
CHARACTER EDUCATION AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS ON PUPILS' WELL-BEING IN THE 2ND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT OF COTABATO

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Article Received: 05 April 2026, Article Revised: 25 April 2026, Published on: 15 May 2026

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DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.9750>

2. ABSTRACT

This quantitative study determined the extent of character education, moral development, and pupils' well-being, and tested the significant relationships and influences between these variables among 265 Grade 6 teachers in the 2nd Congressional District of Cotabato (Magpet, Makilala, and President Roxas), Philippines for School Year 2025–2026. A descriptive-correlational design was used with complete enumeration sampling. Character education was assessed across importance, efficacy, and practice (WM = 3.54, Agree). Moral development was measured through autonomy care, community respect, and moral understanding (WM = 3.73, Agree). Pupils' well-being was examined through positive emotion, engagement, and relationship (WM = 3.95, Agree). Spearman rho analysis revealed that among all character education dimensions, only practice showed a significant relationship with relationship well-being ($r = 0.215$, $p = 0.049$). Among moral development dimensions, only community respect showed a significant relationship with engagement well-being ($r = 0.220$, $p = 0.049$). Regression analysis confirmed that character education significantly influenced relationship well-being ($F = 1.455$, $p = 0.048$; $R^2 = 0.023$), with only practice as the significant predictor ($\beta = 0.153$, $p = 0.046$). Among moral development dimensions, community respect significantly influenced engagement well-being ($F = 2.118$, $p = 0.041$; $R^2 = 0.047$, $\beta = 0.188$, $p = 0.047$). Character education and moral development did not significantly influence positive emotion. These findings affirm that practice-based character education and community respect are the critical nexus points connecting moral programs to pupils' well-being outcomes in rural Philippine elementary settings.

3. KEYWORDS: *Character education; moral development; pupils' well-being; community respect; practice; engagement; descriptive-correlational; Cotabato.*

4. INTRODUCTION

Character education programs aim to foster virtues such as responsibility, empathy, honesty, and social awareness by intentionally shaping students' moral disposition. Research confirms that combining character strengths with emotional learning brings meaningful benefits to students' mental health, sense of purpose, and overall flourishing (Kumar, 2025). In parallel, moral development education—encompassing autonomy care, community respect, and moral understanding—shapes learners' ethical reasoning, interpersonal relationships, and social responsibility (Haidt, 2004; Nussbaum, 2011).

Despite growing evidence for behavioral and academic gains from character and moral education programs, there is limited empirical work examining how these school-based programs affect pupils' well-being—particularly psychological, emotional, and relational dimensions—in elementary settings (Miller, 2025; Smith, 2024). Furthermore, research specifically mapping which dimensions of character education and moral development most strongly relate to and predict distinct well-being outcomes (positive emotion, engagement, relationship) is scarce in the rural Philippine context (DepEd, 2023).

This study is anchored in Haidt's (2004) Moral Foundations Theory, which emphasizes how moral values are shaped by culture and education to strengthen social harmony, and Nussbaum's (2011) Capabilities Approach, which evaluates educational programs by how well they enable students to develop critical capabilities for holistic flourishing. Together, these frameworks position character and moral education as essential tools for fostering pupils' comprehensive well-being.

5. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design. A descriptive-correlational design was employed to describe the levels of character education, moral development, and pupils' well-being, and to determine their significant relationships and predictive influences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Locale and Respondents. The study was conducted in the 2nd Congressional District of Cotabato, Philippines, covering Magpet (n = 62), Makilala (n = 114), and President Roxas (n = 89). Through complete enumeration, all 265 Grade 6 teachers served as respondents.

Instruments. Three validated questionnaires measured: (1) character education adapted from Ampel (2009; $\alpha = 0.795$) across importance, efficacy, and practice; (2) moral development

adapted from Pujiastuti et al. (2019; $\alpha = 0.782$) across autonomy care, community respect, and moral understanding; and (3) pupils' well-being adapted from Butler and Margaret (2016; $\alpha = 0.817$) across positive emotion, engagement, and relationship. All items used 5-point Likert scales.

