EFFECTS OF CHARACTER EDUCATION ON THE SELF-ESTEEM OF INTELLECTUALLY ABLE AND LESS ABLE ELEMENTARY STUDENTS IN KUWAIT

Abir Tannir
American University of Kuwait

Anies Al-Hroub
American University of Beirut

This research study investigates effects of character education activities on the self-esteem of intellectually able and less able students in the lower elementary level in Kuwait. The participants were 39 students in grade three with an average age of eight years old. Students were first divided into two ability subgroups (intellectually able vs. intellectually less able), based on their IQ scores on the Kuwaiti Raven Standard Progressive Matrices (RSPM). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSS) was also administered before and after a five-week implementation of the program. The experimental group received character education, and the control group received traditional English lessons with no specific character education. The results revealed that the intellectually able students who received character education showed a higher self-esteem rating than the intellectually less able. The character education program had benefited the intellectually able more than the intellectually less able students.

Character education is a developmental curriculum aimed at teaching learners to make knowledgeable and responsible choices by acquiring the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed (CEP, 2010). Character education programs focus on social, emotional and personal development. In these programs, children learn to value themselves, respect others, be responsible, cooperate with other individuals, solve problems, and be honest and trustworthy (Hall, Holder, Matthews, McDowell, Pyne, Walker, & White, 1998). Children learn to accept themselves through recognizing their good characteristics. Learning interpersonal relationships also helps children to accept themselves and have good friendships. Over some years, self-esteem has become an established theme in psychological literature (Rodewalt & Tragakis, 2003), being defined as the representation of the person's general feeling about him/herself (Kutob, Senf, & Shisslak, 2010). Having a positive self-evaluation motivates the person to make wise choices that could lead to success (Powell, 2009). Self-esteem is an important factor in people's emotions and a big part of human behavior. At the elementary level, children start to develop judgments about their physical, social, emotional and cognitive attributes. Students are strongly affected by their social environment and think of themselves in terms of social relations which is a generalized self-portrait. In this stage, children describe themselves in terms of emotions and how they are influenced by others' behaviors (Snowman & Biehler, 2000). School character education programs figure largely in teaching self-esteem activities. Most teach self-esteem related lessons, either directly under the self-esteem title or through character traits related to self-esteem like respect, responsibility, self-confidence, self-evaluation and others. In addition, school counselors find it crucial to work with students' self-esteem. Character education can be easily addressed from the emotional intelligence perspective (Mayer & Cobb, 2000).

Raising a child with moral standards is very difficult (McDaniel, 1998) and highly targeted these days. Lawrence Kohlberg has developed a major theory of moral reasoning. He identified six stages of moral development divided into three levels: (1) pre-conventional, (2) conventional, and (3) post-conventional (Crain, 1985). Kohlberg sees moral development as *the increasing ability to differentiate and integrate the perspectives of self and other in making moral decisions* (McDaniel, 1998, p. 1). Accordingly, many schools have adopted moral development as a goal, and have begun enhancing values, such as kindness, fairness, honesty, responsibility and similar traits, talking about understanding to respect differences, developmental discipline, and cooperative learning. Children taking part in character and moral education programs learn to be more respectful, understanding and considerate to one another (Gage & Berliner, 1998). They can be more helpful,

understanding, and responsible. This can connect to Gardner's work on multiple intelligences and Goleman's emphasis on emotional intelligence. Gardner argues that an emphasis on IQ alone discards other important characteristics of the person: social and interpersonal capacities for sympathy, empathy, and other regard. These traits are crucial to students' personal and social development (Carr, 2000). Daniel Goleman (1995) in turn has been very interested in emotional intelligence that is concerned with affective aspects of the child. Emotional intelligence focuses on educating the child to develop affective strategies. This is reflected in schools which are teaching character education. Emotional education plays an important part in children's experiences. Emotions are very important in life, and learning how to deal with them and handle them is the key to emotional intelligence. When counselors work with children, they are encouraging them to uncover their emotions and aim to help them manage certain emotional states that relate to unhappy feelings or are socially problematic (Radford, 2003). Thus, emotional intelligence (learning how to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions [Goleman, 1995]) increases when a child can control and manage his or her emotional life (Radford, 2003). Radford urges educators to focus on emotional development of their students, and consider how it should be supported to achieve an emotionally balanced life. Teaching values and social skills enhances a child's performance in life (Goleman, 1995).

In brain-based learning, the brain cannot function (learn) when a child is experiencing stress or anxiety. That is why character education is useful in establishing a healthy emotional environment. Moreover, the teaching process of personal and social values is supported by social learning theory. Teaching is important in children's lives because it encourages them to learn from a significant model (teacher) (Gage & Berliner, 1998). Children learn the desired values by observing their teachers behaving appropriately. Rational behaviors are then motivated by the teacher, so learning will take place. Thus, learning and observing these positive characteristics can help children build their social skills which can then affect their self-esteem (Mosley & Sonnet, 2002).

