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## The Goodness of Character Strengths in Education

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to reviews overall outcome of character strengths in education, especially towards students and teacher professionalism. This paper also explored applications of other variables in character strengths study and the differences finding of character strengths in education between western countries and Asian countries. This reviewed is based on articles between 2013 and 2018 with the total of 21 studies that have been identified to be referring to character strengths in education including interventions and stages of character strengths. Result of analyzed showing character strength of a teacher is closely related to teaching professionalism. Variables such as subject well-being and life satisfaction, self-efficacy, interpersonal relationships, self-adjustment in school and students emotions are benefits for individual live happily and helping in students in academic field. The character strength of teachers can give a great impact on the student's life and overall well-being of students.

**Keywords:** Character Strengths, Positive Education, Teacher Professionalism, Subject Well-Being, Positive Psychology

### Introduction

In line with the world's technological globalization, the development of education has becoming increasingly challenging. Intellectual development should not be the sole objective of education. Education should also be aimed towards a holistic emotional, spiritual, and physical development as well as human development for a harmonious community. Due to this, research in education has shifted its focus so as to divert from concentrating only on intelligence, student achievement and cultural deficit orientation (Villagas & Lucas 2002). One of the efforts to achieve holistic student development is by incorporating character strengths in education. The main purpose of character strengths introduced in the context of education is to promote and build good and flourishing character of each individual in order to achieve a comprehensive and optimal development (Lopez, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000).

Character Strengths and Virtues (CSV) is developed following reports from a group of researchers who are excellent in building a systematic classification and measuring positive values. The aim is to empirically and scientifically measure and assess ideal human values (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). There are six values and 24 character strengths in CSV. The discovery of these six

values and 24 characters is the result of studies by Martin Seligman and his colleagues who have been researching all major religions and traditional philosophies that have similarities and have surpassed all cultures for three thousand years.

**Table: 1** Character Strengths and Virtues (The VIA Classification of Strengths)

Virtues	Wisdom	Courage	Humanity	Justice	Temperance	Transcendence
<b>Character Strength</b>	Creativity Curiosity Judgment Love of Learning Perspective	Bravery Honesty Perseverance Zest	Kindness Love Social Intelligence	Fairness Leadership Teamwork	Forgiveness Humility Prudence Self-Regulation	Appreciation of beauty Gratitude Hope Humor Spirituality

### Research Objectives

The development of positive psychology began to be active in the field of education after studies had shown that positive psychology can explore ways to improve and enhance human values and individual strength for a more meaningful life (Seligman, 2002; Park, Peterson & Seligman 2004; Linley & Harrington, 2006). Studies on character strengths in education can yield positive findings in academic achievement and student well-being (Seligman, 2000; Lopez, 2006; Govindji & Linley, 2007; Choudhury & Borooah, 2017). Therefore, further studies have been conducted using character strength as an intervention in order to identify and improve the well-being of individuals for overall student development (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Gustems & Calderon, 2014; Hellman & Gwinn, 2016).

Although many studies on character strengths have been conducted, an analysis of the results of past studies has to be carried out in order to identify the importance of character strengths and thus improving future studies. There are a number of systematic reviews on character strengths, i.e. He (2009), Quilan et al. (2012) and Ghielen, Woerkom, Christina (2017). He (2009) discussed the application of character strengths in the mentoring model of pre-service teachers based on strength-based theories and approaches. A literature review by He (2009) identified measurements and processes that support strength-based mentoring model and suggested that empirical data be collected to study the effectiveness of the approach. Quilan et al. (2012) concentrated more on literature reviews regarding the effectiveness of character strength interventions, of which only eight studies were selected outside the clinical context. However, Quilan et al. (2012) have not reviewed further the effects of intervention caused by context, intervention efficacy of relational factors, intervention environment or intervention facilitator attitude. The study by Ghielen et al. (2017) focused more on the systematic review of character strength intervention with moderators with the characteristics of a person (such as demographics and personality) and activity features (such as duration of intervention and language used during intervention).

Since character strengths have a great impact on holistic student development (academic performance and well-being), this study will concentrate on the overall outcome of character strengths in education, especially towards students and teacher professionalism. Based on this discussion, the present study will examine the benefits of education and address the elements of

cultural factors between the western and eastern countries. This study aims to (i) analyses articles that address character strengths in education, and (ii) perform a theoretical analysis to test external variables in character strengths study.

