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Virtues and values education in schools: a study in an international sample

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ABSTRACT

There is a deficit in character education research in Latin America and a lack of clarity about conceptual issues relevant to values and virtues. This lack of conceptual clarity has practical importance. The research sought to investigate empirically how school managers and teachers understand and practice character education, with particular attention to the distinction between educating values and virtues. The study was carried out during the first semester of 2022 on a sample of 160 schools in 17 countries, mainly in Christian schools in Spain and Mexico. The results show that there are differences according to the type of school and country. There are important findings regarding the concept of virtue and its relation to the concept of value, which virtues and values are most relevant for schools to teach, and which are the most used strategies in character education programmes. The research points to moral education as a central theme in schools, which considers both virtue and values education. There is a genuine interest on training teachers in virtue education.

SUMMARY

The study contributes to a better comprehension of moral education (particularly in character education) in Spain and Latin America. It provides an understanding of the differences and similarities between virtue and values education in the minds of educators. It offers information on the main practical strategies linked to character education as well as reflections on how to carry out character education in Latin America.

Finally, the study offers a comparison between the paradigm of virtue education and the paradigm of values education that can be inferred from the responses of school managers and teachers. These are two competing but compatible paradigms of moral education. Our proposal is that there should be a constructive dialogue between paradigms and even a synthesis.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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KEYWORDS

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Introduction

The study aims to identify what school managers and teachers understand by education in virtues and values, whether they find differences in it, and to find out which virtues they consider most relevant in their schools when it comes to educating.

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The specific objectives were to find out:

- The concept of virtue held by school managers and teachers, its relationship with the concept of value and whether these are compatible for them.
- Whether schools have an ‘education in virtues programme’ and, if so, which strategies are most used for teaching them, as well as the educational agents involved.
- Which virtues are commonly taught in schools, and whether civic virtues are taught at the initiative of the public administration.
- The importance given to virtue education and teacher training in this area.
- Whether there are significant differences according to certain classificatory variables: country, ownership of the school, religious principles of the institution.

There is little research on moral education in Latin America, particularly on character education in schools, compared to United States (Pattaro 2016). Studies on principals’ conceptions of character education suggest that in Spain, Argentina, Colombia and Mexico, character education is conceived as a subject linked more to education in values than in virtues (Bernal et al., 2017).

In Colombia, Chile and Mexico, values education has been promoted as part of a competency-based curriculum (Conde-Flores, García-Cabrero, and Alba-Meraz 2017; Velásquez et al. 2017) through an optional subject; its implementation has been difficult due to the social and cultural context of the country, and to challenges from teachers’ unions.

A comparative study of civic education between Mexico, Chile and Colombia shows better results in Chile, although the differences may be linked not so much to the programme, but to the characteristics of the school and the socio-economic level of the students (Treviño et al. 2017).

Spanish and Portuguese educational legislation on education reflects a change of mentality or paradigm in favour of education in values (instead of virtues), starting in the 1980s based on the indications of the European Union (EU Communities 2006, 2007; Fuentes 2018; Gomes-Dias and Hortas 2020). It is worth mentioning that the model of competences for citizenship includes, primarily, values, as well as skills, attitudes, and knowledge (Consejo de Europa 2018).

One explanation for the paradigm shift in Spain and Portugal (linked to values education) may lie in the rejection of the political regime that once promoted virtue education with the support of the Catholic Church (Lopes et al. 2013). Virtue education or character education is rejected because of its link to autocratic and outdated political regimes. It is also considered to be used to stress individual differences, as well as to justify discrimination and a certain supremacy of some over others (Kirchgasler 2018). In any case, the paradigm of value education, particularly civic values (considered as competences or competency components) predominate in these countries.

This does not mean that students in Ibero-American countries are not being educated in virtues today, but that virtues are not mentioned as a learning objective or outcome. The word ‘virtue’ seems to be politically incorrect. Interestingly, in the case of Colombia, education in the value of citizenship is in fact linked to a character education programme, although this term never appears (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013).

Each paradigm – value education and virtue education, in this case – responds to an underlying philosophy about what kind of person to educate, methodological preferences, what values or virtues to educate and how to do it (Berkowitz 2002).

Without denying the differences, is a reconciliation possible? In our view, despite the differences and the existing struggle, there are common elements that allow for reconciliation (Berkowitz 2002; Althof and Berkowitz 2006; Burgos 2013; Nucci, Narvaez, and Krettenauer 2014; Peterson 2020) and mutual enrichment.

