Isip at Damdamin: Filipino College Students' Understanding of Ethics and Its Connection to Filipino Values in Everyday Life

Jun Russel Tejada[1], Nova M. Cabias[2]

Mariano Marcos State University, Laoag City, Ilocos Norte, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

General education ethics courses ask Filipino college students to learn largely Western moral theories while living by Filipino relational values. This convergent mixed-methods survey examined how technology students at a state university in the Northern Philippines understand ethics, connect it with Filipino values, and apply it in daily life. Students answered 15 rating items and four open-ended questions online. After careless, duplicated, and AI-copied responses were screened out, 107 rating responses and 138 written responses were analyzed, and the main results were rechecked with excluded cases restored. Confirmatory factor analysis favoured a two-factor structure: perceived understanding of ethical theory formed a distinct factor, while items on connecting ethics with Filipino values and on applying ethics formed a single factor of perceived cultural and practical relevance (latent r = .90 in the three-factor model; discriminant validity not supported). Students rated their understanding of theory lowest (M = 3.99 of 5), below the values (M = 4.20) and application items (M = 4.26). In written answers coded by trained human coders, students most often found it hard to tell utilitarianism and deontology apart and to apply theory to real dilemmas, and most asked for teaching built on local, real-life situations rather than for less Western theory. Answering a question that explicitly invited examples involving *pakikisama* (getting along) and *hiya* (propriety), students described setting limits on these values rather than rejecting them, treating honesty as part of being a good *kapwa* (fellow person). The findings suggest that students' confidence in ethical theory lags behind their sense of its cultural and practical relevance. Teaching each theory through local dilemmas is a promising approach that should be tested against knowledge-based outcomes.

Keywords Ethics education · Filipino values · Sikolohiyang Pilipino · General education · Mixed methods

INTRODUCTION

Ethics education and the question of what it achieves

Universities worldwide require ethics instruction on the premise that it helps students reason about and act on moral questions. Whether it does so is less settled than the premise suggests. A meta-analysis of ethics instruction in the sciences found modest overall effects that varied with course content and teaching method (Antes et al. 2009), and a meta-analysis of business ethics programs found minimal overall impact on ethical perception, awareness, and behavior (Waples et al. 2009). Both reviews suggest that effectiveness depends on what is taught and how. Both also draw on science and business programs, leaving open how students in other fields, and in general education courses, experience what they learn.

A second line of work argues that culture shapes what ethics instruction can achieve. Scholars of medical ethics education in Asia contend that Western frameworks meet distinct social norms in the region and that cultural context should shape the curriculum (Shamim et al. 2018). Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy makes the broader claim that learning deepens when teaching builds on students' own cultural knowledge (Ladson-Billings 1995; Gay 2018). These literatures agree that context matters, but the work reviewed here offers little direct evidence from students in ethics courses outside the West.

Ethics in Philippine general education

The Philippine general education Ethics course illustrates this problem. Under CHED Memorandum Order No. 20, series of 2013, Ethics is one of the core general education courses required of all college students (CHED 2013b). The course asks students to understand largely Western frameworks, such as utilitarianism, Kantian deontology, and virtue ethics, and to apply them to personal and social dilemmas. Its place in the curriculum has recently been questioned. A 2025 proposal to remove Ethics from the college general education curriculum drew strong objections and renewed debate about what the course does for students (Dano 2026). That debate has drawn mainly on argument and policy documents rather than on evidence from students.

The Ethics course is not the only place where Philippine higher education attends to students' moral development. Institutions are required to provide student affairs and services, including guidance and counseling (CHED 2013a), and guidance and counseling is a regulated profession concerned with helping individuals develop their potential and function well (Republic Act No. 9258 2004). Counselors may meet, in students' personal lives, the same ethical conflicts the course discusses in abstract form, such as academic dishonesty and pressure from peers. Evidence on how students understand ethics and use it in daily life could therefore inform guidance work as well as teaching, yet the work reviewed here has not made this connection.

Filipino values: weakness or moral resource?

Filipino students enter the course with a moral vocabulary of their own. Sikolohiyang Pilipino describes it through *kapwa* (shared identity with others), *pakikiramdam* (heightened sensitivity to others' feelings), *utang na loob* (reciprocal gratitude), *hiya* (propriety or shame), and *dangal* (dignity) (Enriquez 1992; Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2000). Scholars converge on the view that these values are relational, but they diverge on their moral worth. In one reading, which Sikolohiyang Pilipino scholars trace partly to colonial-era accounts, values such as *hiya* and *utang na loob* are weaknesses associated with conformity, patronage, and silence in the face of wrongdoing (Enriquez 1992). Sikolohiyang Pilipino scholars contest this reading, and philosophers have since developed *loob* and *kapwa* into a Filipino virtue ethics (Reyes 2015) and defended *hiya* as a virtue of sensitivity to others (Lasquety-Reyes 2016).