**Research Question (RQ) 1:** What are the results of the analysis of articles on character strength in education?

**Research Question (RQ) 2:** What are the theoretical analysis results obtained from the 21 articles?

### **Methodology**

A systematic review on articles related to character strengths in education has been applied in this study. The purpose of the systematic review is to focus more on the overall outcome of character strengths in education, especially towards students and teacher professionalism. This approach provides an empirical study structure in a large number, and therefore has been selected as an appropriate research method to answer the research questions. This study will review the articles in light of the authors, sample sizes, locations, statistical techniques and findings in the field of education. The articles were retrieved from ACM Digital Library, Emerald Insight, Oxford Journal, Springer Link, Sage Journal, Taylor & Francis Online and Google Scholar databases. Keywords searched were character strength, positive education, teacher professionalism, and all articles reviewed in this study were published between 2013 and 2018.

The selection of articles was refined by reading through the abstracts of the articles and identifying the appropriate and exact keywords. The selected articles were categorized according to the year of publication. A total of 42 articles related to character strengths have been studied. The researcher scrutinized the articles by selecting those related to the field of education only and the researcher focused on character strengths interventions, the measurement of character strengths stages and the correlation with other variables.

### **Finding**

Articles retrieved from the above-mentioned databases were organized into groups to facilitate the researcher's systematic review in order to answer the research questions.

### **Interventions and stages of character strengths in education**

The table below shows the study of articles related to character strengths in education. This table consists of nine columns beginning with, number, article title, author, year, location, sample size, instrument and variable, statistical technique and research findings for each article. A total of 21 studies have been identified to be referring to character strengths in education including interventions and stages of character strengths. These articles were published between 2013 and 2018 only.

**Table 2: The Articles Related To Character Strengths In Education.**

No.	Title of articles	Author/ Years/ Location/ Sampel size	Instruments	Research Outputs
1	Relationships among higher-order strengths factors, subjective well-being, and general self-efficacy – The case of Israeli adolescents	Weber, Ruch, Littman-Ovadia, Lavy & Gai 2013 Israel 396	-VIA-Youth + satisfaction with life scale +affect balance scale +general self-efficacy scale	-Character Strengths as positive values personality traits, important for most worth living in demanding and dangerous environment.
2	Middle School Transition from the Strengths Perspective: Young Adolescents' Character Strengths, Subjective Well-Being, and School Adjustment	Shoshani & Slone 2013 Israel 417	-VIA-Y+School engagement survey + school adjustment report+ school achievement + positive & negative affectivity scale child+ satisfaction with life scale	- Temperance and transcendence strengths were robust positive predictors of students' subjective well-being.
3	Character Strength-Based Intervention to Promote Satisfaction with Life in the Chinese University Context	Duan, Ho, Tang, Li & Zhang 2014 China 360	VIA-IS + Satisfaction with life scale (2ns,9th &18th )	-Strength-based intervention to promote satisfaction with life among Chinese undergraduates was effective similar to the West.
4	Character Strengths and Psychological Wellbeing among Students of Teacher Education	Gustems& Calderon 2014 Barceona, Spain 98	VIA-IS + Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI)	- Relation between character strengths and psychological well-being have an important effect on students' academic performance.

5	Relation of Character Strengths to Personal teaching Efficacy (PTE) in Korea Special Education Teachers.	Lim & Kim 2014 Korea 111	-Character Strengths Test (CST-SF)+ Korean version of the teacher efficacy scale- Personal	- CST-SF were significantly related to PTE - Teachers with high CS were likely to experience greater PTE
6	Teacher Strengths And Talent Development	Majid, Ali & Alias 2014 Malaysia 31	- qualitative survey via face book social network	- Three main dominant CS (wisdom & knowledge, humanity & transcendence)
7	How 'other people matter' in a classroom-based strengths intervention: Exploring interpersonal strategies and classroom outcomes	Quinlan, Swain, Cameron, & Vella-Brodick, 2015 New Zealand 196	-Strength Use scale + I-PANAS-SF+ SLSS + student report of the Engagement Versus Disaffection with Learning	-Strengths intervention can influence desirable classroom as well as individual outcome. -Strengths intervention also can use to pursue personal goals.
8	Known for My Strengths: Positive Traits of Transition-Age Youth With Intellectual Disability and/or Autism	Carter, Boehm, Biggs, Annandale, Taylor, Loock, & Liu 2015 USA 427	- ASPECT-DD + interviewed	-Youth with intellectual disability strengths identified by their parents. - An alternative way to describe CS for transition-age youth people with intellectual and development disabilities.
9	The Good Teacher Understanding Virtues in Practice	Arthur, Kristjansson, Cooke, Brown & Carr 2015 British 641	-Questionnaire (VIA)	-The power of character strength can drives a good teacher.

