

# GETTING SMART: NEED TO FOCUS ON CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT STRUCTURED AROUND THE OBJECTIVE OF REALIZING THE TRUE POTENTIAL OF OUR NEXT GENERATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Most traditionalists argue (and receivers of education believe) that education amounts to the quantum of knowledge, in the form of instruction, being transmitted from a teacher to a student. This model of education also tends to include measurement, of the quality of instruction and learning outcomes, via grades, tests, quizzes and assessments. In our observed opinion, traditional teaching practices, current early education system structure and grade-assessment-method of monitoring progress against target learning outcomes is: (a) primarily focused on providing historical facts and knowledge for foundation-setting of “classified subjects (Math, Science, Languages, History, Geography etc.)”; (b) obsessed with setting measurable “limits” and restricting attainment level assessment in comparison to those pre-set limits. This, in our view, is essentially a “production-factory” model. Facts, figures and instruction are important but not an end in themselves. Success and leadership abilities are not dependent only on academic outcomes and measurement of the quality of instruction but also on the key virtues possessed by an individual. Aristotle believed that virtues are literally habit forming; their hold on our personality grows through intervention and repetition; they strengthen through use and can fade through neglect. So virtues that are either neglected or not activated in repeated and challenging situations of choice, cease to exist. With this backdrop, for our study, we have identified 23 notable contributors (outliers) of the human race in recorded and well-documented history over 2500 years. The focus of our analysis is to trace any emerging pattern of virtues that can be attributed to having played a definitively influencing role in life outcomes of these individuals. Our study intends to address the following questions: (1) of the 23 individuals identified for having contributed significantly, in their respective fields, does a pattern of demonstrated virtues exist? (2) Should a pattern exist, is it significant enough to allow prioritizing intervention for developing these virtues? (3) Is it possible to structure an intervention of traditionally un-quantified virtues and measure outcomes of such an intervention? Case study method for quantitative research was used to conduct the study, examining 23 cases (multiple case studies) to understand the similarities and differences between the cases. We used the data base in the form of secondary data, collected from various sources, on life history of these 23 people. Using this methodology, we have found that 8 virtues have been repeated more than 5 times (statistically significant) in the sample (total 83 data-points). We have concluded that: (a) A combination of 8 intellectual virtues, as defined herein, can be attributed to having played a

definitively influencing (not entirely defining) role in life outcomes of these exceptional individuals – these are: (1) Flexibility of Mind; (2) Focus; (3) Originality; (4) Persistence; (5) Initiative; (6) Resilience; (7) Reflectiveness; (8) Curiosity. The pattern of their occurrence is significant enough to warrant prioritizing their development in the next generations; (b) A key curriculum objective, specially of formative years’ educational system, must be to prioritize the provision of tools and environment that will help pupils in exploring and developing their potential, particularly (not exclusively), for these 8 skills. (c) to take this forward, further literature and original research is needed on: (1) evolving a methodology or set of methodologies to use, during early school years, for “enabled” development of these intellectual virtues; (2) creating an “indicator” mechanism to assess pace of individual (not relative) progress against these eight life-long learning objectives.

**Keywords:** Education, Intellectual Virtues, Life Outcomes, Outliers, Life-long Learning Objectives.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional education is focused on students memorizing facts to make sure that skills are drilled into them. Most traditionalists argue (and those making decision on behalf of their children receiving formal education believe) that education amounts to the quantum of knowledge in the form of instruction being transmitted from a teacher to a student. This model of education also tends to include measurement, of the quality of instruction and learning outcomes, in the form of grades, tests, quizzes and assessments. Facts, figures and instructions are important but not an end in themselves. Success and leadership abilities are not dependent only on academic outcomes and measurement of the quality of instruction but also on the key virtues possessed by an individual [1]. However, these virtues are not measured (and consequentially not formally valued) because, currently, they are not a structured part of our instruction-based teaching.

Joseph Campbell [2] argues that all cultures, all societies and by extension all organizations (political or otherwise) are engaged in a “hero quest”. All cultures search for a unique, larger than life, gifted person, or for a singular idea, belief or iconic symbol that helps to organize, explain and give meaning, purpose and direction to life. He also believes that the “hero quest” is in effect a “leadership quest” [3]. As a concept leadership and quest for leadership are anthropological constants, necessary

