

THE IMPACT OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' CHARACTER STRENGTHS ON QUALITY EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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The Europe 2020 Strategy underscores the importance of universities as key connectors between professional training and labor market demands, focusing on smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. This strategic approach highlights the necessity of aligning academic goals with the dynamic needs of society to promote comprehensive progress. In this context, a conducive teaching-learning environment is essential for quality education (Shaheen et al., 2020). While extensive research exists on quality education, this paper introduces a unique perspective by integrating 24-character strengths from positive psychology to enhance educational quality, emphasizing students' academic, social, and moral development. Based on Seligman's positive psychology theory (2011), the recognition and application of character strengths are crucial for fostering high-quality learners who exhibit strong self-efficacy, happiness, and life satisfaction, areas often neglected in discussions of quality education. This research aims to expand the international dialogue on quality education by conducting semi-structured interviews with international students in Hungary. It examines how they utilize character strengths in their educational journey. The paper employed purposive sampling to select ten participants of varied nationalities in BA and MA degree programs (male: 30%, female: 70%). To ensure the integrity of this research, ethical approval was obtained, and a pilot study was conducted. For analyzing the qualitative data, Atlas.ti software was used, known for its advanced capabilities in thematic and content analysis (Frieze, 2012), and for supporting complex coding schemes and the efficient synthesis of qualitative data (Paulus et al., 2014). This study combines deductive and inductive analyses. It begins with Seligman's theory to hypothesize the influence of character strengths on quality education and inductively examines this through students' narratives. Findings indicate a pronounced impact of character strengths such as creativity, hope, curiosity, teamwork, and self-regulation in educational settings. These strengths corroborate and expand upon Seligman's framework, enriching our understanding of their role in educational success. Six thematic areas emerged, illustrating how character strengths are integral to quality education: (1) their incorporation in educational practices, (2) creating conducive learning environments, (3) the development and recognition of individual strengths, (4) the promotion of creativity and innovation, (5) encouraging teamwork and diverse perspectives, and (6) fostering curiosity and perseverance. This paper advocates a holistic approach to quality education, advocating for a balance between academic knowledge and personal development, and emphasizing the role of institutional support in student development.