



RESEARCH PAPER

A Comparative Analysis of Character Strength Among University and Madrassa Students

¹ Muhammad Shahzad Ashfaq* ² Prof Dr. Muhammad Sarwar
³ Dr. Zunaira Fatima Syeda

1. Ph. D Scholar, Department of Education, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Professor of Education, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan

PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: June 02, 2021 Accepted: September 12, 2021 Online: September 15, 2021 Keywords: Character Strength, Comparative Analysis, Madrassa Students, Pakistan Punjab, University Student *Corresponding Author: shahzadashfaq24@g mail.com	This study analyses the character strength among students at university, and the madrassa system in Punjab, Pakistan. It provides a comparison of the character strength of university and madrassa students. This study used the convergent mixed-method research design. The sample of the study was 896 respondents selected through multi-stage sampling technique. This sample included 640 students (320 from universities and 320 from madrassas) and 256 teachers (128 from universities and 128 from madrassas). Two research tools were used to collect information from the respondents. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures i.e. mean values and Independent Samples Test (<i>t</i> -test). The findings of the study revealed that both the university and madrassa students maintain a high level of character strength. The comparison of students on the basis of their institutions revealed that there was a significant difference among them with reference to their character strength. It also showed that the university students have distinction over madrassa students with respect to their character strength. The study recommended large-scale comprehensive research covering both public and private universities and madrassas across the province of Punjab.

Introduction

Character strength is related to promoting active youth development (Park, 2004; Ahmed, 2009). Character strength is defined as a positive attribute of the individual, which has a positive impact on the emotional, rational, and operational areas of a student's life (Niemi, 2013; Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character strength is expected to contribute to a better life for oneself and others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Wagner et al. & Ruch, 2020). Furthermore, character strength can be explained by pluralism or "families of positive characteristics" (Park and Peterson, 2009), because positive character strength is often combined with other advantages (Park et al., 2004; Hölscher, 2020). Character strength provides a positive and applicable framework and perspective that can improve personal, group, and institutional functions. (Peterson and Seligman 2004, Lavy, 2020). The benefits of these strengths of characters exist for

thousands of years. For example, many religions and cultures are expected that forgiveness is a source of mental and physical satisfaction (McCullough, 2000). Other character strengths, such as kindness and personal intelligence, self-esteem have increased to greater importance (I. Plato, 1966, Karriis et al., 2020).

Psychological research usually focuses on the behavior of individuals in pathological settings. However, the understanding of human interests evolved into positive psychology aimed at establishing superiority. Individual behavior has virtues that can help communities survive, but can also enhance human power (Seligman, 2002; Ahmed, 2009). Students may be exposed to many factors that increase honesty and self-esteem under healthy conditions. Great interest and understanding of the supporting factors that can increase character strength in the healthy environment of young people. Supporting factors promote character strength through a variety of mechanisms so that they can reduce non-religious factors that interfere with educational approaches. Studies have shown that certain values in an individual's personality can reduce the negative effects of stressors. Therefore, the analysis of character strengths appears as a classification of different strengths and virtues (Park, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2001; Ahmed, 2009).

B.F. Skinner was the first who introduced the 'Reinforcement' theory in the year 1938. The 'Reinforcement' theory is one of the oldest theories of motivation that describes the behaviour and how we act. Martin Seligman in 1998, emphasized the field of Organizational Behavior. The term was used to describe the positive character traits, positive emotions, and institutions to enabling the student's strengths. Cuomo, (2020) described the character strength of students that leads to satisfaction which is the root of happiness. In addition to Fredrickson's 1998 borden-and-build theory, Kwok, and Fang, 2021 assert that the student's positive emotions affect the performance and organization process. Peterson and Seligman, (2004) introduced a book of character strengths and virtues that are twenty-four in number. They provided the scientific tools for the assessment and measurement of positive traits in students.

Another study by Hostetter, (2018) points out that the character strength of students in urban public charter elementary schools holds as comprising a plurality of observable, measurable, and ubiquitous strengths, from an appreciation of beauty and excellence to zest. The finding of this study highlighted stress in two questions why students should strive towards the desired outcome in classrooms and schools? Why they should avoid an undesired outcome? Does the study contradict the self-control divide in the lessons for building the strength of students is in question and was not yet answered associated with character growth? The study of Shubert, (2018) suggests a developmental change in character strengths of childhood and adolescence in the school contexts, gap in literature and the findings of the research, several theoretically unexpected patterns in the developmental course of future orientation, teamwork, and perseverance. The study positioned ecological assets as a key mechanism for understanding the change in character strengths across childhood and adolescence. The study results highlight the importance of school-level factors in the development of character strength.