conditions for collective/communal existence. Leadership is not primarily about personality but about specific kinds of behavior. Kouzes & Posner are convinced that each leader is a unique individual but there are shared patterns to the practice of leadership and these practices can be learned (if they can be learned, they can be taught as well). Since 1983, authors conducted multiple surveys with seventy five thousand respondents, from various walks of life, and asked them: what specific values, characteristics or personal traits do you look for or admire in a leader? The results of these surveys have been constant over time and consistent across countries, cultures, ethnicities, industries and organizations. It is not enough to identify the values that people say they admire. It is also crucial to understand the basis of these values i.e. virtues and the role those particular virtues play in life [4]. Baehr [5] lists four different dimensions of personal character i.e. moral, civic, performance and intellectual and explains that all the virtues falling under each character are called its respective virtues i.e. moral virtues (enable us to respond well to situations in any area of experience – e.g. compassion, trust, respect); civic virtues (necessary for engaged and responsible citizenship – e.g. volunteering, service); performance virtues (behavioral skills and psychological capacities that enable us to put many other virtues into practice – e.g. leadership, resilience, perseverance and determination); and intellectual virtues (required for the pursuit of knowledge, truth and understanding –e.g. reflection, communication) [6].

Leadership is character driven [7] and it must never be confused or directly equated with social status, power, position, rank or title [8]. One can lead from where one stands and presence of one or more key virtues is important to depict leadership behavior [7]. Aristotle believed that virtues are literally habit forming; their hold on our personality grows through intervention and repetition; they strengthen through use and can fade through neglect. So virtues that are either neglected or not activated in repeated and challenging situations of choice, cease to exist [9]. (Skinner and Thorndike, separately, proposed that people, like other organisms, do only what they have been reinforced for doing. All behavior is initiated by the external environment [10, 11]). For intervention and repetition of any virtues to be treated as key, as a first step, it is necessary to identify them.

There are many studies [4, 7, 12, 13, 14] that have focused on identifying key virtues for being “successful” in life. However, all these studies started with identifying the virtues and then finding them in various successful/leadership characters.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS & METHODOLOGY

With this backdrop of existing research, for our study, we have identified 23 notable contributors of the human race in recorded and well-documented history over 2500 years, while: (a) excluding prophets and religious scholars; (b) covering a well-diversified range in terms of fields and acknowledged success of contribution to our race. Taking the data-set, we have extracted 5 most notable events from their life-history and assessed each for the top-three demonstrated virtues. The focus of our analysis is to trace any emerging pattern of virtues that can be attributed to having played a definitively influencing role in life outcomes of these individuals. Our study intends to address the following questions: 1. Of the 23 individuals identified for having contributed significantly, in their respective fields, does a pattern of demonstrated virtues exist?

2. Should a pattern exist, is it significant enough to allow prioritizing intervention for developing these virtues? 3. Is it possible to structure an intervention of traditionally un-quantified virtues and measure outcomes of such an intervention?

Case study method for quantitative research [15, 16, 17] was used to conduct the study, examining 23 cases (multiple case studies) to understand the similarities and differences between the cases [18]. This method was used to systematically identify the key demonstrated virtues in the authentically documented history. The study design was flexible, as data gathering and analysis was determined by the subject matter of each case as represented in Fig. 1

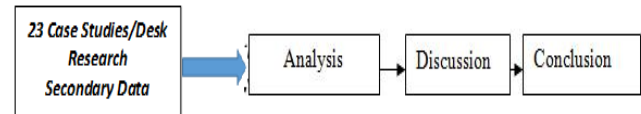


Fig 1 Experimental Design of Study

## 3. DATA FINDINGS

We used the data base in the form of secondary data, collected from various sources, on life history of these 23 people. We organized the data in tabular form [18], represented in TABLE 1 & Fig. 2 as follows.

TABLE 1 DEMONSTRATED VIRTUES OF 23 NOTABLE CONTRIBUTORS OF HUMAN RACE

Personality	Field of Fame	Honors	Demonstrated Virtues
Rabindranath Tagore [19,20,21] (1861-1941) Origin: Sub-Continent	Writer; Painter	1 <sup>st</sup> Nobel Laureate from Asia – 1923 Prize in Literature	Curiosity Flexibility of Mind Reflectiveness
Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib [22,23,24] (1797-1869) Origin: Sub-Continent	Urdu & Persian Poet and Prose Writer	Considered to be the most influential humanist poet by 20% of the world	Courage Flexibility of Mind Originality
Amitabh Bachchan [25,26,27] (1942 to date) Origin: Sub-Continent	Actor; Entertainer	Top 3 Indian Awards 3 Honorary Doctorates for being one the most influential and versatile actors, ever.	Persistence Flexibility of Mind Focus
Adam Smith [28,29,30] (1723-1790) Origin: Scotland	Economics; Philosophy of Ethics / Morals	Father of modern Economics – “The Wealth of Nations”	Flexibility of Mind Curiosity Originality
Bill Gates [31,32,33] (1955 to date) Origin: USA	Technology; Philanthropy	Creator of the Microsoft – the most influential organization of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century	Initiative Flexibility of Mind Focus
Kung Ch’ in Confucius [34,35,36] (551 to 479 BC) Origin: China	Moral & Social Philosophy and Ethics	Founder of Confucianism (Leading by Virtue)	Empathy & Respect Persistence with Resilience Reflectiveness leading to Good