10	Perceptions of Character Development at a Trade College: Triangulating Student, Alumni, Administrator, and Teacher Perspectives	Hershberg, Rubin, Johnson, Callina & Lerner 2016 USA 141	-interviewed + survey	- The development of character strength is due to the structure and discipline applied in the curriculum and interpersonal relationships.
11	Positive Character Traits of Special Education Staff: Commonalities and Applications	Korn, Woodard & Tucker 2016 USA 28	-VIA + interviewed	- The five most highly rated is kindness, honesty, humor, fairness, and love.
12	The Relationship between Interpersonal Relationship and the Subjective Well-Being of Chinese Primary and Secondary Teachers: A Mediated Moderation Model	Zhang, Wang, Liu & Xu 2016 China 912	-VIA-IS+ OHQ+ Job Satisfaction +Interpersonal relationship	- CS moderated the relationship between interpersonal relationship, job satisfaction and subjective well-being and job satisfaction taking the mediation role among them.
13	Character Strength and Life Satisfaction of Teachers in Ghana	Abasimi & Xiaosong 2016 Ghana 104	Character Strength Rating Form (CRSF) + Life satisfaction	- Strong positive relationship between overall character strengths and satisfaction with life.
14	The Effect of Character Strengths and	Lee, Jeong, Youn & HwaJwa 2016	Character Strength Questionnaire +	- Correlation between subcategories of each variable of character

	Anger Control on Teaching Professionalism of Preservice Early Childhood Teacher	Korea 361	Anger control + Teaching Professionalism	strengths and teaching professionalism - The relationship between self-esteem and professional participation in teaching professionalism was statistically significant - Significant interaction effect of anger control on character strengths and teaching professionalism
15	Camp HOPE as an Intervention for Children Exposed to Domestic Violence: A Program Evaluation of Hope, and Strength of Character	Hellman, & Gwinn 2017 USA 234	-Child Self Report+ Counselor Observations	-CS hope & psychological strengths improved from pre-test to post test.
17	Life Satisfaction and Character Strengths in Spanish Early Adolescents	Blanca, Ferragut, Ortiz-Tallo & Bendayan 2017 Spain 457	-VIA-Youth + students' life satisfaction scale	- Women show a high correlation in most of the character's strength compared to men-love and hope are the most relevant force in anticipation of life satisfaction.
18	Character Strengths and Life Satisfaction of High School Students	Abasimi, Gai & Wang 2017 Ghana 210	-CSRF(VIA-IS)+PWI-SC	- Top seven strengths were forgiveness, self-regulation, leadership, kindness, hope, love of learning and fairness. - Five strengths showed significant



				correlated with subjective well-being
19	Purpose and Character Development in Early Adolescence	Malin, Liauw & Damon 2017 USA 1005	- The Pro- social Youth Purpose Scale + interview	-Gratitude, compassion and purpose significant but not highly correlated
20	Assessing Character Strengths in Youth With Intellectual Disability: Reliability and Factorial Validity of the VIA-Youth	Shogren, Shaw, Raley, Wehmeyer, Niemiec & Adkins 2018 USA 258	-VIA-Youth	-CS for youth with intellectual disability at lower levels compare with youth without intellectual disability - Character strengths level, humility and teamwork showed significant differences
21	Young children's character strengths and emotional well-being: Development of the Character Strengths Inventory for Early Childhood (CSI-EC)	Shoshani 2018 Israel 2274	The Character Strengths Inventory for Early Childhood (CSI-EC) + SDQ + PANAS-C + Youth Life Orientation	- Transcendence, intellect and interpersonal power in relation to positive emotional well-being; temperance and interpersonal power are negatively related to emotional social issues.

### Applications of character strengths interventions in education

This section discusses the applications of character strengths interventions in education. The discussion on character strengths interventions is only applicable to students. Among the articles obtained, there are three articles relating to the applications of character strengths interventions in education i.e. interventions for students.

