

A Study of 8 Fundamental Moral Characteristics among Thai Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore the eight fundamental moral characteristics of undergraduate students in order to benefit instructional model development. The eight moral characteristics are diligence, frugality, honesty, discipline, politeness, cleanliness, unity and generosity. The study findings rank these eight moral characteristics from the highest to the lowest as follows: politeness (4.35), generosity (4.14), honesty (3.96), unity (3.90) cleanliness (3.883), discipline (3.72), diligence (3.48) and frugality (3.46). With the moral characteristic data provided by this study, teachers can develop instructional models and activities inside and outside of the classroom in a more targeted manner.

Introduction

The Thai Ministry of Education has established an urgent policy reforming the education system with moral characteristics having priority over knowledge. With a sense of awareness of the sufficiency economy philosophy, harmony, peaceful actions and democratic practices, it is believed that students will mature into content, knowledgeable, morally sound individuals. To this end, educational institutions of all levels are required to instill in their students the following eight fundamental moral characteristics:

1. **Diligence:** A diligent person is the one who is determined to engage in positive and proper endeavors. He is hardworking, perseverant, willing to face obstacles and appreciative of the work he is in charge of.
2. **Frugality:** A frugal person is the one who leads a simple life and in awareness of one's status. He thinks before spending and knows how to save.
3. **Honesty:** An honest person is the one who remains true to his duties and profession. He is punctual and carries out his duties to the fullest.

4. Discipline: A disciplined person is the one who acts within the boundary of regulations imposed by the educational institution, other agencies and the nation.
5. Politeness: A polite person is the one who acts humbly in accordance with the circumstances. He is the one who is not aggressive.
6. Cleanliness: A clean person is the one who keeps his body and mind clean.
7. Unity: A united person is the one who has his mind open to the opinions of others. He is aware of his role as a good listener and follower.
8. Generosity: A generous person is the one who does not concern himself with only himself and his business. He is considerate to others.

Teachers are important individuals who can influence changes of behaviors in the students. One of their responsibilities is to instill in the students an appreciation of moral characteristics and morality, as well as the proper values. The same is true for teachers at the university level. In fact, it is even more important for them to help in this area inside and outside of classrooms. Teachers need to pay attention to their students and be perceptive to signs indicating the urgent need for intervention in order to ensure that the students are not lacking any moral characteristic. The following ideas should be observed by the teachers when engaged in this effort:

1. All teachers are a role model for moral characteristic. They are a living instructional material the students can readily imitate.
2. Moral characteristics should be taught integratively in other lessons. All learning activities need to incorporate a basic moral characteristic such as diligence, honesty and frugality.
3. A supportive environment is required for the development of moral characteristics. Praises and recognition provide valid meaningful incentives to encourage most students to elevate themselves to the social norm of the institution.
4. The politeness, gentleness and kindness offered by the teachers will help the students open up and develop moral characteristics more easily.
5. Teachers need to be perceptive and able to identify normalcy or signs of threat in the students in order to implement a preventive or corrective measure in a timely manner.

Given the above reasons, the researcher is interested in the study of eight moral characteristics of undergraduate students in order to obtain the data necessary for the development of instructional activities and virtuous, competent students in accordance with the policy of the government.

Study Design and Data Collection

This is an exploratory study where the researcher studied all conceptual frameworks, literature and textbooks on the eight moral characteristics; analyzed the contents, and, developed an evaluation questionnaire which is then used with 50 students. The Cronbach confidence obtained is 0.97. The 100 copies of data collected from undergraduate students were analyzed using a standard statistical software which yielded percentage, average and standard deviation. The researcher collected the data by herself.

Findings

The data collected reveals the eight moral characteristics of undergraduate students as follows:

Table 1: Average of eight Fundamental Moral Characteristics

Eight Fundamental Moral Characteristics	Average	Order from the highest to the lowest
1. Diligence	3.48	7
2. Frugality	3.46	8
3. Honest	3.96	3
4. Discipline	3.72	6
5. Politeness	4.35	1
6. Cleanliness	3.83	5
7. Unity	3.90	4
8. Generosity	4.14	2

The study has found that students have politeness the most and frugality the least. Therefore, all those who are involved with the management of education at the higher education institutions need to collaborate into the technical and the extracurricular activities with the hope to help students become aware of the need to be frugal and mindful of one's status so that they will learn how to save, spend, rationalize and lead a simple, modest way of life.

Summary and Discussion

The study findings rank these eight moral characteristics from the highest to the lowest as follows: politeness (4.35), generosity (4.14), honesty (3.96), unity (3.90) cleanliness (3.883), discipline (3.72), diligence (3.48) and frugality (3.46). Apparently, the teachers and the institutions need to realize the need to promote the eight moral characteristics in the students as required by the Ministry of Education. They have to establish a guideline with activities inside and outside of classrooms to encourage the desired behaviors of savings. The educational institutions need to define their roles clearly and position themselves as a good model for the students. They need to have a policy highlighting the significance of the sufficiency philosophy, with practical activities and programs to help encourage income generation and savings, as well as activities with relevant third parties. Another moral characteristic with average below 3.5 is diligence. The teachers and the institutions need to work together and help the students become determined, hardworking, perseverant, willing to face obstacles and appreciative of the work they are in charge of. The eight fundamental moral characteristics cannot be taught efficiently in class. Nevertheless, one can arrange for encouraging ambience and environment to help create awareness in the students.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the researcher has recommendations as follows:

1. Recommendations from the research

Students should be developed in terms of frugality, diligence and discipline. The guidelines suggested by the researcher are as below:

1.1 Policy: Higher education institutions need to plan for the development of the desired moral characteristics. The

administrators need to be determined to succeed, aware of the significance, focused on academic and extracurricular activities, and, build a network of collaboration with the community (e.g. savings program and income generation program). The ambience and the environment within the institutions must be accommodating to the development of discipline and diligence in the students.

- 1.2 Curriculum: Develop integrative curricula where students are encouraged to cultivate their intellectual potentials with discipline and diligence so that they will know how to allocate their time for study and other activities. Students should be encouraged to explore themselves and to enroll in courses where the sufficiency economy philosophy is explained.
- 1.3 Activities: In order for the moral characteristic development activities to be efficient, the institutions need to create a mutual understanding with all concerned parties and concentrate on more proactive and diverse activities such as demonstration, exhibition, sales of local products and awareness creation program.

2. Recommendation for future research

- 2.1 Conduct a research to identify the format of activities that will help develop the eight fundamental moral characteristics.
- 2.2 Conduct a research to improve the curricula towards an integrative model for the elevation of the eight fundamental moral characteristics.

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