Preliminary Study: Exploring the Perception and Experiences of Using Character Strengths in Student Teachers

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Abstract

In order to empower and well prepare student teachers for their future roles, integrating character strengths into their personal development and academic pursuits is crucial. This will equip them to contribute invaluable knowledge and practice to future generations. Given the absence of character strengths research in Myanmar, the investigation is essential. Myanmar Education Degree Colleges (EDCs) are implementing a 4-year degree program that prioritizes competencies and teaching-learning approaches to encourage student teachers to apply character strengths and make them confident and enthusiastic learners. Character strengths can be defined as an inherent quality that allows individuals to achieve their goals and lead fulfilling lives. Peterson and Seligman identified 24-character strengths that are divided into six virtues: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence, based on significant examination of cross-cultural and numerous research. By following the framework of VIA classification, this study aims to explore the Myanmar student teachers' perception and experiences of using their character strengths thereby raising their awareness and validating the existence of 24-character strengths in Myanmar culture. To achieve this, a qualitative exploratory study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with 18 student teachers (M_{age} = 20.22, SD_{age} = .83). The reliability and validity of the research were confirmed through a pilot, and ethical approval was obtained. Direct content analysis and framework analysis were performed by using the VIA classification. The findings showed that 24-character strengths related to Buddhist beliefs were recognized by the participants. When they use their creativity, curiosity, judgment, cooperation, and leadership, they perform better in class and feel more productive. They became more conscious of the value of character strengths as a result of the interview. Their plans for enhancing specific character strengths in EDC provide valuable insights for scholars, educators, and curriculum developers.

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1. Introduction

The study of character strengths evolved in the early 20th century and over 25 million surveys have been taken around the world using the VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). A wide range of literature search and practice has shown fruitful results in various areas and cultures, including intervention and counseling programs and character strengths initiatives incorporated into the existing curriculum in some Australian schools (White & Waters, 2014). Character strengths help to look for what is strongest and best in people. It is a widely recognized practice in education since it enhances positive outcomes and reduces negative aspects.

Character strengths have been linked to an increase in academic achievement (Choudhury & Borooah, 2017), self-efficacy (Weber, 2013; Lim & Kim, 2014), high life satisfaction (Harzer, 2016), positive adaptation to stress (Lee et al., 2019), an improvement of psychological capital which strengthens the people's ability to cope with stressful situations (Hou et al., 2022), and the practice of character strengths provides a positive contribution to both physical and mental health by bringing happiness, meaning of life and purpose, with a fulfilling relationship of decreasing depression (VanderWeele et al., 2019; Seligman et al., 2005). Student teachers' character strengths are positively related to psychological well-being (Gustems & Calderon, 2014) which is particularly important for preventing mental illness.

Gradišek (2023) found that students in teacher education showed Fairness, Kindness, Teamwork, Leadership, and Gratitude as signature strengths. Moreover, they hoped to develop Creativity, Perseverance, Courage, and Self-regulation for future goals. Student teachers frequently applied civic strengths and interpersonal strengths in their daily lives. There should be more support for student teachers to achieve their plans for improving their target strengths that are somehow related to academic activities. Furthermore, the teacher education context needs more attention to study character strengths as there are only a few research can be found within this context and there is no qualitative study that can highlight the deep insights into the usefulness and practices of student teachers' character strengths.

Another point that needs to be considered is that studies investigating the perception and experiences of character strengths are rare and most studies implemented intervention programs using different experimental designs. While prior research has examined the validation of character strengths through adaptations of the VIA classification questionnaire in various international contexts, such investigations have not yet comprehensively explored the practical utility of character strengths in everyday life. Consequently, a more in-depth

examination of this topic becomes imperative. As such, the primary objective of this study is to undertake innovative scrutiny to describe character strengths among student teachers and their usefulness in college students' lives – how they apply their strengths in different situations, advantages of using strengths, feelings, and satisfaction when they reach their goals because of these strengths. It is worth researching as previous empirical studies highlighted the importance of character strengths in promoting well-being (Koydemir & Sun-Selışık, 2016); a decrease in depression, and an increase in life satisfaction and happiness (Schutte & Malouff, 2019).