Empirical studies have not settled the question. Among college students in Metro Manila, gratitude and *utang na loob* were understood positively, as expressions of *loob* and *kapwa* rather than as mere debt (Conde and Flores 2020). Interviews with urban young adults, however, found that autonomy was the dominant ethic in their moral reasoning, although it often co-occurred with concerns for community, a pattern the authors relate to conflicts between traditional and global values (Ochoa and Dela Cruz 2025). Analysis of online discourse treated *pakikipagkapwa* as a public ethic, noting that it has more often been discussed as a cultural and psychological value (Tiangco et al. 2026).

Methodologically, this body of work is largely philosophical (Reyes 2015; Lasquety-Reyes 2016), based on documents or online texts (Dano 2026; Tiangco et al. 2026), or based on small interview samples (Ochoa and Dela Cruz 2025) and convenience surveys (Conde and Flores 2020). Its settings are mostly Metro Manila and urban, and its participants are general college students or young adults. None of the studies reviewed here examines how Filipino values relate to the formal ethical theories students are taught, and none includes students outside the capital or in technology programs.

Understanding and relevance in ethical learning

A further debate concerns how moral understanding and moral action are related. Rationalist accounts treat moral judgment as the product of deliberate reasoning, while intuitionist accounts hold that fast, emotion-laden intuition usually comes first and reasoning follows (Haidt 2001). Character education, for its part, aims at both knowing the good and caring about it (Lickona 1991), and cultural psychology adds that moral reasoning draws on an ethic of community alongside an ethic of autonomy (Shweder et al. 1997). Together these accounts suggest that an ethics course may affect at least two things: how well students believe they understand ethical concepts and frameworks, and how relevant they find ethics to their cultural values and everyday conduct. We refer to these as *perceived theoretical understanding* and *perceived cultural and practical relevance*. Both are self-

appraisals. The second is not a measure of moral feeling or intuition, although Sikolohiyang Pilipino locates much of Filipino moral sensibility in the relational and felt domain captured by *pakikiramdam* and *kapwa* (Enriquez 1992; Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2000). If understanding and relevance can come apart, a course could succeed in one and fall short in the other, and a measure of only one would miss this. We use the Filipino phrase *isip at damdamin* (mind and heart) as shorthand for these two sides of ethical learning, without implying that our relevance items measure feeling.

The present study

Four gaps motivate this study. First, although the value of the general education Ethics course is publicly debated, little evidence describes how students themselves view it. Second, scholars disagree on whether Filipino values are resources or obstacles for ethical reasoning, and none of the studies reviewed here examines how students relate these values to the theories they are taught. Third, prior work relies on philosophical argument, documents, and small urban samples, and does not include technology students at provincial universities. Fourth, it is unclear whether students' perceived understanding of ethical theory and their sense of its cultural and practical relevance form one dimension or more. We therefore surveyed technology students at a state university in the Northern Philippines, using rating scales examined through confirmatory factor analysis together with open-ended questions. The research questions were:

1. How do students rate their conceptual understanding of ethics?
2. To what extent do students connect ethics with Filipino values such as *kapwa*, *pakikiramdam*, *utang na loob*, *hiya*, and *dangal*?
3. To what extent do students apply ethics in their personal decisions, future professions, and interactions with others?
4. How are conceptual understanding, connection with Filipino values, and practical application related, do they form distinct dimensions, and do they differ by program?
5. How do students explain the importance of ethics, its use in their lives, its difficult topics, and ways to make its teaching more culturally relevant?

Methods

Research design

The study used a cross-sectional convergent mixed-methods survey design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2018). Closed-ended items measured students' self-rated understanding, connection with Filipino values, and application of ethics. Open-ended items captured how students explain and use ethics in their own words. The two data streams were collected at the same time and integrated at interpretation through a joint display that pairs each quantitative finding with its qualitative counterpart and classifies each pair as convergent, expanding, or divergent (Fetters et al. 2013).

Participants and recruitment

The participants were undergraduate students taking the required general education Ethics course at a state university in the Northern Philippines. The survey link was shared in the class social media group chats by members of the research team who neither taught nor assessed the participating students, and participation was voluntary. Of 165 respondents, 58 were excluded from the quantitative analyses for careless, duplicated, or AI-copied responses (see Data quality screening), leaving 107. Their ages ranged from 18 to 26 years (M = 19.23, SD = 1.32; one did not report age). Students reported their program and year level, which were grouped by program (Table 1).

