Educational
Administration
Theory and Practice

A Study Of Undergraduate Students Engagement In Moral Education

Li Bing*

*Zhejiang Yuexiu University of Foreign Languages, 2801 Qunxian Middle Road, Yuecheng District, Shaoxing City, Zhejiang Province, the People's Republic of China. Email:katielee66888@gmail.com, Telephone: 0086-15958589175

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study examines student engagement in moral education, investigates the necessity of moral development at universities, and explores the relationship between moral and character education. The research synthesizes findings from various studies, revealing that moral values are closely linked to good character, often interchangeably referenced due to their shared qualities. Moreover, the importance of educators and academics in guiding students toward forming moral identities is emphasized. Prior research indicates that student engagement significantly influences learning, achievement, and various college outcomes, including persistence, academic success, cognitive growth, and other affective developments. Through factor analysis, this study demonstrates that students' moral development progresses during their early university years, underscoring the essential role of moral education in higher education settings. The results advocate that nurturing students' character should be as fundamental as academic instruction and research within university education. **Key words:** Moral education; students' engagement;

Introduction:

Student engagement is an important component of their success in higher education and acts as a mirror of their educational experiences. It has been related to student learning, perseverance, satisfaction, and academic success. Embedded in action, student engagement in a higher education course corresponds to the energy and effort they put into their learning and course activities: in other words, to "how students act, feel, and think" in the course. Often considered from a multidimensional perspective, student engagement in a higher education course manifests itself in different aspects such as affective reactions (emotional) and psychological investment (cognitive); attention and participation (behavioral); interactions and relationships (social); and/or the proactive contribution of students (agentic) (Fredricks, Wang et al., 2016; Reeve, 2013). Student engagement is considered as an indicator of university quality assessment (Kuh, 2001; McCormick et al., 2010; Zilvinskis et al., 2017; Austen et al., 2023). Researcher have developed framework and instruments like the National Survey of Student engagement (NSSE), which are specifically designed to evaluate student engagement. These measures are widely used to assess the quality of the educational experience at universities. The development of technology has brought new ethical challenges, such as issues of privacy, cybersecurity, and the ethics of artificial intelligence. There has been significant attention focused on how college students engage in moral education.

Education is not just about imparting knowledge; it also includes the cultivation of students' moral qualities, which is an important goal of education. Morality is considered as important as material wealth in the development of a nation. It provides a strong spiritual force and is a crucial part of the human civilization and its value system. Moral education is a term used by academics in educational sciences extensively. It is relative to character education, which is a widely known movement in the field. It also intends to remind academics and administrators in higher education that students' moral development does continue throughout tertiary education years. The moral values of students still could be fostered. Robson defines research review as "having a synoptic aim of putting together and evaluating different kinds of findings in a particular field of interest" (Robson 2000).

Review of Literature:

A current and widespread conception of student engagement in the scientific literature involves considering it as a multidimensional psychosocial process stemming from interactions between students and the context. In the scientific literature on student engagement, the most common and widely dimensions are behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) argue that these three dimensions are integral to understanding student engagement comprehensively. In recent research, several authors have also suggested considering the social and agentic dimensions of student engagement (e.g., Bowden et al., 2021; Heilporn et al., 2020; Reeve et al., 2020). Also, Heilporn et al. (2020) have found in their recent research that emotional and cognitive dimensions were intrinsically linked and considered these ones as a single factor. Students' behavioral engagement refers to the time spent in class, their concentration and attention span, participation in activities, and the effort put into the course. Although some authors, such as Fredricks, Filsecker, and Lawson (2016), also include following rules and adhering to norms in this behavioral dimension, studies in higher education generally do not mention these elements (Núñez and León, 2019).

Moral Development during University

Education is not just about imparting knowledge; it also includes the cultivation of students' moral qualities, which is an important goal of education. Universities are viewed as pivotal institutions for moral development, with a responsibility to guide students towards becoming individuals who are not only professionally competent but also morally upright and socially conscious. According to Candee and Kohlberg, morality could be regarded as having interpersonal behavior which includes the rights, duties, or welfare of either party. In their opinion, an action could be considered moral "if it is consistent with what an actor independently judges to be morally right." Kohlberg argues that choices that are moral duties are choices both for ourselves and all people (Kohlberg 1977). The author thinks that moral values are different from other kinds of values in terms of "defining duties and duties as universalizable". In his view, duties do "imply rights and if moral duties rest on rights, moral values rest on justice."
In Yavuzer's view, adolescence, which is the transition period between childhood and
youth, is between the ages of 12 and 21. Due to different conditions in societies, acquiring the role of an adult emotionally takes place between the ages of 15 and 24 and this age group is named youth. The term youth is a wide concept that comprises adolescents and early adulthood stage. Research conducted in the capital city of Turkey and another city in southern Turkey found that the adolescence finishes at the age of 21,6 for girls and 23,1 for boys. The last phase of adolescence is known as late adolescence and it includes the period between the ages of 18 and 21. During this phase, identity development is completed and wholeness in identity feeling is reached (Canat 1996 quoted in Yavuzer 2005).