Statistical Analysis. Weighted means described variable levels. Spearman's rho determined significant relationships between character education/moral development dimensions and well-being indicators. Multiple linear regression identified predictive influence at $\alpha = 0.05$.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Character Education

Overall, character education was rated Agree (WM = 3.54). Practice obtained the highest mean (WM = 3.67), particularly in holding pupils accountable to classroom expectations (M = 3.98, Agree) and teaching virtues such as honesty (M = 3.76, Agree). Efficacy was second (WM = 3.48), strongest in positively influencing character development of pupils lacking parental guidance (M = 3.97). Importance received the lowest mean (WM = 3.46), though character education being mandated in public schools received the highest importance rating (M = 3.97). These findings confirm Martinez (2020) and Lee (2025), who established that effective character education requires culturally responsive implementation and teacher readiness, and align with Hernández (2025), who documented that empathy-focused programs reduce bullying and foster inclusive peer relationships.

Table 1. Overall Level of Pupils' Perception About Character Education.

Dimension	Weighted Mean	Description
Importance	3.46	Agree
Efficacy	3.48	Agree
Practice	3.67	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	3.54	Agree

Moral Development

Moral development was rated Agree overall (WM = 3.73). Community Respect received the highest mean (WM = 3.89), with fostering an environment where diverse opinions are valued during classroom activities rated Strongly Agree (M = 4.34). Moral Understanding was second (WM = 3.84), with facilitating discussions on ethical dilemmas rated Strongly Agree (M = 4.21). Autonomy Care was third (WM = 3.85), with encouraging and supporting

conflict resolution highest ($M = 4.09$). These results are consistent with Santhosh and George's (2023) documentation that trust, respect, belongingness, and positive peer relationships are central to the well-being of school communities, and with Beaumont et al. (2023), who confirmed that students' emotion regulation is linked to school-related well-being.

Table 2. Overall Level of Pupils' Perception of Moral Development.

Dimension	Weighted Mean	Description
Autonomy Care	3.85	Agree
Community Respect	3.89	Agree
Moral Understanding	3.84	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	3.73	Agree

Pupils' Well-Being

Overall well-being was rated Agree ($WM = 3.95$). Relationship had the highest mean ($WM = 4.01$), with positive relationships fostered among students rated Strongly Agree ($M = 4.31$) and collaboration opportunities Agree ($M = 3.73$). Engagement was second ($WM = 4.00$), with active involvement in learning consistently promoted rated Strongly Agree ($M = 4.31$). Positive Emotion was third ($WM = 3.83$), with classroom interactions fostering positive emotions rated Strongly Agree ($M = 4.24$) while achievement acknowledgment and celebration was lowest ($M = 3.40$). These findings are consistent with Noddings' (2005) confirmation that emotional and relational aspects are key to developing character, and with Zhang et al. (2024), who found that student engagement significantly mediates the relationship between teacher support and psychological well-being.

Table 3. Overall Level of Pupils' Well-Being.

Dimension	Weighted Mean	Description
Positive Emotion	3.83	Agree
Engagement	4.00	Agree
Relationship	4.01	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	3.95	Agree

Relationship of Character Education and Pupils' Well-Being

Spearman rho analysis revealed that among all character education dimensions tested against all well-being indicators, only practice and relationship showed a significant relationship ($r = 0.215$, $p = 0.049$). All other combinations—importance and efficacy with positive emotion, engagement, and relationship, and practice with positive emotion and engagement—showed no significant relationships (all $p > 0.05$). This finding implies that the actual implementation of character education in daily classroom routines, value modeling, and accountability practices has a meaningful connection with pupils' relational well-being. This is consistent with Luo et al.'s (2023) documentation that positive school climate fosters prosocial behavior through social support and resilience, and with Moore and Frydenberg's (2023) finding that prosocial behavior is positively related to relatedness.

Table 4. Spearman Rho: Character Education and Pupils' Well-Being.

