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Published in the Slovak Republic  
European Journal of Contemporary Education  
E-ISSN 2305-6746  
2021, 10(1): 148-158  
DOI: 10.13187/ejced.2021.1.148  
[www.ejournal1.com](http://www.ejournal1.com)

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## Correlations between Living Values and Life Skills of Secondary School Students in Vietnam

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### Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the relationship between the living values and life skills of 883 students in five secondary schools in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang. The questionnaire used in the study consists of 42 items reflecting 9 living values (Patriotism, Cooperation, Safety, Happiness, Tolerance, Hardworking, Love – Respect, Responsible for the future and Honesty) and 23 items reflecting 3 life skills (Autonomy, Problem Solving and Creativity, and Communication). The results show that: The students made a clear expression of the 9 living values and the 3 life skills. The living values and life skills were positively correlated with the Pearson correlation coefficients of from 0.33 to 0.684. The correlation coefficients between living values and life skills expressed by females are higher than those for males. The correlation coefficients between living values and life skills by grade level are positive. This study also showed the need to focus on educating the living values and life skills under the focus of the general education program in Vietnam today. The research provides a scientific basis and evidence that many high secondary schools in Vietnam are focusing on educating only life skills in the past decade will review and adjust their model and approach of life skills education. These practical results help reinforce the approach and educational model for integrated living values and life skills. Many schools, especially five schools of the sample group in Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang and Hanoi, can immediately adjust their current model of living values and life skills education.

**Keywords:** correlation, living value, life skill, secondary school student, living values and life skills education.

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## **1. Introduction**

Living values and life skills have been studied in many educational researches in order to be included in educational and mental health care systems (Dewey, 1939; Rath, 1959; Fichter, 1972; Kohlberg, Mayer, 1972; Rath et al., 1966, 1978; Bartlett, 1987; Oades, Anderson, 2012; Komalasari, 2012; Suyatno et al., 2017).

There are many different concepts of values and living values. Value can be understood as something that is gained, thanks to the way it is viewed (how it is appreciated), or something that is a result of the condition of itself and in relation to other things (e.g.: in relation to work, money, or any sort of standard metric) (Dewey, 1939). Everything that is beneficial, desirable or respectable for an individual and a society has a value (Fichter, 1972). Values are beliefs, attitudes, goals, emotions, and reasons that are assessed and selected after they have been considered, challenged and instilled in life (Rath et al., 1978). Values are socially shared ideas about what is good, desirable or important (Thio, 2005). Values refer to ideas held by individuals or organizations concerning the standards that define what is 'good' or 'bad', what is desirable, and what is not desirable (Giddens, 1991). Values can be defined as "principles and fundamental convictions that act as general guides to behaviors and standards by which particular actions are judged to be good or desirable" (Halstead, Taylor, 1996). Living values refer to core and common values of human beings; they reflect the nature of human beings, such as peace, love, respect, responsibility, tolerance, honesty, humility, happiness, cooperation, simplicity, freedom, safety, and solidarity, etc. (Living Values Education, 2020).

There are various life skills concepts. According to UNICEF, life skills are defined as psychosocial and interpersonal skills that are generally considered important (UNICEF, 2012). Life skills are the ability to perform functions fully and to participate in the daily life of an individual. They are the practical skills people need to lead a safe, healthy life, to control themselves, to behave appropriately towards others and in society and the ability to respond positively in daily life situations (WHO, 1999; UNESCO, 2003; Singh, 2003; UNICEF, 2013). OECD sorted life skills into three criteria, specifically: a) Key competencies which contribute to an overall successful life and a well-functioning society, b) Instrumental competencies which meet important challenges in a wide spectrum of relevant contexts, and c) Competencies that are relevant to all individuals.

Generally, life skills refer to a mixture of knowledge, behaviors, attitudes and values and some skills in order to do something and/or reach an aim. They include competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, organisation, social communication, adaptability and problem solving and cooperation on a democratic basis that are needed to actively shape a peaceful future (Singh, 2004).

Living values set a foundation for the orientation, leading, and regulation of human behaviors. Therefore, living values education is to help individuals perform behaviors/skills according to standards and values. A strong foundation of living values is undoubtedly an incentive to develop appropriate skills and/or behaviors. Life skills are influenced by living values; they are the expression of living values or the way an individual behaves in specific situations.