Articles by Quinlan et al. (2015) and Hellman, & Gwinn (2017) addressed the applications of character strengths interventions for school children, while the article by Duan, Ho, Tang, Li & Zhang (2014) focused on university students in China. Findings by Quinlan et al. (2015) in New Zealand found that the intervention provided in the classroom for 6 weeks with 90 minutes per session improved the well-being and participation of students as well as the students' perception of unity and friction. In general, students in the intervention group showed a more significant average report compared

to those in the control group. During each intervention, students were asked to discuss current issues by looking at the perception of character strengths and by identifying their own character strengths. The findings of Hellman, & Gwinn (2017) found that the score of "hope" was significant in Camp HOPE from pre-test ( $M = 25.40$ ;  $SD = 5.38$ ) to post-test ( $M = 26.75$ ;  $SD = 6.19$ ) ( $t(228) = 15.15$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $g^2 = .06$ ). In addition, the score of observation done by the counsellor was also statistically significant. The study by Hellman, & Gwinn (2017) was focused on students in the 6-day HOPE program who have been experiencing domestic violence. The study by Duan et al. (2014) aimed to examine the effectiveness of character strengths interventions in improving the life satisfaction of Southwest University students in China for 18 weeks. The findings proved the effectiveness of interventions because students who received character strengths interventions showed stability in the change of life satisfaction compared to other groups in the short and long term.

All in all, the findings of these three character strengths interventions showed similar significant implications. Interventions do not only improve student well-being (Quinlan et al., 2015) but they also improve the psychological strength and well-being of students (Hellman & Gwinn 2017) and have an impact on life satisfaction (Duan et al., 2014).

### **Applications of other variables in character strengths in the study**

Among the 15 articles, there are 12 articles relating to other variables namely the well-being of the subject and the satisfaction of life (Weber et al., 2013; Shoshani & Slone, 2013; Zhang, et al. 2016; Abasimi & Xiaosong, 2016; Abasimi, Gai & Wang, 2017; Blanca, Ferragut, Ortiz-Tallo & Bendayan, 2017), self-efficacy (Weber, 2013; Lim & Kim, 2014), self-adjustment in schools (Shoshani & Slone, 2013), social economics (Gustems and Calderon, 2014)), interpersonal relationships (Zhang, et al. (Lee, Jeong, Youn & HwaJwa, 2016), teaching professionalism (Lee, Jeong, Youn & HwaJwa, 2016), human positive function (Duan, Li & Mu, 2017), positive and negative effects (Duan, Li & Mu, 2017), depression, discomfort and stress (Duan, Li & Mu, 2017), student emotions (Shoshani, 2018) and student expectations (Shoshani, 2018). 80 percent of quantitative research articles involve other variables to conduct the research. Among the most widely tested variables in a study is satisfaction of life.

### **The difference in the findings of character strengths in education between western countries and Asian countries**

These analyzed articles have involved several Western and Asian countries. Among the Asian countries studied are China (Duan et al., 2014; Zhang, et al., 2016; Duan, Li & Mu, 2017), Israel (Weber et al., 2013; Shoshani & Slone, 2013; Shoshani, 2018), Korea (Lim & Kim, 2014; Lee, Jeong, Youn & HwaJwa, 2016), Malaysia (Majid, Ali & Alias, 2014) and Ghana (Abasimi & Xiaosong, 2016; Abasimi, Gai & Wang, 2017). Overall, 57 percent of the 21 articles obtained shows the findings in Asian countries. Among the Western countries studied are Spain (Gustems and Calderon, 2014; Blanca, Ferragut, Ortiz-Tallo & Bendayan, 2017), New Zealand (Swain, Cameron, & Vella-Brodrick, 2015), USA (Carter et al., 2015; Hershberg et al., 2016; Korn et al., 2016; Hellman, & Gwinn, 2017; Malin, Liauw & Damon, 2017; Shogren, Shaw, Raley, Wehmeyer, Niemiec & Adkins, 2018) and Britain (Arthur et al., 2015).

From the findings of character strengths interventions studies in Asia, China (Duan et al., 2014) showed similarities with the findings of Western countries, USA (Hellman, & Gwinn, 2017) and

New Zealand (Swain, Cameron, & Vella-Brodrick, 2015) i.e. having significant treatment in the treatment group compared to the control group. However, Duan et al. (2014) states that the character strengths of the Chinese community can be divided into three virtues namely interpersonal strength, perseverance and prudence (Duan, Bai, Tang, Siu, Chan & Ho, 2012; Duan, Ho, Bai & Tang, 2013).

