

Character Strengths of Student and College Student Undergoing Learning Activities During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Youth character strengths becomes the front line for the nation's future generations to face future challenges, including during the Covid-19 pandemic. Previous research has shown character strengths in helping people and the nation cope the vicissitudes of Covid-19 pandemic. This research aims to identify differences virtues and character strengths between students and college students when undergoing learning activities during the Covid-19 pandemic. They study harder than usual since the lockdown rule such as self-study, online class in Zoom meetings, Google Classroom, Google Meet, Skype, and unable to meet teachers and friends. This research is a preliminary study to identify youth character strengths with descriptive analysis of 24 character strengths, assessed by the VIA-IS and VIA-Youth. A purposive sampling was employed to 72 participants consisting of 26 students and 46 college students between 15 and 20 years, who experienced a change from offline learning to online learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Data was analysed using independent samples test and descriptive analysis. The results showed that there was a difference of character strengths between students and college students ($t = 10,064$ $p < 0,05$). College students had a higher score of character strength than students with a slight increase in scores on virtues wisdom and knowledge (3,85), courage (3,86), transcendence (3,86), temperance (3,86), humanity (3,87) and justice (3,85). Students emphasised the highest character strengths such as kindness, spiritual, love, forgiveness, hope, humour than college students emphasised the highest character strengths such as kindness, humour, love, honesty, and gratitude. This research is expected to contribute information and increase knowledge about virtues and character strengths of students and college students undergoing learning activities during the covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: *Character strengths, potential development, students, college students.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Many studies in the last few decades have focused on the importance of character in adolescents [1][2][3][4][5][6][7]. Lavy [8] describes the importance of character strengths for every educational institution in the 21st century. The strength of the character of students and college students are at the front line of the nation's future generation to face future challenges, including during the Covid-19 pandemic. Seriousness in policy for youth character is strengthened on PERPRES No. 87 of 2017 in Indonesia about strengthening of

education's character in formal, non-formal and informal education.

The implication of student and college student's character strengths is in their life satisfaction, subjective well-being, success in academics, peer acceptance, and the quality of friendship [7][9][10]. The latest research from Subhashini [11] also explains the character strengths in helping people and the nations cope with the vicissitudes of Covid-19. The importance of character can be described in Billy Graham's popular quote "if wealth is lost, nothing is lost; if health is lost, something is lost; but if the character is lost, all is lost" [11]. The character strength is a positive trait that represents cognitive,

emotional, and behavioural levels [12]. It is composed of six groups of "universal" value (Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Simplicity, and Transcendence) and developed into 24 creative values, curiosity, love of learning, open-mindedness and perspective, courage, persistence, integrity, vitality, inspiration, love, social intelligence, cooperation, honesty, leadership, self-regulation, caution, humility, forgiveness, appreciation of beauty and appreciation, hope, gratitude, humour and spirituality [13]

The Covid-19 pandemic causes many changes in human life, including for students and college students [14], [15]. The pandemic situation creates social and physical distancing which must be obeyed and makes students and college students undergoing online study from home. Learning from home requires more efforts to always focus on studying. Difficulties of online study such as limited communication with teachers or lecturers via WhatsApp, email, Zoom meetings, Google Meet and other applications, signal difficulties and sometimes attention difficulties because of the unconducive home atmosphere for the learning process.

Students and college students have assignments and demands for learning outcomes even during Covid-19 pandemic situations. The environment that changes during a pandemic gives rise to certain character strengths because environment and character are mutually exclusive relationships [13]. This study aims to identify differences in virtues and character strengths between students and college students undergoing learning activities during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. METHOD

This research used a descriptive quantitative approach. This research was a preliminary study to identify the potential development of character strengths possessed by students and college students and find out the differences in the character strengths of students and college students. Student participants in this research were students of class XI between the ages of 15-17 years; while college student participants were between 19-20 years. All participants intensively learned using online media, such as Zoom meetings, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Skype; therefore, they were familiar with online learning systems.

Data collection was carried out on 72 adolescents comprising 46 college students and 26 high school students who were undergoing a change system from offline learning to online learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The character strengths of students and college students were measured using Values in Action Assessment of Seligman and Peterson theory via the website www.viacharacter.org. This measuring tools were divided based on age, namely the Values in Action-IS (VIA-IS) for age 18, which was applied to college students; and the Values in Action-Youth (VIA-Youth) measuring tool for ages 10-17 years, used for students.

The Values in Action-IS (VIA-IS) consisted of 72 questions. The VIA-IS had a fair internal reliability value of 0.75; while the validity of the VIA-IS measuring instrument ranged from 0.36 to 0.48. College student's character was measured by questions, such as "whatever the situation, I can adapt to myself" and "one of my strengths is helping a group of people to work well together when they have many differences".

