

*Ethical Leadership Competencies for Revitalizing Moral Learning in Higher Education*

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**Abstract**

Moral and ethics courses are widely provided in higher education institutions; yet, they are taught by ineffective teaching methods. So, this paper is mainly to explore ideal practices of ethical leaders for revitalizing moral learning in higher education. The research method was based on a qualitative approach. The researcher reviewed books and articles on moral education encompassing the four pillars (1) core values, (2) instructional strategies, (3) curriculum development approaches and (4) moral assessment methods from 1965 until 2016. There were altogether 130 printed and online sources used. From the data analysis, the first pillar, core values were human (58%), social (40%) and political (2%). Respect (26%) ranked first in human values, responsibility (18%) in social values and patriotism (2%) in political value, respectively. For the second pillar, participatory teaching methods ranked first (65.3%). The method that was considered effective was group discussion (44.6%). However, passive teaching method constituted 34.7% and the method under this category ranked first was lecture (15.7%). For the third pillar, process approach ranked first (48%), praxis approach (33%) and product approach (19%). The last pillar, formative assessment was considered to be most effective for moral education, comprising 79% while summative only 21%. Institutional leaders play major roles in revitalizing how moral education should be taught, curriculum be developed, assessment be carried out. The paper recommends strategies of how institutional leaders should implement to enhance quality education of morality and ethics in higher education.

Keywords: moral education, higher education, ethical leadership

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## **Introduction**

Moral and ethics courses are widely provided in higher education institutions; yet, they are taught by ineffective teaching methods. So, this study was mainly to explore ideal practices of ethical leaders for revitalizing moral learning in higher education. The review of related literature involves moral development theories, moral education approaches and ethical leadership competencies. The research method was based on a qualitative approach. The researcher reviewed books and articles on moral education from 1965 until 2016. There were altogether 130 printed and online sources used. Institutional leaders play major roles in revitalizing how moral education should be taught, curriculum be developed, assessment be carried out. This study recommends strategies of how institutional leaders should implement to enhance quality education of morality and ethics in higher education.

## **Literature Review**

*Moral Development Theories.* The term moral comes from a Latin root (mos, moris) which means the code or customs of people. Moral education aims to cultivate children to acquire crucial virtues or moral habits that will lead them to live quality lives and become quality citizens of their communities. Historically, schools were supposed to both educate the young and inculcate a sense of moral virtues. The key moral virtues were honesty, responsibility and respect for others, which were regarded as moral education that common schools should integrate into their curricula. Since the nineteenth century, Abraham Lincoln wrote (March 9, 1832) that “I desire to see a time when education, and by its means, morality, sobriety, enterprise and industry, shall become much more general than at present.” School teachers in that era were expected to teach moral and focus on character formation. Through the teaching of literature, biography, and history subjects to students, teachers could teach them with high moral standards. Moral stories and lessons learnt from these subjects could demonstrate exemplary characters that students could look up to and follow in their heroes’ footsteps. In the past, moral education was regarded as the fabric of society. However, as the world evolved into industrialization, the growth of industrial society saw a significant decline in moral education. Towards the end of twentieth century, many educational institutions tended to disregard the moral dimension in school education. According to Barone (2004), educational institutions tended not to focus on moral education; hence, it created an unfavorable impact directly to the students’ moral development. Mujtaba and Cavico (2009) posited that moral development is the ability of an individual who is able to distinguish the right from the wrong, to embrace ethical values and to learn to behave morally. While Kohlberg (1984) believes that moral development requires the process of socialization, education and experience, Mujtaba (2010) highlights that an individual could be instilled with a sense of morality through a process of education.

