

CULTIVATION OF HUMAN VALUES AMONG GIFTED STUDENTS THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPIRITUAL CIRCLE MODULE IN EFFORTS OF HUMANIZING DIGITAL LEARNING: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the education system with the distinctive rise of e-learning. A sudden shift away from the physical classroom resulted in significant learning loss for students both academically and in their social-emotional progress. Also, the unwillingness of students to engage in virtual classrooms due to low self-esteem, lack of motivation, and self-appreciation has resulted in poor academic achievement. This phenomenon calls for the need to cultivate human values in the virtual classroom that helps to foster character building thus contributing to academic excellence. Thus, in this research, we aim to study the impact of the cultivation of human values in virtual classrooms and how it helps improve the teaching-learning environment through implementing the spiritual circle module. A total of 111 students participated in this study. The study used 21 close-ended questions assessed using a 5-point Likert scale. The study employed descriptive and inferential analyses using SPSS. The analysis revealed that the majority of the students agreed that the spiritual circle module has helped them to engage effectively in the classroom as well as contributed to their personal growth. Also, the Spearman correlation test revealed that there is a strong correlation between the cultivation of human values and student engagement and personal growth respectively. Hence, this study concludes that implementation of the spiritual circle module helps to humanize digital learning by fostering human values which contribute to the improvement of virtual class engagement and personal growth.

Keywords: Human values; teaching-learning environment; virtual classroom.

Abstrak

Pandemik COVID-19 telah mengubah sistem pendidikan dengan peningkatan e-pembelajaran. Peralihan secara tiba-tiba daripada pembelajaran bersemuka kepada pembelajaran atas talian memberi kesan terhadap pencapaian akademik dan kemajuan sosial-emosi pelajar. Selain itu,

keengganan pelajar untuk melibatkan diri dalam aktiviti pembelajaran atas talian disebabkan krisis seperti kurang motivasi, keyakinan diri dan penghargaan sendiri mempengaruhi pencapaian akademik pelajar. Fenomena ini menuntut keperluan untuk memupuk nilai kemanusiaan semasa sesi pengajaran dan pembelajaran supaya dapat membantu memupuk pembinaan sahsiah sekali gus menyumbang kepada kecemerlangan akademik. Justeru, dalam penyelidikan ini, kajian berkaitan kesan pembudayaan nilai kemanusiaan dan bagaimana ia membantu menambah baik persekitaran pengajaran-pembelajaran melalui pelaksanaan modul *Spiritual Circle*. Seramai 111 orang pelajar telah menyertai kajian ini. Kajian ini menggunakan 21 *close ended questionnaire* yang dinilai menggunakan skala *Likert* 5-mata. Kajian ini menggunakan dua jenis statistik ketika menganalisa data, iaitu statistik deskriptif dan statistik inferensi. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa penggunaan modul *Spiritual Circle* telah membantu meningkatkan motivasi pelajar untuk melibatkan diri dalam aktiviti e-pembelajaran serta menyumbang kepada perkembangan diri. Tambahan pula, ujian korelasi *Spearman* menunjukkan bahawa terdapat korelasi yang kuat antara pembudayaan nilai kemanusiaan dengan penglibatan diri dalam kelas dan perkembangan diri. Justeru, kajian ini merumuskan bahawa pelaksanaan modul *Spiritual Circle* membantu memansuhkan pembelajaran digital dengan memupuk nilai kemanusiaan yang dapat menyumbang kepada peningkatan penglibatan dalam kelas dan perkembangan diri.