Table 1 Profile of respondents in the analytic sample (n = 107)

Program	n	%	Main year level	Age, *M* (*SD*)
Program A	59	55.1	Second year	19.41 (1.29)

Program	n	%	Main year level	Age, *M* (*SD*)
Program B	41	38.3	First year	18.85 (1.15)
Other program	1	0.9	Fourth year	24.00 (—)
Not specified	6	5.6	—	19.20 (0.84)

Instrument

The researchers developed a 19-item questionnaire in Filipino-English (Taglish), the language students use in class, drawing on the course learning outcomes and Sikolohiyang Pilipino literature. It was developed in three steps. First, seven faculty members from other universities reviewed the wording of the items. Second, five experts, comprising guidance counselors and ethics professors, rated the content validity of the questionnaire on a 5-point scale (5 = highest); the overall mean rating was 4.81, indicating that the experts judged the items highly valid. Third, the questionnaire was piloted with 15 students who were not part of the final sample, and no items were revised after the pilot. The final questionnaire had four parts after the demographic items (all items in the Appendix):

- **Conceptual understanding of ethics** (5 items), e.g., "Naiintindihan ko ang pinagkaiba ng ethics, morals, at batas (law)."
- **Ethics and Filipino values** (5 items) on *kapwa*, *pakikiramdam*, *utang na loob*, *hiya*, and *dangal*, e.g., "Kapag gumagawa ako ng moral decisions, madalas akong nag-re-rely sa Pakikiramdam." These items ask students to judge how ethics relates to each value; they are evaluative statements, not measures of emotion or intuition. Item 5 asked whether Western theories sometimes conflict with traditional Filipino values. Because it asks about tension rather than connection, it was analyzed separately and the subscale score used items 1–4.
- **Practical application and relevance** (5 items), e.g., "Nakakatulong ang pag-aaral ng ethics para makagawa ako ng mas thoughtful na personal decisions."
- **Open-ended reflections** (4 items): why Ethics is required, a situation where they applied it, the topic hardest to understand, and how teaching could be more culturally relevant.

Closed items used a 5-point scale (1 = *Lubos na Hindi Sumasang-ayon* [strongly disagree] to 5 = *Lubos na Sumasang-ayon* [strongly agree]). Factor structure and reliability are reported in the Results.

Procedure and ethical considerations

Data were collected through Google Forms during the first semester of the academic year 2025-2026. The first page explained the purpose of the study, stated that participation was voluntary, anonymous, unrelated to grades, and asked for consent before the items were shown; students who did not consent could close the form without penalty. No names, student numbers, or e-mail addresses were collected. The data collected were anonymous, minimal-risk, and no identifiers. Institutional authorization was also obtained to publish de-identified findings from the dataset. No author taught or assessed the participating students. To limit pressure to take part or to answer favourably, the survey link was distributed to students who were now known to the researchers, and course instructors had no access to the responses. Names of instructors that appeared in open-ended answers were removed from quoted excerpts.

Data quality screening

Before analysis, responses were screened for careless and inauthentic responding (Meade and Craig 2012; Curran 2016). Two rules were applied. First, 37 respondents (22.4%) gave the same rating to all 15 closed items (long-string or straight-line responding). We treated this as a marker of inattention because the 15 items covered different aspects of the course and included a statement about tension between Western theories and Filipino values, so identical answers to all of them are unlikely to reflect item-by-item judgment; 22 of the 37 gave the highest rating (5) to every item, 10 gave 4 throughout, and 5 gave 3 throughout. Because uniform agreement can also be genuine, straight-liners were removed only from the rating analyses, and the effect of this rule was tested

directly (see below). Second, 27 respondents (16.4%) gave open-ended answers that were near-identical (sequence similarity above .85) to another respondent's answer, or that contained text identifiable as copied from a generative AI tool, such as answer labels and offers of further help. These were treated as inauthentic and removed from all analyses. Together the two rules flagged 58 respondents (35.2%), leaving 107 for the quantitative analyses. For the qualitative analysis only the 27 respondents with flagged written answers were excluded, leaving 138, because straight-lining concerns ratings and does not by itself make written answers unreliable. To show how far the results depend on these exclusions, the main quantitative analyses were repeated with straight-liners restored (n = 138) and with all respondents (n = 165); results are reported under Sensitivity of results to the exclusion rules.

Data analysis

Factor structure was examined by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using lavaan 0.6-17 (Rosseel 2012), with the WLSMV estimator for ordinal items. All 15 items were included, with the conflict item loading on the values factor. Because few students chose the lowest options, response categories 1 and 2 were combined. Four models were compared: one factor; two factors (understanding, and values and application combined); three correlated factors; and a bifactor model with one general and three specific factors. Fit was judged against CFI and TLI ≥ .95, RMSEA ≤ .06, and SRMR ≤ .08 (Hu and Bentler 1999). Reliability was estimated with McDonald's ω, convergent validity with average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity with the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT; Henseler et al. 2015) and the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker 1981). For the bifactor model, hierarchical omega (ωH) and explained common variance (ECV) indicated the strength of the general factor (Rodriguez et al. 2016). The preferred model was chosen on fit, parsimony, and discriminant validity together, so a model with statistically better fit was not preferred if its factors could not be distinguished.