In many studies on social psychology, living values are considered an important factor motivating behaviors (Rockeach, 1968); Living values are also considered a factor especially relating to an adolescent's behavior and capacity. It has recently been realized by many researchers that an adolescent's values and goals can play an important role in determining similarities between social skills and capacity of behaviors. Joseph P. Allen (1989) et al. pointed out certain associations between values and social competencies (a sub-component of life skills) in adolescents. That is why living values education programs often also cover life skills. UNESCO and the International Association of Living Values Education (ALIVE) defined living value education as the discovery and development of 12 basic values (i.e.: Peace, Love, Respect, Responsibility, Tolerance, Honesty, Humility, Happiness, Cooperation, Simplicity, Freedom and Solidarity) and to educate and develop social-emotion and communication (Tillman, 2008).

It can be seen that the similarity of living values and life skills is that they help individuals live and work effectively and provide the foundation for an individual to adapt and integrate successfully into social life. UNESCO and ALIVE identified the fundamental criteria of building and maintaining a safe, healthy and happy school that are living values and life skills (UNESCO, 2016; Tillman, Colimina, 2000; UNESCO, 2019). The Mental Health Promotion and Policy (MHP) team of the Department of Mental Health in the World Health Organisation (WHO) stated: "Life skills education is designed to facilitate the practice and reinforcement of psychosocial skills in a

culturally and developmentally appropriate way; it contributes to the promotion of personal and social development, the prevention of health and social problems, and the protection of human rights” (WHO, 1999).

Therefore, living values and life skills education programs are provided in Vietnamese schools for grades 1-12. Most of the programs cover life skills; few cover living values or both life skills and living values. Those programs are diverse. They are spontaneously provided. There is no research evidence to help understand how logical or scientific they are and if there are any duplications.

We studied the relationship between living values and life skills in secondary school students so as to determine what living values and life skills should be included in a living values and life skills education program; Moreover, the study provides evidence for the selection of a living values and life skills education model.

## 2. Materials and methods

### Research sample

The study was conducted on a total of 883 students from grades 6 to 9 at five secondary schools in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang. The samples were selected with the consent of the local Districts Office of Education and Training (DOET), administrators and parents. All of the five schools are located in the cities, and they are not schools for talented students.

**Table 1.** The research samples

	Items	N	%
Gender	Male	406	46.0
	Female	476	54.0
	vacant	1	
Grades	6 (11 years old)	213	24.1
	7 (12 years old)	221	25.0
	8 (13 years old)	213	24.1
	9 (14 years old)	236	26.7
Places	Ha Noi	343	38.8
	Ho Chi Minh	355	40.2
	Da Nang	185	21.0
	Total		883 samples

### Research tools

A questionnaire was developed by the research team through three steps. In the first step, a set of living values and life skills based on 12 core values in the living values education program (LVEP) was added to a value of patriotism and 3 life skills program according to the orientation that the Ministry of Education and Training has set forth on learners' quality and capacity in a general education program. In the second step, an item pool of living values and life skills was set up based on previous researches and guiding documents on educational innovation promulgated by the Ministry of Education and Training. As a result, 95 items under 13 living values and 30 items under 3 life skills were developed. In the third step, the questionnaire was piloted on 2 sample groups and adjusted accordingly. The first group of 48 samples helped to determine the level of understanding of the items. The items which were questioned repeatedly were rewritten. The second group of 67 samples helped to determine the reliability of each scale. The items with an item total correlation in each scale of  $< 0.3$  were removed. As a result, 60 items in living values (i.e.: "Be honest with yourself", "Have fun, be satisfied with what you have", etc.) and 30 items in life skills (i.e.: "Proactively propose new ideas, new solutions", "Non-verbal communication and effective expression", etc.) were accepted for the official survey. The questionnaire employed a 7 point Likert scale (from point 1 – strongly disagree to point 7 – strongly agree).

The data from the official survey showed that some items were removed because they did not meet the criteria of reliability and validity (Factor loadings of  $< 0.5$ , Item – total correlation of  $< 0.3$ ); the remaining items and the living values and life skills detected are shown in [Table 2](#). It was

indicated that the reliability and validity of the scales on living values and life skills were guaranteed. The remaining 42 items reflect 9 living values and 23 items reflect 3 life skills in secondary school students.

