Perspectives from Singapore Junior College Students: What Makes Them Good and Smart?

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, character education is regaining its importance. Some studies have shown that academic excellence alone is insufficient for an individual to succeed. Character values such as resilience, determination, diligence are essential. On a macro level, character values such as empathy, integrity, respect are necessary for a gracious society. This research aims to answer the question of what platforms or programme in a school enables character development in the domains of 'head', 'heart' and 'hands'. It seeks the answers from the perspectives of the students of a Singapore junior college.

The current and former students of the junior college were invited to complete an online questionnaire consisting of 36 statements with 5-point Likert scale where the participants answered how the character education through formal, hidden, and informal curricula had enabled them to develop their character. In the questionnaire, the participants were also given a descriptive question where they described a significant experience that had helped to develop their character.

The key findings of the research were summarised as follows: firstly, formal curriculum is least impactful in all domains of character development. Secondly, student-centred and social interaction experiences such as co-curricular activities, community involvement projects and academic group work have a significant impact on students' adoption of character values and acting on them. Thirdly, co-curricular activities club is the single most impactful platform in character education although the kind of co-curricular activities does not matter.

Keywords: character education, Singapore, junior college, head, heart, hands

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

President Theodore Roosevelt once said that to educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a danger or a threat to society. Education has long been seen as one of the solutions to the problems such as poverty, oppression etc. While literacy and numeracy have helped to lift some third world societies to first world (e.g. Singapore), education has been rather limited in effecting peace and constructive citizenship at a national level in many countries. Education is more than literacy and numeracy, it encompasses character education. According to the Smart and Good High Schools Report (2005) by Matthew Davidson, Thomas Lickona, and Vladimir Khmelkov, education has two main goals – for students to become smart and for them to become good. Character education is essential for these two goals. Why should we pursue these two goals? The answer is given succinctly by Rosenblatt (1995, p. 37) who quoted educator Kevin Walsh as follows:

> The ultimate purpose of character education is to prepare the next generation to inherit society.

If this is the case, we need to question ourselves what kind of society we want and what kind of society do we presently have. Chris Hedges, an American journalist, activist, author, and Presbyterian minister described the current American society as follows:

> We now live in a nation where doctors destroy health, lawyers destroy justice, universities destroy knowledge, governments destroy freedom, the press destroys information, religion destroys morals, and our banks destroy the economy.

We may not agree totally with Chris Hedges but we all long for an ideal society where politicians join politics with the pure motive to improve the lives of others; where political leaders work together to develop the nation instead of tearing down one another; where religious leaders teach harmony instead of promoting dissentions; where people show compassion for one another and treat

one another with respect. What a world it would be! Education is not and will not be a cure-all pill. It cannot bring about a utopia. However, education undeniably has a major role to make the world a better place. The education that is purely academic-based is insufficient. An education that also emphasizes on character education which teaches the students to be compassionate, respectful, kind and honest etc. is very much needed. Indeed, the development of an individual's character is in no way less important than the honing of one's intellectual ability. According to President Theodore Roosevelt, moral education is not only important; it is a necessity, lest one becomes a menace to society. However, becoming good alone is insufficient. In the 21st century, what is more necessary is character education. Character education not only educates the students in morals, it develops and enhances their character strengths as well as imparts them life skills that are necessary to greater achievement.

The purpose of my research is to study what are programmes or platforms in schools which are impactful to the character development of the students from their perspectives. The following is the outline of my thesis. In the next section, I will elaborate on what is character and what is character education. Character education is not new and takes place via various programmes or platforms in the schools. Chapter 2 looks at how character can be developed while chapter 3 explains the reasons why I chose Singapore junior college students (grade 11 and 12) as the target group in my research. There are some studies on the effectiveness of character education from the perspectives of teachers, school administration or policies makers. However, very few of them look at character education from the perspectives of students. I will explain more in chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents a typical character education framework in a Singapore junior college, where I will elaborate on the various programmes and platforms. I will present my research questions in chapter 6 and my research methods in chapter 7. Chapter 8 presents the research results and chapter 9 presents the key findings.

1.1   What is Character?

Some people equate moral to character. They presume that character is restricted to ethics and has nothing to do with achievement. According to the Smart and Good High Schools Report (2005) by Matthew Davidson, Thomas Lickona, and Vladimir Khmelkov, education has two main goals – for students to become smart and for them to become good. Character is needed for both goals and it has two components: performance character and moral character. Both components help to equip the adolescents to meet the biological, cognitive, psychological, social and moral challenges. More importantly, they are essential to a life of purpose and achievement.

Performance character qualities include courage, diligence, positive attitude, resilience, personal responsibility etc. Performance character enables one to pursue excellence and supports one to achieve one's endeavour. Moral character qualities include empathy, integrity, respect, social responsibility etc. Moral character enables one to have healthy self-image, to care for others and to contribute to society. It helps one to engage in successful personal, civic and professional relationships. Both performance and moral character forms one character. In this research, performance and moral character will be taken to be a singularity as character, to provide a wholesome perspective.

1.2   What is Character Education?

Character education may mean very differently to different individuals. Some people think that character education is about teaching students to follow rules. While character education includes that, it is far more than that. In some context, breaking rules is the essential and right thing to do e.g. one may break traffic rule, dashing across the road to save an endangered cat or one may tell a lie to save a threatened hostage. We need to educate students such that they have right character values to act on when they are in moral dilemma. For example, they should know that lives are more important than traffic rules or moral standards such as truthfulness. We should not and must not assume that know-

ing these values, believing them and the ability to act on them come naturally to anyone. Yet, character education is still more than these. Battistich (2005, p. 3) summarised the goals of character education as follows:

> The goals of character education are thus essentially the goals of raising good children: youths who understand, care about, and act upon the core ethical values (such as diligence, compassion, integrity, and fairness) that make for a productive, just, and democratic society. As they grow in character, young people grow in their capacity and commitment to do their best work, do the right thing, and lead lives of purpose.

Beyond understanding, believing in and acting on character values, character education also enables youths to grow, to be committed, to lead purposeful lives and to contribute to a productive, just and democratic society. Lickona, T., Schaps, E., & Lewis, C. (2007) described how effective character education looks like:

> Effective character education promotes core ethical values; defines character to include thinking, feeling and behaviour; promotes school as a caring community; provides students with opportunities to practice morality; involves parent and community members in developing character; and evaluates character education based on the school, teacher and student's performance.

Therefore, character education must be a deliberate effort to develop the students' character i.e. both performance and moral character. Character education permeates every part of the school life as character qualities or values can be learnt through social interaction, personal experience or school curriculum.

1.3   Importance of Character Education

In Singapore context, the founding Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew in his speech to the principals in 1966 said that:

> I am extremely anxious about the generation that is growing up literate but uneducated. They can read; they can write; they can pass examinations. But they are not really educated; they have not formed; they have not developed. They are not effective digits for the community."

Mr Lee highlighted the importance of character education in the building of a society and a nation. If every citizen has good character, it can indeed impact the whole society and contribute in building a harmonious and progressive society.

Moreover, one's character is not separate from one's achievements including academic performance. In Park and Peterson's research (2004), character education showed a potential 16% improvement in academic performance.

Shoshani and Slone (2013) established that affective school engagement increased in the presence of character strengths such as gratitude, hope, optimism and purpose. According to Scales, Benson, Leffert, and Blyth (2000), there exists a relationship between character strengths in adolescents with various desired outcomes, for example personal well-being, leadership, tolerance, ability to delay gratification, kindness and altruism. Park and Peterson (2004) observed that there were also fewer symptoms of depression and suicidal tendency when character strengths were present. Likewise, the research conducted by Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger (2011) on 213 school-based socio-emotional learning programmes showed positive effect. Walker, Roberts and Kristjánsson (2015) noted that the report by Berkowitz and Bier (2006), which reviewed 109 character education researches, revealed sufficient evidence indicating that some character development programmes do show positive results although they have to be planned, executed and integrated effectively into the local school culture.

The research by O'Flaherty J. and Doyle E. (2014) drew a strong association between moral reasoning to professionalism, citizenship and social capital. She argued that since professionalism, citizenship and social capital are vital, moral development education is essential because higher education aims to prepare the undergraduates for their work life and to educate them holistically. The result of the research showed that moral reasoning did not progress much from senior high students to average working adults. Perhaps this also shows that one's character after senior high school age is almost stable. Therefore, character education in junior colleges seems to be almost the last formal setting

to develop the youths' character. As said by Çubukçu, Z. (2012), many theorists of developmental psychology had highlighted that students develop their moral values and their characters are shaped in their schooling years.

Walker D. I. et al. (2015) had also found that in recent years, some teachers seemed to regard character education as more important than academic performance.

2   HOW TO DEVELOP CHARACTER

In chapter 1, we see that character development is vital to an individual. In this chapter, we shall look at how character is developed.

2.1   Concept of 'Head', 'Heart' and 'Hands'

Davidson, M. (2014) emphasized the important of the two parts of character i.e. moral and performance character. He pointed out that character education is often restricted to the 'head' (the definitions and discussion of character values) and disengaged from the 'heart' (the embracing of character values) and even more so the 'hands' (the ability to act on these values). Gentile (2010) argued that the development of conscience alone is not enough and that competence is essential. 'Head' and 'heart' tell us what to do but the 'hands' tells us how to do.

2.1.1   Engaging the 'Head'

Sanderse, W. (2014) found that the development of virtues has not been given its due attention in education psychology. According to him, Aristotelian model of moral development is crucial to educators' understanding of the moral development. He argued that the Aristotelian categories of the 'morally indifferent', 'un-self-controlled', 'self-controlled' and 'properly virtuous' can be interpreted as the successive stages or levels of a comprehensive developmental model. He further suggested what needs to be done if the proposed Aristotelian moral development is to become psychologically more realistic and educationally useful. He presented in detailed Aristotelian Model of Moral Development. The four stages conceptualized by Aristotle are rather insightful as most people can be fitted in them. It is also useful in marrying development and psychology in character education. Many educators do not take into account of the different moral stages the students are at while planning or carrying out character educa-

tion. This model could be useful for schools to plan their character education curriculum for students at the various stages. In fact, the general approach should be to target students in two or more different stages. Sanderse, W. (2014) stated that:

> However, in an Aristotelian framework, 'moral character' is not understood as a separate faculty that develops alongside the other components, but as a collection of multi-track dispositions that include (from a psychological perspective) sensitivity, judgment and motivation, and (from a moral point of view) courage as well as other virtues. It would be interesting to see in more detail how, on an Aristotelian reading, the interactions between the 'components' of virtue change when a person morally matures.

According to Sanderse, W. (2014), while character educationalists provide hundreds of recommendations that can help teachers to implement character education in schools, they do not explain how people develop morally or how the proposed interventions match the developmental stage people are at. When we know more about the components that make up the 'head' domain, and the ways in which these components affect each other, pedagogies could be adjusted for students at different developmental phases.