Subscale means are reported with 95% confidence intervals. Subscale means were compared with a Friedman test followed by paired t tests (Bonferroni-adjusted $\alpha = .017$), with dz as the effect size. Because the values and application subscales did not form separate factors (see Results), the comparison between them is reported descriptively, and the comparisons of interest are between understanding and each of the other two. Relationships among subscales were examined with Pearson correlations. Program differences were tested with Welch's t test for the two programs with enough respondents and are treated as descriptive given the small groups. One missing item response was handled by averaging the available items for that subscale.

Open-ended answers were analyzed with qualitative content analysis (Elo and Kyngäs 2008). A coding frame was developed from a full reading of all answers and written up as a codebook giving a definition, an exclusion rule, and an example for each code (Online Resource 1); an answer could receive more than one code. Coder agreement was tested before final coding (next paragraph). For the hardest-topic and improvement questions, on which trained coders agreed well, one of the Round 2 coders then coded all retained answers. These codes were audited against the codebook: answers whose wording appeared to match a code that was not ticked, or not to support a code that was, were flagged (53 answers), and the coder and one author reviewed each flag together and changed the codes of 23 answers. For the questions on why Ethics is required and where students applied ethics, coders did not reach adequate agreement, so no code frequencies are reported for them. Instead, the authors read all retained answers to these two questions, identified recurring patterns, and selected quotations that illustrate them; these findings are presented as qualitative themes only. Because the question on application invited examples involving *pakikisama* or *hiya*, all mentions of these values in it are treated as prompted, and the finding concerns how students used the values, not whether they raised them. Percentages for the two human-coded questions use the substantive answers to each question; blank or "none" answers were excluded except for the "nothing difficult" code. Quotations are given in the original language, with only spelling corrected, followed by English translations.

Coding consistency was tested in three rounds, each on a random sample of answers not previously coded. In Round 1, four coders coded 30 answers (29 by all four), and agreement was low (Fleiss' $\kappa = .36$). The codebook was then revised, adding a code for learning ethical concepts and instructing coders to code only what answers stated explicitly. In Round 2, two coders coded 30 new answers (196 coding decisions). Agreement was substantial for the hardest-topic question (Cohen's $\kappa = .65$) and the improvement question ($\kappa = .74$) but low for

why Ethics is required (κ = −.04) and where students applied ethics (κ = .31). Overlapping codes for these two questions were then merged into broader codes; recomputed on the same Round 2 decisions, κ was .06 and .39. A third round on 30 new answers to these two questions, preceded by worked calibration examples, gave κ = .02 and .33. One coder later revised many entries after seeing feedback, so only the first, independent coding is reported. Keyword rules used during early screening agreed only moderately with the human coders (κ = .33 to .51) and were not used for any reported result.

Use of AI tools. AI tools assisted with data organization, first-pass response screening, similarity alerts, excerpt alignment, and language editing; keyword-based candidate codes generated during screening were not used for any reported frequency. The lead author reviewed all code assignments and selected quotations against the source wording. All authors take responsibility for the content.

Results

Factor structure and reliability

Table 2 compares the four models. The three-factor model had the best fit and fit significantly better than the one-factor model, $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 84.04$, $p < .001$, and than the two-factor model that merged values and application, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 11.14$, $p = .004$. The two-factor model also fit well by CFI, TLI, and SRMR, with RMSEA slightly above the .06 guideline. The bifactor model fit about as well as the three-factor model. Because the values and application factors could not be distinguished (see below), we treat the two-factor model as the preferred measurement model and report the three-factor solution for transparency.

Table 2 Fit of the confirmatory factor models (n = 107*)*

Model	χ^2 (*df*)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR
One factor	288.83 (90)	.936	.926	.145 [.127, .164]	.109
Two factors (values and application merged)	128.12 (89)	.987	.985	.065 [.037, .089]	.063
Three correlated factors	112.33 (87)	.992	.990	.053 [.015, .079]	.056
Bifactor (general + three specific)	97.84 (75)	.993	.990	.054 [.013, .082]	.050

Note WLSMV estimation; scaled χ^2 values. All χ^2 $p < .05$. The two-factor model is treated as preferred because the values and application factors lacked discriminant validity.