In the moral development theory developed by Kohlberg (1984), it is composed of six stages grouped into three levels. Level one is pre-conventional level of reasoning, which involves the first and second stages of moral development. It is concerned with an egocentric manner. In stage one, an individual is driven by a level of obedience and punishment while in stage two, self-interest drives an individual to act based on what he believes to be the best interest. An individual tends to have a sense of loyalty and intrinsic respect but still based on personal interest. Level two is conventional

level of moral reasoning, which involves the third and fourth stage of moral development. At this level, an individual tends to abide by the rules and society's norms even though there are no punishments or consequences for breaking the rules. In stage three, an individual tends to have good intentions which are determined social consensus. They try to live up with expectations and to follow their social rules even though they do not understand fully. They tend to have a sense of respect and gratitude towards others. In stage four, there is an outside force and it is authority and social order obedience driven. An individual is expected to have obligations and duty to uphold laws and rules. If someone breaks a law, it is regarded that person is morally wrong. Level three is post-conventional level of moral reasoning which is regarded as a principle level. An individual believes strongly in their own ethical principles such as liberty and justice. In stage five, social contract driven, it is expected that the community holds different opinions, rights and values and people in community should have mutual respect towards one another. In stage six, universal ethical principles of moral reasoning are based on abstract reasoning. An individual who reaches this stage would act because it is right not just to avoid punishment.

Another major theory on moral development in the context of formal education was created by James Rest (1988). Rest (1988) categorizes moral action into four psychological processes. Firstly, it is the process of consciousness: moral sensitivity. An individual is expected to express his sensitivity towards to wellbeing of others. Secondly, it is the process of moral judgement, which compels an individual to make a decision based on certain courses of actions between those are morally right and those morally wrong. Thirdly, it is the process of moral focus or moral intention. Individuals are challenged by the conflict of personal and other values and they are required to prioritize their values and behave morally based on personal responsibility and moral outcomes. The last category is moral character. At this stage, an individual must have courage to overcome temptations and pressure and be able to implement moral course of actions.

*Moral Education Approaches.* There are a number of approaches for moral education based on different contexts, cultures and communities. The first approach, whole school approach, that is based on the belief that it is impossible to separate moral learning from formal education in schools. This approach aims to foster ethical development through instilling values, attitude and skills necessary for students to live peacefully with themselves and others including the nature. Another approach is based on an Aristotelian philosophy, that is pedagogy of values approach. This approach is based on the belief that teaching is where art and science meet. Not only did teachers content knowledge but also integrated the values that help students learn how to think, reflect, evaluate, appreciate, communicate and make better decision. One more approach that focuses mainly on reformation or recreation of values incorporation into the curriculum, which is called infusion approach. This method stresses the important role of schools where all stakeholders such as principals, students, teachers, parents and community collaborate in redefine what morals and values are to be integrated into teaching and learning. Furthermore, one of the most commonly used approaches in moral education is service learning approach, or community service. This method enables students to have experiential learning that is regarded effective and essential to their academic success.

*Ethical Leadership Competencies.* Ethical leadership is a leader whose goal is to transform a school successfully (Fullan, 2003). Ethical leaders are those who value honesty and demonstrate their ethical values and beliefs to his followers by their actions (Yukl, 2006). According to Cumbo (2009), ethical leaders are those who live a virtuous life and make a decision based on virtues while Moreno (2010) believes that ethical leaders could influence their followers by their ethical and moral actions. Revino, Hartman, and Brown (2000) posit that ethical leadership is based on three pillars. The first pillar is role modeling through the visible actions, which means that ethical leaders will perform ethically both in their professional and personal aspects. The second pillar is using rewards and discipline, which means that ethical leaders could encourage ethical actions by using proper rewards while discourage unethical actions through disciplinary actions. The last pillar is communicating about the ethics and values. Ethical leaders should be able to communicate ethics and values to their followers effectively. Referring to the values that ethical leaders must withhold, Northouse (2013) postulates that they shall have following five principles: respect for others, service to others, justice for others, honesty towards others and building community with others.

### **Research Objectives**

This paper is mainly to explore ideal practices of ethical leaders for revitalizing moral learning in higher education and to propose strategies of how institutional leaders should implement to enhance quality education of morality and ethics in higher education.