2.1.2   Moving the 'Heart'

Few people would disagree that one who has good character has a good heart e.g. the heart to serve the community, a heart of compassion or a strong heart of resilience. The term 'heart' is rather abstract but it is essentially an embodiment of one's values. It is when values become beliefs and a motivation to do good. Sanderse, W. (2014, p. 3) mentioned that Aristotle believed that ethics, despite being a theoretical enterprise, has a practical aim:

> …the purpose of our examination is not to know what virtue is, but to become good, since otherwise the inquiry would be of no benefit to us. (NE 1104a25-30; Rowe, C. J., & Broadie, S.,Aristotle, 2002).

Knowing or understanding what character values mean or that they are good is essential but insufficient if one does not embrace them as one's beliefs.

2.1.3   Activating the 'Hands'

Gentile (2010) found an interesting piece of research on altruism and moral courage that had been published several decades ago by Douglas Huneke and Perry London. In the research, they interviewed rescuers who had risked their lives to save others threatened by the Nazis. One common thing that surfaced was that the rescuers, at an earlier time in their lives, had the opportunity to practise what they would say and do if they were to face a moral conflict. They found that most individuals would be likely to act on their values and improve on it if they were given scenarios to craft and verbalise their actions. Davidson, M. (2014) quoted Narvaez (2006) as follows:

> The development of competencies requires action and reflection, practice with feedback, real-world simulation that targets practice of essential skills in settings that are similar to the real challenges one would face, and yet still safe enough to allow the development of mastery. When skills for each of these processes are fully developed and become automatic, cognition and action become intertwined and an individual consistently engages in positive behaviour.

Thus, it is important that character education in schools provide opportunities for students to act on their values. In so doing, it can develop their 'hands' i.e. the competency to act on what their 'heads' and 'hearts' tell them to do.

2.2   Curriculum in Character Education

Since character education should permeate in the domains of 'head', 'heart' and 'hands', we will now look at the platforms via which character education takes place. Character education mainly takes place in the formal, hidden and informal curricula. Çubukçu, Z. (2012) noted that when a good character education is achieved at schools, character values taught are very central. Character which includes thoughts, emotions should be defined and it should be manifested into behaviour. Additionally, schools should provide opportunities for students to develop and practise each character value. The different curricula allow character education to permeate in the whole school life.

2.2.1   Formal Curriculum

The formal curriculum consists of the lessons and learning activities that planned, organized and implemented within school hours. Liu, X. (2014) employed meta-analysis to key literatures about moral development and education. He studied both character education and Kohlberg's moral education. In his article, he suggested that character education is the didactic teaching of moral values in class. He further examined Dewy's moral inquiry and deliberation and emphasized that they would enhance character education and Kohlberg's moral education.

He highlighted that in using moral inquiry, character education should be taught in a way that each moral value needs to be assessed in a specific situation and not just didactic teaching. Using Dewey's concept of moral deliberation, he suggested that the process of moral judgment which involves reason and emotion, self and relationship, concept and context should be taken into consideration in Kohlberg's moral development. He further explained that moral development is not a sequence of moral stages as suggested by Kohlberg. Instead, he stated that moral deliberation leads to pragmatic moral wisdom which is able to assist students in dealing with moral conflicts in a particular situation.

According to Liu X. (2014), character education has the tendency to use ad-hoc moral education lessons to cultivate character but he highlighted that it should not be separated from regular classes. He emphasized that reflection on the moral significance of all the knowledge which is relevant to the common good is what we should be doing. The teacher should focus on the subject itself rather than attempting to force fit a specific moral lesson through the subject. Kristjánsson, K. (2014) mentioned that the most effective classroom discussions in facilitating students' learning and understanding are structured and focused. They happen when students are actively participating in discussion over extended periods of time. They happen when students are stimulated to discuss open-ended and practical real life questions. They happen when affect-inducing, high-level thinking is generated. In teaching the subject, teachers

could incorporate strategies from this finding and it may facilitate students' reflection on the moral significance of the subject knowledge.

2.2.2   Hidden Curriculum

Hidden curriculum was a term first coined by Jackson W. Philip (1968). In his book, Life in Classrooms, he mentioned that crowds, praise and the power together form a hidden curriculum. In other words, hidden curriculum is about social interaction (or lack of it) and includes the relationships which are formed (or which are not formed) between students and their peers or teachers. According to Kentli, F. D. (2009), hidden curriculum is a socialization of schooling can be identified by the social interactions within an environment. Hence, it takes place all the time. It is the unspoken message. It communicates values, attitudes and principles implicitly to students. Hidden curriculum can be uncovered through an evaluation of the environment and the unexpected, unintended interactions between teachers and students, among students and within the school community. In hidden curriculum, the school community plays an important role. Students learn much from the interaction with teachers, their peers or even observing how the school community interact. As character is both taught and caught, the school staff must be committed to character education and to be role models.

In Çubukçu, Z. (2012)'s research, he had constructed five main categories of support activities. They are social and cultural activities, leisure time activities, sports activities, celebrative event and social clubs. He found that social and cultural activities in elementary schools enable children to enhance communication between them and they have an important role in fulfilling the purposes of education while leisure time activities in schools are necessary to develop children socially and their self-esteem. Sports activities in schools help children to learn to abide by social norms and behave appropriately according to their roles in the group. On the other hand, celebrative events held in schools have great importance to strengthen the cultural patterns and values; and for children to acquire new values. As for social clubs, I will discuss it in the section

under informal curriculum. From this research, it is evident that hidden curriculum has a great impact on elementary students. I am keen to find out if the same holds true for junior college students i.e. grade 11- 12. I am glad that the effectiveness of celebrative events on character education was studied. Most would see celebrative events, which include ceremonies and rituals, more as a tool to build school culture and would not consider this aspect of hidden curriculum as an important aspect of character education. I am pleasantly surprised that celebrative events had a strong positive impact on the children's values.

Friendship is one thing that adolescents hold very dear to. Thus, it is not surprising that friends can be an important avenue where an adolescent's character is developed. However, there is one concept of friendship that is particularly important in this aspect. Kristjánsson (2014) highlighted that in Aristotle's concept of character friend, dialogue or interaction for one's moral development is one key factor for effective character education:

> In character friendships, friends love one another because of their respective virtuous characters and wish the best for one another, each for the other's own sake.

In the working world, friendship with benefits is common and people make friends for their self-interest. However, it is highly possible that some kind of character friendship takes place in a junior college setting among the students where there is no mutual competition and the motives of friendship are pure. In addition, Kristjánsson (2014) noted that Aristotle emphasized that character friendships are possible between people of unequal moral and developmental standing such as teacher–student. Many children and teenagers in today's world lack opportunities to engage in genuine dialogue with adults. By giving young people the opportunity to experience dialogues regularly, teachers may progress well in helping the young on their journey of moral reasoning. In the case of junior college, although the interaction may not be of the rigor of Aristotle's concept of character friendship, the students are at a high intellectual level. Therefore, the peer to peer and teacher-student interactions may potentially contribute to their character development. According to Çubukçu, Z. (2012),

studies strongly suggest that teachers have roles in effective teaching of values. It is therefore very important that teachers are role models of good character values and that they have the capability to create a moral environment in the formal and informal settings. It is also important to note that moral environment outside school such as family, neighbourhood community is essential to a student's character development. For the scope of this research, we will, however, only focus on what the school can accomplish.

2.2.3   Informal Curriculum

While formal curriculum focuses on learning during lesson time and hidden curriculum focuses on learning due to the social interaction in the environment, informal curriculum focuses on learning that takes place outside the lesson time. Activities that occur outside regular school hours e.g. during breaks, after school or during weekends, are also sources of learning and constitute the informal curriculum. According to Çubukçu, Z. (2012), supportive activities of informal curriculum such as social and cultural activities, leisure time activities and sport activities, celebrations, social club works can be powerful tools for students to understand, embrace and perform character values. I have discussed the four of the five main categories of support activities which are social and cultural activities, leisure time activities, sports activities and celebrative event earlier. I will now discuss about social clubs. In Çubukçu, Z. (2012)'s research, through the social clubs, elementary school children, gain democratic awareness and recognize the organization of non-governmental institutions. Eccles, et al. (2003) reviewed extensive studies that supports the positive effects of school club activities and community work have on adolescent development. They noted that participation in extra-curricular activities during high school has a direct connection to the reduced drop-out rate and criminal offence, and increase in interpersonal competence, self-concept, high school grade point average, school engagement, educational aspirations, higher educational achievement, better job quality, more active participation in political process and other types of voluntary activities, continual sport engagement and better

mental health during young adulthood. Eccles, et al. (2003) quoted Mahoney in saying that participation in voluntary, school-based extra-curricular activities facilitates learning of social skills and social norms, sense of belonging among peers and strong social and emotional connection to the school.

Indeed, informal curriculum is one of the most powerful means through which character is developed. Co-curricular activities and community involvement programmes are the main vehicles of informal curriculum in Singapore's character education. The dynamic interaction and authentic real life experiences have an unimaginable impact on the formation of the values of the students. They are also platforms where students learn and put into practice values such as empathy, respect etc. The common experience reinforced by reflection and generalisation of these learning into practical life principles are what I believed what make it so successful.

3 WHY SINGAPORE JUNIOR COLLEGE STU-DENTS?

In Singapore, students who are academically competent (about top 20% of the cohort) and aspire to enter local universities will likely opt to study for Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate in Education Advanced level in a junior college. From the point of nation building and societal impact, character education for junior college students is one of the most important since they are most likely to be future leaders of the nation. By emphasizing the importance of being educated in morals and not just in the minds, these students can hopefully be great movers in the society and not a powerful force of menace.

At the age of 17 to 18 years old, these students are at the later stage of adolescence. This is a challenging stage as they move from childhood to adulthood and from dependency to independence. According to Geldard K and Geldard D (1999), adolescence presents many challenges such as biological, cognitive, psychological and social. While facing these challenges, students are also in a formative stage of their lives. As such, character education can be rather effective if it is carried out with due care. I will now elaborate on some of the challenges that these students are facing and the opportunities in character education that accompany them.

3.1 Biological Challenges

Most of the junior college students would have managed their physiological challenges in their early adolescence. As such, the biological challenges are more sexuality related than physiological in nature. At this stage, the students have accepted their physical and sexually mature bodies. Some of them may begin to explore their sexual preferences including homosexuality. As Singapore is generally homophobic, there could be high anxiety and confusion for these students. According to Geldard K and Geldard D (1999), the rise in sexual

hormones may also influence the students' emotions alongside with changes in social relationships, changes in beliefs and attitudes and changes in self- perception. This presents an opportunity for students to learn more about themselves and embracing certain values in the process.