In the three-factor model, standardized loadings were .74–.86 for understanding, .69–.84 for Filipino values, and .81–.97 for application; ω was .86, .85, and .91, and AVE was .64, .63, and .76. In the preferred two-factor model, understanding loadings were unchanged (.74–.86; ω = .86, AVE = .64), the combined relevance factor had loadings of .67–.96, ω = .95, and AVE = .66, and the two factors correlated .67 [.58, .76].

Discriminant validity was clear for understanding but not between values and application. Understanding correlated .68 [.59, .78] with values and .63 [.53, .73] with application, with HTMT ratios of .67 and .62. Values and application correlated .90 [.83, .96] (HTMT = .90), and the square root of the values factor's AVE (.79) was lower than this correlation, failing the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The bifactor model showed a consistent pattern: a general factor accounted for most of the common variance (ωH = .87; ECV = .74); the understanding items kept substantial specific loadings (.51–.65), while most values items had little specific variance once the general factor was modeled. We therefore regard understanding as a separate dimension and treat the values and application items as one dimension of perceived cultural and practical relevance. Item-content subscale scores for values and application are still reported below so that readers can see which items drove the ratings, but they are not interpreted as separate constructs.

Students' ratings

Students agreed with all 15 statements on average, but rated their understanding of ethics lowest (Table 3). Mean understanding was 3.99 [3.86, 4.11], connection with Filipino values 4.20 [4.07, 4.32], and practical application 4.26 [4.13, 4.39].

Table 3 Item-level ratings (n = 107)

Item	*M*	*SD*	% agree (4–5)
Conceptual understanding	**3.99**	**0.66**	
1. I can explain what ethics is in my own words	3.91	0.85	70.1
2. I understand the difference among ethics, morals, and law	4.17	0.82	80.4
3. I easily understand ethical frameworks (e.g., utilitarianism, virtue ethics)[a]	3.88	0.86	67.9
4. The learning materials are easy to understand	3.92	0.86	69.2
5. I am confident I can pass assessments on ethical theories	4.06	0.74	77.6
Ethics and Filipino values[b]	**4.20**	**0.66**	
1. I see how *kapwa* connects with the ethical theories we study	4.14	0.73	81.3
2. In moral decisions, I often rely on *pakikiramdam*	4.20	0.91	79.4
3. Ethics discussions help me critically analyze *utang na loob* and *hiya*	4.32	0.84	85.0
4. Our sense of *dangal* is as valuable as Western frameworks in solving dilemmas	4.13	0.77	80.4
5. Applying Western theories sometimes conflicts with traditional Filipino values	4.02	0.87	73.8
Practical application and relevance	**4.26**	**0.67**	
1. I can apply ethical frameworks to real situations and news in the Philippines	4.11	0.73	80.4
2. Studying ethics helps me make more thoughtful personal decisions	4.34	0.90	82.2
3. Ethics is highly relevant to my future profession	4.35	0.78	86.9
4. Ethics discussions challenged or changed some of my beliefs	4.25	0.81	85.0
5. I often use what I learned when interacting with others, online or offline	4.24	0.71	86.0

Note English translations; original items are in the Appendix. [a] $n = 106$. [b] Subscale mean uses items 1–4; item 5 is reported separately.

The subscale means differed, $\chi^2(2) = 20.79$, $p < .001$, Kendall's $W = .10$. Understanding was lower than connection with Filipino values, mean difference = −0.21 [−0.33, −0.09], $t(106) = -3.44$, $p < .001$, $dz = 0.33$, and lower than application, −0.27 [−0.40, −0.15], $t(106) = -4.31$, $p < .001$, $dz = 0.42$. These are small to moderate effects. Consistent with their loading on one factor, values and application did not differ, −0.06 [−0.15, 0.03], $t(106) = -1.40$, $p = .163$.

The lowest-rated items all concerned theory: understanding frameworks such as utilitarianism and virtue ethics (3.88), explaining ethics in one's own words (3.91), and finding the materials easy (3.92). About 30% to 32% of

students did not agree with each of these items. The highest-rated items concerned usefulness: relevance to one's profession (4.35), better personal decisions (4.34), and critically analyzing *utang na loob* and *hiya* (4.32).

Most students (73.8%) agreed that Western theories sometimes conflict with traditional Filipino values. This item correlated positively with all three subscales: .36 [.18, .52] with understanding, .57 [.43, .69] with values, and .52 [.37, .65] with application. Because a statement about tension would not be expected to rise with every other rating, this pattern may partly reflect a general tendency to agree.

Relationships among the dimensions

Understanding correlated moderately with connection with Filipino values (r = .53 [.38, .66]) and with application (r = .51 [.36, .64]). Values and application correlated strongly (r = .77 [.67, .83]), consistent with the factor analysis. Given this overlap, we did not model one as predicting the other.