The Values in Action-Youth (VIA-Youth) consisted of 96 questions. The VIA Youth-96 was obtained by selecting from the original VIA-Youth survey of 198 questions with the highest correlation of total corrected items. The VIA-Youth had internal reliability consistency of 0.86. The VIA Youth-96 was more efficient and had the same validity as the longer version VIA-Youth 198 questions. Students' character was measured with questions, for example: "I really care when someone tells me about him" and "I am seen as a leader when playing with others".

A descriptive analysis and a comparative analysis were employed using SPSS 20 to identify differences virtues and character strengths between students and college students.

3. RESULT

3.1. The Virtues and Character Strengths of Students and College students

The finding of this study showed that there were differences in virtues between students and college students. As presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Independent t-test

	t	df	Sig. 2 tailed
Independent samples test	10,064	10	000

College students have a higher mean score character strengths than students in all aspects, namely wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, simplicity, and transcendence. as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Mean differences of character strengths between college students and students

VIRTUE DIMENSION	Mean of college student	Mean of student
<i>Wisdom and knowledge</i>	3.854624	3.783425
<i>Courage</i>	3.861166	3.751499
<i>Transcendence</i>	3.864954	3.804843
<i>Simplicity</i>	3.864028	3.783095
<i>Humanity</i>	3.876894	3.790064
<i>Justice</i>	3.856061	3.788462

College students showed stronger character strengths than students in responding to the online system during the Covid-19 pandemic. College students had better values of virtue in the dimensions of wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, simplicity, and transcendence than students,

Based on the results of the category of character strengths obtained the highest character strengths in students were kindness, spirituality, love, forgiveness, hope, humour. The highest character strengths of college students were kindness, humour, love, honesty and gratitude as presented in Table 3 and 4 below.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the highest character strengths for college students

CHARACTER STRENGTHS	PERCENTAGE
KINDNESS	54,1%
SPIRITUAL	8,3%
LOVE	8,3%
FORGIVENESS	8,3%
HOPE	8,3%
HUMOR	8,3%

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the highest character strengths for students

CHARACTER STRENGTHS	PERCENTAGE
KINDNESS	41,6%
HUMOR	29,1%
LOVE	16,6%
HONEST	12,5%
GRATITUDE	12,5%

Virtues and character strengths cannot be separated from an environment [13]. Students and college students have experienced changes in learning activities during covid-19 pandemic. Character strengths for youths acted as a shield to face a crisis in a developmental task. Character strengths such as personalities, tend to be stable over time [17]. Character strengths refer to kindness and a set of positive traits that manifest in thoughts, emotions, and behaviour of individuals [12].

3.2. Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic made enormous changes in the learning process. Learning from home with an online system often makes students and college students get many difficulties in learning. Adolescents with character strengths will be able to show creative attitudes by creating useful things and thinking about productive problem solving, having

curiosity about new things, thinking critically before acting, enjoying learning, having a broad perspective in understanding situations, willing to face difficulties, being diligent in achieving goals, being honest and energetic, showing love for others, doing good things for others, understanding other people's emotions, being able to participate in groups, treating others fairly, having the ability to lead, willing to forgive others, not feeling more special than others, being conscientious, being able to manage one's emotions, pursuing beauty and kindness, showing gratitude, having good hopes for the future, having a sense of humour, and putting faith in a power greater than a creator.

Students have the highest character strengths in kindness, spiritual values, love, forgiveness, hope and humour while the highest character strengths of college students are kindness, humour, love, honesty and gratitude. Ruch et al [16] describe the highest character strengths of love and kindness as the goal of friendship. The changes in the learning system using online certainly make students and students miss many opportunities to gather with friends. The use of appropriate information technology media is a way to help students and college students survive in undergoing learning activities during the covid-19 pandemic. It makes logical sense that individuals working on signature strengths – which are naturally energizing and authentic – would experience more gains across different outcomes than working on middle/lower strengths.

Effective character education should be taken into consideration during the Covid-19 pandemic. Students and college students are the nation's future generations to address forthcoming challenges. Steen et al [18] also confirm that when youth character strengths develop continuously, they will certainly help students and college students to achieve a better life improvement and their future as well. A need to identify and understand students' potential signature strengths such as kindness, spiritual values, love, forgiveness, hope and humour and signature strengths of college students such as kindness, humour, love, honesty and gratitude will greatly support to provide energy in completing study assignments during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.3. Conclusion and recommendation

The result showed differences of character strength between students and college students. The college students had higher strengths scores than students. It is expected that there is an appropriate learning model in addressing the online learning process in educational institutions. Future research is expected to further explain the internal and external determinants of students' and college students' character strengths.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All of the authors conceived and designed the study. HS conducted data collection from www.viacharacter.org, analysed the data and wrote the paper. All of the authors contributed to manuscript revision until the final version.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Allah SWT for always giving me ideas for problem solving. Thankful to my promotor and co-promotor for supporting me. Thanks to the research team for this collaboration.

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