

The Correlation between Students' Academic Achievement and Ethical and Moral Activities Involvement in a Christian Institution

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Abstract

This study investigates the correlation between students' academic achievement and their involvement in ethical and moral activities. The sample of the study was 472 students from Asia-Pacific International University, Thailand, who were enrolled in different programs in the second semester of the academic year 2013-2014. Data were obtained from the internal software created by the IT department at Asia-Pacific International University called System for Administration, Reports, Requests and Academics. Data were analyzed using One-way ANOVA to examine significant difference between students' academic achievement and their participation in ethical and moral activities. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's r) was used to analyze the correlation between students' academic achievement and their ethical and moral activities involvement. The study revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between students academic achievement and their involvement in ethical and moral activities at $\alpha = 0.05$. The findings of the study also revealed that there was also a statistically positive correlation between students' academic achievement and their involvement in ethical and moral activities (r -value = 0.447, p -value = 0.000 at $\alpha = 0.01$).

Keywords: academic achievement, ethical and moral activities, college students

Introduction

Off-site school activities have been recognized for promoting ways to enhance students' school experiences and increase social skills, self-discipline, public interest, and leadership skills (Adeyemo, 2010). Extracurricular activities and activities promoting ethical and moral values have long been integrated into the school syllabus as a means to propel students to a greater path of life, as well as to develop desired graduate traits outlined by various stakeholders. Worldwide educational systems perceive moral values as a significant component to govern behaviors and cultivate a person to be upright and virtuous. These ethical and moral values are consolidated either directly or indirectly in a school curriculum. In Thailand, for example, the Implementation Handbook of the National Qualification Framework for Higher Education designates five domains of learning, which are integrated into courses that students need to take. The five domains are ethical and moral integrity, knowledge, cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and responsibility, and numerical analysis, communication and IT skills. Of the five, ethical and moral development takes precedence over other domains (Handbook of National Qualification Framework for Higher Education in Thailand, 2006). This is also apparent in the manual of the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment for external quality assessment, whereby the first indicator in the ONESQA manual (ONESQA, 2014) on quality of graduate stated the following: "students should live worthwhile and valuable daily lives; they are on good terms with others, willing to serve, and develop various moral virtues such as discipline, gratitude, kindness, patience, honesty, frugality, diligence, unselfishness. They also obtain work experience, join in extracurricular activities, and engage in beneficial service" (p. 1). This criterion requires all learners in all programs of study to be engaged in beneficial service (extracurricular) while pursuing professional skills and knowledge at school.

At Asia-Pacific International University (AIU), holistic education is provided in which the principles of education are grounded by Biblical values and students are prepared for lives of joyful and selfless service to others (Academic Bulletin, 2014). The institution is guided by principles and philosophy of education stated

over a century ago by a church pioneer, Ellen G. White, in her book entitled 'Education' published in 1903. She stated, "True education means more than the perusal of a certain course of study. It has to do with the whole being and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers." (p. 13). This statement can be explained that education must not put an emphasis in the learner of one particular dimension, but it must deal with the whole being, namely, physical development (curriculum or programs that enhance physical health which includes practical work-study programs, community service projects, or service learning), mental empowerment (all subjects or courses offered in school settings that promote function of mental discipline and empowerment), and spiritual emphasis (extra-curricular activities such as personal devotions, worships, prayers, vespers, chapels, or other religious-related activities that enhance an individual's faith in the Christian God).

In corresponding to its mission, the institution requires all students to attend a Chapel Program every Wednesday morning and this ethical and moral activity is known as Character Development Program (GENL110) and it is obligatory for all students at Asia-Pacific International University. Failure to attend this character development program on a weekly basis or receiving a 'U' grade will be noted in students' academic records. The university enforces this policy to implement its identity to uphold ethical and moral values in building desirable characters in its students. Boarding students at Asia-Pacific International University are strongly encouraged to attend dormitory worships to learn and digest moral lessons from the Christian Bible perspectives to live a worthy and meaningful life. It is not only this character development program and worships that students are required to attend, but also a variety of activities as well as other religious-related programs and community service programs in which students are urged to be engaged in. The institution believes that all these ethical and moral exercises will prepare students to be well-rounded citizens with public-mindedness in serving others selflessly in the community they live in.