3.2   Cognitive Challenges

By late adolescence, the students have largely developed their thinking from concrete concepts to abstract thinking. They are presented with more decisions as they are given more independence. At the same time, the rigorous academic demands force them to develop their cognitive ability and to develop it quickly. This causes tremendous amount of stress especially if the students are not coping academically. They may have sense of failure and low self-worth. At the same time, they may be worried by the perceived bleak future. According to Geldard K and Geldard D (1999), students at this stage, are egocentric and overly worried about others' perception of them. Their increased cognitive ability and independence present itself as an opportunity to be stimulated in moral discussion with open ended and high level thinking which is essential to their character development in the 'head' and 'heart' domains. The situation of stress, sense of failure also becomes a platform for the students to act on their character values such as empathy and resilience.

3.3   Psychological Challenges

The search of personal identity is an important phase for these students. Their experiences of successes and failures, acceptance by peers and adults and experiences during their growing up have a great impact on how they see themselves. The students also begin to search for meaning and purpose in life. Through this endeavour, often their beliefs and values are taking shape, contributing to their personal identity. The importance of having a healthy personal identity cannot be understated. Adams and Marshall (1996) highlighted that

personal identity helps to provide the structure of understanding oneself, provide the meaning and direction through commitment, values and goals, provide a sense of personal control and free will, enable consistency, coherence and harmony between values, beliefs and commitments as well as enable the recognition of potential through a sense of future possibilities and alternative choices.

As the students mature from dependency to independence, they may struggle with striking a balance between their social relationship with others and their own individuality. A failure to do so may result in tensed relationship with their peers and other adults particularly their parents, or in the other extreme case, the lack of personal identity.

These challenges can indeed be stressful and cause much anxiety for the students. They may become reactive and overly sensitive to some minor situations for example they may be easily agitated when their parents gently remind them of house rules. At this stage, social interaction with peers means a lot to these students. This is where hidden curriculum can be a formidable force to shape the character of the students. This is also likely a stage where character friendship can be most impactful.

3.4   Social Challenges

In the search of personal identity, the students also seek integration with the society. In fact, relationship with other people and the expectations of others influence largely the formation of personal identity. Geldard K and Geldard D (1999) stated that:

> The combined expectations of society, parents and peers together with newly acquired psychological and cognitive changes, challenge the adolescent to make changes in social behaviour.

These students' peers also expect them to be loyal sometimes even at the expense of other important aspects of life such as family relations. In addition, Singapore society and parents have high expectations of a junior college student. They are supposed to be well-mannered, have good moral character,

strong academic ability, good social skills and able to communicate well. There is a lot of social pressure and challenges for them to be integrated with the parental and societal expectations.

Evidently, as these students are growing into adulthood, they face many challenges. A good character education not only imparts them with values and skills, it can be a powerful tool can help make this transition into adulthood a smoother and positive one while facing these challenges.

4   WHY PERSPECTIVE FROM STUDENTS?

In Çubukçu, Z. (2012)'s research, he mentioned that character education develops the knowledge, skills and abilities which provide students to make reasonable choices and that they should carry the responsibility of these choices. Ultimately, the limitation of character education is also its success indicator i.e. students' personal choices and the impacts of those choices on their lives. Schools need to learn to trust the students to make their decisions and allow the students to make them. Students, being the objects of character education and the ones who would eventually carry the responsibilities of making life choices, should, without a doubt, be one of the most valued critics of the character education. It is thus important that their perspectives be studied and made known. According to Howieson, C., & Semple, S. (2000), a number of researchers have commented on the neglect of the pupils' or students' perspectives on schooling, including their experience of pastoral care or guidance. One justification for this neglect was the view that students' opinions are subjective and unreliable. This is likely related to the low power and status of the students. James A. (1998) stated that:

> The legacy of developmental psychology, which stresses the cognitive limitations of children and young people before they have achieved full adult status, has also been seen as undermining the value placed on their views and raising doubts about their interpretative ability.

Another explanation is the tendency of educationists to regards the students' perspective as possibly critical and threatening. However, studies e.g. in MacBeath, J. (1999) have shown that students have the ability to make meaningful judgements about their education and will be responsible and constructive when they are valued and taken seriously. This is especially true in this research since the participants are junior college students who have good reasoning powers.

5 CHARACTER EDUCATION IN A SINGAPORE JUNIOR COLLEGE

To understand what programme or platforms of character education is impactful, it is now imperative to learn about the character education in the Singapore junior college which I did my research on. In the school, there is a character and citizenship education department led by a head of department who is an experienced teacher. The department is made up of teachers teaching different levels and subjects. Some aims of the department are:

- To instil good character values such responsibility, respect, resilience and integrity in students since values define an individual's moral character and shape one's belief system that influence one's attitude and action.

- To equip students with social and emotional skills so that they are able to know themselves, manage their emotions, develop care and concern, have healthy relationships with others and make good decisions.

It can be seen that these aims of the department are aligned to the most of the goals of character education. To achieve the aims, the school has the following structure and programmes.

5.1 Character and Citizenship Education (CCE)

The CCE curriculum consists of several modules which every student has to go through in their two years in the school. Each week, approximately two hours of curriculum time in school is allocated for different modules of CCE.

5.1.1 Civics and Moral Education (CME)

Civics and Moral education seeks to inspire the students to uphold good values through class activities, cases studies, inspirational movies etc. This is part of the formal curriculum and carried by the form teacher or moral education teacher. There is one hour of Civics and Moral education lesson each week.

5.1.2   Citizenship Education (CE)

The goal of Citizenship Education is to raise awareness of local issues, needs and also how each of them as a citizen can make a difference. Students may be exposed to sharing by the social enterprises on how they contribute to society etc. Citizenship education has no regular platform. It can be done during weekly assembly period or incorporated into Civics and Moral education lessons. Within some academic subjects such as history, citizenship education is also carried out depending on the topics.

5.1.3   Community Involvement Programme (CIP)

Every class will choose a beneficiary which they can serve as a class. The service to the community could be cleaning the house of the senior citizens who live alone, tutoring the elementary school pupils or spending time with the disabled. Some students may also sign up for overseas community involvement projects (OCIP) where they may go to rural villages of the less developed countries. Usually they will teach the children basic English and Mathematics. They may also build some facilities e.g. library for the school.

The main idea behind CIP and OCIP is that each student gets to interact with the less fortunate and learn about their situation. The experience will help to widen their perspective of the world around them- to be both introspective and outward looking, enable them to embrace character values such as empathy and respect, and raise their awareness of how they can play a part to serve others. It is also an avenue where students can act on good character values such as empathy and respect.

5.2   Co-Curricular Activities (CCA)

Every student is encouraged to participate in sports, performing arts or activities of other clubs and societies. Although it is not compulsory, the participation rate is usually quite high in the range of 90%. The activities provide the stu-

dents the opportunities to develop their social and leadership skills, to discover their passion and talents, to shape their character as they learn values such as resilience, responsibilities and to facilitate them forming their own unique personal identity.

5.2.1 Leadership

Leadership CCAs provide students with many opportunities to shape the school. Student councillors are elected by the student body and they are the official voice of the students. They are also the bridge between the school administration and the student body. They have the important role of building the school spirit and identity. They will lead cheering during national competitions, bring the students together to organise open house, organise freshmen orientation etc. They also provide services the students such as running and maintain the student lounge. Another leadership CCA is the house council. The whole student population is divided into five houses and each house is headed by a house captain and his or her executive committee. The role of house council is to bond the school through the houses especially through events such as sports day.

5.2.2 Sports

The school has a wide variety of sports clubs e.g. rugby, water polo, basketball, badminton, table tennis, netball, hockey etc. Some of them are the niche sports of the school and can be very competitive where the students train hard to win the national schools 'A' division championship title. The tough training develops resilience in the students and more often than not teaches them about teamwork. There are also recreational sports clubs where students join to pick up a new sport, to socialise, to release their stress or simply to exercise. The recreational clubs may not learn resilience like the competitive group but it provides peer support and platform for socialising.

5.2.3   Performing Arts

Like the sports clubs, among the performing arts clubs such as concert bands, dance clubs, choirs, there are more demanding ones where students are trained to go for national or global competitions or hold public concerts. These students put in many hours of practice and rehearsals. They are likely to learn the importance of values such as perseverance and diligence. In the recreational performing arts clubs, students may still learn these values although the demand is less as these clubs may at most hold a school concert.

5.2.4   Service and Others

This group of clubs and societies is the most varied. Some examples are Environment Club, Science Club, Debate Society, Media Club, Photography Society, Interact Club etc. Although the activities are very diverse, students usually learn about teamwork, contributing to community and values of responsibilities etc.

Co-Curricular Activities form a very vital part of character education in the school as this is where the action happens- the practice of good values, social and emotional skills, where students discover their talents and passions, where strong peer support exist. It is also a pre-experience to the working world where the students learn to pursue their meaningful place in the society.

6   RESEARCH TASK

Although there is a deliberate effort by the school to develop the character of the students enabling them to be successful in life, it remains a question if these platforms/ programmes are meeting their objectives. The purpose of this research is to find out which part of the character education impact the junior college students' character development from their perspectives. This research seeks to answer the following questions in the context of the junior college:

1. What are the programmes or platforms that help students to understand character values cognitively?

2. What are the programmes or platforms that help students to adopt or embrace character values as their beliefs?

3. What are the programmes or platforms that help students to act on their character values?

4. Which curriculum – formal, hidden or informal is most impactful in character education?

5. What are some significant experiences in schools that develop the students' character?

To answer these questions, I conducted a study from the students' perspectives since they are the main beneficiaries. The research is exploratory in nature and seeks to investigate students' perspectives on what programmes or platforms of the character education have an impact on their character development. In the next chapter, I will describe how I conducted the study.

7   IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDY

7.1   Overview

To understand how character is developed from the perspective of students in a Singapore junior college, I designed a questionnaire and distributed it online using Typeform to some current and former student councillors of the school. I requested that they distribute it to their peers from the same school. Results were then exported to Microsoft Excel. IBM SPSS Statistics version 22.0 was used to generate values of means, standard deviation and Cohen's d to study the impact of the formal, hidden and informal curricula and various areas of the character education programmes on the character development of the participants in the domains of 'head', 'heart' and 'hands'. IBM SPSS Statistics version 22.0 was also used to derive values of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the reliability testing of the items in the questionnaire. In the subsequent sections, I will elaborate on each stage of the approach.

7.2   Instrument Design

The instrument was designed based on the theoretical framework that character development takes places in three domains namely, 'head', 'heart' and 'hands'. In the context of Singapore schools, character education is implemented through three curricula i.e. formal, hidden and informal. Based on how character education was carried out in the Singapore junior college, I had classified the various areas of programmes and platforms under different curricula. Each area was then evaluated in the three domains using a 5-point Likert scale statement. The questionnaire was designed with 12 groups of statements in three categories: formal curriculum, hidden curriculum and informal curriculum (see Table 1). This was based on my experience as a former teacher in a junior college, and my knowledge of the programmes or platforms where character education takes place in the local context.