Program differences

Program A (n = 59) and Program B (n = 41) students reported comparable ratings for understanding (3.99 vs. 4.01), Filipino values (4.19 vs. 4.26), and application (4.23 vs. 4.35); none of the differences were statistically significant (all p > .40; d = 0.03-0.17). Due to high correlation between program and year level, and small sample sizes, these comparisons are merely descriptive.

Sensitivity of results to the exclusion rules

Table 4 shows the main results in the analytic sample, with straight-liners restored, and in the full sample. With all 165 respondents, means were slightly higher (understanding 4.10, values 4.27, application 4.31). Understanding remained lowest (dz = 0.29 vs. values and 0.36 vs. application, both $p < .001$), and values and application still did not differ ($p = .139$). The three-factor model again fit best but less well (RMSEA = .074 [.056, .091]), and the values–application correlation rose to .94. With straight-liners restored ($n = 138$), means were 4.10, 4.27, and 4.32; understanding remained lowest (dz = 0.29 vs. values and 0.36 vs. application, both $p < .001$); values and application did not differ ($p = .163$); and the three-factor model again fit best (RMSEA = .069 [.049, .089]), with a values–application correlation of .93. Including flagged responses therefore raised agreement and factor overlap but did not change the pattern of results.

Table 4 Main results under different exclusion rules

Result	Analytic sample (n = 107)	Straight-liners restored (n = 138)	Full sample (n = 165)
Understanding, *M*	3.99	4.10	4.10
Filipino values items, *M*	4.20	4.27	4.27
Application items, *M*	4.26	4.32	4.31
Understanding vs. values, *dz*	0.33	0.29	0.29
Understanding vs. application, *dz*	0.42	0.36	0.36
Values vs. application, *p*	.163	.163	.139
Three-factor model RMSEA	.053	.069	.074
Values–application latent *r*	.90	.93	.94

Note The analytic sample excludes straight-liners and respondents with duplicated or AI-copied written answers; the middle column restores straight-liners; the full sample includes all respondents. Latent *r* is from the three-factor model.

Students' own accounts

Among the 138 respondents whose written answers were retained, 136, 130, 109, and 126 gave substantive answers to the four questions. Table 5 gives code frequencies for the two questions coded by trained coders and the themes identified for the other two.

Table 5 Codes from the open-ended answers (n = 138 respondents*)*

Question and code or theme	% of answers	Example (respondent)
Why Ethics is required[b] (*n* = 136; themes)		
Moral judgment and decision-making	—	"Para matuto kaming gumawa ng tamang desisyon at maging mabuting tao, hindi lang magaling sa acads" [So we learn to make the right decisions and be good people, not just good at academics] (R16)
Character and respect for others	—	"Para mai-apply ang magandang asal at rumespeto sa kapwa tao" [To practice good conduct and respect fellow people] (R7)
Preparation for work and adult life	—	"Hinahanda ito ng mga batang teenager sa adult life" [It prepares young teenagers for adult life] (R111)
Where they applied ethics[b] (*n* = 130; themes)		
Cooperation and helping	—	Declining to list a non-contributing member's name, but talking with him first (R85)
Respect for elders, teachers, and peers	—	"Gumagamit po ako ng ma'am at sir pag nag-uusap kami" [I use ma'am and sir when we talk] (R57)
Hiya named and worked through[a]	—	"Kahit nahihiya akong magsabi ng aking opinyon, natutunan kong maging tapat at magalang" [Even though I am shy to give my opinion, I learned to be honest and respectful] (R12)
Honesty and integrity	—	Refusing to mark an absent classmate present on the attendance sheet (R118)
Pakikisama bounded by what is right[a]	—	"Ang tunay na pakikisama ay hindi ang pagsunod sa gusto ng iba kahit mali ito" [True pakikisama is not going along with what others want even when it is wrong] (R72)
Hardest topic[c] (*n* = 109)		
Telling the theories apart	45.9	"Nalilito ako kung resulta ba o intensyon ang dapat basehan ng pagiging tama" [I am confused whether results or intentions should be the basis of what is right] (R137)
Applying theory to real dilemmas	40.4	"Mahirap malaman kung ano ang tamang desisyon dahil may mga pagkakataong parehong may magandang dahilan ang dalawang panig" [It is hard to know the right decision because sometimes both sides have good reasons] (R132)
Utilitarianism or consequentialism	22.0	"Nahirapan akong tanggapin na maaari nitong isakripisyo ang karapatan ng iilang tao" [I found it hard to accept that it can sacrifice the rights of a few] (R43)
Nothing difficult	17.4	"Wala, dahil understandable naman po lahat" [None, because everything is understandable] (R146)