Character strengths are important for teacher education, for instance, they are positively related to life satisfaction, college satisfaction, and GPA (Lounsbury et al., 2009); psychological well-being (Linley et al.,2010); personal well-being (Hutcherson et al., 2008; Park & Peterson, 2008). Using character strengths had impacts on those variables: fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety (Gillham et al. 2011; Schmid et al., 2011; Park & Peterson 2008), fewer externalizing problems (Park and Peterson, 2008), and internalizing problems (Beaver, 2008). Moreover, scholars found that fairness (78%), creativity (68%), a love of learning (61%), humor (53%), perseverance (45%), and leadership (40%) were considered top character strengths to be a good teacher (Arthur et al., 2015). Student teachers at the Education Degree College (EDC) in Myanmar are trained to become effective and skilled educators who can make valuable contributions to the field of education. Therefore, it is important to explore their character strengths, related experiences, and perceptions. This exploration will contribute positively to understanding how these student teachers operate within their tasks and can provide valuable insights into their overall performance and development within the education system.

All in all, character strengths research in teacher training programs can bring effective awareness of the application of strengths and promote student teachers' qualities in this twenty-first-century challenging world.

Aims

  i. To examine how student teachers perceive and experience character strengths.
  ii. To explore the underlying philosophical beliefs that shape student teachers' perceptions of character strengths.

Research questions

  i. What are student teachers' perceptions of their character strengths?
  ii. How do student teachers describe the experiences of using 24-character strengths in Education Degree College?
  iii. What are the underlying philosophical beliefs that shape student teachers' perceptions of character strengths?

2. Theoretical Background

In this study, student teachers' character strengths will be classified using the framework of VIA Classification of Character Strengths, which is based on trait theory (Niemiec, 2020). The classification system draws its origins from historical analysis and the application of specific criteria, further bolstered by cross-cultural investigations. Subsequent to its inception, the VIA Classification has undergone meticulous refinement, substantiated through rigorous reliability and validity studies, including multiple factor analyses. The classification's scientific rigor is evidenced by its extensive peer-review process. The essential intent of this classification is to facilitate the betterment and empowerment of human beings, thereby making a meaningful contribution to the greater welfare. It accomplishes this objective by presenting a user-friendly framework suitable for practitioners.

Character strengths are positive aspects of personality that reflect the fundamental identity of individuals and produce positive outcomes for themselves and others, as well as contributing to the collective good (Niemiec, 2018). According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), there are 24-character strengths that make up the six virtues – (1) Wisdom and knowledge (*cognitive strengths* - creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness/judgment, love of learning, and perspective), (2) Courage (*emotional strengths* - (bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality), (3) Humanity (*interpersonal strengths* - love, kindness, and social intelligence), (4) Justice (*civic strengths* - teamwork, fairness, and leadership), (5) Temperance (*temperance strengths* - forgiveness and mercy, humility/modesty, prudence, and self-regulation), (6) Transcendence (*transcendence strengths* - appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality).

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

18 student teachers (Year 1 and Year 2) from one of the Education Degree Colleges (EDCs) in Myanmar participated in this study. The curriculum reform in EDCs started in 2019 and is still in process so the data can be collected only from those participants.

3.2. Research Design

This qualitative study was designed to investigate the perceptions and experiences of using character strengths in student teachers, as it is the most effective method for providing a deeper understanding of the nature of the related variable (Creswell, 2015). The exploratory approach was used to uncover vital information that will contribute to the achievement of the primary goal of the study. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain a deeper insight into their actual experiences and perceptions of character strengths.

One-on-one interviews were employed by using the virtual platform (audio call) to allow the participants to share their ideas and experiences comfortably. The researcher used the purposive sampling method and the data collection process was terminated when the

saturation point was reached, which meant that it was possible to make sense of the phenomenon without further information from new participants. 18 student teachers took part in this study. The criteria for participant selection are made based on the purpose of the study to explore the perception and experiences of character strengths, so the participants are those who (1) have completed Year 1, first semester; (2) are interested in exploring their character strengths; (3) are willing to participate in the study and provided informed consent; (4) believe in Buddhism (according to the VIA framework, character strengths are based on the traditions of Buddhism for South Asia; Peterson & Seligman 2004).

3.3.   Data Collection

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants through the provision of the consent form. A demographic data sheet and a semi-structured interview guide were utilized in this investigation. These two instruments were reviewed by experts in the respective field and ensured validity and reliability by conducting a pilot with 3 participants from the targeted population.