Literature Review

Many approaches have been proposed to study self-esteem. Although the literature covers a variety of such research, this review will focus on three main topics: character education and self-esteem, moral reasoning and gender differences, and character education, self-esteem and intellectual abilities. Research has considered moral education as part of character education sharing similar attributes and skills. Literature shows that teaching character education can improve the levels of self-esteem (Allred, 2008; Snyder et al., 2010; Watson, 2006; Goodwin, Costa, & Adonu, 2004; and others). This effect of character education varies according to intellectual abilities and gender differences. Literature deals with these topics in different contexts, but this paper will focus on the effect of character education on self-esteem with relation to intellectual abilities and gender differences.

Character Education and Self-Esteem

There has been little research on the effects of character education on self-esteem in the Arab world; however, similar research to the effect of character education is worth mentioning. The results of two character education programs certainly merit discussion in relation to the present study. In a study by Allred (2008), the findings revealed that a positive action system improves a child's academic and character aspects. The study concerned a developmental curriculum to teach character education and included the following concepts: self-concept, healthy body and mind, self-management, getting along with others, being honest, and developing social and personal skills. Teaching positive actions encouraged the students to acquire social and emotional development which helped them improve decision-making skills. Positive behaviors yield positive feelings about one-self, and the concepts discussed in this program are the base of achieving academic and life success. Its implementation results in students' feeling good and happy about themselves and who they are, and what they do. In another study by Snyder et al., the findings showed that a positive action program positively affects both behavior and academic performance (Snyder et al., 2010), as well as self-esteem. Similarly, character education has many positive results in elementary school.

The Child Development Project (CDP) is another character program adopted by some American schools (Watson, 2006). It promotes students' social, emotional, ethical, and intellectual development. The effect of the program was examined in the elementary level, and showed a long term positive effect on students' self-esteem. These students showed positive views about their school and themselves; they linked this positive view to their success, moral, and personal values. In Eidle's (1993) research study, the findings revealed that self-esteem and value-oriented living are strongly related. Character programs teach children how to behave positively. Values-education programs are mainly designed to foster students' self-esteem. Clearly, predictions indicate a relationship between values and self-esteem, but no direct relationship has been observed (Goodwin, Costa, & Adonu, 2004).

In addition, Srikala and Kumar (2010) examined the effect of life skills education (LSE) on adolescents. Life skills were defined as positive behaviors that help students deal effectively with everyday life. Decision making, problem solving, interpersonal skills, coping with feelings and self-awareness are all part of the life skills education. Their study was conducted on 605 students from two secondary schools in comparison with 423 adolescents from nearby schools outside the LSE program. The program was evaluated after one year of the study and it showed a positive effect on students' self-esteem for those receiving LSE. It also showed positive changes in classroom behavior and interaction.

Donegan and Rust (1998) examined the effectiveness of Vernon's Thinking, Feeling, Behaving Curriculum (1989) on 41 second-graders. Two experimental and control groups were investigated using the Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem (BASE) and McDaniel-Piers Young Children's Self-Concept Scale in a pre-test/post-test setting. Vernon's program was introduced to the experimental group for a period of 15 weeks. The results showed gains in the self-concept of students in the experimental group. In summary, Vernon's (1989) curriculum was partially effective in improving students' self-esteem.

A study by Martin, Marsh, Mclnerney, Green and Dowson, (2007) examined the effects of two interpersonal relationships – teacher-student and parent-child – in achievement, motivation and self-esteem. The sample was 3450 secondary students ranging from 12 to 18 years in six Australian schools. The results showed a positive correlation between relations and general self-esteem. The interpersonal relationships were strongly associated with students' self-esteem.

A correlational study by Parker, Nelson and Burns (2010) examined the occurrence of behavioral problems in classrooms with a character education program called *Smart Character Choices* (SCC). The results showed that the SCC program reduced the occurrence of behavioral problems in classrooms. In a related study, Houlston and Smith (2009) examined the impact of peer-counseling on bullying behaviors in a North London girls' school. The results indicated that a peer-counseling support scheme can improve self-esteem of peer supporters. The peer support scheme describes the student's potential to help other children. Peer supporters go through training before they work with other students. Peer-counseling can change the students' views of bullying in the school. Peer-counseling is supporting students in befriending, resolving conflicts, and mentoring. These are common ingredients of character education programs. Also while receiving character education, students are encouraged to help each other and motivate positive behaviors and help reduce undesired ones; this can also be categorized under peer-support and will most likely improve self-esteem of peer-supporters.

Moral Reasoning and Gender Difference

Further research has studied the effect of gender differences on moral reasoning. Rothbart, Hanley and Albert (1986), for example, tested Gilligan's theory which focuses on gender differences in moral reasoning. The theory proposed that males tend to consider moral dilemmas in terms of justice and rights, while females are more concerned with care for and relationship to others. The results showed that both males and females used both moral orientations while females tended to focus more on care considerations. These findings were supported by Friedman, Robinson and Friedman's (1987) study.

Gupta and Puja (2010) examined the moral judgment ability of 200 pre-adolescent children, ages between 8-11 years, at public school. The findings showed that gender has insignificant impact on moral judgment ability of children. Likewise, Daniels, D'Andrea, and Heck (1995) investigated possible differences in the moral development of male and female youths. The results exhibited statistically no significant gender difference in moral development.

Gender difference of moral reasoning was also studied in Kuwait. Al-Ansari (2002) investigated the effects of gender and education on the moral reasoning of Kuwaiti students. The results showed no significant gender differences. Similarly, Al-Rumaidhi (2008) examined the moral reasoning patterns of Kuwaiti males and females adolescents. The results showed that gender has no significant influence on their moral reasoning.