Question and code or theme	% of answers	Example (respondent)
Deontology or Kant	8.3	"Sa kulturang Pilipino na may pakikisama at utang na loob, parang ang hirap i-apply" [In a Filipino culture of pakikisama and utang na loob, it seems hard to apply] (R164)
Relativism and culture	2.8	"Sinasabi ng Cultural Relativism na ang tama at mali ay nakadepende lamang sa kultura ng isang lipunan" [Cultural relativism says right and wrong depend only on a society's culture] (R153)
How to improve teaching[c] (n = 126)		
Real-life, local examples	57.1	"Mas gumamit pa ng mga example na talagang nakaka-relate ang mga katulad ko" [Use more examples that students like me can really relate to] (R49)
Filipino values woven in	44.4	"Gamit ng mga Pinoy situational examples tulad ng utang na loob o pamilya, kesa puro foreign theories lang" [Use Filipino situations like utang na loob or family, rather than only foreign theories] (R51)
Interactive methods	12.7	"By putting students in a scenario and asking them what decision would they make" (R89)
Current issues and social media	5.6	"Korapsyon sa barangay, nepotismo... 'padulas' o 'lagay' system" [Corruption in the barangay, nepotism... the bribery system] (R4)
Clearer explanation	4.8	"I-discuss nang maayos ang ethics para mas lalong maintindihan ng bawat isa" [Discuss ethics well so that everyone understands it better] (R161)
Less reliance on Western theory	4.0	"Hindi lang puro teorya galing sa ibang bansa" [Not only theories from other countries] (R159)

Note Answers could receive more than one code. Percentages use substantive answers to each question. Merged themes: moral judgment and decision-making combines distinguishing right from wrong, responsible decision-making, and critical thinking; character and respect for others combines character and respect; cooperation and helping combines group work and helping; honesty and integrity combines academic honesty and returning what is not one's own. [a] The question invited examples involving *pakikisama* or *hiya*, so these themes were prompted. [b] Coders did not reach adequate agreement on this question (Cohen's $\kappa \leq .39$), so themes are reported without frequencies; they rest on the authors' reading of all retained answers and on the quotations shown. [c] Codes assigned by a trained human coder and audited against the codebook (see Data analysis).

Ethics as making good decisions and good people. Students most often explained the requirement as learning to tell right from wrong, make responsible decisions, and become good people rather than only capable professionals; several presented character and academic skill as two halves of a complete education. A few found the course unnecessary because they had already learned ethics in high school (R31).

Setting limits on *pakikisama*. Students' examples of applying ethics were mostly everyday school situations such as group work, examinations, and attendance. Because the question explicitly invited examples involving *pakikisama* or *hiya*, the presence of these values in the answers was prompted and is not itself a finding. What is informative is how students used them. In several accounts, *pakikisama* and *hiya* first pulled students toward going along with others, and ethics helped them draw a line: "Natutunan ko na mahalaga ang pakikisama, pero

hindi dapat isakripisyo ang tama para lang makisama sa iba" [I learned that pakikisama is important, but what is right should not be sacrificed just to get along] (R64). These students did not discard the values but reinterpreted them, so that true *pakikisama* meant being honest in a respectful way.

Theory as the hard part. Difficulties centered on the major frameworks. Students struggled to tell utilitarianism and deontology apart and were uneasy that utilitarianism could sacrifice a few for the many. Several found Kant's strict duties hard to fit with a culture that weighs relationships and context. Many also found it hard to apply the theories to real decisions, and about one in six said nothing was difficult. These accounts are consistent with the lower ratings for theoretical understanding.

Make it Filipino and make it real. The most common request was for teaching through real-life situations that Filipino students face, connected to *pakikisama*, *hiya*, *utang na loob*, and respect for elders. Others asked for discussions, role-play, and scenarios, and some named current issues such as corruption, nepotism, and cyberbullying.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how technology students perceive their understanding of ethics, the connection between ethics and Filipino values, and their application of ethics in daily life. Four findings stand out. First, perceived understanding of ethical theory was rated lowest and formed its own factor. Second, connecting ethics with Filipino values and applying it in daily life were so closely related that they formed a single factor. Third, when invited to give examples involving *pakikisama* and *hiya*, students described reinterpreting these values rather than discarding them. Fourth, students asked for teaching that connects Western theories to local situations rather than teaching that replaces those theories. Below we integrate the two strands, interpret the findings in light of prior work, and consider tentative implications for teaching and for guidance and counseling.

Integration of findings

Table 6 pairs each main quantitative finding with its qualitative counterpart. The strands converged on where students struggled, the written accounts expanded on why values and practice formed one factor, and two pairs diverged.