Kata kunci: Nilai kemanusiaan; persekitaran pengajaran-pembelajaran; pembelajaran atas talian

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak posed a threat to humanity, and the global response has dramatically changed people's lifestyles worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic on 30th January 2020 as many global sectors and global systems including the education sector have had a tremendous effect (Oyedotun, 2020). The pandemic has forced many global activities to be closed, including educational activities involving all levels of global education systems from preschool to universities (Maatuk et al. 2022; Peng et al. 2020). All countries all over the world have adopted measures and policies involving the complete closure of schools and educational facilities (Alsafi et al. 2020; Pather et al. 2020). The COVID-19 crisis has obligated most education systems to adopt alternatives to physical teaching and learning (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The education institutions have been forced to switch to e-learning using available educational platforms in an effort of reducing the spread. Also, many education systems have moved to online teaching to enable teaching and learning to continue despite closures. The sudden transformation has exposed some challenges; thereby affecting millions of students as well as educators globally.

E-learning or online learning is a type of formal learning system implemented with the help of electronic resources whereby the use of the internet is the main component of e-learning (Aboagye et

al. 2020; Saul, 2004). Online teaching is defined as teaching that is conducted mostly online (Baran et al. 2011). Therefore, online teaching and learning can be conducted regardless inside or outside the classroom. According to Dhawan (2020), online learning helps in making the teaching-learning process more student-centered, innovative, and flexible. Besides that, Singh and Thurman (2019) stated that the learning experience gained through online learning in a synchronous and asynchronous environment. Synchronous environment learning is structured through live lectures whereby asynchronous environment learning is structured using different devices (mobile phones and laptops) and learning content is not available in the form of live lectures or classes. Therefore, students can be anywhere (independent) to learn and interact with instructors and other students in these environments (Singh & Thurman, 2019).

E-learning was the best option to replace the traditional educational method as social gatherings in educational institutions are more likely to cause the spread of the virus (Lizcano et al. 2020). In efforts of strengthening online teaching and learning or virtual classrooms, many educators have explored all kinds of applications and platforms in order to facilitate students. However, the transition to online learning has been difficult for students around the world, and this struggle has manifested itself in many different ways for students. Due to online learning, students have been going through an emotional coaster as it was something very new to adapt to. For many students, the new format of their classes has created a lack of motivation that can hamper their academic performance throughout the semester. This effect can have many causes, with some describing a lack of structure in online learning compared to their traditional classroom setting (Flores et al. 2022). During online classes, many students often do not participate actively in class and remain silent or there is a tendency to join the class but soon end up doing something else.

Therefore, it is essential to cultivate human values in the virtual classroom that helps to foster character building thus contributing to academic excellence. Human values are the virtues that manual us to not forget the human element whilst we interact with others. Human values are, for instance, honesty, integrity, gratitude, self-acceptance, courage, and clarity. Human values deliver a high-quality and effective surge, which enhances the purpose of ethical values. They are the values that allow us to stay collectively in harmony and personally make contributions to peace.

In this study, we will discuss the impact of the cultivation of human values in virtual classrooms and how it helps improve the teaching-learning environment through implementing the spiritual circle module. The spiritual circle is a session conducted once on a weekly basis for all students to enhance human values and inner peace. Through this session, students are able to work on their human values and learn to overcome their low self-esteem, low motivation, and self-appreciation. The module that had been catered for the Spiritual Circle session comprises many aspects of human values and enables students to not only improve themselves spiritually but also to come out of their comfort zone and be bold and outspoken people. Herein, our study aims to investigate the impact of the cultivation

of human values in virtual classrooms and how it helps improve the teaching-learning environment through implementing the spiritual circle module.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study used a survey research design and was conducted at GENIUS@Pintar National Gifted Center, National University of Malaysia. This study includes students who participated in the spiritual circle sessions enrolled in the academic session of 2021/2022 at GENIUS@Pintar National Gifted Center, National University of Malaya. The sample was collected online. A total of 111 students participated in this study. Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire distributed to students. Google Form was used to measure students' interest level in spiritual circle sessions cultivation of human values, student engagement in virtual classrooms, and personal growth using a 1–5 Likert scale. The questionnaire consisted of 21 close-ended questions and these statements were measured using a 5-point Likert scale from the participant's approval level: "Completely Agree (5)," "Agree (4)," "Neutral (3)," "Disagree (2)," and "Completely Disagree (1)". The instrument was developed based on four main constructs. Firstly, to investigate students' interest level in spiritual circle sessions followed by the study on the cultivation of human values and its impact on students' engagement in virtual classrooms and personal growth. These constructs are developed based on the objectives of our study.