The first instrument was specifically crafted to acquire pertinent information regarding participants' age, gender, streams, and educational level (Year 1/Year 2). The second one, the interview guide was carefully informed by the positive psychology of character strengths and previous literature. Each interview commenced with a brief introduction to the topic (3-4 minutes), elucidating the construct of character strengths. Subsequently, a series of 7 meticulously designed questions were employed to incite fruitful discussion about perceptions and experiences of character strengths. The entire interview spanned a duration of approximately 30 to 45 minutes while the demographic data sheet required approximately 3 minutes to complete.

The recruitment of participants and interviews transpired in May 2023 at Myanmar EDC. All interviews were exclusively administered by a single researcher to ensure uniformity and consistency throughout the data collection process. Furthermore, participants were invited to check reflections and conclusions, thereby mitigating any potential misunderstandings or omissions that may have arisen during the interview. Phone recordings were employed for data collection and deleted after transcribing the data. The subsequent section exhibits the interview guide.

Semi-structured interview guide

1. What is your understanding of character strengths?
2. How do you use your character strengths?
3. Why do you use your character strengths?
4. Please, share your philosophical beliefs that you think influence your perception of character strengths.
5. What character strengths do you often use in college?
6. What are the benefits of using character strengths?

7. How can you improve your character strengths?

3.4.   Data Analysis

The data analysis component was directed under the supervision of a proficient qualitative research expert. The operational framework for this analysis was informed by the VIA classification of character strengths, serving as the primary guiding structure. The present qualitative investigation employed the directed approach to conduct content analysis. This method entails the analysis being executed in alignment with pre-existing theory, framework, and pertinent literature, which served as guiding principles for the formulation of initial codes. The utilization of direct content analysis predominantly centered on the interpretation of textual data and the deductive approach. Grounded within the naturalistic paradigm, this analytical approach was employed to substantiate the presence of character strengths among Myanmar student teachers.

The direct content analysis consists of three phases (1) preparation phase: This initial task includes familiarization with the transcriptions through an immersive engagement of the data and the comprehension was concurrently documented through meticulous field notes, yielding a comprehensive grasp of the data; (2) organizing phase: The second stage shifted toward the analytical framework by identifying and exploring prevalent themes within the data set, developing a thematic framework, resulting in the amalgamation and enrichment of themes and subthemes; (3) reporting phase: a summarization was created by the systematic incorporation of data into the VIA framework, a rigorous evaluation of the analysis results concerning the original dataset was undertaken and provided the explanation of the subthemes, and themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

4. Results

4.1.   Demographic Characteristics of Student Teachers

The demographic information of the study's participants is comprehensively delineated in the following Table.

Table 1 : *Demographic Information of the Participants (n = 18)*

Characteristics	*Number*	*%*
Age (years) Mean ± SD	20.22 ± 0.83	
Gender: Male	10	55.6
Female	8	44.4
Educational level: Year 1	2	11.1
Year 2	16	88.9
Streams: Arts	1	5.6
Science	13	72.2
Arts-Science	4	22.2
Religious & Ethnic (Buddhism & Burmese)	18	100

4.2.   Exploring Character Strengths of Student Teachers in the Myanmar Context Using the VIA Framework: Perceptions and Experiences

To address research question 1, the findings were similar to those of Linley (2008) which highlighted that around two-thirds of individuals are not aware of their own strengths. People lack self-awareness in considering their positive characteristics and they tend to focus more on their weaknesses. This lack of awareness can take various forms: general unawareness, not connecting with how they use their strengths, considering their strengths as something ordinary, etc. Based on the findings from this study, it has come to light that a considerable majority of student teachers exhibit a lack of recognition concerning the presence and significance of the 24-character strengths, despite manifestly engaging certain of these strengths in their personal lives. Partial acknowledgment is only extended to a few of them, namely, creativity, teamwork, leadership, and bravery. Hence, it is reasonable to posit that student teachers perceive strengths as commonplace or ordinary and an optimistic viewpoint emerges in the form of their endorsement of the applicability of the 24-character strengths in their daily lives. The sample quotes from participants are described below.

> Year 1 Semester 2: "People have different abilities and personalities. Each person is special in their own way. This means that each person's good qualities can be different. I think I have some good strengths too, but I didn't know about most of these 24-character strengths until I joined this interview."
>
> Year 2 Semester 1: "I think that character strengths are good qualities that people have. I don't believe I possess all 24-character strengths. I have certain strengths I know about and use regularly in my daily life."
>
> Year 2 Semester 2: "I am aware of a few of my strengths, although not all 24. I believe these strengths can be helpful and effective for individuals in their lives."