The Office of Higher Education Commission in Thailand has given a strong emphasis on ethical and moral values to be integrated in all courses in addition to theoretical knowledge and skills imparted to learners. To address these concerns as well as to enrich other researchers' findings on positive impact of students' involvement in extracurricular activities, this research intends to examine if extra-curricular programs (ethical and moral activities, community service activities, and other religious-related activities) organized by Asia-Pacific International University have any impact on students' academic achievement. The findings could serve as a reference point for further development of students' character.

Review of Literature

Morality is associated with both a descriptive and a normative sense. In the descriptive sense, morality refers to a code of proper conduct corroborated by individuals or groups (Gert, 2012). In contrast, the normative sense defines 'morality' as a code of conduct, given specified conditions and endorsed by particular groups (Luco, 2014). Pornrunroj (2014) stated that morality is a beneficial act which each organization, society, or community prizes its value. Morality is essential and necessary, and it is a desired characteristic which differ individuals to be distinctive. According to the Pornrunroj (2014), the moral values which enrich a person to be virtuous and noble are such as self-discipline, conscience, gratitude, kindness, patience, honesty, austerity, perseverance, and selflessness. Morality refines one's character and behavior to be well thought of and admired. A person with moral values is able to endure hardship, overcome criticism, and optimistically confront challenges in a tranquil manner. Guseinov asserted that the golden rule of morality is "a rule of mutuality" which means "relationship between people are moral when they are interchangeable as subjects of individually responsible conduct and when they have the ability to put themselves in other's places." (Guseinov, 2014, p. 91). In religious perspectives, for example Christianity, morality is based on God's character and laws outlined in the biblical doctrines, and morality is modeled by Christ. In the Christian perspective, morality should not differ from one person to another for the Bible is the source of morality and so is God. The golden rule in the scripture sums up the core doctrine of Christianity that human beings must love their God and their neighbors. Any individual who complies with this golden rule and perceives that God is the source of morality, that person is anticipated to act and live moral life. In Buddhism, morality has to do with the Five Precepts, namely 1) *ahimsa*, no killing; 2) no stealing; 3) no lying; 4) no adultery; and 5) no imbibing in intoxicating drinks (Sellmann, 2009). Buddhists believe that moral development can be secured when a person can control his own actions or refrain from exercising thoughts or actions that yield negative effects, and making moral decisions can lead to positive feelings and emotional enhancement (Malti, Keller & Buchmann, 2012).

A number of research articles showed that learners who uplift ethical and moral values and actively participate in ethical and moral activities can improve their inner potential as well as their academic performance. In other words, students' academic achievement may be linked with their involvement in activities that promote ethical and moral values (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Broh, 2002; Huang & Change, 2004; Jeynes, 2007; Wang & Shiveley, 2008; Strapp & Farr, 2010; Mooney, 2010; Erickson & Phillips, 2012). Research by Adeyemo (2010) found that students' involvement in extracurricular activities helped boost their achievement in learning physics, and social activities that they were engaged in positively influenced their academic achievement, while Metsapelto and Pulkkinen's study (2012) revealed that students' participation in academic clubs was associated with their higher academic achievement and lower internalizing problems compared to those non-participating students. Extracurricular activities provide students with a sense of personal belonging to their committed group and they often receive moral support from companions to achieve the objectives or common goal of their plan. Chip, Cynthia and Jane (2003) studied the improvement of student achievement through character education with middle school students in Chicago, Illinois, and they found in their post-intervention data that the improvement of moral character such as integrity, honesty, trustworthiness, and respect increased student academic achievement. Character education facilitates students on decision making, which Stiff-William (2010) calls 'decision filter' where a decision making process engages both cognitive and affective processes and it supports individuals when they encounter barriers or problems in life. This 'decision filter' will enhance learners' ability to make perceptive and sound decisions in life. Mooney (2010) and Erickson and Phillips (2012) revealed that extra curriculum activities such as religious activities which promote morality and virtue had a positive impact on student success. Mooney found that students who attended religious services once a week or more during their last year of high school had higher grades at college than non-regular religious attendees. In her study, she averred that religious students reported studying more, partying less, and dedicating more time to extracurricular activities which they find beneficial to their academic life, while Erickson and Phillips (2012) revealed in their study a positive relationship between religious participation and educational outcomes. Mooney's (2010) and Erickson and Phillips' (2012) studies are congruent with that of Jeynes (2007) whose study showed that students attending religious schools had higher levels of academic achievement than those who are in public schools. Jeynes affirmed that religious schools outperformed nonreligious schools due to differences in school culture such as school atmosphere, racial harmony, level of school discipline, school violence, and amount of homework done. This, according to Jackson and Coursey (1986, cited in Jeynes, 2007, p. 15) is because "religious people are more likely to have internal locus of control and perform well." Students attending a religious institution with strict regulations and disciplinary procedures under the supervision of caring teachers tend to reduce the academic gap and succeed in school. Jeynes (2007) argued that religious commitment could have a positive impact on academic outcomes. This is echoed by Sumari, et al. (2010) where religiosity is cited as one of the significant factors that contributes to academic achievement.