**Table 2.** Reliability of the scales

Values – Skills	Items	$\alpha$	Values – Skills	items	A
Patriotism	6	0.908	Cooperation	3	0.875
Safety	7	0.892	Happiness	5	0.848
Tolerance	6	0.845	Hard working	3	0.843
Love – Respect	5	0.787	Honesty	4	0.860
Responsibility for the future	3	0.841	Communication	9	0.938
Problem solving and creativity	8	0.914	Autonomy	6	0.882

### Statistical analysis

In this study, factor analysis and Cronbach Alpha were employed to examine the validity (convergence and discrimination) and the reliability of the scales. Statistical parameters such as mean and standard deviation were calculated to describe the current status of the living values and life skills of secondary school students. Finally, Pearson correlation was calculated to analyze the relationship between living values and life skills.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. The living values and life skills of secondary school students

The living values and life skills of secondary school students are presented in [Table 3](#).

The mean of the living values and life skills ranged from 5.14 to 5.89.

In [Table 3](#), the expression of the secondary school students in 9 living values and 3 life skills ranges from 5.14 to 5.89 on the 7-point scale. The deviation between living values and life skills is negligible.

On living values: The living values that the students expressed at a higher level included: (1) happiness, (2) responsibility, (love – respect) with a mean of from 5.49 to 5.89. The living values that the students expressed at a lower level are (1) patriotism, (2) hard working, and (3) honesty with a mean of from 5.23 to 5.45. The living values that the students expressed at the lowest level are (1) tolerance, (2) safety, (3) cooperation with a mean of from 5.14 to 5.22.

On life skills: The mean of the three life skills has no significant difference ranging from 5.14 to 5.55. The skill expressed the most is (1) autonomy followed by (2) problem solving and creativity. The skill that gained the lowest mean is (3) communication (5.14). This result is similar to the results found for the secondary school students in Hanoi ([Tran et al., 2020](#))

**Table 3.** Description of the living values and life skills of secondary school students

Values – Skills	Mean	SD	Values – Skills	Mean	SD
<b>Living values</b>					
Patriotism	5.23	1.17	Cooperation	5.22	1.22
Safety	5.16	1.20	Happiness	5.49	1.16
Tolerance	5.14	1.14	Hard work	5.44	1.18
Love – Respect	5.89	0.87	Honesty	5.45	1.14
Responsibility for the future	5.63	1.26			
<b>Life skills</b>					
Autonomy	5.55	1.06	Communication		
Problem solving and Creativity	5.30	1.09		5.14	1.24

Note: The highest average score = 7 (values, skills expressed at a high level) and the lowest = 1 (Do not show values and skills)

The students expressed the highest levels in the living values of: (1) happiness, (2) responsibility, (3) love – respect and in the life skills of: (1) autonomy, (2) problem solving and creativity. This indicated that the students showed clearly that they are happy, satisfied with what they have, think positively and optimistically about life, have dreams and a clear orientation for their future. They sympathize, share and listen to themselves and people around them and are accepting of differences... At the same time, they also expressed their attitudes more clearly through specific behaviors in daily-life and learning situations such as: not to rely or depend on others; be able to recognize their strengths and limitations; take initiative in setting goals; be aware and adjust their personal emotions; identify problematic situations; take initiative in solving problems and proposing new ideas; understand the thoughts of others and sympathize with them and like to do things in new, interesting ways.

The two living values the students expressed at the lowest level are tolerance and safety. The life skill that the students gave the lowest score is communication. Therefore, it is possible to see that in the living value of tolerance the students neither understood nor expressed clearly that they should accept and forgive themselves and others and they didn't really accept the limitations of others. On the living value of safety: the students were very afraid and worried when they make mistakes, they were hesitant to ask questions if they don't know or don't understand. On the life skill of communication: They are still hesitant to communicate and do not really feel confident and actively participate in exchanges and communication activities in public. These limitations are possibly due to their psychological and cognitive characteristics. At the same time, it could be due to the fact that the educational curricula, living environment, and learning environment has not yet promoted either safe interactions or tolerance. These results indicated that education as well as education on living values and life skills should be improved to maintain and promote the living values and life skills that secondary school students have developed stably and positively, and also strengthen the living value and life skills that are under-developed.