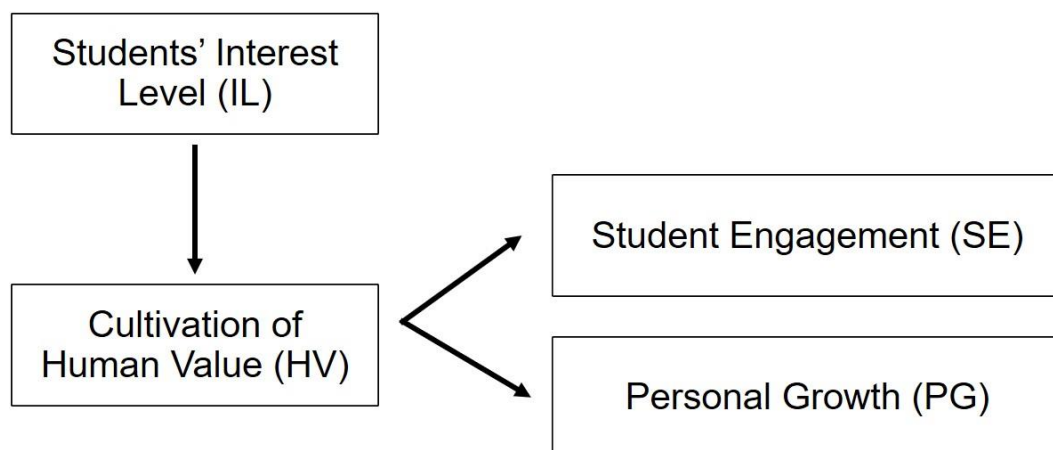


Figure 1. Flowchart of the measurement of four main constructs of the instrument

After the instrument was compiled and developed following the objective, the instrument was tested to examine the validity and reliability of the questionnaire used. The trial of this instrument consisted of 30 students. The instrument testing using SPSS (Version 25) showed the results of the

validity and reliability of each variable in Table 1. Table 1 showed that the validity and reliability of each statement of each variable are feasible to use because it has Cronbach's alpha value >0.60 and the validity of each statement $>r_{table}$ 0.361 (Yusof & Fajri, 2022). Also, the total item's score for each category was found significant, $p < 0.05$.

Table 1. Scores of instrument reliability and validity

Variable	N	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Validity
Interest Level (IL)	111	Item 1	0.985	1
	111	Item 2	0.985	0.853
	111	Item 3	0.986	0.766
	111	Item 4	0.985	0.884
	111	Item 5	0.985	0.926
Human Values (HV)	111	Item 6	0.986	0.704
	111	Item 7	0.985	0.865
	111	Item 8	0.986	0.682
	111	Item 9	0.985	0.880
	111	Item 10	0.985	0.851
	111	Item 11	0.986	0.781
Student Engagement (SE)	111	Item 12	0.985	0.818
	111	Item 13	0.985	0.764
	111	Item 14	0.986	0.740
	111	Item 15	0.985	0.864
	111	Item 16	0.985	0.736
Personal Growth (PG)	111	Item 17	0.985	0.788
	111	Item 18	0.985	0.631
	111	Item 19	0.986	0.631
	111	Item 20	0.985	0.849
	111	Item 21	0.986	0.669

2.2 Data analysis

The descriptive and inferential statistical analysis was employed using SPSS (version 25). The data were tested for normality. The result of the normality test shows that the obtained significant value is lower than 0.05. Therefore, a non-parametric test, the Spearman Correlation Test was used to analyze the relationship between the cultivation of human value through the spiritual circle module and students' engagement in the virtual classroom and personal growth respectively.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Students' Interest Level (IL)