Owing to a lack of awareness concerning the 24-character strengths, student teachers tend to believe that they possess and apply only some of these strengths. However, in reality, they possess experiential familiarity with all 24-character strengths within their surroundings. The utilization of these strengths takes place even without their conscious recognition of them as strengths (Linley, 2008). Upon an in-depth exploration of how student teachers apply character strengths within the educational context (EDC) to answer research question 2, it was revealed that these individuals can readily recall instances from their experiences and acknowledge their consistent utilization of the entire gamut of strengths in response to the demands posed by their environment.

Consequently, the description of 24-character strengths (subthemes) under six virtues (themes) harmonizes cohesively with the tenets articulated within the VIA framework. No new themes were found in this study. Student teachers' perceptions and practices of character strengths can be found in the accompanying tables with their anonymous code numbers.

Theme 1: Wisdom and knowledge virtue (**cognitive strengths** – *creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning & perspective*), student teachers applied these strengths both

within and beyond the classroom context – posters creation, project implementation, lesson planning, microteaching, peer group teaching, and social life. According to the data, the majority of the participants are active and interested in showcasing their cognitive strengths within the college environment.

Table 2*: Cognitive Strengths*

Character Strengths in Education	Personal Experiences
Creativity – think in innovative ways to make learning fun and facilitate students' understanding	I often apply creativity when engaging in microteaching, peer group teaching, projects, and preparing lesson plans at EDC. (ST 4, 7, 10,12, 13)
Curiosity – have an interest in all experiences, keen to learn new objects and from others	I am very curious about new things because I want to have different experiences and feelings. (ST 10, 15, 16, 17)
Judgment – analyze and evaluate systematically to create a good conducive learning environment	I use my judgment in social situations. Moreover, I apply it in the classroom to decide whether others' presentations are good. (ST 11, 18)
Love of learning – devote to pursuing new things of respective subjects	Learning my favorite subjects makes me happy. (ST 2, 5)
Perspective – provide wise counsel to others	I'm good at explaining difficult lessons to my friends and providing ideas and advice about their social lives, especially to my close friends. (ST 3, 6)

Note. ST = Student Teacher

Theme 2: Courage virtue (**emotional strengths** – *bravery, perseverance, honesty, & zest*) was essential in their relationship with classmates, roommates, teacher educators, and administrative staff. Besides they incorporated these strengths into academic activities. The following descriptions indicated that the student teachers possess a degree of freedom to articulate their rights and are willing to openly express their attitudes.

Table 3: *Emotional Strengths*

Character Strengths in Education	Personal Experiences
Bravery – are not afraid of communication to others and take action immediately	I'm confident when it comes to public speaking, and enjoy showcasing my group's learning to the entire class. I don't feel scared to communicate with my teacher educators when discussing various matters. (ST 2, 3, 4, 9, 13, 14)
Perseverance – do not give up halfway and find new ways to finish things	I enjoy finishing tasks in my favorite subjects, but for the others, I have to do all the assignments and homework to achieve a good grade. (ST 1, 3, 13-17)
Honesty – always behave openly and truthfully to others	Honesty is paramount; I treat everyone with sincerity and integrity. (ST 1-4, 10-16)
Zest – reveal enthusiasm in activities with reflective practices to gain essential competencies	Zest energizes me, particularly when I'm engaged in academic tasks. (ST 1, 12)

Note. ST = Student Teacher

Theme 3: Virtue of Humanity (**interpersonal strengths**) was evident as student teachers emphasized the importance of both giving and receiving *love* while a few found it challenging to openly express love within their families, they consistently supported their loved ones when needed. *Kindness* was displayed in various situations, including social gatherings, studies, and times of need with a focus on empathy and helping others through acts of charity. Student teachers' *social intelligence* was demonstrated by providing support and adapting their communication to different situations. Even though they may struggle at

times to predict others' feelings, they are comfortable with socializing, making friends easily in new environments, and focusing on others' feelings when interacting.