### **Methodology**

The research method was based on a qualitative approach by applying a content analysis approach. Out of selected sources of data which were 110 books and 297 articles related to moral education, there were 16 books and 114 articles directly related to moral education, ethics, character formation and value education. The researchers extracted key words from all these sources and explored if certain themes and patterns were emerged by recording into coding sheets. The researchers listed out each individual extract obtained from each source and categorized them into similar or related groups. Each group was then reviewed and classified into a broader related theme. All items in each theme were ranked and quantified by a number of occurrences, which were computed into percentage and ranked, in order to demonstrate to what extent each item was repeatedly mentioned and highlighted.

### **Research Findings**

From the content analysis of selected sources on moral education and related, four crucial factors were found as the structure of moral education, so-called the four pillars. They were core values, instructional strategies, curriculum development approaches and moral assessment methods. The first pillar, core values were composed of human values (essential principles for human interactions); social values (essential principles for sociability) and political values (essential principle for citizenship). Human values constituted 58% which ranked the most important value that schools should inculcate into students. Within human values, the first three most crucial human values found were respect (26%), caring (8%) and tolerance (6%). A sense of respect refers not only respecting community, respecting others, but also respecting oneself. Caring refers to expressing kindness and consideration to others

while tolerance or broadmindedness refers to being able to accept different beliefs and feelings. The second category of value was related to a social aspect that encompassed a number of values. The first three highly ranked out of nine values were responsibility (18%), honesty (11%) and cooperation (4%). Responsibility means obligation that one must perform while honesty refers to a sense of uprightness and trustworthiness that one must hold on to. Cooperation concerns an ability that one must be able to work with other peacefully. The third category of value was political, only one value found was patriotism, referring to emotional attachment and national pride towards to nation with a sense of devotion to the country.

The second pillar was instructional strategies which were considered as the means to the ends. Without sound and effective teaching strategies, values learning would be impossible. From all the related extracts, there were two major themes emerged in teaching moral values. One was a participatory teaching strategy and another was passive. The participatory teaching methods, which involved students in learning through various activities, constituted 65.3%, while passive teaching methods 34.7%. The participatory teaching methods that were considered effective were group discussion (44.6%) while the method of passive teaching that ranked first was lecture (15.7%).

The third pillar was curriculum development, which is a planned way of preparing the content that students have to learn in their schools. Process approach ranked first (48%), which means that it is important that teachers and students need to interact with one another and moral is integrated into their learning activities. The approach that was ranked second was praxis approach (33%), which means that moral learning requires active interaction between teachers and students through reflective activities for they could gain insightful understanding through moral learning. The last one is product approach (19%), which is the program designed by pre-determined educational objectives. The last pillar, formative assessment, was considered to be most effective for moral education, comprising 79% while summative only 21%.

### **Proposed Strategies for Educational Institution Leaders**

Inculcating a sense of ethics and morality into students is challenging and takes a considerable of time, effort and devotion. To propose strategies for effective moral learning that educational leaders should take into account is to deploy self-sustaining cyclic triad: learning-leading-living (Rungrojngarmcharoen, 2012). Moral educational platforms shall be developed based on strong and continuous correlation among three core components: learning (content/knowledge sharing), leading (ongoing leadership), and living (learning communities). Firstly, a group of stakeholders involving principals, teachers, students, parents, and community should work in close collaboration in determining what moral principles and content are crucial in this digital era. The community of practice should be developed to ensure explicit and implicit knowledge is shared and a moral network should be built up to ensure this moral content is reached the students in all offline and online platforms at anytime and anywhere. Secondly, ongoing leadership requires shared missions and values to be determined by the same group of stakeholders with respect, commitment, openness, trust and responsibility. This is to ensure that moral teaching and learning is everyone's obligation and duty that they all have to be held accountable. The last

component is living in learning communities where all individuals realize their roles and are willing to embrace moral learning into their daily lives.

### **Conclusion**

All educational leaders should be in charge of promoting effective learning and teaching moral in education, and also be role models for communities of how to become ethical and moral citizens. Ethical leaders should have perseverance to drive this challenging mission of lifting up moral learning and education, determination to drive this task to success, and courage to make certain changes in moral learning strategies into higher educational institutions. Leaders could not accomplish this alone but rather they need to involve all stakeholders with shared mission through respect, trust and responsibility that would lead them to revitalize moral learning in community.

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