The values education paradigm has at its core a stream that, based on Piaget and Kohlberg, seeks the cognitive and moral development of students with an emphasis on reasoning; but it also includes civic education for citizenship (Taylor 1994; Thornberg and Oğuz 2016). Although Kohlberg disdained virtue education as arbitrary and ungrounded in research -what he called the ‘virtue bag’ (Kohlberg and Mayer 1972, 478; Linde 2010) – it is unquestionable that in his proposal there is a consideration of the virtue of justice and relational maturity as expressions of moral development. One can even discover in his writings an attempt to link himself to the educational tradition of Plato, defender of moral virtues (Kohlberg and Mayer 1972). In this paradigm, virtue and values have a commonality in the behaviour learnt by children and in their maturing rationality.

Even if values and virtues are considered as different concepts for educators, they are intimately related in moral action and in moral development, both in theory and in practice, as discussed below. This close relationship explains why for many teachers or school managers virtues and values are a similar concept. The aim is to offer a theoretical framework that can integrate virtues and values while respecting their differences. Something has ‘value’ when we discover a quality in a being that we consider estimable, valuable. Values refer to objective properties of being that, when recognised by a person, are estimated as valuable, as something good. Values have an objective foundation that is subjectively known, although in some specific cases the subject can be deceived and recognise as an apparent value, something without any value (Guardini 1999). For his part, Ortega y Gasset (2004) agrees on the objectivity of values and the subject’s estimative capacity to appreciate them. The knowledge of values is reached through experience and practice (Spaemann 1987), without denying the value of theoretical knowledge or moral reasoning. The values that we discover with the intelligence are at the same time desired as goods by the will and desired by the affectivity of the person. This desire for a good triggers human action and accompanies it (De Finance 1966; Bosch 2020). The practice of the good leads the person to develop the capacity or habitual disposition to act well, i.e. to virtue, according to the Aristotelian perspective.

There is also evidence that teachers, are eclectic in their use of these paradigms or in linking to these traditions (Revell and Arthur 2007; Thornberg and Oğuz 2016). Moral reasoning, a central element of values education, not only does not run counter to virtue education, but correlates positively (Arthur et al. 2015) and helps to address moral emotivism (Marulanda, 2012).

Therefore, education in values and education in virtues can be distinguished, but not separated. Whenever one educates in virtues, one also educates in values and vice versa. Education is a secondary effect on the very character of the person (Spaemann 2003, 479).

Moral education helps the subject to discover and guide his or her actions towards values by considering their hierarchy: practical wisdom (or prudence) enables him or her to order his or her actions appropriately. It should not only be an education focused on cognitive and normative aspects or values, but also on affection and virtues (Lickona 1991; Melina, Noriega and Pérez-Soba 2007); it requires a pedagogy of desire whereby the person, attracted by a good, strives to act in accordance with that value and enjoys doing so. In the Aristotelian perspective, rationality, and desire (*orexis*) interact in human action: it is not enough to know. It is desire, not so much the intellect, which guides us towards ends or purposes, but without this being arbitrary: we desire what we recognise as good and true. Doing and desiring go together (Bastons 2020).

Education is a side effect on the very character of the person (Spaemann 2003, 479). The virtues are not the goal of our actions, but they are the fruit and condition for reaching the ultimate end, which is communion with God and with others. Full human flourishing consists precisely in communion.

We assume that an education in virtues and values is possible, which distinguishes, without opposing, the two concepts or paradigms. Certainly, these distinctions are not always clear in the minds of educators or in educational programmes that aim at education in virtues and values.

Methodology

Participants

The study population was 160 schools in seventeen countries. 160 representatives (school managers or teachers) answered the survey, corresponding to each of the participating schools. Due to the difficulties in obtaining a representative sample of schools (both by country and by type of school), it was necessary to opt for a convenience sampling with the schools we work with and that have a relation with our university because it was the only way we had to drum up participants. The sampling does not allow the results to be generalised but do offer valuable information to formulate hypotheses. The sample obtained allows us to explore the understanding and practice of character education in Christian schools (133 out of 160), particularly those in some countries such as Mexico (49 out of 160) and Spain (61 out of 160).