TABLE 1- Examples of formal, hidden and informal curricula

Category	Examples
Formal Curriculum	Civics and moral education lessons, academic subject lessons, interaction through projects or group work, weekly school assembly/ chapel, daily scripture reading
Hidden Curriculum	School traditions and events, interaction with peers, teachers' influence and learning from others in the school community.
Informal Curriculum	Co-curricular activities, community involvement programmes, school disciplinary system, personal reflection etc.

I had extended the 'head', 'heart', 'hands' concepts beyond moral character to include performance character since character education encompasses both moral and performance character. Statements 1 to 12 each consisted of 3 sub-statements 'a', 'b', and 'c'. Sub-statements 'a' are the 'head' statements. They sought to learn about participants' character development in the cognitive realm i.e. what had helped the participants think about character values. Sub-statements 'b' aimed at finding out what had helped the participants adopt or embrace character values. Sub-statements 'c' investigated on what had equipped the participants to act on their character values. The statements were designed in a way that each area e.g. CCA has three sub-statements, one for each domain of "head, 'heart' and 'hands'. For example,

7   My experience in CCA has ...

a   ... helped me to *think* about my values e.g. integrity, pursuit of excellence etc.

b   ... enabled me to *adopt* some values e.g. resilience, empathy, perseverance etc.

c   ... equipped me with *life skills* e.g. social skills, leadership, self-discipline etc.

This enabled participants to recall their CCA experience once for three domains and helped to increase effectiveness and efficiency when the participants responded to the statements. More importantly, it helped to improve consistency. Statements 1 to 12 were based on 5-point Likert scale. Participants had to indicate a response of 1 to 5 - 1 being strongly disagree, 2 being disagree, 3 being neither disagree nor agree, 4 being agree and 5 being strongly agree.

Question 13- a descriptive question, was added to elicit the students' significant experience. The concept was also based on a research by Quackenbush

S. W. & Barnett M. A. (2001). In his research, participants were told to narrate a single experience that they perceived to be the most important in their moral development. They were also given questions to assess the extent to which they learnt from the experience. The method combined qualitative method which was the narrative section and quantitative method which was made up of a scaled questionnaire. The qualitative results of critical experience were put into different categories of experience whereas the quantitative data were analysed to give the mean, standard deviation and inter-correlation.

Similarly, I used results from statements 1 to 12 of my questionnaire to study the extent the participants agree if the various programmes or platforms of the school's character education were helpful in their character development. However, statements 1 to 12 limits the responses of the participants since they are closed statements. Therefore, an open ended descriptive question was included to capture responses of the students possibly outside the confines of the closed statements. The intention is for the participants to highlight experiences significant to their character development which are not limited to those mentioned in the earlier statements. The participants' responses in question 13 were placed in different categories. These categories were then examined together with the quantitative results to give a more complete picture of the students' perspectives on the school's character education. The questionnaire can be found in the Appendix.

7.3   Participants

Current and former students from a Singapore junior college were invited to be the participants of the research. There were a total of 165 participants. As junior college's education is only two years, getting the response of current students does not give a full picture as they had not gone through the full school cycle. At the point of survey, the grade 12 (born in 1997) had been in the school for about 15 months while the grade 11 (born in 1998) had been in the school for about three months. By including former students, it gave an added dimension

to the results since they might gain understanding of whether their school experience had benefitted them after their graduation. The particular school that was chosen has a rich and established school culture with programmes and practices which were fairly consistent for the past six years. This meant that the current and former students had gone through fairly similar experience in the school. This facilitated a study that is more representative of a stable school experience. The following tables and figures show the distribution of the participants in the gender, year of birth and co-circular activities club groups.

7.3.1 Gender Distribution of the Participants

The gender distribution of the participations is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2 Gender distribution of the participants

Gender	No of participants	Percentage (%)
Male	75	45
Female	90	55

The gender distribution of the participants is similar to the estimated average gender distribution of the school's population.

7.3.2 Distribution of the participants in their year of birth

The year of birth distribution of the participants is shown as follows:
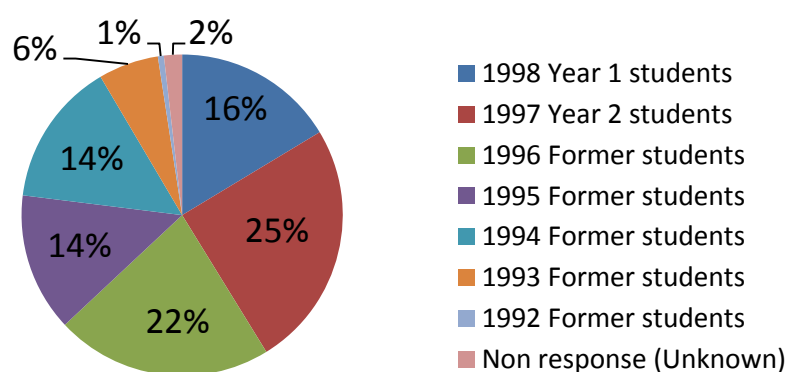
Figure 1 Distribution of the participants in their year of birth

TABLE 3   Distribution of the participants in their year of birth

Year of Birth	Status	No of participants	Percentage (%)	Combined Percentage (%)
1998	Year 1 students	27	16.4	41.2
1997	Year 2 students	41	24.8	
1996	Former students	36	21.8	
1995	Former students	23	13.9	
1994	Former students	24	14.5	56.9
1993	Former students	10	6.1	
1992	Former students	1	0.6	
Non response	Unknown	3	1.8	1.8

The school has an average of 700 students in each year of birth (cohort) and there were a total of 165 participants spanning across seven years of birth. The highest proportion of the participants was of the birth years 1997, 1996 and 1998. Together they formed 63% of the participants. At the time of survey, those born in 1998 had been in the school for about three months while those born in 1997 had been in the school for about 15 months. Those who were born in 1996 had graduated from the school for about four months. Current students made up 41.2% of the participants while former students made up 56.9%. The ratio of current students to graduates is about 1: 1.36 and it should give a balanced picture of the perception of character education in the school. 1.8% of the participants did not respond to the question hence it was not known which year they were born.

7.3.3   CCA Groups distribution of participants

The CCA distribution of the participations is show in Figure 2 and Table 4.
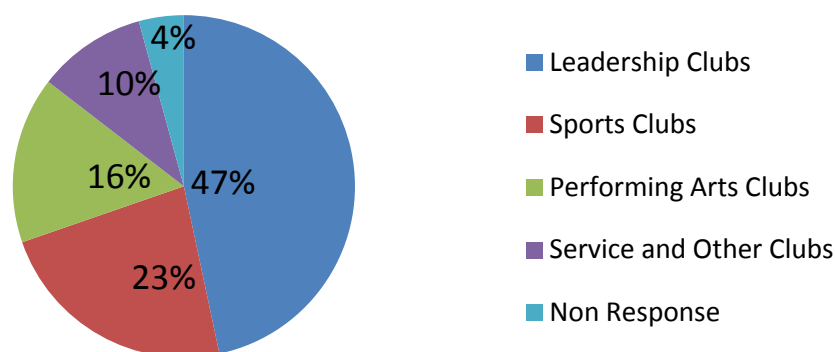
FIGURE 2 CCA Groups distribution of participants

TABLE 4   CCA Groups distribution of participants

CCA Groups	No of participants	Percentage (%)	Estimated population percentage (%)
Leadership Clubs	77	46.7	20
Sports Clubs	39	23.0	35
Performing Arts Clubs	26	15.8	25
Service and Other Clubs	17	10.3	20
Non Response	6	4.2	

The sample distribution was very different from the estimated distribution of the population. The leadership CCA group was over represented. This could be due to two reasons. Firstly, I had disseminated the questionnaire through the student council using chain sampling. Although chain sampling was random, it was somewhat biased towards the leadership CCAs. Secondly, the student leaders were likely to be more enthusiastic than the average students in participating in a voluntary research. I would discuss if this over representation of leadership CCA had an effect on the results under the section 8.1.7.

7.4   Data Collection

Chain sampling was used to reach a sample of wider variation as my main contact points are student councillors in the school. They had helped to disseminate

the questionnaire to other students to generate as much co-curricular activities diversity as possible.

In such instances that the students had no incentives to participate in the questionnaire, the survey platform was designed and used in a format that facilitated dissemination. Typeform, an internet survey platform, was used as it has a user-friendly and attractive interface on tablets, laptops, PCs and most of all in smart phones. The ease of answering the questionnaire via smart phones was particularly important as many young people including adolescents use their smart phones extensively. This facilitated convenience especially when the questionnaire could be answered within 8 minutes. Typeform allowed the questionnaire to be accessed via a URL which was distributed through Whatapps and Facebook to the current and former students who were mostly from student council. These students helped to disseminate and sent the URL to their peers from the school. Several teachers' help was also enlisted to send the questionnaire to their students.

There was a total number of 358 unique visits to the survey and a total of 165 responses. 24 participants completed the questionnaire using personal computers/ laptops. One participant used the tablet while 140 participants used smartphone to complete the survey. For the descriptive question, a total of 128 out of 165 participants responded. The average time to complete the whole questionnaire was 7 minutes 37 seconds.

7.5   Reliability

Originally, I had wanted to use an existing tool by other researchers so as to ensure the reliability of this research. One of the most extensively used tools is the Character Education Quality Standards – a self-assessment tool for schools and districts developed by Character Education Partnership (CEP) in 2008 based on CEP's Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education and the Eleven Principles Survey by Thomas Lickona and Matthew Davidson. Although this instrument was widely used as a means for educators, administra-

tors, and community members to reflect on their current practices, identify some objectives, and develop or improve a strategic plan, there were some draw-backs in using the Standards in my research.

Firstly, the questions were not contextualised in the Singaporean system and in the school of interest. Secondly, the questions were not designed from the students' perspectives. I realised that other questionnaires would have the similar constraints, hence I decided to design my own instrument to ensure that it is contextualised to the school as well as centred on the students' experience in the school.

To ensure reliability, I made sure that firstly, I had a sizeable sample size so that the 5-point Likert scale data could take on the properties of interval data. Secondly, I designed 36 statements in the questionnaire, sufficient to test for internal reliability using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, without making it burdensome for the participants. Thirdly, I included a descriptive question and categorised the responses. These categories were then examined together with the quantitative results to as a comparison with the results from the 36 statements.

8   RESULTS

The survey result from Typeform was exported to Microsoft excel format and imported into IBM SPSS Statistics, version 22.0 where means and standard deviation were calculated for each statement. There was a total of 36 statements based on 5-point Likert scale and 1 descriptive question. Although individual responses in a Likert scale are usually treated as ordinal because it cannot be assumed that the participants perceive the relative positions to be equal. In this case, as each aggregate measure (mean and standard deviation) was based on considerably large number of participants (N=165), at the aggregate level, the ordinal Likert data took on the properties of interval data. Therefore, I had used the Likert scale response as interval data.

Cohen's d was used to analyse the Effect Size (ES) of each area (e.g. academic group work) compared to the area of highest mean (i.e. CCA) to give an idea of its impact relative to CCA. It was also used to study the relative ES among formal, hidden and informal curricula in the 'head', 'heart' and 'hands' domains. Following the guidelines given by Cohen, ES of 0.2, 0.5 and 0.8 are regarded as small, medium and large respectively.