Descriptive statistics on students' interest level in spiritual circle sessions reveal an overall mean of 4.00 (SD=0.89) (Table 4). This shows that the majority of the students are interested in joining the spiritual circle session. Previous studies have defined interest as an outcome of an interaction between an individual and a particular content (Linville, 2014). In this context, the reflecting content of the spiritual circle module enables them to learn, grow, appreciate, and understand. Therefore, interest continues to develop because of the interactions provided through the module. However, studies have shown that interest levels may constantly change over time. The term interest is described as a psychological state which is identified by increased attention and effort experienced in a particular moment (Harackiewicz et al. 2016). Efforts need to be taken in order to sustain the students' interest in spiritual circle sessions. Interest can be further explored into two distinct experiences; situational interest and individual interest. In our study, the items measured under the construct of students' interest level were focused on how the activities, content, and structure of the module have helped in building interest. These items were fostered by features of the situation hence students have shown more fascination and persistence in the class. Based on a study by Harackiewicz et al. (2016), situational interest can directly promote learning by increasing attention and engagement. As a result, situational interest can develop into an emerging individual interest which consequently contributes to sustaining particular interests (Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Renninger & Hidi, 2016).

Table 2. Frequency distribution of students' interest level (IL) in spiritual circle session

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
IL_1	111	1.00	5.00	3.98	1.04
IL_2	111	1.00	5.00	4.04	0.97
IL_3	111	1.00	5.00	3.86	1.02
IL_4	111	1.00	5.00	4.26	0.95
IL_5	111	1.00	5.00	3.87	1.08
IL	111	1.00	5.00	4.00	0.89

3.2 Cultivation of Human Values

Human values are described as qualities that we choose to embody to guide our actions. These values offer insights into human beliefs and attitudes and play an important role in personal, social, and cultural activities. In the realm of education, inculcating human value is an essential process to ensure the betterment of students' quality of life. Moreover, in times of digital learning, values are the tools that form the basics of character formation and personality development. Humanizing our teaching and our

students' learning in times of disruption is critical. As we make choices in adapting our instruction to the online environment, creating a humanized experience is essential to learning, particularly during a time when our lives are disrupted and things are changing at a rapid pace. Therefore, efforts are taken to cultivate human values in order to facilitate digital teaching and learning environment. The values that were emphasized in this study are honesty, integrity, gratitude, self-acceptance, courage, and clarity (Figure 2)