Character/Moral Education, Self-Esteem and Intellectual Ability

The intellectual abilities of highly able and able children can lead to advanced social and emotional problem-solving skills. Teaching highly able students to develop their social aspects can foster their self-esteem and leadership skills (Silverman, 1993). Elmore and Zenus (1994) examined the effect of teaching inter-personal skills, including cooperative learning strategies on the self-esteem of high, moderate and low gifted achievers'. The findings indicated a significant increase in self-esteem after implementation of the program although students at the higher and lower achievement levels had trouble adjusting to the program. Students with a moderate achievement level were the most adaptable in the program. Intellectually less able students tended to

work alone because they were scared by able students who might expose their inferiority. They did not answer problems; instead they waited for gifted/able students to give their answers. Throughout the program, their cooperative skills improved and they were more involved in discussions. The findings revealed that less able students benefited most from the social and emotional development program. Another study by Knepper, Obrzut and Copeland (1983) examined the social and emotional problem-solving skills of 60 intellectually gifted/able and average students in the elementary level. The findings supported the view that intellectually gifted score higher on interpersonal and intrapersonal cognitive problem-solving skills than intellectually average children.

Derryberry, Wilson, Snyder, Norman and Barger (2005) examined the moral judgment of a group of intellectually able youths compared to a group of college students who were intellectually less able. The college group was older in age and life experiences than the intellectually able group. The results showed significant advances of moral judgment for the intellectually able group. Another study by Lee and Kubilius (2006) examined the level of emotional intelligence, moral judgment, and leadership for gifted students. A major finding was that intellectually gifted students scored higher on adaptability than intellectually average students, while lower scores were achieved when investigating stress management and impulse control ability. On the other hand, gifted students scored highly on moral judgment and their levels were comparable to people with higher degrees, masters or professional degree. They also showed high leadership skills.

In a study conducted by Vialle, Heaven and Ciarrochi (2007), the findings indicated that the level of self-esteem did not significantly differ between gifted and non-gifted students. Similarly, gifted students and non-gifted students showed approximately equal self-esteem levels in a study conducted by Hoge and Renzulli (1991). On the other hand, in another study gifted students were friendlier and showed good leadership skills and had higher self-esteem when compared to average ability students (Kenny, Archambault & Hallmark, 1995).

To sum up, research related to this topic is limited in Kuwait and is either related to character education implementation (e.g., Douglas, 2005) or self-esteem in relation to religious (e.g., Abdel-Khalek, 2011) and psychological factors (e.g. Al-Fayez, Ohaeri, & Gado, 2012). There is no research in Kuwait dealing with character education and self-esteem at the same time. Moreover, the Kuwaiti curriculum does not emphasize character traits such as responsibility, self-discipline, and cooperation, but emphasizes citizenship education and teaching students in Arabic social studies, how to be *good citizens* without operationally defining the traits of a good citizen. On the other hand, many private schools develop their own character education programs or adopt programs that are already published. However, character education, when taught, is delivered using the same approach for all students. It does not take into account different ability levels and how to address their needs. Therefore, the current study examines which ability group benefits more from character education programs.

The Current Research

Research aims and questions

The purpose of the current research was three-fold: (1) to investigate effects of character education on third grade students' self-esteem in Kuwait, (2) to examine the difference in self-esteem level between intellectual ability groups when being exposed to character education activities; and (3) to examine the difference in self-esteem level between boys and girls when being exposed to character education activities. Therefore, the **following** are the specific **research questions** addressed in this study:

1. Do character education activities have a positive effect on Kuwaiti students' self-esteem?

2. Is there interaction between self-esteem level and the two intellectual ability subgroups in the experimental group?

3. Do character education activities have differential effects on boys' and girls' self-esteem?

Method

Design and participants

The study adopted the quantitative experimental design with pre- and post-test comparison. Two conditions were established. The first condition, the character education condition, consisted of students who participated in a character education program. The second condition consisted of students who participated in English language activities that did not include a character education program and this served as a control condition. The first independent variable of the study was character education activities. On the operational level, these activities were based on Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), and taught students self-acceptance, dealing with their feelings, dealing with beliefs and behaviors, problem solving and decision-making techniques,

and interpersonal relationships (Vernon, 1989). The second independent variable was intellectual ability (able and less able).

Thirty-nine students, aged 7 years and 6 months to 8 years and 6 months with an average of 8 years from Grade 3 were selected from one private bilingual school in Salmiya city in Kuwait. This grade is considered as a transitional stage for students to start understanding their social context. The participants were chosen from two class sections, and these sections were assigned to one of two research groups: experimental (N=20) and control (N = 19).

Tools

Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices (Raven's CPM). The Kuwaiti version of the Raven's CPM is a non-verbal test of intellectual ability and is regarded as being relatively free of accumulated knowledge (El-Korashy, 1987). According to Raven et al. (1998), the Raven's CPM test gives an indication of the level of analogical thinking and abstract thought that a person has achieved. The Raven's CPM is designed for young children ages 5:0-11:0 years and older adults. The test consists of 36 items in three sets (A, Ab, B), with 12 items per set. The reliability and validity of the CPM was studied on Kuwaiti children. The Raven's CPM was administered to a sample of 152 elementary Kuwaiti students with ages ranging between 6 and 10.5 years old. The internal consistency coefficients for sub-sets of the test ranged from .46 to .91, and split reliabilities were .87 during the first administration and .82 for the second administration. The test-retest reliability after one month was .79 (El-Korashy, 1987).