In addition, the responses to the descriptive question, where the participants were asked to describe some significant experiences in the school that had helped to them develop their character, were categorised, ranked and tabulated. Categories which had higher number of responses were ranked higher. In other words, these categories were perceived by students to have greater impact on their experience in character development.

8.1.1   What are the Programmes or Platforms that Help Students to Understand Character Values Cognitively?

The responses to the 'head' statements were analysed and presented in Table 5. Each area was ranked in ascending order of their ES relative to CCA. The higher ranked area is perceived to be more impactful to understanding of character values by the participants.

TABLE 5 Results table showing the areas that enable the participants to understand character values cognitively

Rank	Curriculum	Areas	Mean	S.D	ES relative to CCA (Cohen's d)
1	Informal	Co-Curricular Activities (CCA)	4.37	0.86	0.000
2	Hidden	Peer Interaction	4.24	0.72	0.164
3	Informal	Personal Reflection	4.18	0.82	0.226
4	Informal	Community Involvement Projects (CIP)	4.08	0.82	0.345
5	Hidden	School Community	4.02	0.75	0.434
6	Hidden	School Events/ Traditions	3.99	0.87	0.439
7	Hidden	Teachers	3.99	0.78	0.475
8	Formal	Morning Scripture Reading/ Weekly Assembly	3.76	1.00	0.654
9	Formal	Academic Group Work	3.76	0.89	0.691
10	Formal	Academic Subject Lessons	3.61	0.92	0.862
11	Formal	Civics and Moral Lessons	3.59	0.90	0.891
12	Informal	Disciplinary System	3.39	0.92	1.096

CCA impacts students' cognitive understanding of values most. Peer interaction takes the second place. Personal reflection is highlighted as an important area to character development in the cognitive domain. It can be seen that school community, school events/ traditions and teachers are quite close in their ES. Interestingly, all three of them are part of hidden curriculum.

The ES of morning scripture reading/weekly assembly and academic group work relative to CCA are 0.654 and 0.691 respectively. They show a medium ES, implying that CCA has more impact on character development in the 'head' domain compared to morning scripture reading/weekly assembly and academic group work.

The ES of CCA against academic subject lessons is 0.862 - a large ES. This shows that CCA is visibly more impactful on character development in the 'head' domain compared to academic subject lessons, civics and moral lessons and disciplinary system.

8.1.2   What are the Programmes or Platforms that Help Students to Adopt or Embrace Character Values as their Beliefs?

The responses to the 'heart' statements were analysed and presented in Table 6. Each area was ranked in ascending order of their ES relative to CCA. The higher ranked area is perceived to be more impactful in the adoption of character values by the participants.

TABLE 6   Results table showing the areas that enable the participants to adopt character values as their beliefs

Rank	Curriculum	Areas	Mean	S.D	ES relative to CCA (Cohen's d)
1	Informal	Co-Curricular Activities (CCA)	4.47	0.77	0.000
2	Informal	Community Involvement Projects (CIP)	4.15	0.78	0.413
3	Hidden	Peer Interaction	4.14	0.73	0.439
4	Informal	Personal Reflection	4.05	0.82	0.528
5	Hidden	School Events/ Traditions	4.00	0.86	0.576
6	Hidden	Teachers	3.98	0.83	0.612
7	Formal	Academic Group Work	3.79	0.87	0.828
8	Formal	Academic Subject Lessons	3.76	0.85	0.875
9	Hidden	School Community	3.78	0.74	0.914
10	Formal	Morning Scripture Reading/ Weekly Assembly	3.62	0.96	0.976
11	Informal	Disciplinary System	3.53	0.92	1.108
12	Formal	Civics and Moral Lessons	3.28	0.92	1.403

CCA has most impact on students' adoption of character values as their beliefs, followed by CIP and peer interaction. The ES of personal reflection, school events/ traditions and teachers relative to CCA are medium.

The ES of academic group work, academic subject lessons, school community, morning scripture reading/ weekly assembly, disciplinary system and civics and moral lessons relative to CCA are large. This implies that, relative to

these areas, the top three areas are considerably more impactful in the adoption of character values by the participants.

8.1.3   What are the Programmes or Platforms that Help Students to Act on their Character Values?

The responses to the 'hands' statements were analysed and presented in Table 7. Each area was ranked in ascending order of their ES relative to CCA. The higher ranked area is perceived to be the area that had enabled the participants to act on their character values more.

TABLE 7 Results table showing the areas that enable the participants to act on their character values

Rank	Curriculum	Areas	Mean	S.D	ES relative to CCA (Cohen's d)
1	Informal	Co-Curricular Activities (CCA)	4.48	0.73	0.000
2	Formal	Academic Group Work	4.16	0.85	0.404
3	Informal	Community Involvement Projects (CIP)	4.14	0.79	0.447
4	Hidden	Peer Interaction	4.13	0.71	0.486
5	Hidden	Teachers	4.02	0.74	0.626
6	Formal	Academic Subject Lessons	3.93	0.88	0.680
7	Informal	Personal Reflection	3.88	0.89	0.737
8	Hidden	School Events/ Traditions	3.89	0.86	0.740
9	Hidden	School Community	3.73	0.78	0.993
10	Formal	Morning Scripture Reading/ Weekly Assembly	3.39	1.00	1.245
11	Informal	Disciplinary System	3.40	0.96	1.266
12	Formal	Civics and Moral Lessons	3.28	0.92	1.445

The ES of teachers and academic subject lessons relative to CCA are medium. The ES of personal reflection and school events/ traditions relative to CCA are medium but close to large.

The ES of school community, morning scripture reading/ weekly assembly, disciplinary system and civics and moral lessons relative to CCA are considerably large. This implied that comparing to these areas, the top four areas are considerably more impactful in enabling the participants to act on their character values.

8.1.4 Which Curriculum – Formal, Hidden or Informal is Most Effective in Character Education?

The responses of the different areas under the formal, hidden and informal curricula were presented in Figure 3.
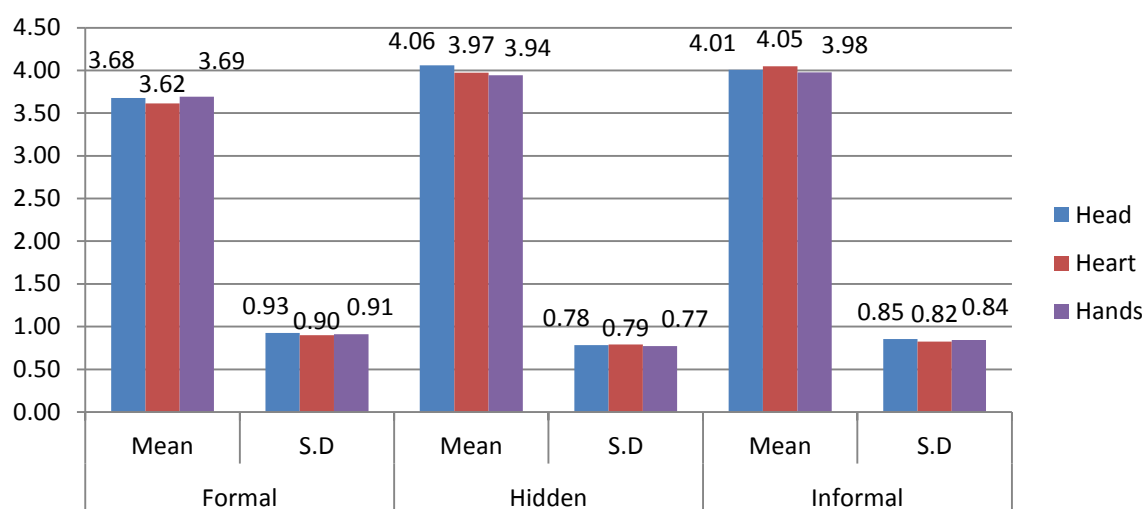
FIGURE 3 Comparison of mean and standard deviation of the different domains across the three curricula

Within formal curriculum, 'hands' has the highest mean, followed by 'head' and 'heart'. Within hidden curriculum, 'head' has the highest mean followed by 'heart' and 'hands'. Within informal curriculum, 'heart' has the highest mean followed by 'head' and 'hands'. However, within each curriculum, the values of mean and standard deviation are very close. For example, within formal curriculum, the means of 'head', 'heart' and 'hands' are 3.68, 3.62 and 3.69 respectively. These differences are insignificant and it implies that there is not much difference in the impact on the domains within each curriculum.

However, when comparison of each domain was drawn across the different curricula, it can be seen that for the 'head' domain, hidden curriculum has the highest mean, followed very closely by informal and then formal. In the 'heart' domain, informal curriculum has the highest mean, followed by hidden and then formal. In the hands domain, informal curriculum has the highest mean, followed by hidden and then formal.

The responses of the different areas under the formal, hidden and informal curricula were grouped together in their respective 'head', 'heart', 'hands' domains to give an aggregate mean and standard deviation. The aggregate mean and standard deviation of 'head'', 'heart' and 'hands' within each curriculum were presented in Figure 4 as curriculum mean.
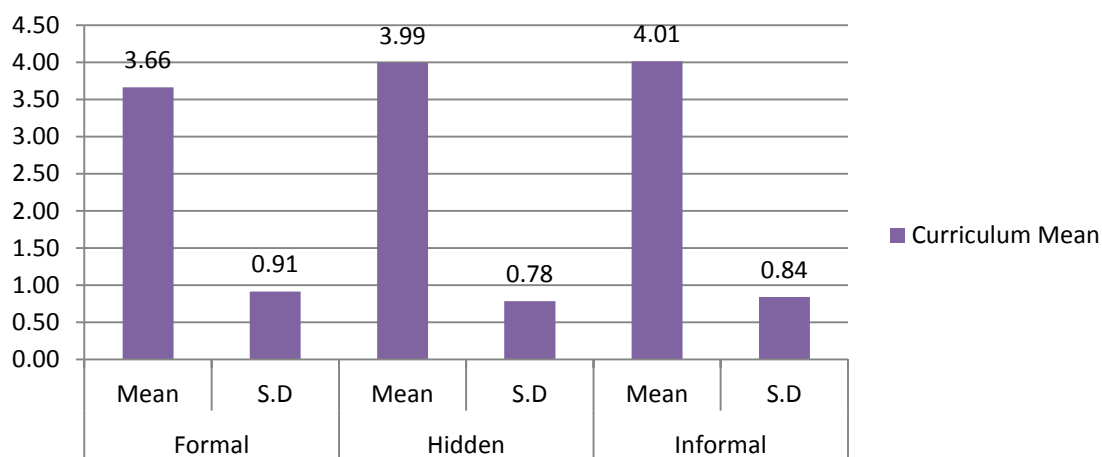
FIGURE 4 Comparison of mean and standard deviation of the three curricula

As can be seen, informal curriculum has the highest mean. This is consistent as the highly impactful areas such as CCA and CIP are part of informal curriculum. Hidden curriculum has also proven to be impactful with a high mean of 3.99. It shows that the experiences which are unseen, in particular, interaction and school culture can be impactful indeed. Formal curriculum has a mean of 3.66. While it is not as high as the other two curricula, its value suggests that it has some impact.