### 3.2. The correlation between living values and life skills

#### 3.2.1. The general correlation between living values and life skills

The statistical analysis of Pearson's correlation coefficient of the nine living values and the three life skills is presented in [Table 4](#).

**Table 4.** The general correlation between living values and life skills

Living values	Autonomy	Problem solving and creativity	Communication
1. Patriotism	0.521**	0.499**	0.516**
2. Cooperation	0.540**	0.603**	0.584**
3. Love – Respect	0.431**	0.349**	0.330**
4. Tolerance	0.392**	0.357**	0.361**
5. Safety	0.663**	0.662**	0.684**
6. Happiness	0.530**	0.473**	0.467**
7. Responsibility for the future	0.557**	0.470**	0.464**
8. Honesty	0.557**	0.499**	0.500**
9. Hard working	0.507**	0.469**	0.459**

Note:\*\*  $p < 0,01$

The correlation coefficient of each living value and life skill is positively correlated with  $r = 0.3-0.68$  ( $p < 0.01$ ). The correlation of all living values and life skills is statistically significant with the values being from average to relatively strong. The highest correlation coefficient is between the living value of safety and the three life skills ( $r = 0.66-0.68$ , of which the highest correlation is communication ( $r = 0.684$ ); followed by the quite high correlation between life skills and the living values of cooperation, honesty and patriotism ( $r = 0.5-0.6$ ). This indicated that when the students expressed life skills, they also expressed living values and vice versa. The expression of living values and that of the life skills is quite similar. For example: For safety, the students expressed their opinions, proactively found somebody to ask what they didn't know and they dared to apologize. This expression is very consistent with pro-activity in communicating (the life skill of

communication); proposing new ideas (the life skills of problem solving and creativity); setting career goals and determining to implement them (the life skill of autonomy). This result is consistent with the published studies suggesting that living values and life skills are closely related (Lovat, Clement, 2008, 2005; Lovat, 2009; Nguyen, 2018; UNESCO, 2019; Tran et al., 2020; Tillma, Colimina, 2000; Tillma, 2010).

The living value of tolerance has the lowest correlation with the life skills (autonomy ( $r = 0.392$ ); problem solving and creativity ( $r = 0.357$ ) and communication ( $r = 0.36$ ). This result is quite similar to the survey results on the expression of living values of the secondary school students as discussed above, while the expression of tolerance has the lowest mean among the living values.

### 3.2.2. The correlation between living values and life skills by sex and grade

Table 5 provides statistical analysis of the correlation between living values and life skills in male and female students.

**Table 5.** The correlation between living values and life skills by gender

Living values	Autonomy		Problem solving and creativity		Communication	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1. Patriotism	0.491**	0.546**	0.458**	0.544**	0.483**	0.553**
2. Cooperation	0.526**	0.549**	0.564**	0.647**	0.547**	0.625**
3. Safety	0.662**	0.668**	0.599**	0.722**	0.639**	0.725**
4. Happiness	0.540**	0.514**	0.439**	0.515**	0.434**	0.507**
5. Tolerance	0.379**	0.403**	0.327**	0.389**	0.330**	0.394**
6. Hard working	0.524**	0.482**	0.415**	0.532**	0.432**	0.496**
7. Love – Respect	0.413**	0.431**	0.333**	0.386**	0.319**	0.363**
8. Responsibility for the future	0.534**	0.572**	0.469**	0.482**	0.455**	0.483**
9. Honesty	0.593**	0.516**	0.433**	0.577**	0.482**	0.531**

Note: \*\*  $p < 0,01$

In terms of gender, the living values and life still have positive correlation coefficients at an average level ( $r$  from 0.4 to over 0.5;  $p < 0.01$ ) and some correlation coefficients are quite high ( $r$  from about 0.6 to over 0.7).