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSS, 1989). This scale was designed to measure students' self-reported global self-esteem, and has been widely used in social sciences. The scale is a ten item Likert scale with items answered on a four point scale - strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The items are self-worth statements ranging from negative to positive wording (Ang, Neubronner, Oh & Leong, 2006). The RSS was administered in English. The items were read and explained to all the students, and then emphasized when necessary.

The original sample for which the scale was developed consisted of 5,024 high-school juniors and seniors from 10 randomly selected schools in New York State (Rosenberg, 1965), and when administered to measure global self-esteem of college students and community members, it showed alpha reliability from .80 to .90, and construct validity from .72 to .76 (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001). Many studies were conducted of the validity and reliability of the RSS. Silbert and Tippett (1965) administered RSS on college students (N=44) using Guttman scaling. The convergent validity showed 0.56 with interviewers' ratings of self-esteem and the reliability was 0.85. Albo, Núñez, Navarro and Grijalvo (2007) studied the validity of RSS on university students. They found that the internal consistency of the scale was between .85 and .88. The test-retest correlation value scored .84. RSS also had good internal consistency in a different context. When administered to 98 African-American single mothers the scale showed internal consistency of .83 alpha coefficients (Hatcher & Hall, 2009).

Procedure

This research consisted of three phases: pre-treatment, treatment, and post-treatment as follows:

The first phase: pre-treatment included administration of the Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices (RCPM) to the experimental and control groups, and pilot testing of the character education activities. Both experimental groups were divided into two intellectual ability subgroups based on the students' IQ scores on the RCPM (El-Korashy, 2007). An educational specialist administered the RCPM to all participants at the beginning of the process. After obtaining the total raw scores, percentile ranks, and age equivalent the students were classified on the basis of Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices (El-Korashy, 2007). According to RCPM, there are 5 percentile classifications. Students in the 91st percentile and above are the well above average group, 71st-90th percentile are above average, 31st-70th percentiles are average, 11th-30th percentiles are below average, and 10th percentile and below are well below average. In this present paper**,** students were categorized by percentiles in two broad subgroups as 'intellectually able' and 'intellectually less able' for two main reasons: (1) the small sample size; and (2) the concepts of 'able' and 'less able' are broad, so that the two groups would quite reasonably contain most, if not all, student participants. Accordingly, students in the 71st and above percentiles were categorized as 'intellectually able', while students in the 70th and below percentiles were categorized as 'intellectually less able'. The results showed that 23 students were between the 75th and 95th percentile, while 16 were 50th percentile and below. None of the student participants' percentiles was between 51st and 74th. The dependent variable was the students' self-esteem level. There were many debates on the nature of self-esteem, but it could be defined as the student's overall evaluation of himself including positive feelings and

satisfaction (Manning, 2007). RCPM does not have a specific duration, but the average duration of the test was 45 minutes. The items were read and explained to all the students, and then emphasized when necessary.

Regarding the character education activities, two groups activities, 'Just Different' and 'I Can Try', were pilot tested with 20 students in a school with the same age group to examine the pace, duration, and the level of the lesson. The pilot testing was conducted at the beginning of the academic year to rule out maturity bias.

The second phase: this is the phase of implementation of the character education program. The study involved collaboration between two researchers (one of the authors as teacher-researcher), one English teacher, external observer, a school principal, and two education advisors in a private school in Kuwait. The teacher and the teacher-researcher were females to avoid gender bias. The teacher based in the school had several years of experience in teaching English as a second language. The external observer was a third grade teacher, who visited the two groups twice throughout the implementation phase to observe their teaching techniques. The observer had five years of experience in elementary education, and used the Teaching Observational Checklist that was developed by Al-Hroub (2010) (see Table 1) to observe the teaching techniques of both teachers and ensure the fidelity of the teaching of the two programs. The teaching mechanics included the duration of the lesson, the pace and clear voice of the teacher, teacher involving all the students in the class, teacher taking students' questions and input seriously, being open for questions and additional answers, giving time after the question, motivating the students, and ensuring that the students understood the lesson. The observer noted that both lessons were fairly implemented. It was clear from the noted observation that the character education teacher had a challenging start to the program because the pace of the lesson started slowly then gradually increased to the right pace.

Table 1. Teaching Observation Checklist

• …..Begins and ends class on time.	• …..Invites alternative or additional answers.
• Teaching at about right . . . slow . . . fast….. pace.	• …..Involves a large proportion of the class.
• …..Sees that everyone hears questions and answers.	• …..Makes sure that students are paying attention.
• …..Treat students' questions seriously.	• …..Calls students by name.
• …..Calls on non-volunteers as well as volunteers.	• ….Gives motivational cues.
• ….Allows time after question for formulation of good answers.	• ……Makes sure that comments or questions have been heard by all.
• ……Allows time after answer to consider it.	• …..Checks to see whether answer has been understood.