Of the 160 representatives surveyed for each school, 27.5% were male and 72.5% female. 63.7% are school managers and 36.3% are only teachers; 61.9% have more than 11 years of experience in education as shown in the [Tables 1 and 2](#).

Table 1. Distribution of the sample according to years of experience.

Levels	Number	% Total	Cumulated %
6 to 10 years	30	18.8%	18.8%
Under 5 years	31	19.4%	38.1%
Over 11 years	99	61.9%	100.0%

Table 2. Sample distribution according to years of experience and current institutional position.

Years of experience and institutional position	N	% Total
Teachers under 5 years	17	10,63%
Teachers 6 to 11 years	10	6,25%
Teacher over 11 years	31	19,38%
Manager under 5 years	14	8,75%
Manager 6 to 11 years	20	12,50%
Manager over 11 years	68	42,50%
N (sample size)	160	100%

Characteristics of the type of schools

In terms of the type of schools represented in the sample, 65.6% are private schools with Christian school principles; 8.1% of the schools are public schools and 13.8% are schools without Christian school principles as shown in [Table 3](#).

The schools studied are from seventeen different countries, mainly from Spain

Table 3. Distribution of the sample according to ownership and principles of the school.

Type of centre	N	% Total
Charter with Christian School Principles	20	12,50%
Charter without Christian School Principles	7	4,38%
Private with Christian School Principles	105	65,63%
Private without Christian School Principles	15	9,38%
Public with Christian School Principles	1	0,63%
Public without Christian School Principles	12	7,50%
Total	160	100

(38.1%), Mexico (30.6%) and the United States (7.5%) as shown in [Table 4](#).

Table 4. Distribution of the sample according to the nationality of the educational institution.

Nationality	N	% Total	% Cumulative
Argentina	4	2.5%	2.5%
Brazil	5	3.1%	5.6%
Canada	1	0.6%	6.3%
Chile	6	3.8%	10.0%
Colombia	2	1.3%	11.3%
Coast of Ivory	1	0.6%	11.9%
Ecuador	1	0.6%	12.5%
Spain	61	38.1%	50.6%
Philippines	3	1.9%	52.5%
France	1	0.6%	53.1%
Guatemala	1	0.6%	53.8%
Ireland	1	0.6%	54.4%
Italy	1	0.6%	55.0%
Mexico	49	30.6%	85.6%
Peru	4	2.5%	88.1%
USA	12	7.5%	95.6%
Venezuela	7	4.4%	100.0%

Instruments and variables

The following socio-demographic variables were included for consideration in the study: Sex (male or female); Time as a teacher (less than 5 years; between 6 and 10 years; more than 11 years); Role in the school (teacher or manager); Name of the school. We also considered as socio-demographic variables: The ownership of the school (public, private or charter); Country and, finally, the type of school principles (religious or not).

The complete questionnaire can be found in [Appendix A](#). Except for the question on the concept of virtue education, the rest of the variables could be coded, and their frequency analysed.

Data collection

Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire created in Google Forms addressed to school managers and teachers from elementary school to high school level, with open and closed questions. The questionnaire was written in Spanish, English, Italian and French. The data collection was conducted during the months of January to March 2022. The link and an invitation to answer the questionnaire, was passed via email to a database of schools linked to the Francisco de Vitoria University which is a Catholic university located in Spain and linked, in a particular way, to Mexico and Chile.

The name of the school was requested to verify that there were no duplicate schools in the responses.

Data analysis

Descriptive analysis of the variables were conducted. An inferential analysis was performed using contingency tables with chi-square to evaluate whether there was independence between some of the target variables of our research. Analysis were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistic v.21. For the qualitative part, a frequency analysis of the concepts and key words was performed according to the research objectives. The graphical representation of the qualitative analysis was done using Atlas.ti 9.

Results

Regarding the characterisation of virtue education in this sample of schools, the results obtained are as follows:

A large majority of schools do have a programme for virtue education (84.7%). These programmes are not the result of a requirement of the public administration (only 16.3% of the schools indicate this requirement of the governmental authority), but of the school's own initiative. 83.1% of the schools promote virtue formation among peers, i.e. among pupils. 100% of respondents indicated the importance of teacher training in this area.

The results showed statistically significant differences between the type of school (private, public and charter) and having a formal virtue education programme ($\chi^2(2) = 27.3, p < .001$). Public schools do not usually have a formal programme of education in virtues, unlike private or charter ones.