Table 4: *Interpersonal Strengths*

Character Strengths in Education	Personal Experiences
Love – create a friendly environment that shows mutual respect, shares constructive feedback, and provides support	I hold the belief that love is significant in this world. It's essential for everyone to both receive and give love. I make an effort to spend time with those dear to me, and I consistently express my feelings of affection. (ST 3-7, 10-12)
Kindness – help others who have difficulties in studying, and emphasize mutual understanding	I support those who struggle in social gatherings or studies. I consistently consider the perspectives of others when they make mistakes and propose that there might be reasons behind their actions. This is how I spread my kindness to other people. (ST 1, 8, 12)
Social Intelligence – sensitive to others' feelings, make new friends and enjoy group's work	I provide support and encouragement to my friends when they're feeling down, and I know how to adapt my communication based on the situation. (ST 6, 1, 2, 4, 5)

Note. ST = Student Teacher

Theme 4: Justice virtue (**civic strengths**) was prioritized by valuing *teamwork* and *fairness*. They believe in contributing effectively to a team and upholding principles of equality and justice. They excel at cooperating in the classroom and prioritize fairness in group work. They also possess strong *leadership* qualities, guide others effectively, and set an example through ideal behavior.

Table 5: *Civic Strengths*

Character Strengths in Education	Personal Experiences
Teamwork – have the ability to work with teams for the best results	I work with others by listening to their ideas and expressing my thoughts. I believe I can contribute effectively to a team. (ST 3, 6, 7, 13)
Fairness – respect others' opinions and treat everyone the same	I'm fair when assigning tasks in group work and prioritize justice. (10, 1)
Leadership – focus on team harmony by knowing the needs of the individual members	As a class leader, I prioritize being a good leader by addressing my classmates' needs, valuing their ideas, and working for the collective welfare. (ST 4, 5, 2, 12, 16)

Note. ST = Student Teacher

Theme 5: Temperance strengths appeared when student teachers demonstrated *mercy* by not dwelling on negativity from others and forgiving others. They also exhibited *humility* in their academic and social interactions, avoid arrogance, and prioritize helping others. They possessed the strength of *prudence* in handling significant situations but acknowledged challenges in maintaining calmness. Additionally, they practice *self-control* through meditation and listening to music.

Table 6: *Temperance Strengths*

Character Strengths in Education	Personal Experiences
Forgiveness – considerate and prioritize empathy to maintain relationships and learning opportunities	I forgive people when they apologize, or even if they don't, I try to move on considering their perspective. (ST 5, 4, 14, 17)
Humility/modesty – value strengths and weaknesses of others and help each other	I demonstrate humility in both academic and social contexts. While I excel in my studies, I avoid being overly proud and instead help classmates who struggle with their learning. (ST 6, 1-5, 10, 13)
Prudence – take time to think from multiple perspectives and make careful decisions	It is a strength I use when facing significant situations in my life. I remain calm when important matters arise, and I'm able to think carefully and logically in a systematic manner. (ST 3, 5, 9, 11)

Note. ST = Student Teacher

Theme 6: Transcendence strengths (*appreciation of beauty & excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, & spirituality)* highlighted the fact that student teachers value the beauty of the mind over physical appearance and strive to recognize and learn from the strengths of others without envy. They also appreciate the beauty in nature and people, acknowledging their strengths and expressing gratitude in alignment with Buddhist teachings. They remember and reciprocate kindness from those who help them during tough times. They hold long-term academic aspirations and short-term motivations for life, fostering a positive mindset, and aspiring to become a capable teacher and supportive family member. They find happiness in chatting with friends, incorporating humor into presentations, and adhering to Buddhist teachings and principles.

Table 7: *Transcendence Strengths*

Character Strengths in Education	Personal Experiences
Appreciation of beauty and excellence – recognize the good things in others and be happy to appreciate them	I value the beauty of the mind over physical appearance. I make an effort to recognize the strengths of others and aspire to learn from them without feeling envious. (ST 3, 9, 12)
Gratitude – thankful for the good things in life and don't hesitate to respond to others' help	I express gratitude aligns with Buddhist teachings; reciprocating kindness by performing good deeds for those who help us. (ST 4, 6, 13)
Hope – have the best wishes and goals for future works relating to teaching and learning	I hold both long-term academic aspirations and short-term motivations for daily life, fostering a positive mindset. (ST 4, 18)
Humor – a thoughtful action to keep the students' attention and make the activities alive	I use humor in my presentations to keep my classmates engaged and alleviate stress, recognizing its importance in college life. (ST 13, 15, 4, 11)
Spirituality – believe in religion, follow good principles, and have high ambitions in teaching-learning situations	I adhere to Buddhist teachings and principles, integrating them into my life. (ST 18, 2, 9-11, 13-16)