			Judgment
Mohammad Ali [37, 38] (1942 to date) Origin: USA	Professional Boxing & Principles	Considered to be the most influential athlete of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century	Risk-taking Courage Focused Resilience Persistent self-assurance
Richard Branson [39,40,41] (1950 to date) Origin: England	Founder of Virgin Group	Created one of the most diverse companies of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century	Initiative Risk-taking Courage Flexibility of Mind
Steve Jobs [42,43,44] (1955-2011) Origin: USA	Founder of Apple	Created the most creative enterprise of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century	Originality Persistence Focus
Winston Spencer Churchill [45,46,47] (1874-1965) Origin: England	World War II Prime Minister of Britain	Nobel Prize in Literature – 1953 and considered to be one of the most inspirational statesman on the 20 <sup>th</sup> century	Initiative Flexibility of Mind Focused decision-making
Abdul Sattar Edhi [48,49,50] (1928 to date) Origin: Sub-Continent	Humanitarian / Social Work “Angel of Mercy”	Lenin Peace Prize – 1988 Founder of the largest charitable ambulance service in the world	Empathy Focus Persistence
Aristotle [51,52] (384 to 322 BC) Origin: Greece	Scientific Philosophy	Considered to be one of the most revered thinkers and creator of “deductive-reasoning based inference”	Originality & Initiative Curiosity Flexibility of Mind
Isaac Newton [53,54,55] (1643-1727) Origin: England	Mathematician & Physicist	Defined gravity & invented the telescope – considered to be the father of 17 <sup>th</sup> century scientific revolution and classical mechanics	Curiosity & Initiative Originality Flexibility of Mind
Nelson R. Mandela [56,57,58] (1918-2013) Origin: South Africa	Human Rights Activist / Statesman	First Elected President of South Africa Nobel Peace Prize - 1993	Resilience Courageous Persistence Reflective Focus
Plato [59,60,61] (428 to 348 BC) Origin: Greece	Scientific Philosophy	Founded the first Western Civilization Institution to study science through original research (University)	Curiosity Flexibility of Mind Initiative
Jalal-ad-Din Mohammad Rumi [62,63,64,65] (1207-1273) Origin: Persia	Poet / Spiritual Master & Religious Scholar	Regarded as creator of the greatest work ever (over 27000 line) on mystical poetry	Focus Reflectiveness Originality
Albert Einstein [66,67,68] (1879-1955) Origin: Germany	Physicist	Nobel Laureate for Physics – 1921 Founder of “Theory of Relativity”	Curiosity Flexibility of Mind Originality

Charles (Charlie) Spencer Chaplain [69,70,71,72] (1889-1977) Origin: England	Comic Entertainer	5 Academy Awards Considered to be the most special silent-era entertainer	Originality & Initiative Resilience Focus & Reflectiveness
Helen Keller [73,74,75,76] (1880-1968) Origin: USA	Deaf & Blind Author and Activist	Honorary Harvard Doctor. First deaf-blind person to acquire a university degree. Hall of Fame - 1971	Resilience & Persistence Reflective Focus Flexibility of Mind
Anjeze G. Bojaxhiu Mother Teresa [77,78,79] (1910-1997) Origin: Macedonia	Missionary Humanist	Nobel Peace Prize – 1979. Named Blessed Teresa of Calcutta & Mother Teresa.	Empathy Focused Persistence Collaboration
Opera Winfrey [80,81,82] (1954 to date) Origin: USA	Entertainer	Richest (the only “Black-Billionaire”) & Most Philanthropic African-American of 20 <sup>th</sup> century.	Resilience Courageous Persistence Initiative & Originality
Pablo Ruiz Picasso [83,84,85] (1881-1973) Origin: Spain	Artist (Painter)	Considered as the most influential artist of the 20 <sup>th</sup> Century	Creativity Flexibility of Mind Originality
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart [86,87,88] (1756-1791) Origin: Austria	Music Composer	Considered to be the most prolific music composer in recorded history	Focus Creativity Originality