With these in mind, the present study intends to enrich existing ideas by examining the correlation between students' academic achievement and their involvement in ethical and moral activities regulated by Asia-Pacific International University, as well as investigating if there is significant difference between students with a higher academic achievement and the ones with lower achievement with respect to their participation in ethical and moral activities. The researcher anticipates that the current study would contribute to the understanding of the relation between moral enrichment and academic achievement. It could also serve as a reference for individuals who have invested in a large amount of time in promoting extracurricular activities that are associated with ethical and moral values in order to enhance and nurture character development in students' lives while pursuing a Christian education.

Research Methodology

Participants

The target population for this study was 472 college students consisting of 204 male and 268 female students enrolled in different majors at Asia-Pacific International University, Thailand, in the second semester of academic year 2013-2014. Of this population, 223 students were from the Thai program while 249 were from the International program. These students resided in the university dormitories so that they could independently participate in the on-going extra-curricular activities provided by the university.

Instrument

The researcher retrieved data of students' records of extracurricular activities attendances from the learning management system of AIU called SARRA (System for Administration, Reports, Requests and Academics). This software was built on .NET framework version 3.5 and used ASP.NET and runs on Windows Server 2008. SARRA features different capacities and the system generates grade reports, financial report, expense report, course evaluation, and other reports such as worship attendance, citizenship point, learning center attendance, and many more. SARRA also provides different features and facilitates administrative procedures for various departments. For example, the registrar from Admission and Records Office can use this software for student data management, course evaluation management, student academic achievement (GPA). Thus, the researcher obtained prompt data of students' ethical and moral activities attendances which were recorded in the software and investigated their correlation with student academic achievement (GPA) which was provided by the Admission and Records Office.

Students' ethical and moral activities attendances' scores were tabulated into percentage by SARRA as the students participated in such activities as dormitory worships, vespers, Sabbath worships, community service on Saturday afternoon, chapel programs, family group, student assemblies, departmental worships, and small groups or clubs. All these ethical and moral activities attendances were recorded by student attendance system which was closely monitored by student residence hall assistants.

Results and Discussion

The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Frequency of Percentage of subjects divided according to gender, program of study, year of study, and major of study (N= 472).

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	204	43.2
Female	264	56.8
Program of study		
International	249	52.8
Thai	223	47.2
Year of study		
Freshman	150	31.8
Sophomore	115	24.4
Junior	101	21.4
Senior	106	22.5
Major of study		
English	250	53.0
Business	111	23.5
Science	26	5.5
Theology	23	4.9
Education and psychology	62	13.1

The majority of the research participants were English majors, which made up 53% of the total sample followed by business (23.5%), while the smallest group was theology students (4.9%).

The aims of this study were to examine the correlation between students' academic achievement and their involvement in ethical and moral activities, and to investigate if there is significant difference between students with higher academic achievement and the ones with lower academic achievement with regards to their involvement in the ethical and moral activities regulated by the university. The researcher assumed that getting involved in ethical and moral activities has a positive impact on students' academic performance. Table 2 below shows students' academic achievement and mean scores for involvement in ethical and moral activities.