The researcher-teacher of the character education group is one of the authors, who has had several years of teaching experience and has practiced teaching character education. The character education activity (Table 2) was run daily for 30 minutes, of which 15 minutes were devoted to discussion and 15 minutes to the stimulus activity (Vernon, 1989). This period was divided between talking about the objective of the lesson, doing the activity, and discussing it with the students. The intervention period required five weeks excluding the teacher sessions and treatment period. The activities were run in an interactive manner; in that they were student-centered where students were encouraged to brainstorm and communicate with their friends whenever possible. The first week students engaged in five activities related to self-acceptance. The first activity was *Just Different*. First the objective of the activity was explained: *To recognize that just because people are different doesn't mean they are better or worse* (Vernon, 1989). The material needed for this activity was pencils. The procedure took about 15 minutes and started by introducing the activity and asking each child to get a pencil he used and to talk about it in front of the class. The student talked about differences that made his pencil special. Then, they examined their pencils and came up with special features to identify their pencils. After that, they placed all the pencils in one basket and mixed them together. Then, the teacher asked each student to find his pencil from the

basket. The discussion phase (15 minutes) followed by asking questions related to the activity. The teacher stressed the importance of differences, and consequently there was no need to compare ourselves to others and judge accordingly (Vernon, 1989). The second week had *feelings* as a theme and involved activities focusing on how to deal with our feelings and face them. The theme of the third week was 'Beliefs and Behavior' and it focused on the importance of checking out the belief before taking it as a fact. The following week highlighting the topic *Problem Solving/Decision Making* and covered ways to solve problems and how to choose a good solution and make better decisions. The last week was about *Interpersonal Relationships*, with emphasis on seeing the positive traits in oneself and avoiding judging oneself and others; every person is special and unique.

The control group received traditional English reading lessons under the theme *Making a Difference*. The stories were *Roadrunner's Dance* and *My Brother Martin*. The teacher started the session by introducing the lesson's objective. The students then explored the new vocabulary and put the words into context. Brainstorming next took place regarding the title of the story. The story is general and does not necessarily relate to moral themes. The students read the story and then the teacher asked questions to test comprehension of the information. At the end of the session, the students summarized the story.

The third research phase was the group re-testing of the RSS, which was administered by the same researcher. Sufficient time was given, with an average of 15 minutes, to allow the students in the pre- and post-tests to read and understand the items before responding to them.

Table 2. Character Education Activities per week

Group of Activities	**Week 1:**	**Week 2:**	**Week 3:**	**Week 4:**	**Week 5:**
	Self-Acceptance	**Feelings**	**Beliefs and Behavior**	**Problem Solving/Decision Making**	**Interpersonal Relationships**
Activity 1	Just Different	Face Your Feelings	Facts and Beliefs	What Happens When…	Judgment Machine
Activity 2	Nobody Likes Me	I Think, I Feel	Beliefs, Feelings, and Behaviors	Once Upon a Time	Face the Facts
Activity 3	Put Downs	How Strong	Checking It Out	For Better or Worse	Glad to Be Me
Activity 4	So They Say	Thermometer of Emotions	Stop, Go, and Caution	The Ripple Effect	It's Me!
Activity 5	I Can Try	I Feel, I Do	Options	React and Respond	One of a Kind

Data Analysis

Data analysis of a two-way, within-between analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. One factor was the method of training, and the second factor was time. The training method was the *between* factor, because the study examined the differences between groups using different training methods. Time, was the *within* factor, because the study measured each group twice by pre- and post-treatment survey. Therefore, the study observed the difference within each group over time. The two-way, within-between ANOVA yielded the following results.

Results

The students' raw scores on the RSS were calculated and analyzed. Standard deviations and means were calculated before and after the character education program was implemented. The mean difference was significant between the ability groups. The mean of the intellectually less able group decreased in the post-treatment when receiving the traditional instructional program, while it increased while receiving the character building program.

Table 3 presents the number of cases, and mean and standard deviations for both treatment groups in the pre- and post-treatment. The results show that whereas the first group made, on average, a regression of 0.53 points (21.00–21.53) after they received the traditional teaching, students in the second group showed, on average, a slight progress of 0.20 points (22.00–21.80) after they received the character building program. The intellectually able group who received the traditional instructional program showed a progress of 1.22 points (22.33-21.11) between pre-treatment and post-treatment surveys. On the other hand, the intellectually less able group showed a slight regression of 0.53 points (19.8-21.90) after they received the traditional instructional program. Alternatively, after the intellectually able group received the character building program, a regression of 0.71 points (22.50-23.21) was found, while the intellectually less able showed a progress of 2.33 points after the character building program.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Pre- and Post-Treatment Surveys for the Two Experimental Groups

Program	Intellectual Ability Group	Pre-Treatment Survey			Post-Treatment Survey			Pre- and Post-Mean Difference
		N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	
Traditional Instructional Program	Able	9	21.11	5.25	9	22.33	3.81	1.22
	Less Able	10	21.90	3.28	10	19.80	3.33	-2.10
	Total	19	21.53	4.22	19	21.00	3.70	-0.53
Character Building Program	Able	14	23.21	4.63	14	22.50	5.92	-0.71
	Less Able	6	18.50	3.51	6	20.83	4.58	2.33
	Total	20	21.80	4.77	20	22.00	5.49	0.20

