

Title

A study on the perceived life values of college students in an introductory course to the Bible

Research Overview

This study investigates whether the instruction of the guided reading of the Bible pericopes and issue discussions and reflections would affect college students' attitudes towards life values. A group of college students from various majors taking the general education course on the introduction to the Bible was asked to complete a pretest and a posttest. The results show significant improvements in faith-related cognition, moral values, and attitudes after the 16-week course intervention.

Purpose of Study

In the information bombing era of social media, college students receive all kinds of information, especially information of injustices and inequality that may have fostered the spread of “cancel culture” worldwide (Ng, 2022; Norris, 2023, etc.) and in Taiwan (e.g., Cheng and Liu, 2020). While alternative perspectives or contrarians that instigate heated debates challenge or question dominant group cultures, Janssens and Spreeuwenberg (2022), with a morally neutral stance, consider this “cancelling” phenomenon as “redistributing attention”. Even though it seems that various views and value judgments can be voiced, a question concerning the goal of human life remains unanswered: “as a human being, what is the meaning of living?,” which lies at the core of the “three fundamental questions of life” in life education in terms of reflecting on “why we live, how we should live, and how we can live the life we ought to live” (e.g., Sun, 2010, 2015; Wang, 2013, etc.). These questions highlight the importance and urgency of life education.

As these issues have been widely discussed and valued across various disciplines, religious studies offer an alternative perspective on life education (Chan, 2001; Cheng, 2013) by providing unique insights into the value and meaning of life (e.g., Kane & Jacobs, 2010; Duche-Pérez et al., 2024) as well as contributing to spiritual well-being (Pong, 2018). Despite that, there is a lack of empirical studies of integrating Biblical texts into life education courses in higher education contexts (e.g., Chang, 2017, 2019). Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' perceived cognition of life value prior to and after their engagement with reading the Biblical pericopes.

Research Methods

With the aim to investigate the effects of guided reading of biblical pericopes and related Christian classical texts on university students' perceived cognition of life value, a quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design was adopted, and the Perceived Life Education Scale (PLES) was used as the data collection instrument to examine changes in students before and after the course intervention. The PLES consists of 21 items across three dimensions and demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .59-.73$).

The course was designed to focus on the “three fundamental questions of life” and consisted of guided reading of biblical pericopes, group discussions, and written reflections. During in-class activities, students were encouraged to reflect on life-related issues and construct personal values. Specifically, books of Genesis, Ecclesiastes, and the Gospel of John addressed the issue of “why we live?.” The excerpts from the books of Exodus, Joshua, and the wisdom in Proverbs highlighted the aspect of “how we should live?.” Moreover, the transformation life of Jacob, Joseph and Paul corresponded to “how we can live the life we ought to live.”

The course was implemented over a 16-week period from September 2024 to January 2025 with 61 undergraduate students from various academic majors at a university in southern Taiwan. A pretest was administered in the first week of the course and a posttest in the final week. After excluding incomplete or invalid questionnaires, 30 matched pretest and posttest responses were retained for analysis. Paired-samples t-tests were employed as the primary method of data analysis to compare differences in students' perceived cognition of life education before and after the intervention.

Results and Discussion

The results of the paired-samples t-test show a significant improvement in the overall scores of the three dimensions -- “why we live,” “living out life,” and “how to live,” suggesting that the course have had a positive impact on students' life education development. In the “why we live” dimension, students show significant gains in understanding biblical concepts of human composition ($t = -4.419, p < .001$) and the origin of life ($t = -3.673, p < .001$). In the “living out life” dimension, significant improvements are found in moral cognition and faith-based value identification, particularly in acting according to one's conscience ($t = -2.536, p = .017$) and recognizing the importance of the belief in Jesus ($t = -2.841, p = .008$). As for the “how

to live” dimension, students demonstrate a more positive attitude toward actively living out their lives ($t = -2.192$, $p = .037$). On the contrary, more abstract or rooted values such as life purpose, emotional adjustment, showing gratitude, and spiritual maturity are not shown much difference.

Overall, the findings suggest that the course was effective in enhancing faith-related cognition, moral values, and attitudes toward life practice, while deeper life attitudes and spiritual development await further observation. The findings provide practical implications for integrating religious texts into life education curricula in higher education.

Keywords

Life Education, Biblical Worldview, three fundamental questions of life, Scripture Reading