Regarding the existence of virtue education programmes in different countries, considering the countries with a sufficiently large sample (Mexico, Spain, and the USA), significant differences were found ($\chi^2(2) = 10.8, p < .004$) with respect to the existence of a virtue programme, as shown in Figure 1.

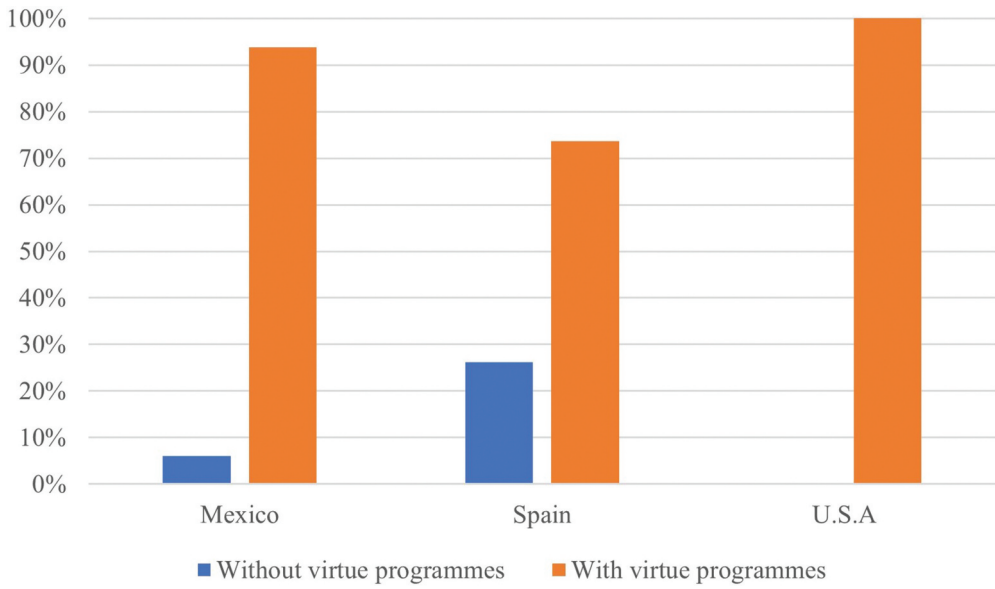


Figure 1. Existence of virtue education programmes in Mexico, Spain, and the USA.

In terms of schools with Christian principles and a virtues programme, the result was also statistically significant ($\chi^2(1) = 18.1, p < .001$). 7.6% of schools with a Christian ethos reported not having a formal virtue education programme compared to 40% of schools with a non-Christian ethos.

Non statistically significant differences were found between question 9 and the type of school, ($\chi^2(6) = 11.06, p < .071$), country, ($\chi^2(48) = 43.3, p < .664$), school principles, ($\chi^2(3) = 0.252, p < .969$) and, ($p < .380$), neither with question 13 and the type of school ($\chi^2(4) = 2.21, p < .697$), country ($\chi^2(32) = 39.0, p < .183$), and school principles ($\chi^2(2) = 1.60, p < .450$).

Question 16 does not have sufficient variability in the answers, so an inferential analysis with chi-square was not appropriate.

As for the main virtues taught in the different schools, we have differentiated them by educational level: elementary school and middle/high school.

In elementary schools, the most frequently mentioned virtues are shown below in Table 5.

Table 5. Virtues most promoted in primary school.

Word	Frequency
1. generosity	61
2. respect	46
3. responsibility	44
4. charity	30
5. joy	29
6. honesty	28
Total	238

We proceeded to group the virtues by areas based on the meta-model of López and Ortiz de Montellano (2021) where virtues are divided for their education into three areas: 1) relational virtues (whose area of application is the relationship with others); 2) performance virtues (those oriented to the performance of tasks); 3) intellectual virtues (those whose main area is the understanding of reality); 4) Theological virtues (whose scope is linked to divinity) were added. Table 6 shows the data according to this grouping criterion, leaving nine words ungrouped (because they do not clearly correspond to any group) out of a total of 763 that have been mentioned.

Table 6. Grouping by domains of the virtues mentioned in primary education.