To have a better picture of the effect of each curriculum on the character development of the students in each domain, a table of Cohen's d values of each curriculum in each domain is tabulated and shown in Table 8.

TABLE 8 Effect Size of different curricula in the three domains

		Effect Size (ES) using Cohen's d		
	Curriculum	Formal	Hidden	Informal
	Formal	0.000		
Head	Hidden	-0.442	0.000	
	Informal	-0.370	0.061	0.000
	Formal	0.000		
Heart	Hidden	-0.413	0.000	
	Informal	-0.499	-0.099	0.000
	Formal	0.000		
Hands	Hidden	-0.296	0.000	
	Informal	-0.331	-0.050	0.000

In all three domains, hidden and informal curricula have a larger impact compared to formal curriculum as seen from their relatively larger ES although still within ES of small to medium. In the 'heart' domain, comparing to formal curriculum, hidden curriculum has a close to medium ES while informal curriculum has a medium ES. However, the difference in ES between hidden and informal curricula is not significant in all domains.

8.1.5 What Are Some Significant Experiences in Schools that Develop the Students' Character?

The responses from question 13 were categorised under different areas and presented in Table 9. A total of 128 out of 165 participants responded to this question. In Table 9, the percentage of respondents was calculated with the denominator of 128 so that the comparison in the difference in percentage between different areas could be more pronounced. An interesting observation is that the area of hardships/ challenges which was not mentioned in the quantitative statements surfaced with a high level of responses of 30 (23.4%).

TABLE 9 Areas that contributes to learning from Significant Learning Experience

Rank	Curriculum	Areas	No of responses	Percentage of respondents
1	Informal	Co-Curricular Activities (CCA)	57	44.5
2	others	Leadership opportunities	50	39.1
3	Informal	Personal Reflection	34	26.6
4	Hidden	Peer Interaction	32	25.0
5	Others	Hardships/ Challenges	30	23.4
6	Hidden	School Events/ Traditions	13	10.2
7	Hidden	Teachers	12	9.4
8	Informal	Community Involvement Projects (CIP)	11	8.6
9	Hidden	School Community	9	7.0
10	Formal	Academic Group Work	7	5.5
11	Informal	Disciplinary System	4	3.1
12	Formal	Academic Subject Lessons	2	1.6
13	Formal	Morning Scripture Reading/ Weekly Assembly	2	1.6
14	Formal	Civics and Moral Lessons	0	0.0

As can be seen from the results, significant experience occurs when there is social interaction such as CCA, leadership opportunities, peer interaction, school events/ traditions, teachers etc. Personal reflection and hardship/ challenges also play an important role in forming significant learning experience. The high number of responses in leadership opportunities may be due to the fact that 77 participants are from leadership clubs although some participants did mention class leadership positions such as class chairman or subject representative as their leadership opportunities.

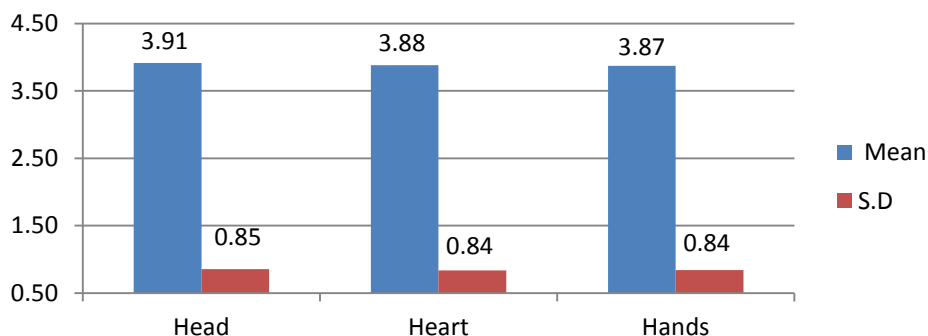### 8.1.6   Comparison of 'Head', 'Heart' and 'Hands' Domains

FIGURE 5 - Comparison of 'head', 'heart' and 'hands' domain

It can be seen that the three domains have very close mean values which are quite high. This could imply that the current character education is well balanced in the three domains and there is no one dominant domain. The high mean values of the three domains could also suggest that the character education had been impactful in the character development of the participants.

8.1.7   Comparison Across CCA Groups

As seen from the earlier results, CCA plays an important role in character education. It is thus important to study which CCA group has more impact.
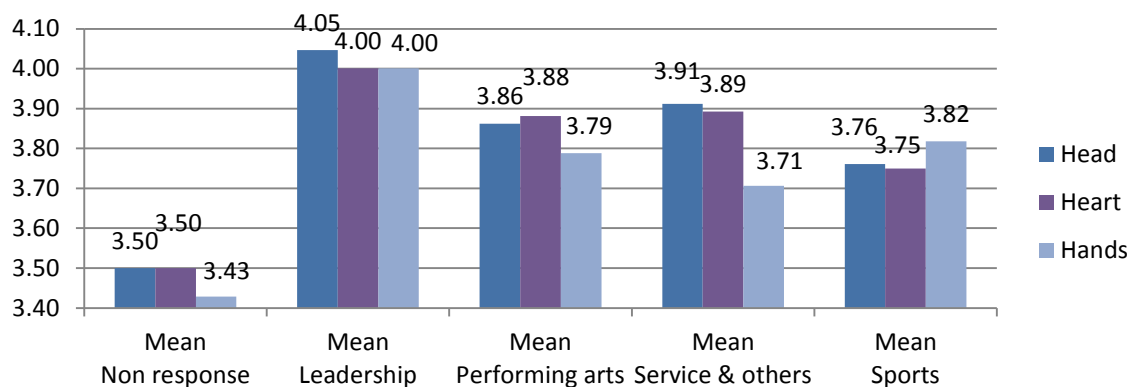

FIGURE 6 Comparison of CCA group mean across domains

Leadership CCA group has the highest mean in all three domains. Service & others CCA group consists of Audio-Visual club, Interact club, Photography society (which serve the school and the community on regular basis) and other

clubs such as Art club, debate society, Chinese cultural society etc.(which may be more cognitively inclined). This may explain why it has next higher mean in 'head' and 'heart' domains. Sports CCA group scores the second highest in 'heart' domain. This could be due to the reason that sports people are generally action-people who would show their character values mainly through their actions. Performing arts CCA group has third highest mean values in all three domains. There were seven non responses. It could be that some of them did not join any CCAs. As N is small, the data in this group can be easily skewed hence is not reliable and one should not read too much into it.
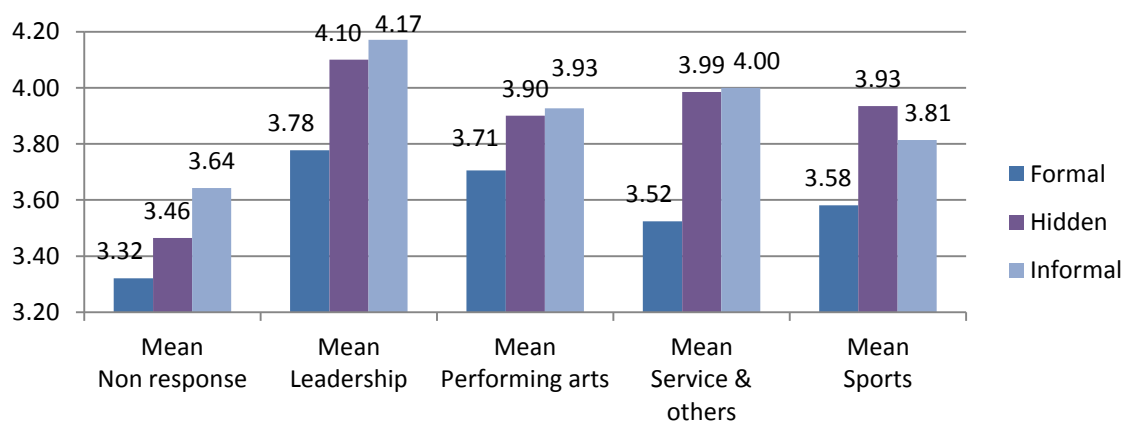
FIGURE 7 Comparison of mean of CCA group across the three curricula

Leadership CCA group has the highest mean values in formal, hidden and informal curricula. This is interesting as it may imply that as an informal curriculum, CCA has a spill over effect in the formal and hidden curricula. It may mean that the skills and values learnt have been successfully transferred to other curricula to a certain extent or it could just mean that the students in leadership CCA are more driven to begin with, hence showing good results in other curricula as well. Sports CCA group is the only one that has a higher mean value in hidden curriculum than informal curriculum. This may imply that interaction and relationship could be the primary platform sports people develop their character.

To study the effect of the CCA groups on character development of the students, Cohen's d values of each CCA group based on their aggregate mean

and standard deviation in all domains and curricula were tabulated and shown in Table 10.

TABLE 10 Effect Size of different CCA groups

CCA group	Leadership	Performing arts	Service & others	Sports	Non response
Leadership	0.000				
Performing arts	0.226	0.000			
Service & others	0.232	0.000	0.000		
Sports	0.290	0.071	0.073	0.000	
Non response	0.537	0.354	0.359	0.288	0.000

As can be seen from the Cohen's d values, the ES between the various CCA groups is small. This indicates that the over representation of leadership CCA has insignificant effect on the results of the research. It also implies that which-ever CCA a student joins, the impact on his/ her character development is not significantly different. It was noted that the Cohen's d value of non- response relative to leadership clubs indicates a medium ES although its effective size relative to other CCA groups is between small to medium. As discussed earlier, one should not read too much into the non-response group since N=7 is very small and can be easily skewed by the response of one or two participants.