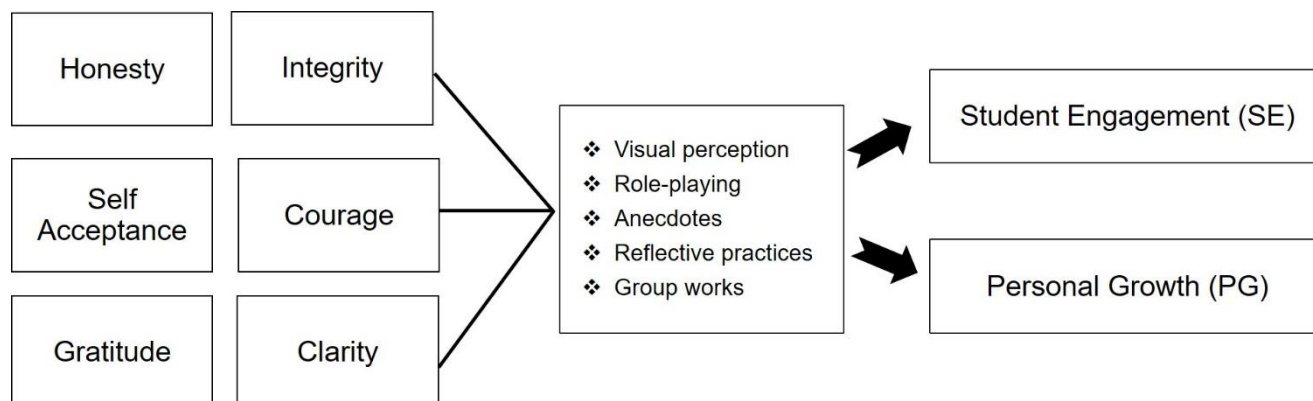


Figure 2. The spiritual circle module framework

The items investigated under the section cultivation of human values have shown an overall mean score of 3.94 (SD=0.93) (Table 5). The results show that students agree that they have instilled values such as honesty, integrity, gratitude, self-acceptance, courage, and clarity through spiritual circle sessions. Successful participation in activities and engagement in learning material during the spiritual circle session has helped them to embark on a journey of self-discovery. For example, some strategies such as visual perception, role-playing, anecdotes, reflective practices, and group works were integrated into the spiritual circle module to teach values explicitly and systematically.

Table 3. Frequency distribution of cultivation of human values through spiritual circle session

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
HV_1	111	1.00	5.00	3.50	1.15
HV_2	111	1.00	5.00	3.99	1.07
HV_3	111	1.00	5.00	3.66	1.18
HV_4	111	1.00	5.00	4.10	1.01
HV_5	111	1.00	5.00	3.98	1.09
HV_6	111	1.00	5.00	3.92	1.10
HV	111	1.00	5.00	3.94	0.93

A study conducted by Hollister et al. (2022) highlights that online learning can be engaging for students with the right tools despite its challenges. A theoretical framework presented by Bond and Bedenlier (2019) for engagement in online learning mentioned that teachers, peers, curriculum, and environment act as influential components for online learning. In our study, we hypothesized that the cultivation of human values among students strongly influences students' engagement in virtual classrooms and personal growth respectively.

3.3 Correlation between Cultivation of Human Values (HV) and Student Engagement (SE)

The term 'student engagement' generally refers to the effort and commitment that students give to their learning (Kahn et al. 2017). Factors such as teaching and learning management system, teaching tools, teacher presence, feedback, support, availability, technology skills, and much more influence the participation of students in the lesson especially during the virtual classroom (Hollister et al., 2022). However, students' behavior and attitude play an important role in ensuring student engagement. One's attitudes and behavior arise out of core values that one holds internally. Therefore, there is a need to cultivate human values as they may influence our motivation, intention, and engagement with a specific task. From our findings, the Spearman Correlation analysis shows that the correlation between the cultivation of human values through the spiritual circle module and student engagement in the virtual classroom is positive and very strong, ($r=0.82, p<0.05$). The results support the hypothesis whereby the cultivation of human values does influence students' engagement in the virtual classroom. Human values implantation among students has the potential to improve their self-confidence, self-motivation, and self-resilience. Besides that, instilling these values also helps to energize and direct their behavior toward achievement. As a result, students become more goal-oriented, thus they understand the need to engage in learning regardless of a physical or virtual environment.

3.4 Correlation between Cultivation of Human Values (HV) and Personal Growth (PG)

During the pandemic, students across the world faced many unexpected challenges which hindered their personal growth. Personal growth or sometimes referred to as personal development is a process of developing and expanding self-abilities, thus contributing to the increase in overall well-being. Therefore, students experiencing personal growth will exhibit high self-esteem and coping skills. Furthermore, they also may have redefined priorities and a greater appreciation of life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Taubman-Ben-Ari & Weintraub, 2008). Personal growth allows students to be the best versions of themselves as the process of development gives them the skills and confidence to navigate any situation. In the realm of education, personal growth is the key to students' success as it involves a continuous process of exploring their fullest potential. Interestingly, in our studies, we found out that the cultivation of human values through the spiritual circle modules helps students to experience personal growth. The Spearman Correlation analysis shows that the correlation between the cultivation

of human values through the spiritual circle module and personal growth is positive and very strong, ($r=1.00, p<0.05$).

4.0 CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the fostering of human values will indeed improve the teaching-learning environment at Pusat GENIUS@Pintar Negara UKM. Through this, the students will be able to perform well in their education and thus have a stable emotional state despite the medium of teaching and learning, especially through virtual classrooms. The strong correlation between the cultivation of human values and student engagement as well as their personal growth indicates that human values play an important role in humanizing digital learning.

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