Note. ST = Student Teacher

4.3. The Underlying Philosophical Beliefs that Shape Student Teachers' Perceptions of Character Strengths

The primary objective of this study is to delve into the perceptions and experiences of student teachers' character strengths. Through this investigative pursuit, it is crucial to uncover the underlying philosophical beliefs that shape the perceptions of character

strengths and address the gap in the literature. Although the character strengths are based on virtues of different cultures, the previous studies did not sufficiently emphasize the background philosophy of participants' character strengths. In this study, the researcher has gained insight into the manifestation of a comprehensive collection of 24-character strengths within the context of Myanmar. The outcomes of the study affirmed the presence of these 24-character strengths within the teacher education area and underscored their potential significance in shaping the experiences of student teachers. Notably, to address research question 3, participants in the study have drawn parallels between these character strengths and Buddhist philosophy, highlighting a perceived relationship between the 24-character strengths and the teachings and foundational principles of Buddhism.

These strengths encompass attributes such as judgment, perspective, perseverance, love, kindness, fairness, humility, forgiveness, self-regulation, spirituality, and hope, etc. The findings align with Peterson and Seligman's (2004) conceptualization of character strengths in Buddhism. Various opinions concur that these character strengths are close to the teachings of Buddha, suggesting a harmonious compatibility between these strengths and Buddhist philosophy. The sentiment prevails that the practice of these strengths has the potential to contribute positively to individuals' lives by promoting fulfillment, peace, and alignment with the tenets of Buddhism which focuses on inner awareness and virtuous dispositions.

> Year 1, Semester 1: In my opinion, these 24-character strengths are consistent with the teaching of Buddha, for instance, ways to live as a good person by contributing loving kindness, honesty, perspective, judgment, etc.
>
> Year 2, Semester 1: 24-character strengths are related to the teachings of Buddha. I agree that these positive constructs lead to a fulfilling and peaceful life.
>
> Year 2, Semester 2: I think character strengths are connected to the teachings of Buddha. 24-character strengths are consistent with the living styles of Buddhists (Noble Eight-Fold Path).

In Buddhism, Mudita (Sanskrit and Pali word) or unselfish joy is taking delight in the good fortune of another and sharing in the joy of others (Kornfield, 2019). For instance, a person feels joy in the success of others or overcomes obstacles with courage and determination. This highlights the appreciation of beauty and excellence strengths of character. Furthermore, all practicing Buddhists are expected to observe Five Virtues or Percepts in fulfilling the primary conditions of Right Livelihood: (1) to abstain from killing any living creature; (2) to abstain from stealing; (3) to abstain from sexual misconduct; (4) to abstain from false speech or lying; and (5) to abstain from intoxicants (Khin Zaw, 2001). One can see notions of humanity (interpersonal strengths) and justice (civic strengths) in the first, second, and fourth percepts, and strong directives toward temperance or self-restraint in the third and fifth percepts (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Hence, it is evident that the philosophical beliefs of Buddhist practitioners significantly influence the student teachers' perceptions of character strengths.

5. Discussions

The interview data provided the positive impact of applying character strengths in various aspects of the individual's life. These strengths are seen as tools for personal growth, effective communication, achieving goals, and improving overall well-being. The environment, circumstances, and mood play a role in when these strengths are applied. The participants acknowledged that they often use some strengths unconsciously, benefiting from them even in everyday situations. The main information is that by recognizing and leveraging their character strengths, the individual experienced increased self-confidence (Ferguson & Lockman, 2024), better relationships, expanded social connection (Xie et al., 2020), enhanced skills, and overall high quality of life (Zhang & Duan, 2023).

The top strengths that student teachers frequently use in the college setting emerged and it can be said that EDC is a place that encourages student teachers' strengths to get a satisfying life. The EDC offers students a wealth of options for learning more and growing intellectually and physically, including the opportunity to improve their values, talents, attitudes, and character strengths (Hamrick et al., 2002). The most prevalent strengths were teamwork, judgment, leadership, curiosity, creativity, appreciation of beauty and excellence, love, and social intelligence. Drawing upon the top strengths exhibited by student teachers, the subjects encompassing their curriculum, the teaching methodologies they learn, the way teacher educators imparted knowledge to them, and the student-centered new curriculum collectively foster an environment that encourages and motivates student teachers to actively employ their *cognitive strengths* such as creativity, curiosity, and judgment – alongside their *civic strengths*, which encompass the domains of teamwork and leadership. Moreover, *interpersonal strengths*, inclusive of social intelligence and love, are brought to the fore, complemented by *transcendence strength*, characterized by an appreciation for beauty and excellence.