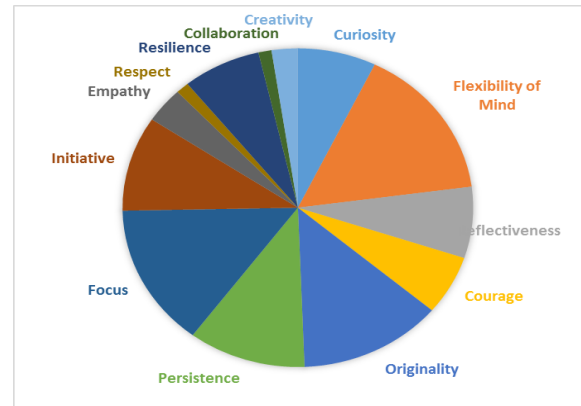


Fig. 2 Complete Set of Virtues Identified as Top 3

#### 4. ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

While the methodology used is not mathematically quantifiable, the results are backed by highly compelling qualitative deductive-reasoning. Using this methodology, we have found that 8 virtues have been repeated more than 5 times (statistically significant) in the sample (total 83 data-points) presented in Fig. 3. These, in decreasing order of repetition, are:

- (1) Flexibility of Mind (Defined as: the mental ability to switch between thinking about multiple concepts simultaneously while being able to incorporate new information in previously formed reasoning and adapt to the change / impact of the new variable);
- (2) Focus (Defined as: the ability to block out distractions and

noise from the core aspect under the limelight irrespective of the tenor of its execution period);

(3) Originality (Defined as: the ability to think independently or visualize possibilities that do not necessarily have an established precedent);

(4) Persistence (Defined as: the ability to continue pursuing logic-backed opinion or course of action in the face of adversity and/or counter-popular belief);

(5) Initiative (Defined as: the ability to launch an idea or a concept or thought independently without waiting for pre-validation or encouragement by others);

(=6) Resilience (Defined as: the ability to be effectively buoyant in the face of change or misfortune);

(=6) Reflectiveness (Defined as: the ability to play-back events and incorporate unbiased analysis while using the benefit of hindsight);

(=6) Curiosity (Defined as: the desire to know or learn with the discipline to follow-through on inquiry).

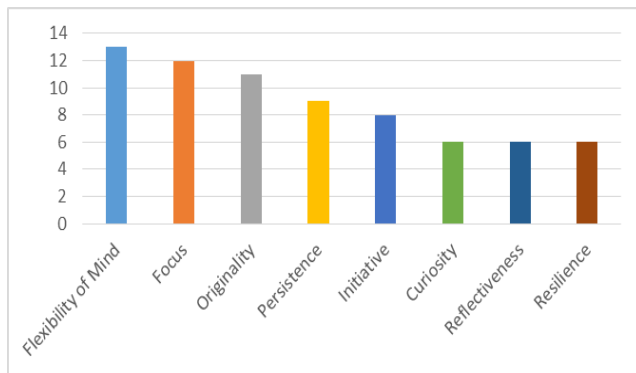


Fig. 3 Top 8 Virtues

These results are partially supported by Genovese in 2014 [89], who listed flexibility of mind as one of the key virtues, and contrary to the results found by some of the previous studies, where Honesty [4,7], Courage [7,14], Trust [12], Integrity [13] & Justice [13,14] were identified as key common virtues.

Having found these common virtues and history demonstrating what these 23 achieved, we can reasonably assume that these virtues can be treated as a proxy for predicting, and therefore influencing, possible range of outcomes for individuals. While a clear limitation of the approach is that the impact-magnitude (direct co-relation of each individual virtue with the overall outcome) has not been established, it can be intuitively deduced that virtues, which are acquired skills (we have therefore excluded gifts like artistic genius, highly developed empathy and process outcomes like decision-making ability or good-judgment) can be developed through intervention and/or enabling environment (result supported by Durant in 1926 and Gini & Green in 2013) [7,90] and are retained through habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtues but we rather have these virtues because we have acted rightly in the right environment [7].

Given that a key objective, particularly of formative years' educational institutions, must be to provide tools that can help learners explore and develop their potential, based on our findings, we are proposing that developing these 8 skills and achieving quantifiable learning outcomes should be considered as an integral objective of our formal development-education (life-long learning) curriculum. This, however, raises two key questions: (1) is it possible to structure formal development intervention, of these largely un-quantified skills in the prevailing education system, for pupils in early (primary &

middle) school years? (2) Does intervention actually work and is it possible to measure progress and learning outcomes against "soft-skills"?