Grouping of virtues by area	Frequency
(1) generosity, kindness, charity, solidarity, empathy, conviviality, community, friendship, companionship, friendliness, friendliness, cordiality, justice, obedience, trust, piety, forgiveness, gratitude, respect, honesty, sincerity, integrity, modesty, chastity	404
(2) responsibility, orderliness, commitment, perseverance, effort, courage, punctuality, self-control, self-regulation, self-esteem, excellence, temperance, patience, humility, optimism, cheerfulness	275
(3) truth, prudence, intelligence	35
(2) faith, hope, charity	40
	Total: 754

For middle/high schools, 777 words were mentioned as virtues worked on in schools. The most promoted virtues are listed as follows in Table 7:

Table 7. Most promoted virtues at middle/high school level.

Words	Frequency
(1) Respect	52
(2) Generosity	48
(3) Responsibility	42
(4) Charity	40
(5) Honesty	33
(6) justice	31
(7) solidarity	26
Total	272

Grouping the virtues mentioned in middle/high schools with the same criteria used for elementary schools, we can see the results in the following table. Out of a total of 778 virtues mentioned, 769 were classified, leaving nine ungrouped as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Grouping by domains of the virtues mentioned in middle/high school education.

Grouping of virtues by area	Frequency
(1) generosity, kindness, charity, solidarity, empathy, conviviality, community, friendship, companionship, friendliness, cordiality, justice, obedience, trust, trustworthiness, piety, forgiveness, gratitude, respect, honesty, sincerity, integrity, patriotism	388
(2) responsibility, orderliness, commitment, perseverance, effort, courage, punctuality, self-control, self-regulation, self-esteem, excellence, temperance, patience, humility, optimism, happiness	279
(3) truth, prudence, intelligence, creativity	60
(4) faith, hope, charity	42
	Total: 769

Of the most frequently mentioned virtues in both elementary and middle/high school education, there is agreement on the following: generosity, responsibility, charity, honesty, and respect. Joy is only proposed for primary school, while solidarity and justice are only proposed for middle/high school as shown in Figure 2.

Civic virtues most promoted at school are as follow in Table 9:

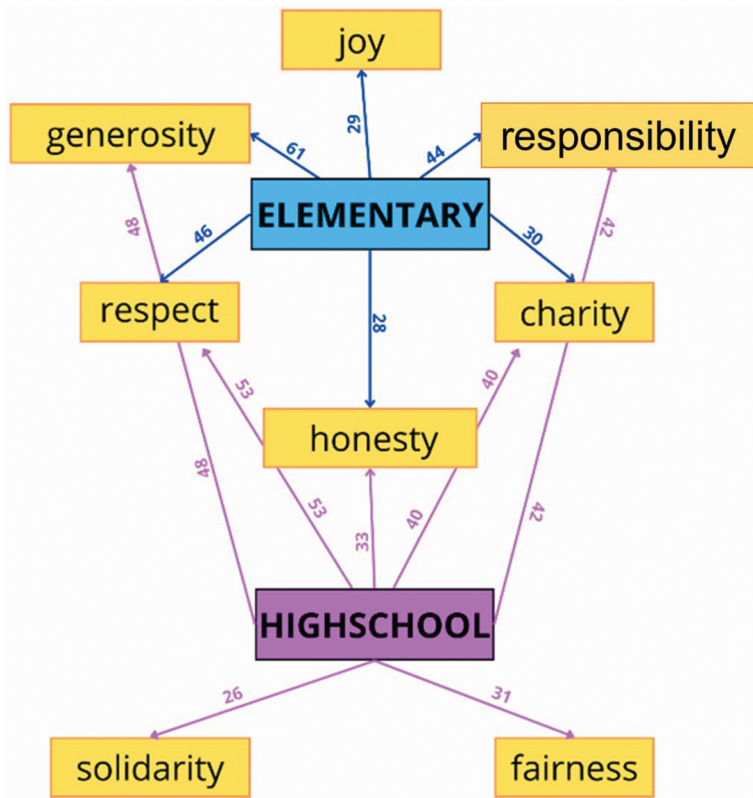


Figure 2. Similarities and differences in virtues promoted at elementary and middle/high school level. Note: List of the main virtues according to school stage, with the frequency found (shown on the arrows).

Question 11 and question 8 point to the respondents' concept of moral education in virtues and values.

Table 9. Civic virtues most promoted at school.