The character building program might contribute to the students' self-esteem, but that effect might differ across different intellectual ability groups. Table 4 shows the outcomes of the two-way ANOVA that yielded an interaction effect for the two intellectual ability group's difference, $F(5.35) = .027$, $p < .05$, such that the average peak was significantly higher for the intellectually less able group than for the intellectually able group. The main effect of a character building teaching approach, as compared to the traditional teaching group, was slightly higher but it was non-significant, $F(.822) = .371$, $p > .05$. However, the interaction effect, as indicated earlier, was significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 4. Tests of Within-Subjects Effects for the Two Experimental and Interaction Groups

Source	Mean Square	*F*	Sig. (df = 35)
RSS	.612	.072	.789
RSS * Experimental Group	6.94	.822	.371
RSS * Experimental Group* Ability Group (interaction)	45.16	5.35	.027*

*Significant at $p < .05$ level

As shown above, the interaction between pre/post-treatment, experimental groups and intellectual ability groups was significant. This could be due to the considerable positive changes of the interaction between the experimental group and the less able group, but there was a negative change for the control group (see Table 3).

Figure 1 illustrates the findings of Table 3 and represents the difference between the two experimental groups. It was clear that the mean self-esteem decreased between pre- and post-treatment in the traditional instructional program. On the other hand it showed an increase in the mean self-esteem of the character building program.

Figure 2 illustrates the findings of Table 4 and represents the effect of character education on students' self-esteem by their intellectual ability groups. At the beginning of the implementation, there was a big gap in the mean self-esteem level between the intellectually able and less able groups. The intellectually able self-esteem level started at 23.21 and intellectually less able group started at 18.50 making the difference between the groups 4.71. After the treatment, the intellectually able mean self-esteem slightly decreased to 22.50, while the intellectually less able group increased to 20.83. Due to the character education program, the gap between the two ability groups started to close, the difference being 1.67 at the end of the treatment.

Figure 3 illustrates the effect of gender difference on the self-esteem score. The pre-survey mean score of boys in the group receiving character education was 20.8, while girls scored 24.8. In the post-survey, males in the character education group scored higher than girls with a mean score of 22.27 while girls' score dropped to 21.2. Girls scored higher as well in the pre-survey traditional instruction group with a mean score 22.4, while boys scored 20.56. In the traditional instructions group boys' self-esteem score increased to 20.89 while girls' scores decreased to 20.9.

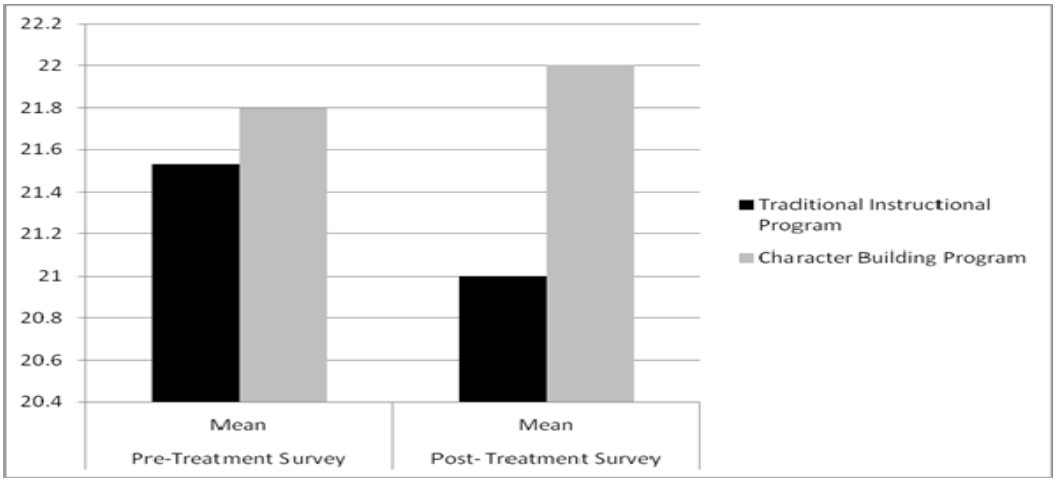

Figure 1. Comparison Between the Traditional Instructional Program and Character Education Program Groups in the Pre- and Post-Survey