In the context of Pakistan, the study of Zubair and Artemeva, (2018) described gender differences in character strengths; social competence, and peer relations among university students. The findings of the study focus on the functions of cognitive skills and

perceptual processes to develop social competence and peer relations in determining the role of learning to shape the student's behaviour. It shows a gap in the literature that was not to explain the acquisition of supportive virtues and social competencies that help the youth to develop positive relations and provide peer relations.

Literature Review

According to Niemiec and Pargament, (2020) character strengths are defined as universal and positive traits of people that identify positive outcomes. Khanna and Proctor, (2021) said that character strength is a group of positive traits and behaviours of youth personality. Strengths of youth generate personal accomplishment and a sense of family relationships with academic development. The evidence from diverse cultures supports that good character promotes positive outcomes.

The best focus of positive education is to bring out the difficulties and hindrances of students. Thus, the backbone of teaching character strength includes kindness and self-control for positive intervention (Vuorinen & Uusitalo-Malmivaara, 2019). In positive psychology, character strengths are the central field of human strengths. These strengths identified the universal strengths and cultures. Peterson and Seligman, (2004) pointed out 24-character strengths which are divided into different categories such as (i) wisdom, (ii) courage, (iii) humanity, (iv) justice, (v) temperance, and (vi) transcendence. These strengths are the durable attributes of a person. The presence of character strengths in cross-cultural research is indeed universal one (Schutte & Malouff, 2019).

Furthermore, these strengths are valued morally and universally with individual differences that exist in the lifespan of a person. Character strengths based on the scientific literature and historical surveys. Zhang and Chen, (2018) study supports Peterson and Seligman, virtues in action classification of twenty-four-character strengths with six core virtues. Consequently, character strength predicts psychological well-being. Emotional and interpersonal strength in character with relating to subjective well-being. The positive dimensions of character strength focused on environmental dominance and autonomy of wisdom (Demirci & Ekşi, 2018).

Therefore, it is concluded that life and positive functioning possess strengths in a direction to achieve a better life. Although, it is a difference of clarity in using and possessing strengths. For example, if a person was creative mind but he never makes use of this skill, he is unlikely to earn benefit from that strength. A person has a high level of creativity and get benefits from experiencing accomplishment (Zhang & Chen, 2018). The teaching of character along with strengths in students should be appreciated in academic and traditional subjects because it expands mutual respect among class fellows. This means that social binding in the classroom promotes heterogeneous learning and teacher-student relationship enhance behavioural and emotional engagement (Vuorinen & Uusitalo-Malmivaara, 2019).

The character strength model was applied in various settings of universities with individual disabilities. The specific value of strengths depends on the situation because that model reflects in individuals to integrate their plans and actions. It is possible when individuals increase their character strength by identifying important strengths and their

use (Schutte & Malouff, 2019). As noted by Littman-Ovadia and Freidlin, (2020) the degree of strengths expression depends on individual situation as adopting Aristotle approach in specific strength use. The strengths of an individual retain the potential benefit with a specific situation. Aristotle classified the individual strengths in three categories: the underuse strength of unexpressed situations; the overuse of overexpressing situations; the optimal use of appropriate expressions in each situation.

Moreover, the character strength application and promotion shape the leaders and future citizens in our society. Therefore, education is not considered as another field in which strengths of character can be applied. Although the need for character strength in use and development is crucial and young people contribute to change human communities of the twenty-first century (Lavy, 2020). Character strength relates to prosocial strength that encourages kindness and gratitude. The previous research found that character strength relates to a positive personality. Classification of character strength encourages the recipient. Then, individuals have high encouragement that fell a sense of social connection. The character practice of an individual cultivates a positive view that enhances psychological well-being (Wang & Li, 2020). As cited by Noronha and Campos, (2018) traits of character strengths are important for human development because they contribute to self-confidence and social responsibility. Thus, most authors explain psychological ingredients that lead people to own good and other societies.

Hypothesis

H₀1: There is no significant mean difference among character strength of university students and madrassa students.

Material and Methods

Research Design

The research design explains the basic structure and guidance for conducting research. The research reflects plans that can be quantitative or qualitative (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In the research literature, there are different research designs in the fields of social sciences and education e.g. experimental research design, correlation design, cross-sectional and comparative survey research (Omair, 2015). But these designs are the least appropriate designs for the present study as the influence of variables is not essential when analyzing the character strength. (Spector, 2019).