Civic virtues	Mentions
1. respect	53
2. solidarity	26
3. responsibility	12
4. patriotism	9
5. justice	9
6. tolerance	9
7. empathy	7
8. effort	7
Total	132

The majority consider virtues and values to be different concepts (60.1%), although for a significant group they are the same (22.5%). A not small group considers that even though they are different, they are similar (14.4%).

Analysing the content of the responses, it is possible to identify three basic distinctions that express the difference between virtues and values according to our respondents. The first is that virtues are internal, and values are external (25 times). The second distinction is that values are attitudinal or cognitive and virtues are operational (47 times). The third is that virtues are Christian, and values are secular (8 times). In [Table 10](#) we can see some examples.

Table 10. Differences between virtues and values according to respondents.

Values as something external and virtues as something internal (25 answers)	Values more secular and virtues more Christian (8 answers)	Values more attitudinal, cognitive, and virtue more operative. (47 answers)
<i>'Virtues are a habit that helps us to do good. Values are what is considered good and desirable for a person to do.'</i>	<i>'There's a nuance that differentiates it: values have a secularist connotation, which tries to exclude any Christian roots (although this is not always the intention when the term is used).'</i>	<i>'Education in values seems to me to be more generic (principles, convictions). To educate in virtue is to focus on the way of being and acting of those being educated.'</i>
<i>'Values are criteria that mark us in our family, society, etc., but virtue is when you manage to make those values a way of life.'</i>	<i>'It could be the same thing, but that depends on your definition of the terms. I think virtues are more directly derived from Christ, while values can more easily be derived from anywhere.'</i>	<i>'Courage is a criterion for action and virtue is the habit – living that value as a way of life. So, they are complementary and always go hand in hand.'</i>
<i>'I don't think it is the same thing. Educating in values is a more civic sphere, of respect and responsibility in your life as a citizen, parent, professional. Educating in virtues has to do with a more transcendental sphere.'</i>	<i>'Virtue is concerned with a higher ideal than that of the social constructor, on which values depend. Therefore, values are founded on a particular culture while the origin of virtues is divine.'</i>	<i>'No, because you can know the value but not apply it in your daily life. For example, I can know what Honesty means but not be honest in my daily life. The virtue is to be honest.'</i>
<i>'Virtues are everything that God gives us to put at the service of society that can be trained and improved (also to counteract vices) and values are those items necessary for life in society that the school, as a subsidiary of the families, must promote but which must be established in the family.'</i>		<i>'Values education is necessary for virtue education. We first need to know what we value to be able to put it into practice and take it on board.'</i>

From the responses we can identify two approaches or paradigms that are present in our sample: an approach that stresses the importance of virtues in moral education and other that stresses the importance of civic values related to cognitive and social development.

In classifying the responses -based on the differences in terms of terminological preferences- we found that 126 of the respondents assumed the virtue education approach, while twenty-eight followed value education approach. It was not possible to classify the answers of the remaining respondents (6) as they did not give a clear answer.

Each paradigm prefers certain terms. The answers of the respondents who assume the virtue education paradigm, tend to use words such as habitus (36 times) while, those followers of the value education paradigm, hardly mention it (1 time). Something similar happens with the word formation (41 vs. 1), integral (23 vs. 0) and Christ or Gospel (13 vs. 0). The word development, on the other hand, is proportionally more used in the value education paradigm (it appears in 21.4% of the responses) than in the virtue education approach (it appears in only 13.4% of the responses). We did not find a significant preference for the word value or values in either paradigm: in the value education paradigm it appears seven times, while in the virtue education paradigm it appears thirty-two times. Similarly, the word ‘educate’, or ‘education’ appears 49 times in the virtue education approach and 13 times in the value education paradigm, which does not imply a significant difference if we consider the sample sizes. Examples are given below in Table 11.

Table 11. Terminological preferences and differences between virtue and value education.