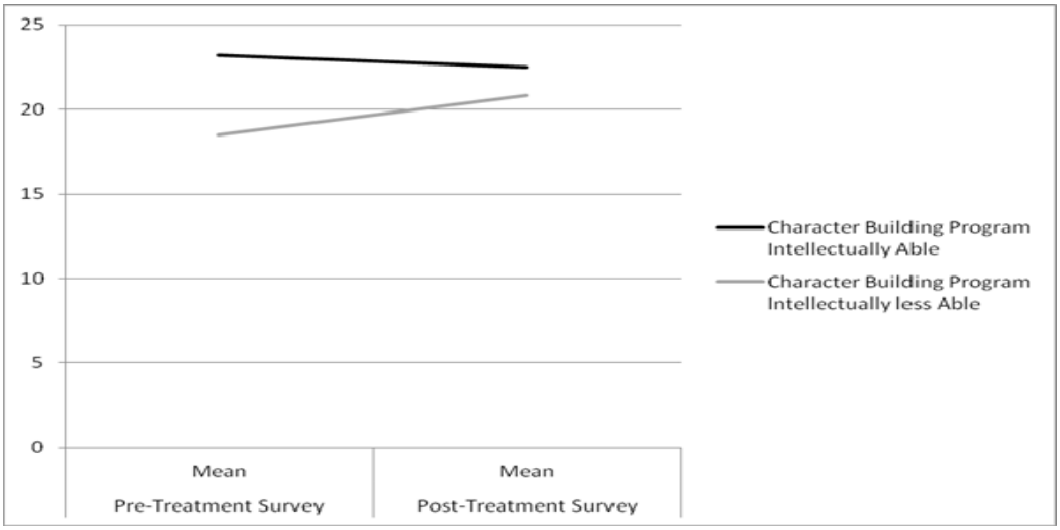

Figure 2. Effect of Character Education Program by Intellectual Ability Groups

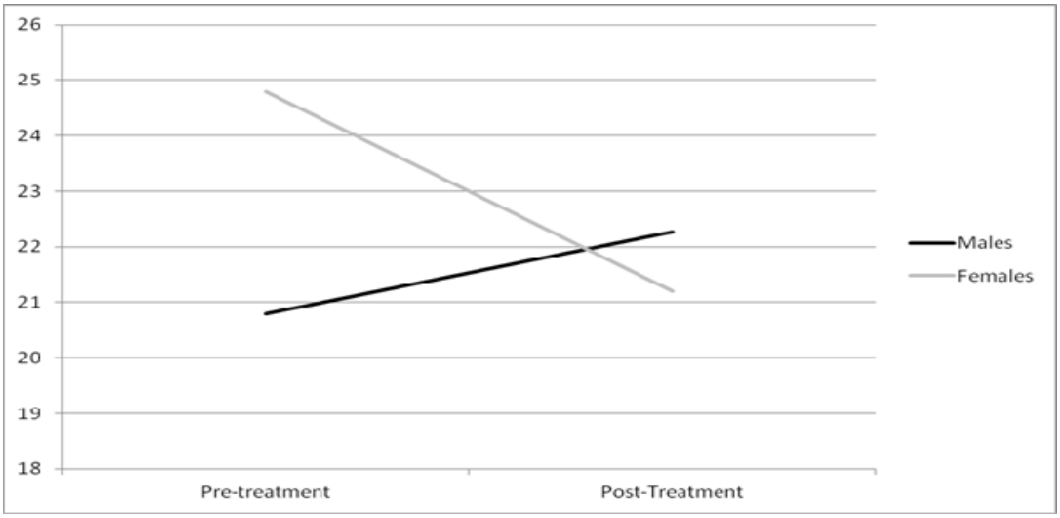

Figure 3. Effect of Gender Differences on Self-Esteem

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings revealed a slight difference between the experimental and control groups. Students who received character education showed slight progress in their self-esteem score, whereas students in the traditional instructional group did not show any progress in their self-esteem. In fact, students in the non-treatment group showed a regression in their self-esteem scores based on the RSS tool. It is important to note that this regression might be because they did not receive skills to maintain or increase their self-esteem. There was a positive aspect of this, which was an improvement in self-esteem for students who received character education. It indicates that more in-depth studies should be conducted to examine that specific purpose.

On the other hand, the two intellectual ability groups showed different results, as character education enhanced the less able students' self-esteem. A statistically significant increase in their self-esteem was reported. Given that there are more within-group differences than between-group differences, the character education program seemed to be more useful for less able students. According to the results, less able students showed lower self-esteem during the pre-treatment test than the able students. This could be related to the fact that the students were in a heterogeneous class. A study argued that when able and less able students were grouped together, higher ability students seemed to have higher self-esteem (Knepper, et al., 1983) because they were outperforming the intellectually less able, who had lower self-esteem because in relation to academic achievements the intellectually able students were achieving better (Kenny et al., 1995). Intellectually less able students benefited more from a social and emotional development program because it helped them mingle with other students, and it, indirectly, taught ways to participate in discussions (Elmore & Zenus, 1994).

Previous literature also indicated that students with high intellectual ability frequently have high self-confidence and leadership skills (Berkowitz & Hoppe, 2009). Similarly, students who have high intellectual ability have more advanced emotional and social problem-solving skills than intellectually average students (Knepper, Obrzut, & Copeland, 1983). Also, students who perform well at school tend to have higher self-esteem than intellectually less able students (Kutob et al., 2010). One observation of the findings was that intellectually less able students are more in need of raising their self-esteem and gaining self-confidence. In contrast this group of students in the traditional instruction group showed a regression after they were exposed to this program. It suggested that the traditional program was not challenging enough to their social and emotional skills to build their self-esteem or enhance their confidence.