8.1.8 Comparison Across Years of Birth

The responses by participants born in different year seem to yield rather differ-ent results. There is only one participant born in 1992 and hence this result can be biased and have been disregarded in the analysis.
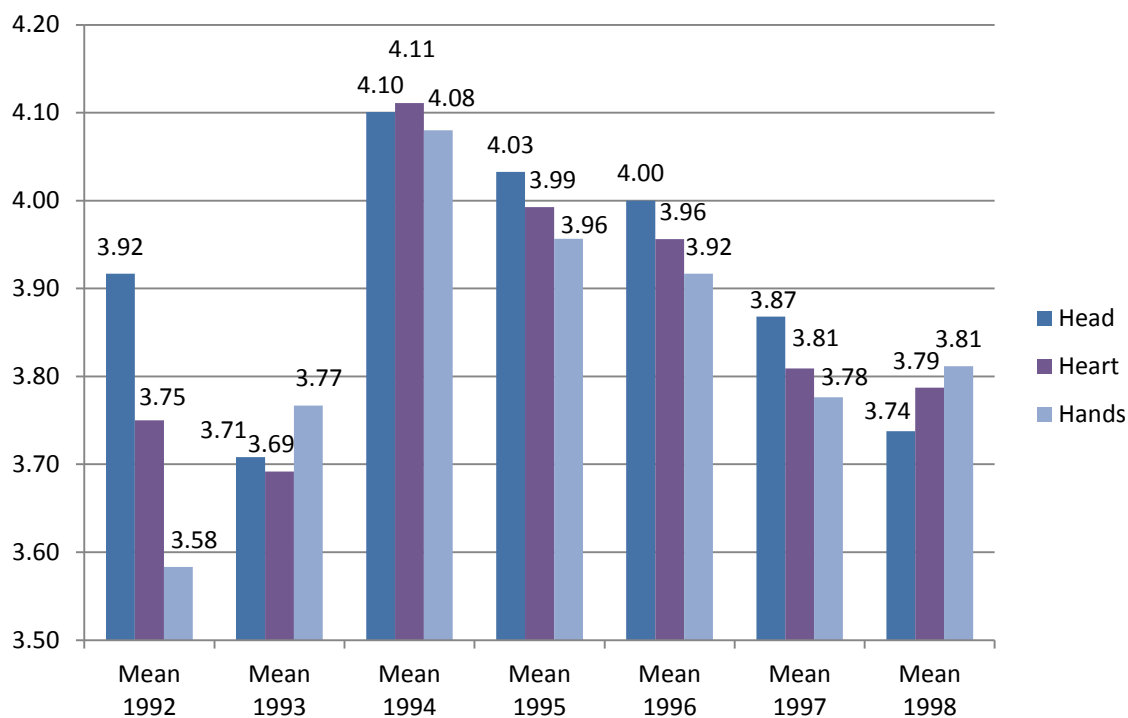
FIGURE 8 Comparison of domain mean across the years of birth

The mean values of those born in 1993 are the lowest among the other mean values (ignoring 1992 data). These participants have graduated from the school for four years and they may not remember their school experience as well as other years. It can be seen that those born in 1994, 1995 and 1996 have closer mean values while those born in 1997 and 1998 have closer values to each other. The mean values of those born in 1997 and 1998 are lower than those from 1994 to 1996. This could be due to the fact that they have not gone through the full education cycle in the school. It is also interesting to note that the mean of the domains those born in 1998 (year 1 students) shows a reverse pattern from those from 1994 to 1998) i.e. mean for 'hands' domain is higher than 'head' domain. At the point of survey, they were in the school for about four months, hence they have not experienced many different programmes especially in academic group work and CIP, accounting for the lower mean values in 'head' and 'heart' domains.
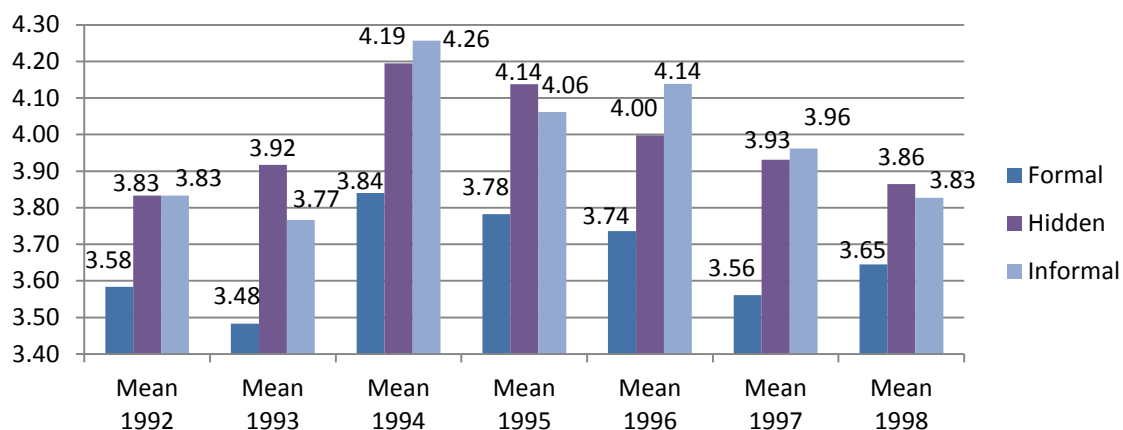
FIGURE 9 Comparison of curricula mean across years of birth

Comparing the means of each curriculum, the mean values of those born in 1993 are again significantly lower than other mean values. It can be seen that those born in 1994, 1995 and 1996 have closer mean values while those born in 1997 and 1998 have closer values to each other. The mean values of those born in 1997 and 1998 are lower than those from 1994 to 1996. This could be due to the fact that they have not gone through the full education cycle in the school. It is also interesting to note that the mean value of the formal curriculum of those born in 1997 (year 2 students) is lower even than that of year 1 students.

To study the effect of year of birth on character development of the students, Cohen's d values are tabulated and shown in Table 11.

TABLE 11 Effect Size (Cohen's d) of year of birth

Year of birth	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
1992	0.000						
1993	0.058	0.000					
1994	-0.697	-0.528	0.000				
1995	-0.404	-0.343	0.141	0.000			
1996	-0.341	-0.299	0.176	0.035	0.000		
1997	-0.125	-0.131	0.373	0.208	0.168	0.000	
1998	-0.047	-0.073	0.395	0.241	0.203	0.047	0.000

Disregarding 1992 data, it can be seen that 1994 has a larger ES relative to other years of birth particularly when compared to 1993. The reason to this is unknown. However, since the ES across all six years of birth is from small to medium, the difference in the impact of the character development across these six years is not significant. This implies that the data has been fairly consistent in these six years. This consistency is important as it shows that the character education in the school is not ad-hoc but has established practices and traditions.

9   DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will discuss about key areas which impact in the 'head', 'heart' and 'hands' domains; the reliability of this research; the generalisability and limitations of this research; and possible future research.

9.1   Key Areas which Impact in the 'Head', 'Heart' and 'Hands' Domains

9.1.1   Peer Interaction and Teachers' Influence

Peer interaction is ranked second in the 'head' domain, third in the 'heart' domain and fourth in the 'hands' domain. Teachers influence is ranked at seventh, sixth and fifth in the 'head', 'heart' and 'hands' domains respectively. This may imply that junior college students are capable of developing character friendship with their peers as well as adults such as the teachers. This could be one reason why peer interaction and teachers' influence are seen to be instrumental in character development. It is also likely that the informal environment in CCA, CIP reinforce this character friendship. Teachers' influence has always been seen as a key factor in the quality of teaching. This research shows that it is an important factor in character education since character is both taught and caught.

9.1.2   Personal Reflection

Personal Reflection is ranked at third, fourth and seventh in the 'head', 'heart' and 'hands' domains respectively. This is not surprising as reflection is a very much cognitive activity, and is not an avenue for acting on values. Its high rank in both 'head' and 'heart' suggests that personal reflection is important to one to understand and internalise the character values. Perhaps, students should be taught reflection skills and a greater emphasis on personal reflection can be placed.

9.1.3 Academic Group Work

In the 'head' and 'heart' domains, academic group work and academic subject lessons have always been ranked next to each other and have small relative ES of 0.17 and 0.05 respectively. In the 'hands' domains, academic group work is ranked second and academic lesson is ranked sixth. Their relative ES is 0.28 which is between small and medium. This seems to suggest that in group work, students learn more to act on character values compared to learning to understand or adopt values. Perhaps this is because in academic group work, students have many opportunities to act on their values e.g. showing respect in their collaboration. This is quite significant as this is the only time a formal area has been ranked highly and may suggest the importance of group work in the formal curriculum.

9.1.4 Community Involvement Projects (CIP)

Community Involvement Projects (CIP) is ranked fourth, second and third in the 'head', 'heart' and 'hands' domains respectively. Unsurprisingly, CIP has a great impact on character development since it has one of most direct connections to character values such as empathy, compassion, kindness and gratitude. Its high rank in the three domains is expected as CIP is not only hands-on; it can be an emotional experience and/ or one that raises moral questions in the mind. Through the projects, students learn to work together; they get to feel and see needs of the community; and to interact with them. The research confirms the belief that being involved in the community is one of the best ways for students to develop their character.

9.1.5 Co-Curricular Activities (CCA)

From the results, CCA is undisputedly the most impactful programme in all three domains and one that creates significant learning experiences for many students. However, whichever CCA a student joins, the impact on his/ her

character development is not significantly different as seen from the small ES between the various CCA groups shown in Table 10.

There could be a few characteristics of CCA that might explain its success in character development. Firstly, students choose and join CCA club of their choice by their own will. This means that students have at least some interest in the club, hence are more likely to be engaged and committed. Secondly, CCA clubs are run for students by students. While there may be coaches or teachers, the students have the autonomy in how activities are run. With autonomy, they also carry the responsibility to make the club excel e.g. in competitions, performances or event management. Thirdly, the social interactions within clubs are meaningful. While there are casual interactions, there are also constant looking after the welfare of one another, spurring one another to excel and discussion to improve the club. Fourthly, CCA offers authentic learning experience. Whatever the students do are practical and have a clear outcome e.g. practising for concert, training for competition, planning an event. The authentic experience motivates the students, bond them to a common purpose and make their work matters. Fifthly, many elements of success in character education are embedded in CCA. They include peer interaction, teachers' influence and group work.

CCA is a very integrated part of Singapore education system. This research shows that it is an impactful one in character development too. To improve it further, schools may incorporate personal reflection and enhance the club culture and traditions.

9.1.6   Disciplinary System and Civics and Moral Lessons

Disciplinary system as well as civics and moral education have been ranked as the bottom last two in all the domains. Results have shown that they have significantly less impact compared to CCA. Although these two areas have relatively little impact in character education, it important to understand the reasons behind as they may provide insights to what is crucial to character education.

Disciplinary system is generally seen as the 'rod' that corrects the students' misbehaviour. It usually takes a passive role as an intervention; hence it has limited impact in the character development of majority of the students. It is noteworthy that disciplinary system was mentioned by four participants as their significant learning experience. It is likely that it is only significant to those students who had misbehaved and had received disciplinary actions.

Civics and moral education which exists as part of formal curriculum seems to have failed especially in the 'heart' and 'hands' domains with a mean of 3.28 which is close to a neutral response. In the 'head' domain, it has a mean of 3.59 which is acceptable but not impressive. This implies that the although civics and moral education lessons has been more effective in teaching the students what the character values mean than adopting them as their beliefs or acting on them, it is significantly less impactful compared to CCA. Civics and moral lessons were also not mentioned as significant experience by any participants. Its limited impact on character development could be that the lessons were generally didactic. It does not engage students' thinking; nor create experience for students to internalise the values; nor provide enough opportunities to act on their values. This is something that certainly needs to be reviewed if it is to be more impactful.