Character Dimension	Education	Positive Emotion (r/p)	Engagement (r/p)	Relationship (r/p)
Importance		0.067 / 0.443	-0.096 / 0.274	-0.017 / 0.843
Efficacy		-0.027 / 0.755	-0.015 / 0.864	0.082 / 0.351
Practice		0.050 / 0.566	0.062 / 0.480	0.215* / 0.049

*Significant at $p < .05$

Influence of Character Education on Pupils' Well-Being

Regression analysis confirmed that character education significantly influenced relationship well-being ($F = 1.455$, $p = 0.048$; $R^2 = 0.023$), with practice as the sole significant predictor ($\beta = 0.153$, $t = 1.565$, $p = 0.046$). Character education did not significantly influence positive emotion ($F = 0.349$, $p = 0.790$; $R^2 = 0.008$) or engagement ($F = 0.422$, $p = 0.738$; $R^2 = 0.010$). The finding that 2.3% of variance in relationship is explained by character education, with the remaining 97.7% attributable to other factors, implies that the daily practice of values formation—accountability structures, value modeling, and virtue instruction—produces measurable but contextually embedded relational gains. This aligns with Addae et al.'s (2023) documentation that peer relationships significantly predict school satisfaction, and with Sette et al.'s (2023) finding that teacher-child and peer relationships are protective factors against children's loneliness.

Relationship of Moral Development and Pupils' Well-Being

Among all moral development dimensions tested, only community respect and engagement showed a significant relationship ($r = 0.220$, $p = 0.049$). Autonomy care and moral understanding showed no significant relationships with any well-being dimension (all $p > 0.05$). This finding indicates that when pupils experience respect for teachers, elders, peers, and diverse opinions, they are more likely to participate actively and become engaged in classroom activities. This is supported by Chan and Lam's (2023) finding that perceived school climate is positively associated with academic engagement, and by Xu et al.'s (2023) documentation that perceived teacher support significantly influences student engagement.

Influence of Moral Development on Pupils' Well-Being

Regression analysis confirmed that moral development significantly influenced engagement well-being ($F = 2.118$, $p = 0.041$; $R^2 = 0.047$), with community respect as the sole significant predictor ($\beta = 0.188$, $t = 1.971$, $p = 0.047$). Moral development did not significantly influence positive emotion ($F = 0.372$, $p = 0.774$; $R^2 = 0.009$) or relationship ($F = 0.220$, $p = 0.882$; $R^2 = 0.005$). The 4.7% explained variance in engagement, with 95.3% attributed to other factors, suggests that community respect—encompassing respect for authority, peer valuation, and diversity appreciation—directly enables pupils' active participation in learning. This aligns with Barrance and Hampton's (2023) finding that children's participation in school decision-making is linked with subjective well-being, and with Conesa et al. (2023), who showed that classroom support for psychological needs improves autonomy satisfaction and engagement.

Table 5. Summary Regression Results: Character Education and Moral Development on Well-Being.

Predictor Dimension	→	Well-Being	→	R ²	F-Value	Probability	Decision
Character Education	→	Positive Emotion	→	0.008	0.349	0.790 (NS)	Not Significant
Character Education	→	Engagement	→	0.010	0.422	0.738 (NS)	Not Significant
Character Education	→	Relationship	→	0.023	1.455	0.048*	Significant (Practice)
Moral Development	→	Positive Emotion	→	0.009	0.372	0.774 (NS)	Not Significant
Moral Development	→	Engagement	→	0.047	2.118	0.041*	Significant (Community)

Engagement				Respect)
Moral Development Relationship	→	0.005	0.220	0.882 (NS) Not Significant

*Significant at $p < .05$; NS = Not Significant

7. CONCLUSION

Character education and moral development are positively perceived among Grade 6 teachers in the 2nd Congressional District of Cotabato at an Agree level, and pupils demonstrate an overall Agree level of well-being with relationship and engagement as the strongest dimensions. Among all character education dimensions, only practice significantly predicts relationship well-being, establishing the daily enactment of values—accountability, virtue instruction, and moral modeling—as the critical mechanism connecting character programs to pupils' social bonds. Among all moral development dimensions, only community respect significantly predicts engagement well-being, establishing the cultivation of respect for diversity, authority, and peers as the pivotal moral driver of pupils' active classroom participation. Both significant predictors explain modest proportions of variance ($R^2 = 0.023$ and 0.047), underscoring that broader contextual factors—family environment, school climate, peer dynamics—also powerfully shape well-being outcomes. Schools should prioritize embedded, daily practice of character values and systematic cultivation of community respect as core program components, complemented by multi-stakeholder approaches that extend well-being support beyond classroom instruction.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher sincerely thanks all 265 Grade 6 teacher respondents from the three municipalities for their participation. Gratitude is extended to the Schools Division Office of Cotabato and participating district supervisors and school heads for facilitating data collection, and to Dr. Norhata M. Plang for expert advisory guidance.

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