The findings of qualitative studies of character strengths stages showed significant similarities and continuity between Western countries (Hershberg et al., 2016; Korn et al., 2016) and Asian countries (Majid et al., 2014) where teachers can influence the development of students holistically, especially teachers with humanitarian approach towards students.

Comparison of the findings from Western countries (Gustems and Calderon, 2014; Carter et al., 2015; Arthur et al., 2015; Blanca, Ferragut, Ortiz-Tallo & Bendayan, 2017; Malin, Liauw & Damon, 2017; Shogren, Shaw, Raley, Wehmeyer, Niemiec & Adkins, 2018) and Asian countries (Weber et al., 2013; Shoshani & Slone, 2013; Lim & Kim, 2014; Zhang, et al. 2016; Abasimi & Xiaosong, 2016; Lee, Jeong, Youn & HwaJwa, 2016; Duan, Li & Mu, 2017; Abasimi, Gai & Wang, 2017; Shoshani, 2018) which use other variables did not show the difference that character strengths had a positive relationship with other variables, especially the well-being of an individual. However, the study by Malin, Liauw & Damon (2017) only showed significant correlation and could not predict developmental relationship.

### **Theoretical Analysis**

This section will list articles that use external variables that have implications in education.

#### **The implications of the addition of external variables in education**

The addition of external variables in character strengths study gives a huge impact on education. Among the implications of character strength relationship with student life satisfaction is that character strengths can predict the level of student's satisfaction. At the same time, teachers, schools or educational institutes may provide intervention programs or religious programs to enhance the satisfaction of life and to motivate students as well as to avoid negative effects among students so that students have the strength to face any stressful environment (Ferragut, Ortiz-Tallo & Bendayan, 2017; Abasimi, Gai & Wang, 2017; Gustems and Calderon, 2014; Weber et al., 2013; Shoshani & Slone, 2013).

Studies show that character strengths can encourage good teachers (Arthur, Kristjansson, Cooke, Brown & Carr, 2015) because good teachers have strong character strengths, especially the significant humanitarian virtue to influence students (Majid et al., 2014). The study by Lim & Kim (2014) also noted that a high teacher character strength has a close correlation with teaching efficacy. This will have implications on the development of teacher training programs and the recruitment policies of the teaching profession in order to ensure that teachers achieve a certain level of character strengths so as to avoid low teaching efficacy (Lim & Kim, 2014).

### **Discussion**

An analysis of 15 articles that involve external variables in character strengths studies has shown that character strength is especially important in the development towards a positive education. The addition of variables such as subject well-being and life satisfaction, self-efficacy, interpersonal

relationships, self-adjustment in school and student emotions is important in human development for an individual to be able to live happily and for helping students in the academic field.

The addition of other variables in teacher character strength study shows that the character strength of a teacher is closely related to teaching professionalism, especially the structure and curriculum of the educational institution. From the analyzed articles, it is found that the character strengths of teachers, i.e. humanitarian value, are an important factor in educating children and also have become an important requirement in the development of teaching professionalism. A high character strength of teachers indicates that better pedagogy. The character strength of teachers can affect the well-being of students and their progress and have a great impact on the student's life. Character strengths can affect the work environment and give a positive impact to colleagues.

The comparison between Western countries and Asian countries did not show different results. However, the findings of the study conducted in China showed that the Chinese culture leans towards the virtues of interpersonal strength, perseverance and prudence. Past studies focused only on individual efforts and actions in character strengths studies while leaving behind interpersonal or inter-group cultural factors.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, character strengths in education is very important especially to students and teachers. Although Ghielen et al. (2017) and Quinlan et al. (2012) have identified the effectiveness of character strengths interventions, this systematic review has looked into character strengths interventions together with other variables in education.

The correlation between other variables can be a predictive measure of educational goals to be achieved, i.e. a positive education especially the well-being of individuals, and can enhance teaching professionalism. This information is important and useful to academics to plan future research related to character strengths in education. Although there are studies showing that character strengths affect teaching methodology of teachers, further studies have to be carried out to achieve higher educational outcomes.

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