Table 2. Learning achievement and mean scores and standard deviation of involvement in ethical and moral activities

Learning Achievement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
low achievement (0.00-1.99)	34	24.7009	24.36010
average achievement (2.00-2.99)	219	57.9098	37.00061
high achievement (3.00-4.00)	219	80.5990	35.90920
Total	472	66.0451	39.04755

As can be seen from Table 2, the analysis shows that students with higher learning achievement demonstrated greater involvement in ethical and moral activities ($M=80.59$, $SD=35.90$) than those students with average achievement ($M=57.90$, $SD=37.00$) and low achievement ($M=24.70$, $SD=24.36$). Interestingly, as the mean score of academic achievement increases, the mean score of ethical and moral activities involvement is also boosted subsequently as shown in Figure A.

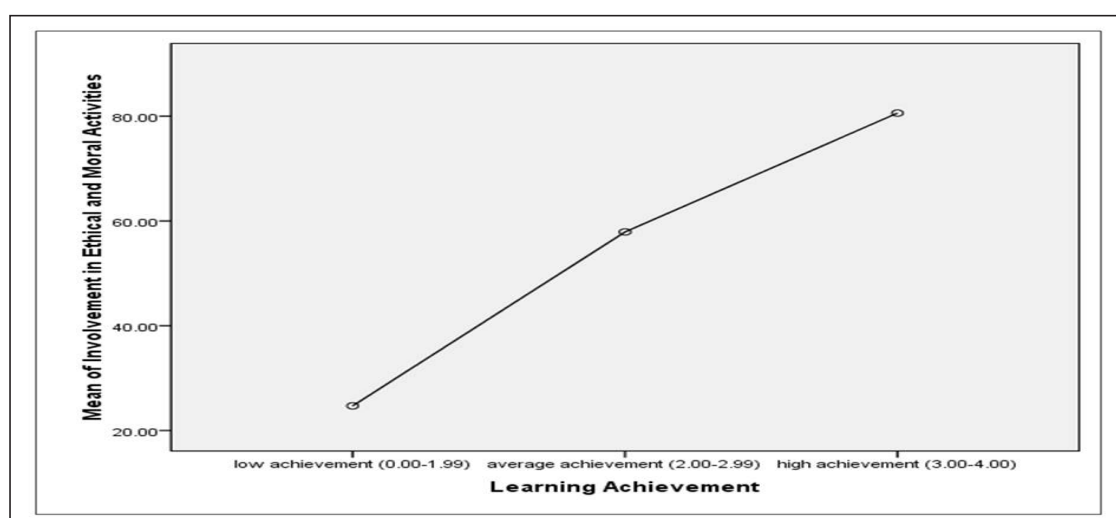


Figure A. Line graph of the mean of ethical and moral activities attendance vs academic achievement (GPA)

To determine whether there are significant differences among heterogeneous learners with regard to their involvement in ethical and moral activities, One-way ANOVA and Scheffe test were used to analyze data. The result of statistical analysis shows in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3. Analysis of the significant difference between heterogeneous learners in regard to their involvement in ethical and moral activities

(I) Learning Achievement	(J) Learning Achievement	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
low achievement (0.00-1.99)	average achievement (2.00-2.99)	-33.20893*	6.58834	.000	-49.3872	-17.0307
	high achievement (3.00-4.00)	-55.89816*	6.58834	.000	-72.0764	-39.7199
average achievement (2.00-2.99)	low achievement (0.00-1.99)	33.20893*	6.58834	.000	17.0307	49.3872
	high achievement (3.00-4.00)	-22.68922*	3.41563	.000	-31.0766	-14.3019

high achievement (3.00-4.00)	low achievement (0.00-1.99)	55.89816*	6.58834	.000	39.7199	72.0764
	average achievement (2.00-2.99)	22.68922*	3.41563	.000	14.3019	31.0766

*.The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4. Analysis of groups classified in different subset (Involvement in ethical and moral activities – Scheffe)

Learning Achievement	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
low achievement (0.00-1.99)	34	24.7009		
average achievement (2.00-2.99)	219		57.9098	
high achievement (3.00-4.00)	219			80.5990
Sig.		1.000	1.000	1.000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

In Table 3, One-way ANOVA statistical analysis shows that there are significant differences among the three different groups by their involvement in ethical and moral activities at $\alpha = .05$. Students with high academic achievement showed statistically significant difference from the other two groups with average achievement ($p=0.000$) and low academic achievement ($p=0.000$) by their participation in ethical and moral activities. Likewise, the group with average academic achievement shows statistically significant difference from their peers with low academic achievement ($p = 0.000$) by their participation in ethical and moral activities. The analysis also shows that the three different groups were classified in different subsets (Subset for $\alpha = 0.05$) as shown in Table 4.