Qualities of Moral Education

Moral education aims not only to impart knowledge but also to develop the whole person, including emotional, social, and ethical dimensions. Berreth and Berman believe that it is possible to help students to improve their moral values and social skills by way of modeling, instruction, experience, and continuous practice (Berreth & Berman 1997).
They list seven principles for a moral school community: "(1) The school community collaboratively develops, clearly states, and celebrates core moral values; (2) adults exemplify positive moral values in their interactions with one another and with students; (3) the school functions as the hub of the neighborhood community; (4) students develop skills in goal setting, problem solving, cooperation, conflict resolution, and decision making; (5) students are involved in decision making within their classroom and school; (6) educators use a problem-solving approach to discipline; (7) school communities provide opportunities for service – both within and outside the school." In summary, Berreth and Berman outline the essential conditions for moral education in a school environment. Like previous authors, they emphasize the role of teachers in enhancing students' moral values.
In addition. Total Moral Quality (TMQ), as developed by Hasan Baharun in 2017, is an evolved concept of character education. It builds on Thomas Lickona's ideas of moral modeling, moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral habituation. TMQ is specifically adapted for implementation in educational settings like schools and is aimed at a holistic development of character. This approach suggests that effective character education should encompass various aspects of morality: modeling ethical behavior, understanding moral principles, experiencing moral emotions, and practicing moral habits consistently.

Methodology:

The research method was qualitative and using factor analysis. The purpose of factor analysis is to make data reduction and pattern identification. The first step is to simplifies many variables into fewer factors. After that, it helps in identifying the structure in the relationships between variables, which can suggest theories or concepts. The researcher reviewed books and research articles to find the key words. The researcher collected

the various literature reviews from books, articles both online and offline sources that provide information on moral education to improve students' engagement. There are many documents (books and articles) about the moral education university levels. Thus, the researcher also investigated the moral education at this level that could possibly apply to the university level. As a result, forty books and one hundred articles published between 2014 to 2023 were included in the review of literature.

Findings & Recommendation:

Astin and Antonio conducted research on the influence of higher education on character development (Astin & Antonio 2004). They chose dependent variables to complement and extend the literature on the moral and civic development of college students. Three of them were composite measures whose constituent variables were derived through exploratory factor analyses: civic and social values, cultural awareness, and volunteerism. They also anticipated that institutions promoting community service and volunteerism and those valuing diversity would be more likely to contribute to students' character development.

Table 1: Composites Developed by Factor Analysis

Values	Key Terms
Social Values	• Help to promote racial understanding • Influence social values • Develop a meaningful philosophy of life
Cultural Values	• Acceptance of people of different races and cultures • Ability to work cooperatively • Understanding of community problems
Volunteers	• Hours per week doing volunteer work • Plan to do volunteer work after college
Services oriented	• Priority to facilitate student involvement in community service • Campus provides opportunities for community service • Most students are strongly committed to community service • Help students examine and understand their personal values
Diversity	• Create a diverse multicultural campus environment • Hire more minority faculty and administrators • Recruit more minority students • Many courses include minority group perspectives.

As for civic and social values, the findings align with those of Malin and Pos (2015) and Stefaniak et al. (2017). These studies highlight the significant role of civic engagement in promoting social and personal development and argue that fostering youth civic engagement should be a key focus for research and policy. In addition, cultural awareness refers to the understanding, knowledge, and sensitivity that individuals have about the cultural differences and similarities within, among, and between groups. This awareness helps people recognize and appreciate the values, have ability to work cooperatively and understanding community problems. Cultivating cultural awareness is essential for fostering respect and effective communication in diverse social, educational, and professional environments. It enables individuals to navigate cross-cultural interactions more thoughtfully and effectively, promoting inclusivity and reducing cultural misunderstandings. Meanwhile, Cultural awareness is an integral part of the skills needed for the 21st century, often categorized under "21st-century skills." These skills are essential for preparing individuals to work collaboratively in a globally connected world. However, studies have indicated a lack of uniform cultural awareness training programs for staff in non-governmental humanitarian organizations (Hart et al.,2021).

Furthermore, educational institutions that actively promote community service and volunteerism, as well as those that emphasize the importance of diversity, are more likely to facilitate comprehensive character development among students. This hypothesis is grounded in the belief that engagement in community service and exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives play a critical role in fostering key character traits such as empathy, responsibility, and social awareness. Furthermore, institutions that integrate these values into their curricula and campus culture are, therefore, posited to provide environments that enhance students' moral reasoning and ethical sensitivity. The anticipated outcomes of such educational practices include not only the enrichment of individual student experiences but also the potential to contribute positively to society at large. Educational institutions that advocate for inclusivity and embrace cultural diversity foster environments in which all students feel respected, valued, and empowered to achieve success (Chima, et al., 2024).