Overall, the biggest difference in the living value-life skill correlation between males and females is in autonomy. In communication and problem-solving and creativity, between males and females, there are more similarities, especially in communication. The correlation coefficients between living values and life skills expressed by females are higher than those for males. For example, the correlation between safety and autonomy for females is greater than that for males. The correlation of safety and problem solving – creativity for females is higher than for males. The correlation of safety and communication for females is higher than that for males. However, the correlation coefficients between males and females also consist of similarities and differences if the correlation of each skill or each value is considered. For autonomy: Both males and females have the highest positive correlation. The lowest correlation in both males and females is for tolerance and love-respect ( $r = 0.38-0.43$ ). For the remaining values, the correlation is very different between males and females. For problem solving and creativity: Both males and females have a high correlation in safety, cooperation and patriotism ( $r = 0.46-0.72$ ). The correlation of both males and females is lower in tolerance and love-respect ( $r = 0.33-0.38$ ). For communication: both males and females have the highest correlation in safety, cooperation, patriotism and honesty ( $r$  from 0.48 to 0.73). The lowest correlation for both males and females is in love – respect and tolerance ( $r = 0.3-0.36$ ). The research results are similar to those for secondary school students in Hanoi (Tran et al., 2020).

Table 6 provides an analysis of the correlation between living values and life skills by grade level.

**Table 6.** The correlation between living values and life skills by grade level

Living values	<i>Autonomy</i>		<i>Problem solving and creativity</i>		<i>Communication</i>	
	<i>Grades</i>	<i>Grades</i>	<i>Grades</i>	<i>Grades</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Grades</i>
	<i>6-7</i>	<i>8-9s</i>	<i>6-7</i>	<i>8-9</i>	<i>6-7</i>	<i>8-9</i>
1. Patriotism	0.552**	0.481**	0.579**	0.406**	0.562**	0.461**
2. Cooperation	0.589**	0.479**	0.684**	0.510**	0.632**	0.526**
3. Safety	0.723**	0.593**	0.685**	0.630**	0.699**	0.656**
4. Happiness	0.579**	0.471**	0.491**	0.444**	0.523**	0.396**
5. Tolerance	0.463**	0.300**	0.419**	0.275**	0.431**	0.264**
6. Hard working	0.515**	0.480**	0.469**	0.453**	0.420**	0.468**
7. Love – Respect	0.516**	0.348**	0.409**	0.286**	0.391**	0.273**
8. Responsibility for the future	0.566**	0.547**	0.489**	0.448**	0.500**	0.427**
9. Honesty	0.598**	0.502**	0.540**	0.445**	0.506**	0.471**

Note: \*\*  $p < 0,01$

The correlation coefficients between living values and life skills by grade level are positive. The correlation between living values and life skills of grade 6-7 students is higher than that of grade 8-9 students. In grades 6-7 and 8-9, all of the 3 skills are highly correlated in (1) safety and (2) cooperation. The lowest is in (1) tolerance and (2) love-respect.

When looking at the correlation of each skill in a grade, it also shows certain similarities and differences. Autonomy: in grades 6-7 and 8-9, the highest correlation is in safety, in which grades 6-7 have the highest correlation ( $r = 0,72$ ) and the lowest in tolerance. The rest have different correlations between grades. For problem solving and decision-making: in grades 6-7 and 8-9 safety and cooperation are most highly correlated; the lowest correlation is in tolerance and love-respect; the correlation in the rest of the values is different between grades. For communication: in grades 6-7 and 8-9, the highest correlation is in safety and cooperation; the lowest in love – respect and tolerance. In the rest of the values, the correlation is very different between grades. These research results are similar to those for the secondary school students in Hanoi (Tran et al., 2020).

#### 4. Discussion

This study aims to indicate the status of living values and life skills and their relationships in secondary school students. The research results can help educators consider the reasonableness and effectiveness of existing living values and life skills education programs for secondary school students. At the same time, there is evidence found to facilitate the selection of a living values and life skills educational model.

The research results for 883 secondary school students in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Da Nang show that: the students made a clear expression of the nine core living values, in which the clearest and highest expression is observed in: love – respect, responsibility for the future, happiness and honesty; and the lowest expression is seen in safety, tolerance, patriotism and cooperation. The highest expression is seen in autonomy; lower in problem solving and creativity; and the lowest in communication. This result indicated that the education the students received from a young age to secondary school age has built and developed several living values and life skills quite well. However, some of the values and skills were not well expressed. Therefore it is necessary to focus on developing those values and skills. This result is similar to the study authored by Nguyen Thanh Binh et al., on developing core competencies for students following the living values and life skills approach in 2018 (Nguyen et al., 2018).