The practice of leveraging one's character strengths offers a multitude of positive outcomes. These benefits encompass personal development, enhanced well-being, and improved interactions. By utilizing strengths, individuals experience personal growth, satisfaction (Lounsbury et al., 2009), and a more positive self-perception. This, in turn, fosters increased confidence, happiness, and a sense of accomplishment (Smith et al., 2021). Furthermore, they have plans for the improvement of various character strengths. The overarching theme involves acknowledging areas for enhancement and implementing targeted strategies to bolster these attributes. Social intelligence, self-regulation, perseverance, creativity, judgment, humility, and forgiveness emerge as recurrent focal points. A notable sentiment expressed is that of utilizing past experiences for learning and adjustment, seeking guidance from knowledgeable sources, and experts, and engaging in practices such as mindfulness.

Overall, the findings of this study offer a detailed insight into how student teachers perceive and utilize character strengths within the context of teacher education in Myanmar. In comparison to the existing literature on character strengths in teacher education internationally (Gradišek, 2012; 2023), university students (Listiyandini et al., 2017), and the general population (Zábó et al., 2023), this study delves into the philosophical underpinnings that shape the understanding of character strengths. It emphasizes the importance of considering philosophical beliefs when applying constructs from one country to another with different participants. Furthermore, the study's results highlighted the usefulness of character strengths in Myanmar teacher education and its potential contribution to the global landscape of teacher education, particularly in a curriculum focusing on the student-centered approach.

The recognition of this discovery highlights a crucial aspect that warrants attention in future research pursuits. The potential implementation of an intervention program or counseling session emerges as a promising strategy to facilitate the improvement of character strengths (top strengths or lesser strengths), with the overarching goal of bolstering the overall state of individuals in the college environment. This endeavor could be effectively undertaken through a collaborative partnership involving teacher educators and experts. Strengths-based practices should be developed systematically according to the nature of the Myanmar teacher education setting.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The outcomes derived from this study substantiate the theoretical comprehension of character strengths within the specific context of Myanmar, particularly student teachers from EDC. The open-ended interview explored how they applied character strengths in teacher education, thus enhancing their awareness of the presence and significance of character strengths. A noteworthy observation is that character strengths are subject to transformation, with participants perceiving these strengths as not inherently fixed but rather susceptible to alteration based on the nature of practical application. The process of identifying and acquiring knowledge about these strengths holds considerable significance for student teachers, representing a fundamental psychological construct that equips them with the means to lead a gratifying and flourishing life. This, in turn, empowers them to confront challenges resolutely and embrace success as prospective teachers.

Several limitations necessitate acknowledgment in the scope of this study. To attain a more comprehensive and insightful perspective of character strengths, future researchers should encompass student teachers from alternate EDCs and diverse racial backgrounds. The current study's restricted participant pool raises concerns regarding the extent to which its findings can be extrapolated to a broader population. Moreover, the exploration of

character strengths was exclusively reliant upon participants' responses, which might introduce subjectivity and response bias. To enrich the study's validity and encompass a more extensive array of perspectives, it would be prudent to extend the interviews to include teacher educators. Their input could shed light on whether EDCs effectively facilitate the application of character strengths and enable an evaluation of the character strengths they perceive within student teachers.

6. Conclusion

This research makes a substantial contribution to the comprehension of the character strengths displayed by student teachers in Myanmar, with a particular focus on Buddhism. The application of character strengths reflects the nature of student teachers and the teaching-learning environment in Myanmar EDC. The implications of the findings extend beyond the present research setting, with potential applications in both national and international teacher education. The philosophical beliefs held by the participants significantly support the literature on character strengths within the context of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the study's contributions are particularly relevant for educational practitioners, teacher educators, and curriculum developers. Armed with the insights generated, these stakeholders can better formulate strategies aimed at fostering the integration and practical application of character strengths among student teachers. As such, this study has the potential to positively contribute to the ongoing discourse of teacher education, ultimately nurturing a more comprehensive development pathway for aspiring educators.

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