9.1.7   Formal, Hidden or Informal Curricula

It is clear that informal and hidden curricula have greater impact on character development than the formal curriculum. What is alarming but not unexpected is that the formal curriculum is perceived to be least impactful in the 'head' domain. This implies that what is being done formally during school hours is not as impactful as what is hidden and done outside school hours. This may suggest that formal curriculum does not provoke the thinking of the students on character values sufficiently. This is true especially in the context of junior college where there should be more open discussions that are stimulating instead of didactic teacher-centred teaching. This is an important area that schools can review.

Hidden curriculum e.g. peer interaction, school tradition/ events have significant impact in the 'heart' domain. It is likely that adoption of character values require personal experience of an individual in an authentic environment. This implies that students' active participation and engagement has a big impact on their adoption of values as their beliefs. Therefore, more deliberate effort could be placed on hidden curriculum instead of allowing it to take a natural course. Schools, for example, could look into the quality of interaction among the students and with the teachers; how to shape the school culture; as well as how to embrace and celebrate the school traditions and events to strengthen the hidden curriculum.

The results show that student centred programmes and social interaction are the means through which students develop their character most. This is clearly seen in the informal curriculum such as CCA and CIP. Even in formal curriculum, academic group work, where it is student centred and social interaction, is most effective in both the 'heart' and 'hands' domains.

9.1.8   Significant Experiences in Schools

The high responses in CCA, leadership opportunities, peer interaction and hardship/ challenges are likely related to the social challenges and psychological challenges faced by the late adolescents highlighted in chapter 3. While facing these challenges, their character is significantly developed and that leaves a significant impression on them. CCA and CIP had also already been discussed earlier.

It is also noteworthy that many educators or parents may see hardships/ challenges as negative and protest that the academic rigour is too demanding. However, the participants see them as positive at least in their character development. Educators and parents should perhaps have more faith in the abilities of the students; support them during the challenges instead of removing the challenges from the students. This is especially as hardship and challenges provide opportunities for students to learn grit which is identified as the one of the

most important keys to success by a number of researchers including Tough, Paul. (2013).

9.2 Reliability of the Study

IBM SPSS Statistics version 22.0 was used to generate Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the testing for reliability. The results are shown in Table 12.

TABLE 12 Reliability test results based on Cronbach Alpha's coefficient

Items used for Reliability Testing	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient
Formal Curriculum	0.854
Hidden Curriculum	0.866
Informal Curriculum	0.840
'head' domain	0.779
'heart' domain	0.798
'hands' domain	0.799
All 36 items	0.925

Following the rule of George and Mallery (2003), reliability is considered to be excellent, good, acceptable, questionable, poor and unacceptable if the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient are > 0.9, >0.8, >0.7, >0.6, > 0.5 and <0.5 respectively. As can be seen, when 12 items under formal, hidden and informal curricula were analysed, the reliability is good. When 12 items under the domains of 'head', 'heart' and 'hands' were analysed, the reliability is acceptable and close to good (0.8). When all the closed statements were analysed together, the reliability is excellent.

In addition, all areas in the closed (Likert scale) statements (except for civics and moral lessons) were mentioned in the descriptive question. This shows that the closed statements were considerably well crafted to include areas that were impactful in the students' experience. The key areas highlighted as significant experience by 30 (23.4%) or more respondents were CCA, leadership op-

portunities, personal reflection, peer interaction and hardships/challenges. Although leadership opportunities and hardships/ challenges were not explicitly areas in the closed statements, they were implicitly subsumed under different statements e.g. leadership opportunities could provide in academic subject lesson such as subject representative mentioned by one participant and in CCAs by some participants while resilience is needed to face challenges and hardships. Resilience was one character values given as examples in multiple statements.

The close alignment of response from the descriptive question with the closed statements as well as the high Cronbach's alpha coefficients value showed that the instrument and results were of good reliability.

9.3   Generalisability and Limitations

The purpose of the research is to explore what programme or platforms has impact on character development from the perspectives of students. It is not to study how each area impacts character development. As such, it cannot provide solutions on how to run the character education. However, it does highlight areas which are significant in character education and it is up to each school to review them in their local context although from the reliability and results of the research, I am confident that the key findings can be applied in other junior colleges in Singapore since the profile of these students are quite similar.

However, I do not think that all the key results and findings may be generalised to other contexts. For example, CCA in junior college is not mandatory unlike in secondary schools. Therefore the impact of CCA in the secondary schools might be very different as the clubs struggle with attendance and commitment of the students. In many countries, CCA is non-existent; however, the characteristics of CCA such as choice, autonomy, meaningful interaction and authentic experience are likely to have effect in other context. In other words, the research provides some principles that are useful but they have to be adapted to the local context.

In the implementation for character education, schools should not merely focus on instilling good character values but also help students to understand the character values, embrace them and devote themselves to practicing these values in their daily life. Character is both taught and caught. It is taught intentionally through the three curricula and caught through the reality of the shared culture one lives in of which hidden curriculum is one main component.

9.4   Further Research

In this research, I have identified some key areas which have significant impact on the character development of the students. Going forward, there are several questions that need to be answered. It would be beneficial if there can be research on how some of these areas, which are less known e.g. personal reflection, impact one's character development. Other possibilities include how effective is school culture in developing the character of the students; or how is teacher-student or student-student character friendship formed.

Character education is increasingly more important in the 21st century as I have discussed in Chapter 1. It would be important if more researchers and educators can come on board to make it more effective in the homes, schools and community.

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APPENDIX

Statements and Responses (%) of the Questionnaire

Statements	Responses (%)					Mean	S.D
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**		
1. The civics/ moral education lessons have helped me to ...							
... *think* about my values e.g. resilience, empathy etc.	3.0	8.5	25.5	52.7	10.3	3.59	.90
... *adopt* some values e.g. resilience, empathy etc as my own values	3.6	9.1	35.2	43.0	9.1	3.45	.91
... learn some *life skills* e.g. socio-emotional skills, how to be resilient etc.	3.6	15.2	36.4	38.8	6.1	3.28	.92
2. The academic subjects e.g. General Paper, PW, Economics, Mathematics have helped me to ...							
... *understand* what some values (e.g. passion for learning, diligence, integrity) mean more deeply.	1.8	10.3	27.3	46.7	13.9	3.61	.92
... embrace some values e.g. resilience, diligence etc.	1.8	6.7	19.4	57.6	14.5	3.76	.85
... pick up some *life skills* e.g. how to be self-disciplined etc.	1.8	4.8	16.4	52.1	24.8	3.93	.88
3. The academic group work e.g. in PW or Science, Geography projects etc has helped me to …							
... *think* about what makes a good person or what are good values e.g. diligence.	1.2	7.3	24.8	47.3	19.4	3.76	.89
... *adopt* some values e.g. resilience, empathy, diligence etc.	1.2	7.3	21.2	52.1	18.2	3.79	.87
... learn some life skills e.g. perseverance, teamwork, being responsible, crisis management etc.	1.2	4.2	9.1	48.5	37.0	4.16	.85
4. The morning scripture reading and weekly assembly/ chapel has helped me to ...							
... *think* about my values.	2.4	10.3	19.4	44.8	23.0	3.76	1.00
... *adopt* some values.	3.0	8.5	28.5	43.0	17.0	3.62	.96
... learn some *life skills*.	5.5	9.7	37.6	35.2	12.1	3.39	1.00
5. The school events/ traditions (such as singing of college hymn, orientation, friendship week, open house, cheer support) have enabled me to ...							
... *think about some values e.g. unity, pursuit of excellence etc.*	2.4	1.8	18.2	49.1	28.5	3.99	.87
... *adopt* good values e.g. showing appreciation or gratitude.	2.4	2.4	14.5	53.9	26.7	4.00	.86
... learn some *life skills* e.g. how to interact with others, how to contribute in a community etc.	1.8	2.4	24.2	47.9	23.6	3.89	.86

6. The college disciplinary system e.g. consequences of late coming, reflection during detention has helped me to ...							
... *think* about my values e.g. integrity, self-discipline, pursuit of excellence etc.	5.5	6.7	38.2	42.4	7.3	3.39	.92
... *believe in* the importance of some values e.g. resilience, self-discipline etc.	4.2	4.8	37.0	41.8	12.1	3.53	.92
... learn some *life skills* e.g. self-management, reflection etc.	6.1	7.9	33.9	44.2	7.9	3.40	.96
7. My experience in CCA has ...							
... helped me to *think* about my values e.g. integrity, pursuit of excellence etc.	1.2	3.0	8.5	32.1	55.2	4.37	.86
... enabled me to *adopt* some values e.g. resilience, empathy, perseverance etc.	1.2	1.8	4.2	34.5	58.2	4.47	.77
... equipped me with *life skills* e.g. social skills, leadership, self-discipline etc	.6	1.2	6.7	32.1	59.4	4.48	.73
8. My experience in CIP/ OCIP has ...							
... helped me to *think* about my values e.g. gratitude, empathy, compassion etc.	.6	1.8	20.6	43.0	33.9	4.08	.82
... enabled me to *adopt* some values e.g. compassion, kindness, gratitude etc.	0	2.4	16.4	45.5	35.8	4.15	.78
... equipped me with *life skills* e.g. how to show compassion, how to show kindness, how to interact with others etc.	0	2.4	17.6	43.6	36.4	4.14	.79
9. Interaction with my peers has inspired or helped me to …							
... *think* about what are good values or what makes a good person.	.6	1.2	9.7	50.9	37.6	4.24	.72
... *adopt* some values e.g. integrity, resilience, empathy etc.	0	1.8	15.2	50.3	32.7	4.14	.73
... learn some life skills e.g. perseverance, integrity etc.	0	1.8	13.9	53.3	30.9	4.13	.71
10. The teachers have inspired or helped me to ...							
... *think* about my values e.g. pursuit of excellence, humility etc.	1.2	3.0	14.5	58.2	23.0	3.99	.78
... *adopt* some values e.g. resilience, optimism, empathy etc.	1.8	2.4	17.6	52.7	25.5	3.98	.83
... learn some *life skills* e.g. how to respect other opinions, how to speak with confidence, how to put others before self etc.	.6	2.4	15.2	57.6	24.2	4.02	.74
11. Observing how others in the school community interact or carry themselves has helped me to …							
... *think* about what are good values or what makes a good person.	0	2.4	20.0	50.9	26.7	4.02	.75
... *adopt* some values e.g. integrity, resilience, empathy etc.	0	4.2	28.5	52.7	14.5	3.78	.74
... learn some life skills e.g. perseverance, integrity etc.	0	5.5	30.9	49.1	14.5	3.73	.78

12. My personal reflection helped me to ...

... *think* about my values.	.6	1.8	17.0	40.0	40.6	4.18	.82
... *adopt* some values.	1.2	2.4	17.0	49.1	30.3	4.05	.82
... learn some *life skills*.	1.8	3.6	24.2	44.8	25.5	3.88	.89

Q13   Describe a significant experience during your years in school that had helped to develop your character.