To respond to the research objective of examining the correlation between students' academic achievement and their involvement in ethical and moral activities, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's r) was used to analyze data and the statistical analysis is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Correlation statistics between student academic achievement and their involvement in ethical and moral activities

		Involvement in Ethical and Moral Activities	Academic Achievement
Involvement in Ethical and Moral Activities	Pearson Correlation	1	.447**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	188.065	5194.253
	Covariance	.399	11.028
	N	472	472
Academic Achievement	Pearson Correlation	.477**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	5194.253	718138.859
	Covariance	11.028	1524.711
	N	472	472

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The statistical analysis shows in Table 5 that there is a significantly positive correlation between students' academic achievement and their involvement in ethical and moral activities (r -value = 0.447, $p < 0.01$). In other words, ethical and moral activities organized in the university may play a positive role in students'

academic performance. Such finding is congruent with Mooney's (2010) and of Sumari, Hussin, and Siral's (2010) who all reported that ethical and moral as well as religious daily practices establish social control and promote positive educational outcomes at school settings.

Discussion

From the results of this study, it can be assumed that ethical and moral activities organized by AIU may have a positive bearing on the students' academic performance. The findings of this current study suggested that students with higher academic achievement (GPA) show trends of positive involvement in ethical and moral activities. From this current study it is obvious that participation in ethical and moral activities did not lower students' academic performance per se, but instead helped them to persist and perform better in their academic life. The finding of the study is congruent with Wang and Shiveley's (2008) whose study revealed that extracurricular activities have a very positive impact on the academic performance of students at Sacramento State. They discovered that students achieved higher rates of retention and graduation, better GPAs when students are engaged in activities such as board members of associated students, residence hall associates, orientation leaders, or student club leaders. The findings of this current study also corresponded with Jeynes' (2007), Mooney's (2010), and Erickson and Phillips' (2012) who found that attending religious activities increases students' academic achievement and reduces disciplinary behavioral problems as well as drug problems in school.

The results of this study paralleled other researchers' works on correlation between students' academic achievement and their participation in extracurricular activities as studied and synthesized in the literature review (Broh, 2002; Huang & Change, 2004; Jeynes, (2007); Wang & Shiveley, 2008; Mooney, 2010; Erickson & Phillips, 2012). This phenomenon can be explained from different angles. From the researcher's perspectives, the current study results can be interpreted as the following:

Ethical and moral activities as well as religious-related activity enhance students' academic performance. This is because religion plays a vital role in an individual's life and religious belief and practice as suggested by Mooney (2010) where religion "give(s) believers solace in time of trouble, thereby enabling them to deal better than nonbelievers with stressful events that might otherwise negatively impact their academic achievement." (p. 199).

According to Jeynes (2003: 119) religious practice produces "internal locus of control" in propelling devotees to confront challenges with positive perception. Religious practice can also establish social control and promote positive educational outcomes (Mooney, 2010), and involvement in religious activities during adolescence has long-term effects on a range of life outcomes which result in mental health as well as educational attainment. Religiosity is one of the significant determinants of high academic success and moral standard, so students who uphold religious disciplines and bring them into compliance in daily practice will enhance their mental ability (Sumari, Hussin, & Siral, 2010). In the Christian and Biblical perspective, the scripture claims, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge" and "the LORD GIVES WISDOM; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 1:7, 2:6, New International Version). Nedley argued that in a Christian school setting, nurturing spiritual faith and reading spiritual materials on a daily basis could enhance the brain function as well as intellectual empowerment, so students' academic performance can be improved (Nedley, 2010).