Participants of the Study

At the final stage of study, 10 Bachelor of Sciences students from each selected department (10x32=320) and 10 Shahadatul Alia and Shahadatul Almiya students from each madrassa (10x32=320); four university teachers from each department including head of departments (4x32=128) and 4 madrassa teachers including head of the institution (Nazim) (4x32=128) were taken conveniently. In this way, the total sample of the study was 640 students and 256 teachers.

Research Instruments

Two questionnaires were used to collect information from the respondents.

Questionnaire for Students

The student's questionnaire was comprised of demographic information, and thirty items representing character strength on a 5-point Likert scale based on character strength values (justice, honesty, compassion, self-sacrifice, teamwork, work ethics).

The draft of the original questionnaire having 6 indicators which include thirty items of character strength values was discussed with the panel of experts to determine content validity. The experts identified a grammatical mistake in the item no.3. The necessary changes were made accordingly. Moreover, the student's suggestions about the understanding of close-ended questions also helped to improve the research tool with respect to its clarity and relevance. At the same pattern, the semi-structured interview schedule comprising the aspects of character strength was validated through expert opinion.

Data Collection and Analysis

Following the ethical obligation, the researcher got a permission letter from their supervisor for the very purpose. The researcher personally visited the universities and madrassas. Before starting the data collection process, the researcher visited the sampled institutions and sought permission from the head of the institutions. The questionnaire was distributed among the students and they were briefed about the things they would have to take care of while filling in a questionnaire. During collecting questionnaires, the researcher scrutinized them to see any kind of discrepancies therein. Written interview schedules were distributed among the teachers and heads of the institutions of both the university and madrassas after getting permission and planning meeting time. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures i.e. mean values and Independent Samples Tests (*t*-test).

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Level of Character Strength of the University Students

S. No	Main Theme/Sub-themes	Mean Score	Level
	Character Strength of the University Students	4.58	High
1	Moral Character	4.64	High
2	Social Character	4.52	High

Table 1 shows the level of 'character strength' of university students. Data in the table revealed that the level of character strength of the university students is high ($M=4.58$). Likewise, the levels of their 'moral' ($M=4.64$) and 'social character' ($M=4.52$) as components of character strength are also high.

Table 2
Level of Moral Character Strength of the University Students

S. No	Theme/Sub-themes	Mean Score	Level
	Moral Character Strength of the University Students	4.64	High
1	Justice	4.66	High
2	Honesty	4.63	High
3	Compassion	4.62	High

Table 2 represents the level of ‘moral character’ ($M=4.64$) of university students is high. Data in the table revealed that the level of ‘justice’ ($M=4.66$), ‘honesty’ ($M=4.63$), and ‘compassion’ ($M=4.62$) as indicators of character strength are also high.

Table 3
Level of Social Character Strength of the University Students

S. No	Theme/Sub-themes	Mean Score	Level
	Social Character Strength of the University Students	4.52	High
1	Self-sacrifice	4.34	High
2	Teamwork	4.69	High
3	Work ethics	4.52	High

Table 3 display the level of ‘social character’ ($M=4.52$) of university students is high. Data in the table revealed that the level of ‘self-sacrifice’ ($M=4.34$), ‘teamwork’ ($M=4.69$), and ‘work ethics’ ($M=4.52$) as indicators of character strength are also high.

Table 4
Level of Character Strength of Madrassa Students

S. No	Main Theme/Sub-themes	Mean Score	Level
	Character Strength of Madrassa Students	4.20	High
1	Moral Character	4.37	High
2	Social Character	4.03	High

Table 4 depicts the level of ‘character strength’ of madrassa students. Data in the table revealed that the level of character strength of madrassa students is high ($M=4.20$). Similarly, the levels of their ‘moral’ ($M=4.37$) and ‘social character’ ($M=4.03$) as components of character strength are also high.

Table 5
Level of Moral Character Strength of Madrassa Students

S. No	Themes/Sub-themes	Mean Score	Level
	Moral Character Strength of Madrassa students	4.37	High
1.	Justice	4.38	High
2.	Honesty	4.42	High
3.	Compassion	4.32	High

Table 5 indicates the level of ‘moral character’ ($M=4.37$) of madrassa students is high. Data in the table revealed that the level of ‘justice’ ($M=4.38$), ‘honesty’ ($M=4.42$), and ‘compassion’ ($M=4.32$) as indicators of character strength are also high.