In our previous work, Sattar & Nazir [91] in 2014 "Analyzing impact of formally taught life skills' curriculum on self-esteem and thinking skills of early school children", given the rapidly developing trend of anxiety and depressive disorders and the level of prevalence of such disorders at 34% in urban Pakistan, we investigated: (a) the impact of structured, taught and activity based curriculum for life skills with focus on self-esteem and thinking skills (these thinking skills include five sub-skills, which are: (1) decision making; communication skills; dealing with stress; (4) social skills; (5) assertiveness); (b) the differences in impact, if any, by gender. Our conclusions and recommendations were as follows: 1. Introducing a structured and well-researched program in the early school years, to develop self-esteem and thinking skills, will play a significant role in preparing children for inclusive, reflective and productive citizenship; 2. 5 years intervention for Life Skills is projected to lead to a 55% to 65% enhancement (based on linear progression assumption) in self-esteem and thinking skills respectively. However, there is no way to determine the actual or maximum impact on improving of these skills, as progression in not likely to be linear but compounded; 3. In light of the 34% presence of anxiety and depressive disorders in Pakistan, and based on our findings, it is deemed necessary that: (a) more targeted research be conducted to determine the level of intervention, on self-esteem and thinking skills, at which a significant correlation exists to treat this intervention as a preventive tool against developing mental disorders; (b) on concluding such research, it may be used to form the basis of prescriptive policy and law making for changing the early education curriculum to include mandatory life skills' education as one preventive intervention against avoidable mental disorders caused by inability to manage stress and frustration.

There is a whole array of research and testing studies which support intervention as a vital tool to assist learning of character, values and virtues. Leming (1993) [92], proposed an approach using experimental designs, focusing on behavior of students, attempting to control for bias, and comparing program participants with nonparticipants. Using this approach, "The Weber County Character Education Project" was conducted in Utah, involving 3,000 students and 109 teachers, covering a two year longitudinal study which reported a statistically significant reduction in disciplinary problems. Using the same approach, another study was conducted by the "Child Development Project" in San Ramon, California, where a character education program had been implemented in three elementary schools. The longitudinal study tracked the students for seven years from kindergarten through sixth grade. The study involved: (a) hypothetical-reflective interview measures of social problem-solving skills; and (b) observational data on four types of classroom behavior. After five years, the study showed improvement in student understanding or belief (understanding what is right and what is wrong).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In our observed opinion, traditional teaching practices, current early education system structure and grade-assessment-method of monitoring progress against target learning outcomes is: (a) primarily focused on providing historical facts and knowledge for foundation-setting of "classified subjects (Math, Science,

Languages, History, Geography etc.)”; (b) obsessed with setting measurable “limits” and restricting attainment level assessment in comparison to those pre-set limits. This, in our view, is essentially a “production-factory” model and does not promote life-long learning. Facts, figures and instruction, while important, are not an end in themselves. Leadership originates from certain key virtues. However, these virtues are not measured and, consequently, are not formally valued. This, in our view, represents a massive flaw in the way we currently educate or receive education. Our analysis of 23 “outliers”, who walked this earth from 500 BC to date, and have stood (and will most-likely stand) the test of time for the “dimension” of their contribution to the human race, across a broad range of fields, indicates that:

(1) A combination of 8 intellectual virtues, as defined herein, can be attributed to having played a definitively influencing (not entirely defining) role in life outcomes of these exceptional individuals – these are: (1) Flexibility of Mind; (2) Focus; (3) Originality; (4) Persistence; (5) Initiative; (6) Resilience; (7) Reflectiveness; (8) Curiosity. The pattern of their occurrence is significant enough to warrant prioritizing their development in the next generations;

(2) As also argued by Aristotle, virtues, which are intellectual skills (excluding natural gifts and consequential derivatives), can be developed through intervention and/or enabling environment. A key curriculum objective, particularly of formative years’ educational system, therefore, must be to prioritize the provision of tools and environment that will help pupils in exploring and developing their potential, particularly (not exclusively), for these 8 skills. Based on analyzed contribution of the cases reviewed, it can be intuitively concluded that these virtues, when evolved in a whole “smart” generation through systematic and targeted intervention, will serve to open a possible range of highly-valuable outcomes at the individual as well as the collective society level;

(3) Following on, from our previous research and demonstration of the impact of intervention through a structured life skills’ program, as well as other studies with supporting results for intervention, and to take this forward, we recommend further literature and original research on: (a) evolving a methodology or set of methodologies to use, during early school years, for “enabled” development of these intellectual virtues; (b) creating an “indicator” mechanism to assess pace of individual (not relative) progress against these eight life-long learning objectives.

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