Virtue Education Paradigm	Value Education Paradigm
‘An educational model where the experience of human virtues is evident in the daily experience inside and outside the classroom’.	‘To prepare children to be people who are consistent in their thinking and who help to create a better society’.
‘It is the formation of people in the face of the perennial values of Christian humanism’.	‘A positive approach to education for cognitive development ’.
‘Virtue education is the intentional teaching of character to students in a school context with the ultimate goal of increasing human flourishing’.	‘An education based on fostering the development of each of the different abilities of the different pupils in a classroom’.
‘It is to develop good operational habits in pupils with intentionality so that they can make them their own and lead them to be people of integrity and do good’.	‘ Developing and empowering students’ skills, so that they can intervene positively in their immediate context. Adapt the contents to the uniqueness of the student, for their easy and better acquisition.’
‘That which seeks to support the development of qualities, human habits such as goodness, commitment to others, the development of the common good, among others’.	‘Education in virtues exercises a good in each person that allows them to perfect the cognitive part’.
‘To foster in students the desire to give the best of themselves for the love of truth and beauty’.	‘A set of pedagogical strategies that help to close teaching-learning processes permeated by a backbone called values and thus the adoption of virtues’.
‘To form the mind, will and heart of people so that they are well disposed to discern, choose and enjoy goodness, truth, beauty and love, having Christ as their model, centre and criterion of life’.	Promote capacities that could be applied with values.
‘It is to educate our student according to the Catholic values defined in our Pedagogical Principles’.	‘Educate so that children acquire and truly internalise values , prioritising them as the basis of all learning’.

*The words in bold are to highlight preferred terms in the paradigms.

Another aim of the study was to identify the most important actors in virtue education. Respondents' answers to question 14, grouped by categories, allow us to identify five types of agents who play a significant role in virtue education: teachers, non-teaching staff, pastoral team, family members and students as shown in [Table 12](#).

Table 12. Key actors in virtue education.

Category	Agents	Frequency
Teaching Staff	Teachers	105
	Academic coordinator	9
	Religion Teachers	5
	Mentors	25
	Principals	19
Non-Teaching Staff	Dean of students	7
	Formators	
	Person in charge of camps	3
	Instructors	8
	Deans of discipline	15
	Orientation Department	11
	Co-workers	10
	School employees	21
	Pastoral team	5
	Chaplain	8
Family and Society	Consecrated people	10
	Parents	23
	Family	2
Students	Grandparents	1
	Society	1
	Students	28

The teacher is considered the most relevant agent of virtue education.

Another objective of the research was to identify the most used practices in virtue education. The most relevant were divided into the following categories as shown in [Table 13](#):

Table 13. Most relevant virtue education practices.

Practice	Frequency	Definition and examples
Experiential	64	Practices that are more experiential within the school dynamics, such as educating in virtues through stories, films, school discipline, games, conflict and emotion management, experiential classes, coexistence, excursions, testimonies.
Campaigns and Competitions	61	Practices that seek to work on virtue education through competitions that include incentives and recognition.
Theoretical training	47	Practices aimed at theoretical training in virtue such as parents' school, theoretical classes, staff courses, training activities, conferences.
Social	41	Practices that have a social dimension such as missions, social responsibility activities, volunteering, social participation.
Personal Attention	23	Practices that seek the individual or group accompaniment of the student such as personal interviews, or dialogues, listening courts, mentoring.
Spiritual	13	Practices with a more spiritual dimension such as celebration of sacraments, prayer, pilgrimages, bible reading, religious teaching.

The most used are the so-called experiential ones as well as campaigns and competitions; and the least used are the so-called spiritual ones.

Discussion

The information collected clearly shows that the representatives that were surveyed consider virtue education to be of greater importance. Although education authorities promote the values education paradigm, omitting to mention virtues, most schools (84.7%) have a virtues education programme, compatible with values education, in which experiential practices predominate. Kolb's (2015) educational model of experiential learning has a certain affinity.

It is also reasonable that since Latin America (in particular Mexico) is a region with a Christian tradition, there is a great vitality in terms of education in virtues. Christian educational institutions, according to some studies, are more likely to assume a model or paradigm of virtue education and for their teachers to assume a moral role towards their students (Revell and Arthur 2007). It is not surprising, therefore, that in the sample of schools studied (mostly Christian-inspired) we find interest in virtue education.

Other important finding is the concept of virtue and the concept of value that school managers express in their responses. The values are more related to the attitudes and reasoning of the person while the virtues are considered more linked to the person's way of being and acting.

As for the virtues most frequently mentioned, it is interesting to compare this finding with those of the VIA Youth Survey (VIA-YS). According to this study, gratitude, good humour, and love are the most developed virtues in the opinion of the young people themselves. The least developed are prudence, forgiveness, religiosity (or spirituality) and self-regulation (Park, Peterson and Seligman 2006). Good humour does not appear, and gratitude occupies an intermediate position. Instead, temperance and responsibility are more prominent. One explanation may lie in who answers the questionnaires: in our sample it is the school managers and teachers, while in the VIA-YS sample it is the young people themselves who answer the questionnaires. In any case, our study confirms the importance given to relational virtues, especially in middle/high school, above operational and intellectual virtues. As in the VIA-YS, it is striking how little mention is made of intellectual virtues.