Students' active involvement in ethical and moral activities at Asia-Pacific International University could be an essential determinant for them to apply for available educational scholarships procured by the university. As a practice here at the university, an ad hoc committee assigned to select qualified candidates for scholarships would often define a criterion that applicants must exhibit characteristics that depict an earnest involvement in ethical and moral activities regulated by the institution, apart from their outstanding academic performance. Along with this, a number of academic excellence awards initiated by various departments are presented annually during the consecration ceremony on graduation day attended by academia, guardians, patrons, distinguished guests, relatives and friends. This honorable ceremony brings dignity and acknowledgement to distinctive students whose academic achievement as well as life aspect is well-worth praising. In achieving a favorable outcome, learners are often motivated by internal and external factors to stimulate them to reach their goals since both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have a positive relation with students' learning achievement (Kitjaroonchai & Kitjaroonchai, 2012). In addition to this, a number of subjects used for this study are sponsored students whom their respective mission, church, or patron anticipates will grow in wholesomeness as defined in the Adventist holistic educational philosophy; the harmonious development

of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers (White, 1903). The university strongly emphasizes these three aspects of development through ethical and moral activities in order to shape students to become fully prepared to live in a competitive society where ethical and moral values are often neglected.

Furthermore, involvement in a committed group or club activity strengthens social bonding among the members. The findings of this study correspond with Wang and Shiveley (2008), whose study revealed that students obtained better GPA and higher good standing when they are engaged in activities such as serving as a board member or serving in a leadership position in student clubs. This might be due to social relations among the members that boost them to support each other to achieve their set goals as well as learning objectives. Their sense of belonging drives them to harmoniously achieve the outcomes. As Hinck and Brandell mentioned (cited in Fujita, 2005, p. 6), "involvement in community and service learning affects learners' higher level thinking skills, motivation to learn, application of learning, problem solving, as well as basic academic skills." Students' involvement in a well-structured community service, club activity, or ethical and moral activities could enhance their potentiality as they learn skills necessary for life, social skills, and time management. Huang and Chang (2004) claimed that students' co-curricular involvement is highly associated with cognitive development, affective growth, and interpersonal skills growth. Thus, students should be encouraged to participate in such practical activities to maximize their cognitive domain.

Ethical and moral activities in particular play significant roles in students' lives by improving their characters, self-discipline, positive attitudes as well as school performance, as they deal with internal and external conflicts in solemn manner with the application of an internal locus of control mode (Jeynes, 2003). Students who uphold moral values and religious disciplines rigorously may respond well to challenges to their worldview and attempt to conquer those obstacles by learning more about their faith and striving to excel in their field of study in order to show their peers and teachers that religious faith and academic life are not mutually exclusive (Mooney, 2010).

Ethical and moral values as well as religious principles have a positive impact on students' academic achievement and they are inevitably needed in all walks of life in this competitive world where materialism and intellectualism are prized. The knowledge of ethical and moral values and religious principles need to be fostered together with academic knowledge, and demonstrated through an individual's life for service to people and society at large.

Recommendations for Further Study

The study provides useful information regarding the issue of whether extracurricular activities such as ethical and moral activities have a positive or negative impact on students' academic performance. Additional questions pertaining to whether or not ethical and moral activities have a positive impact on the academic performance of students need further investigation. Thus, the researcher would suggest that consideration be given to further studies being made in the following areas:

1. This study should be replicated, using a different population, particularly Buddhist or non-Christian students who enrolled in a Christian school in other regions to investigate if ethical and moral activities or religious-related activities regulated by a Christian-based school have any impact on their academic performance or college life.
2. The data sources used for analyzing correlation between academic achievement and involvement in ethical and moral activities in this current study are quantitative in nature. Therefore, a qualitative study should be conducted to enrich cross-validation of data for in-depth discussion of the findings.
3. A study on the effects of involvement in the university's ethical and moral activities on students' future profession should be researched or followed up to investigate whether or not these extracurricular activities have an impact on students' profession or daily life following graduation

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the correlation between students' academic achievement and their involvement in ethical and moral activities as well as to examine if there is any significant difference between students with higher academic achievement and the ones with lower academic achievement with regard to their involvement in ethical and moral activities. The study's results showed that involvement in ethical and moral activities had a positive correlation with students' academic achievement. The findings also revealed

that there was a statistically significant difference between students with high GPA and those with lower GPA. To sum up, the current study results should be valuable to the Student Administration Office and Chaplaincy Office at Asia-Pacific International University as well as other sister institutions who have invested a large amount of time to regulate these meaningful activities in order to foster students to grow mentally, socially, and spiritually as defined by the Adventist education philosophy.

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