focus on self-control with successful performance in various domains.

Indeed it is challenging to motivate and nurture self-control among individuals since individuals are always unique to each other and they have different personalities and dispositions (Omar M. Muammar, 2015). In order to motivate students, it is important not to devoted attention to satisfying the psychological and physical needs of students (external), but to focus on spiritual aspect manifested in the belief in Allah and the Hereafter (internal). In fact, faith is considered a constant motivator and guide for individuals' behavior. The greater the faith an individual attains the greater the role faith plays in motivating human beings towards the desired behavior.

5.0 REFERENCES

Al-Quran

- Ali, A. J., (2009). Levels of existence and motivation in Islam, *Journal of Management History*. 15(1) 50–65.
- Dan Laitsch (2016). Self-Discipline and Student Academic Achievement. Research Brief.
- Duckworth, A. L., & Kern, M. L. (2011). A meta-analysis of the convergent validity of self-control measures. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 45(3), 259-268. doi: 10.1016/j.jrp.2011.02.004
- Duckworth, A., & Seligman, M. (2005). Self-discipline outdoes IQ in predicting academic performance of adolescents. *Psychological Science*, 16 (12), 939–944. June 26, 2006. Volume 4. Number 6.
- Ibrahim Badr Shehab (2016). Motivation To Work Between Western Theories And Islam, *European Journal of Business and Innovation Research* Vol.4, No.2, pp.11-35.
- Information on <http://www.psychologydictionary.org/self-control>. Psychology Dictionary.
- Information on <http://www.suhaibwebb.com/islam-studies>. Psychology, Islam & Self-Control.
- Irena Bakanauskienė, Mindaugas Ubartas (2012). The changes of employee's motivation in the crisis conditions: the case of a telecommunication company, *Impresa Progetto – Electronic Journal of Management*.
- Job, Veronika, Friese, Malte, Bernecker, Katharina (2015). Effects of practicing self-control on academic performance. *Motivation Science*, Vol 1(4), Dec 2015, 219-232.
- Moffitt, T. E., Arseneault, L., Belsky, D., Dickson, N., Hancox, R. J., Harrington, H., Caspi, A. (2011). A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 108(7), 2693-2698. doi: 10.10
- Myers, D. G. (2010). *Psychology* (9th ed.). New York, NY: Worth Publishers.
- Nora Honken (2016). Self-Control And Academic Performance In Engineering. *American Journal of Engineering Education*. 2016 Volume 7, Number 2.
- Omar M. Muammar (2015). Intelligence and Self-Control Predict Academic Performance of Gifted and Non-gifted Students. *Turkish Journal of Giftedness and Education*, Volume 5, Issue 1, 67-81.
- Rafikul Islam, Ahmad Zaki Hj. Ismail (2008). Employee motivation: a Malaysian perspective, *International Journal of Commerce and Management*, Vol. 18 Iss: 4, pp.344 – 362.
- Stephen P. Robbins, David A. DeCenzo & Mary Coulter (2013). *Fundamentals of Management*, eight ed., Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Syed, J., & Ali, A. J. (2010). Principles of employment relations in Islam: A normative view, *Employee Relations*. 32(5) 454–469.
- Yousef, D. A. (2000). The Islamic work ethic as a mediator of the relationship between locus of control, role conflict and role ambiguity: A study in an Islamic country setting. 15(4) 283–302.
- Yudhir, S. (2012). Employee's Motivation: Theories and Perspectives. *Asian Journal of Multidimensional Research*, 1(2), 56–64.