The most frequently mentioned civic virtues are respect, solidarity, and responsibility. There is a remarkable coincidence with virtues promoted in schools linked to character education programmes in the United States (Lickona 1996).

It is important the finding regarding the differences between schools (in different countries and their principles) and the existence of formal or non-formal programmes of virtue education. Spain seems to be the country where formal virtue education programmes are least implemented. This can be explained by the effect of secularisation in culture and the view of character education as outdated.

As for the concept of virtues and values, the results indicate that these concepts are close and linked to each other according to the respondents. Educating in virtues implies educating in values, and vice versa. Certainly, differences are noted (e.g. virtues are more interior and at the same time have to do with action, while values are more attitudinal and cognitive) but they are not opposed to each other. The responses express that there is no rejection between paradigms but that school managers, even recognising differences and having their preferences, seek to integrate both approaches in moral education.

The most practised virtues point to the relational domain, which responds to the fact that the school interacts with people all the time. Our research recognises the importance of these virtues, particularly the so-called ‘civic’ virtues. The scarce presence of intellectual virtues is striking, as is the lack of reference to the theme of truth and goodness. Moral reasoning, which is being neglected, should be promoted. It is therefore necessary to recover *phronesis* or practical wisdom, i.e. to educate in prudence in all its dimensions and expressions.

The research points in this direction: moral education is a central issue in schools, which considers both virtues and values education, particularly in Christian schools. In general, education in virtues is intentional and it is organised through a specific work programme with concrete strategies and practices. In this intentional effort to educate in virtues, the whole community has an educational role, but the main agents are the teachers. They are undoubtedly expected to provide education in virtues and not only academic or competence teaching. Their training is key.

In certain virtue education proposals, there may be an excessive preoccupation with external behaviours, judging by some of the respondents’ answers. It is a contradiction because virtue education should be oriented towards the interiority of the person: the intentionality of a good and the priority of being over making. Education in virtues needs to be purified of an inappropriate behaviourist bias.

Although teacher training in virtues is considered essential (100% responses say so), the reality in Ibero-America shows that there is little teacher training available in this area (Fuentes 2018).

Public policies in virtues education are not particularly relevant according to the respondents. Perhaps the answers are biased and in fact they do have an influence, but we have not been able to find evidence of this.

Conclusions

There is a genuine interest on virtue education and training teachers in virtue education. A large majority of schools (not only Christian) have intentional activities or programmes to educate in virtues or values. We can observe that for most respondents virtues and values are different concepts, however, a significant percentage consider them to be similar. Although they are different concepts, they are not opposed to each other, but rather complement each other, both in theory and in practice.

The character or virtue education paradigm proposed is more practically oriented, whereas the value education paradigm is more attitudinal and intellectual. All these elements (cognitive, affective, practical) are needed for an adequate education in virtue.

For the future, it would be useful to apply the survey to a larger and more universal sample of countries and types of schools, to be able to better compare the differences. The limitations of the sample do not allow conclusions but offer exploratory hypotheses. In particular, the sample should include more public and non-denominational schools.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire

- (1) School Principal or Teacher
- (2) Gender: male or female
- (3) How long have you been teaching
- (4) Name of school
- (5) Country
- (6) Type of school: private, charter, public
- (7) Does the school have Christian principles: yes/no
- (8) What do you understand by virtue education?
- (9) Do you think that education in virtues is the same as education in values? Justify your answer
- (10) Tell us if the school has a virtue education programme or something similar.
- (11) What are the six main virtues you seek to educate in your elementary school students?
- (12) What are the six main virtues you seek to educate in your high school students?
- (13) Among the virtues you promote, are there any that have been included on request of the governmental educational authorities?
- (14) What civic virtues do you promote the most at school?
- (15) Mention four educational practices or strategies used in the school to educate in virtues.
- (16) Who are the most important agents in the virtue education of students in the school
- (17) Does the school promote the formation of virtues among peers, i.e. among students?
- (18) Is it important in your school to have teachers trained in this area?