It should be noted that Astin, H. S., & Antonio, A. L. (2004) discuss the impact of college on character development in their work, defining character as "moral excellence and firmness," a definition originally put forth by Anderson in 2000 (p. 63). The authors assert that "integrity refers to a code of moral values." In their opinion, character and integrity are mutually dependent and, as such, are inseparable in effective educational programs. They propose four common core character traits: hard work, respect, responsibility, and fairness. The importance of morals in character education is echoed by Anderson, Glanzer, and Milson. Clearly, moral values are integral to good character. Glanzer and Milson view character education as an approach to moral education, a perspective supported by their colleagues previously mentioned.

Conclusion:

To conclude, moral education is closely connected to character education and universities should not ignore their students' moral development. The two concepts resemble each other in many ways and sometimes one has replaced the other one in terms of "names" as they seem almost identical. Higher education institutions should assist students during their journey to find their moral selves laden with values. Thus, moral education needs to be considered seriously by universities. Active engagement in moral education not only enhances students' ethical reasoning and decision-making skills but also fosters a more inclusive and empathetic campus culture. It is imperative that institutions continue to prioritize and innovate in the delivery of moral education to address the complex social and ethical challenges of our time.

References:

1. Anderson, D. R. (2000). Character education: Who is responsible? Journal of Instructional Psychology, 27 (3), 139 – 142.
2. Astin, H. S., & Antonio, A. L. (2004). The impact of college on character development. New Directions for Institutional Research, 122, 55 – 64.
3. Austen, L., Pickering, N., & Donnelly, A. (2023). Researching and evaluating student engagement. Advancing Student Engagement in Higher Education, 18-30.
4. Azevedo, R. (2015). Defining and Measuring Engagement and Learning in Science: Conceptual and Analytical Issues. Educational Psychologist, 50(1), 84–94.
5. Baharun, H. (2017). Total Moral Quality: A New Approach for Character Education in Pesantren. Ulumuna, 21(1), 57-80.
6. Berreth, D. & Berman, S. (1997) The moral dimensions of schools. Educational Leadership, 54 (8), 24 – 27.
7. Bowden, Jana Lay-Hwa; Tickle, Leonie; Naumann, Kay (2019). The four pillars of tertiary student engagement and success: Studies in Higher Education, 1–18.
8. Campbell, E. (1996) The moral core of professionalism as a teachable ideal and a matter of character. Curriculum Inquiry, 26 (1), 71 – 80.
9. Candee, D. & Kohlberg, L. (1987) Moral judgment and moral action: A reanalysis of Haan, Smith. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52 (3), 554 – 564.
10. Chima Abimbola Eden, Onyebuchi Nneamaka Chisom, & Idowu Sulaimon Adeniyi. (2024). Cultural competence in education: Strategies for fostering inclusivity and diversity awareness. IJARSS, 6(3), 383-392.
11. Glanzer, P. L., & Milson, A. J. (2006). Legislating the good – a survey and evaluation of character education laws in the United States. Educational Policy, 20 (3), 525 – 550.
12. Hart, A., Toma, M., Issa, F., & Neault, N. (2021). Developing cultural awareness curricular competencies for humanitarian. PDM, 36(6), 669-675.
13. Howard, Robert W., Berkowitz, Marvin W. & Schaeffer, Esther, F., (2004), Politics of character education. Educational Policy, 18 (1).
14. Kagan, S. (2001). Teaching for character and community. Educational Leadership, 59 (2), 50 – 55.
15. Kohlberg, L. (1977) The implications of moral stages for adult education. Religious Education, 72 (2), 183 – 201.
16. Kuh, G. D. (2001). Assessing what really matters to student Learning Inside the national survey of student Engagement. The Magazine of Higher Learning, 33(3), 10-17.
17. Lickona, T. (1996). Eleven principles of effective character education. Journal of Moral Education, 25(1), 93-100. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305724960250110
18. Malin AJ, Pos AE (2015) The impact of early empathy on alliance building, emotional processing, and depression. Psychotherapy Research 25(4): 445–459.
19. McCormick, A. C., Moore, J. V., & Kuh, G. D. (2010). Understanding the Working College Student (1st ed.). Routledge.
20. Reetz, L. J. & Jacobs, G. M. (1999) Faculty focus on moral and character education. Education, 120 (2), 208 – 212.
21. Robson, C. (2000). Real world research – a resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
22. Stefaniak A, Bilewicz M, Lewicka M (2017) The merits of teaching local history: Journal of Environmental Psychology 51: 217–225.
23. Wardekker, W. (2004) Moral education and the construction of meaning. Educational Review, 56 (2), 183 – 192.
24. Zilvinskis, J., Masseria, A. A., & Pike, G. R. (2017). Student engagement and student learning: Examining the convergent and discriminant validity of the revised national survey of student engagement. Research in Higher Education, 58(8), 880-903.