The study also found that the living values and life skills of the secondary school students have a strong and positive correlation. Actually, it is a dialectic, inseparable relationship. This was proved in previous studies and affirmed that living values set the foundation for students to nurture life skills and to apply life skills. Life skills provide a way for living values to be revealed and effectively applied in the learning and life of each individual student (Tillman, 2020; Medcalf,

1950; Mckie, 2010). This result is similar to that of the studies on educating living values simultaneously with communication, life skills and/or social emotional skills (Lovat et al., 2009; Payton et al., 2008; Raths, 1978; Nguyen, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018; Tran et al., 2020; Allen et al., 1989; Durlk et al., 2011).

Currently in Vietnam, some secondary schools have integrated living values and life skills learning into their educational curricula in different ways, such as: Including living values and life skills in an educational curricula for the whole school; integrating living values and life skills into school subjects, depending on the specific subjects and separating living values education from life skills education. In schools that teach both living values and life skills in their educational curricula, agreement of the educational objectives and the sustainability of the educational curricula can be seen. This means that when students are fully equipped with living values, they will be able to express life skills and thus in other words, learners' behaviors and habits will be consolidated more firmly. This study provides clear evidence that the inclusion of living values and life skills is a correct and necessary trend – this is also the approach that has been confirmed in many theoretical and practical studies (Do, 2011; Dang, 2011; Nguyen, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2018; Lovat, 2009; Hanbury, 2008; Bartlett, 1987; Daunic et al., 2013; Covey, 2015; Payton et al., 2008; Makie, 2010; Nguyen & Tran, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2010).

The correlation analysis indicates that community-oriented values such as patriotism, cooperation and safety are highly and strongly correlated with the two more community-driven skills of communication and problem solving. And the values associated with individuals themselves (e.g.: safety, responsibility for the future and honesty) are highly correlated with the skill of autonomy. This skill requires individuals to make efforts towards themselves. Particularly, safety is always strongly and highly correlated with all skills, because the value itself is related to the feeling of security inside the individual and towards the society (in interactions with everyone). Differences in the level of expression of living values and life skills in the students and the correlation of living values and life-skills by gender and grade also shows the development and implementation of an educational curriculum on living values and life skills should be adjusted in terms of content, form, and method. This has also been mentioned in many publications related to the selection, translation, and Vietnamisation of existing or new educational curricula on living values and life skills for secondary students (Halstead) (Halstead, Taylor, 1996; Tillman, Colimina, 2000; Tillman, 2010; UNESCO, 2013; Wilson et al., 2001; UNESCO, 2002; Blackmore, 2010).

However, our study still has certain limitations. The evaluation of the student's living values and life skills is only based on the analysis of the self-report questionnaire results, with no comparison with the parents' and teachers' assessment or the observations as well as interviews. Therefore, long-term observation, as well as the addition of interview results or case studies can support this study to be deployed on a larger scale and to become more accurate. Moreover, this study is as yet to analyze the differences between living values and life skills in the students across the regions (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang) or to discuss the determinants affecting the expression of living values and life skills of the students, such as a living values and life skills educational curriculum, educational methods, educational forms, school settings, classroom atmosphere, family and teachers... Other aspects relating to living values and life skills educational curricula, models of the implementation of living values and life skills education can all be subjects for further research in the future.

## **5. Conclusion**

These research results have practical implications for living values and life skills education in Vietnam today. If the expression of living values and life skills is considered a result of the integration of living values and skill education, the relationship between living values and life skills shows that the combination of living values and life skills in one educational curriculum may ensure the high efficiency of comprehensive personality education. This combination will have a highly sustainable effect as it promotes the education of safety, cooperation, patriotism, happiness and honesty together with the education of the 3 skills. Especially, it is necessary to clarify and further promote the effectiveness of the education of tolerance, love-respect and responsibility for the future and hard working for the three life skills. Overall, it is suggested to promote the education of the three core values of safety, cooperation, tolerance and the skill of communication.



## 6. Acknowledgements

This research is funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) under grant number 501.01 – 2016.01.

All Authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

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