Unlike the traditional instruction program, the character building program was surprisingly not useful for the able students. This may have been because intellectually able students already have higher self-esteem than intellectually less able students. Linking this finding to previous studies, Berkowitz and Hoppe (2009) found that teaching character building skills to high performing students was challenging because they needed striking techniques to motivate their learning. Likewise, moral judgment in students with high intellectual abilities was more advanced than average students (Derryberry et al., 2005). In a study conducted by Vialle et al (2007), teachers described intellectually gifted students as being well adjusted and experiencing fewer behavioral and emotional problems than intellectually average students. Gifted or able students did not show deficits in their self-esteem; self-esteem of gifted students could increase when they are labeled as gifted/able (Hoge & Renzulli, 1991).

It is interesting to note the gender data collected from the study. Boys receiving character education had an increase in their self-esteem score at the end of the implementation. On the other hand, girls in the same group noted a decrease in their self-esteem. This can be linked to Gilligan's theory of the effect of gender differences on moral reasoning (1993). The increase in boys' self-esteem might be due to the knowledge they received from the character education activities. They experienced taking decisions and making judgments concerning what is right or wrong. This aligned to Kohlberg's theory of moral development. In the conventional morality level, stage 3 is about moral reasoning from good interpersonal relationships (Kohlberg, 1971). Our finding also supported Gilligan's theory that males tend to consider moral dilemmas in terms of justice and rights, while females were more concerned in care and relationship to others (1993). Moreover, they learnt to solve their problems and to deal with their emotions. The decrease that occurred in girls' self-esteem score could be explained according to the hypothesis that they tend to work with moral dilemmas on the basis of care and relationship to others (Gilligan, 1993). Gilligan suggested that females can move in their thinking from the conventional to the post-conventional mode because they stop considering their responsibilities and think according to their values of care (Crain, 1985). In addition, girls might have doubts in their moral reasoning when they start observing boys' moral development. It is highly recommended for future research to pay more attention to gender difference effects on moral reasoning and self-esteem.

Taken together, these findings provide some important preliminary considerations regarding character development, particularly that of low intellectual ability students. Teaching character or social and emotional skills enhances students' general self-esteem. This is particularly true for intellectually less able students. This suggests that character education benefited the intellectually less able group more than the intellectually able. So this finding was observed throughout the program implementation and statistically proved by the results obtained. Extensive research in this field would be required to support or defeat the present findings.

Although most of the intellectually able group exhibited a higher self-esteem level than the intellectually less able, teaching character education helps maintain that standard and enhances the self-esteem of the intellectually less able. In relation to the above suggestion, character education can foster self-esteem in students with average and low abilities. Teaching these students social and emotional skills will allow them stand-up for themselves in different settings. This might also positively affect their performance because it gives them self-motivation (Kutob et al., 2010). Children with high self-esteem operate positively and are able to influence their surroundings, while. students with low self-esteem can be easily led by others and avoid difficult situations and challenges (Wiggins & Wiggins, 1992)This implies that non-academic classroom activities would be beneficial to encourage students to actively interact with each other. It also suggests that character education is important in schools because it gives the teacher the opportunity to target everyday troubles with the students.

The current study suggests that students learn about emotional and social skills to enhance their ways of communication and interaction with others (Snyder et al., 2010). When students learn about being kind and accepting others, the teasing between them should decrease (Hall et al., 1998). This allows room for diverse students to share and be part of the society/school. Practicing character skills and values encourages students to build positive relations and fosters a kids-friendly environment (Parker et al., 2010).

Research Implications and Limitations

Our present study is one of the first conducted in Kuwait to deal with character education and self-esteem in relation to ability grouping. This is why extensive research is needed to be able to generalize similar findings. Several conclusions could be drawn from this study. First, teachers, practitioners and counselors need to direct their efforts to the implementation of a suitable curriculum to meet the students' social and emotional needs. Second, designing and implementing a good character program would help schools develop moral education and values and thereby decrease undesired behaviors. A good character is developed through teaching, learning, and practice (Haynes & Oliver, 2007). Third, many character skills fall under the heading of *developing a good citizen*; among these skills are honesty, fairness, interpersonal relationships, self-acceptance, responsibility, loyalty, compassion, etc. (Kemp, 2000). The values are a non-definitive list, but the present study dealt with values common to developing a good citizen. It included self-acceptance, judgment, fairness, honesty, interpersonal relationships, and compassion. Thus, it is critical to foster character development in schools. This also entails that there will need to be professional development of teachers to train them to teach character education to students of different ability groups. Fourth, it is recommended to look more closely at the gender differences in relation to moral thinking. Some research has indicated that there is no difference between males and females regarding moral judgment abilities (Gupta & Puja, 2010; Daniels et al., 1995). Extensive research should consider moral reasoning in different societal and cultural contexts to study gender differences. Fifth, it is recommended in future research to include qualitative data collection in the research design. A mixed-methods approach that includes participant observation and analysis of classroom discourse would help to capture not only aspects of students' pre- and post-treatment self-esteem, but also interactions during the character education treatment sessions that might have led to the changes in student performance.

There are some limitations that signify that caution must be applied when generalizing the findings. The research was conducted solely in one bilingual school and therefore may not be representative of students in other settings. The sample size is small for the findings to be generalized. The period of implementation is only six weeks which is possibly too short to bring about the desired significant changes in self-esteem levels of both ability groups. Also, the tool used to collect teachers' feedback is not structured and teachers' reflections are not systematic, and thus not included in the article. The findings could also mean that a more specific domain of self-esteem may be more relevant than the general self-esteem considered

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