Table 6
Level of Social Character Strength of Madrassa Students

S. No	Themes/Sub-themes	Mean Score	Level
	Social Character Strength of Madrassa Students	4.03	High
1.	Self-sacrifice	4.10	High
2.	Teamwork	3.89	Moderate
3.	Work ethics	4.10	High

Table 6 depicted the level of 'social character' strength of madrassa students is high ($M=4.03$). Data in the table revealed that the level of 'self-sacrifice' ($M=4.10$), 'teamwork' ($M=3.89$), and 'work ethics' are also high ($M=4.10$).

Table 7
Comparison of Character Strength among University and Madrassa Students

Aspect	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Character Strength	Universities students	320	4.5807	.26991	8.42	638	.000
	Madrassas students	320	4.3816	.32563			

Table 7 indicates that the mean score of character strength of the university's students is 4.58 with $SD .269$ and the mean score of character strength of madrassa's students is 4.38 with $SD .325$. The computed t value for df 638 is 8.421. As the computed t -value is greater than the required table value, consequently, it may be determined that the results of both groups are significantly different regarding character strength aspects. Therefore, the null hypothesis that "there is no significant mean difference among character strength of universities students and madrassa students was rejected". It was uncovered that the universities students demonstrated distinction in character strength.

Findings

Character Strength among University Students

The overall level of 'character strength' among university students' is high ($M=4.58$). Similarly, the 'moral character' ($M=4.64$) and 'social character' of university students are also high ($M=4.52$).

Character Strength among Madrassa Students

The overall level of 'character strength' among madrassa students is high ($M=4.20$). Similarly, the 'moral character' of madrassa students ($M=4.37$) and 'social character' ($M=4.03$) are also high.

Comparison of Character Strength of University and Madrassa Students

The results of *t*-value assessment found that there are significant differences in character strength of university students and madrassa students. It was also uncovered that the university student's demonstrated distinction in character strength.

Discussion

The present study aimed to analyze character strength among university and madrassa students in Pakistan. The comparison was made between the students of both education systems based on their character strengths. The findings of the study revealed that the level of character strength among university students is high. Similarly, the level of character strength among madrassa students is high. The findings of the present study are consistent with the work of Gander et al., (2020) who examined the character strength of the Swiss, German, and Austrian adults with age ranging from 18 to 81 years. They found that the level of character strength of these adults remained high in a number of character strengths for several years during their longitudinal study. The results of the study by Abasimi and Xiaosong, (2016) also supported these findings who established that the Ghanaian teachers from the Builsa district of the Upper East Region maintain a high level in 7 out of 9 strengths of their character strength which include 'Gratitude', 'Kindness', 'Fairness', 'Love of Learning', 'Integrity/Honesty', 'Perspective and Judgment' (Open-mindedness). These findings also coincide with the findings of the study by Gustems and Calderon, (2014) in which the respondents displayed high scores in six-character strengths on a character strength scale. They showed a high level of character strength with respect to 'kindness', 'fairness', 'teamwork', 'love', 'honesty', and 'leadership'.

The present study also tried to compare the character strength of university and madrassa students. The results of the estimation of the *t*-value found that there is a significant difference in the character strength of university and madrassa students. It was also uncovered that the university students demonstrated distinction in character strength. The calculated *t*-value shows a significant difference between university students and madrassa students. The study conducted by Berthold and Ruch, (2014) on the comparison of character strengths between the practising and non-practising religious people. The findings of the present study are consistent with it. Berthold and Ruch, (2014) established that those participants who practice their religion regularly scored higher on the character strengths scale with reference to a number of strengths as compared to the participants who were not regular practitioners of religion.

Conclusions

It was revealed from the findings of the study that the level of character strength among university students was high. Alongside, the madrassa students were found to have a high level of character strength as well.

As a result of comparing the character strength of the university students and madrassa students, there were significant differences in the character strengths of university students and madrassa students. It was also uncovered that the university students demonstrated distinction in character strength. The computed *t*-value revealed

that there were significant differences in the character strengths of university students and madrassa students.

Recommendations

The present study indicates the following recommendations based on conclusions.

The study was delimited to public universities and madrassas of the Sargodha division, Pakistan. Future researchers may conduct a large-scale comprehensive study, covering both public and private universities and madrassas across the province of Punjab. The level of character strength of university and madrassa students was measured on a self-assessment scale. Future research may use an experimental approach or a survey with a mixed-method research design adding an observation checklist to other tools to have a clear picture of students' character strength.

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