Table 6 Joint display of quantitative and qualitative findings

Quantitative finding	Qualitative finding	Meta-inference
Understanding of ethical theory was rated lowest (M = 3.99) and formed a distinct factor	45.9% found it hardest to tell the theories apart and 40.4% to apply them to real dilemmas	Convergence: both strands locate the difficulty in theory
Connection with Filipino values and application were nearly indistinguishable (r = .90)	When prompted with *pakikisama* and *hiya*, students described acting through these values while redefining them to include honesty	Expansion: the accounts show how values and practice are joined in action
73.8% agreed that Western theories sometimes conflict with Filipino values	Only 4.0% asked for less Western theory; 57.1% asked for real-life, local examples	Divergence: students perceive tension but want theory bridged to local life, not replaced
Usefulness items were rated highest (up to M = 4.35), and agreement was high across items	17.4% said nothing was difficult, while most named a specific difficulty	Partial divergence: written answers temper the uniformly high ratings, consistent with a general tendency to agree

Note Percentages for the qualitative findings are from Table 5.

Expected and unexpected findings

Some results were expected and others were not. Given how abstract the frameworks are, lower confidence in theory than in the course's relevance was expected, and the written answers showed where the difficulty lay. Less expected, most students agreed that Western theories sometimes conflict with Filipino values, yet very few asked for less Western theory. And although *pakikisama* and *hiya* are often described as values that encourage going along with others, students who were asked about them described using them to set limits on wrongdoing. The sections that follow interpret these results and compare them with prior work.

Understanding stands apart from a joined sense of values and practice

The factor analysis separated students' perceived understanding of ethical theory from their sense of how ethics relates to Filipino values and daily practice. Understanding was a distinct factor and the lowest rated. Students were least sure they could explain ethics, tell frameworks apart, and follow the materials, and their written answers named the same difficulty, especially separating utilitarianism from deontology. Connection with Filipino values and practical application, by contrast, were so closely related ($r = .90$) that students do not appear to judge them separately.

One reading is substantive. For these students, seeing *kapwa*, *pakikiramdam*, and *dangal* in ethical terms and applying ethics in everyday life may be parts of one experience rather than two. This reading fits the Sikolohiyang Pilipino view of Filipino moral sensibility as relational and felt before it is reasoned (Enriquez 1992; Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2000) and dual-process accounts in which intuition often precedes reasoning (Haidt 2001). In Filipino terms, the pattern could be described as *isip* (mind) lagging behind *damdamin* (heart). We offer this only as a heuristic for future work: our values items asked students to evaluate how ethics relates to each value and did not measure feeling or intuition, so the data cannot show that the joined factor is affective.

A second reading is methodological. Several values items and several application items refer to the course and its discussions, so their overlap may reflect shared wording and a generally positive attitude toward the course. The data cannot separate these readings, and the cross-sectional design does not allow us to claim that values lead to practice. What the data do show is that students' confidence in theory is distinct from, and lower than, their sense of the relevance of ethics.

Why understanding lagged cannot be settled with these data. The frameworks students found hardest ask them to judge the same act by different criteria, and students named exactly this ambiguity: intentions versus outcomes. Meta-analyses of ethics instruction suggest that outcomes depend less on whether ethics is taught than on what is taught and how, with case-based and applied approaches tending to do better (Antes et al. 2009; Waples et al. 2009). Read this way, the low ratings for understanding may point to how the frameworks are presented rather than to a lack of ability or interest among students, who rated the course's relevance highly. The ratings measure confidence, not knowledge, so they may also reflect how well students can judge their own grasp of theory; either way, they mark where students feel least secure.

The findings may also inform the recent debate over removing Ethics from the college curriculum (Dano 2026), though only modestly, since they come from self-reports at one university. These students did not describe the course as irrelevant: they rated its relevance to their profession and personal decisions highest and explained its value in moral terms. Their weakest point was theory. For this group, at least, the question the data raise is less whether the course should exist than how it connects theory to students' lives.

Students reframe, not reject, Filipino values

The most informative qualitative pattern concerned how students handled *pakikisama* and *hiya*. Because the question asked for examples involving these values, their presence is expected and is not itself a finding; what matters is how students described them. In group work, examinations, and attendance, both values first pressed students to go along with others. Students did not abandon the values but redefined true *pakikisama* as honesty offered respectfully, often in private, so that the other person could correct the mistake. Because the prompt may

also have invited socially desirable examples, these accounts show how some students reason about the values, not how common such reasoning is.

This pattern is also consistent with Enriquez's (1992) distinction between surface values such as *pakikisama* and *hiya* and the core value of kapwa which gives meaning to these surface values. When students described the real *pakikisama* as honesty given respectfully, they were in essence transitioning from the surface value of getting along with people to the core value of treating people as fellow human beings whose well-being matters, even if that means disagreeing with them. *Hiya* too made a similar transition. Students still felt it, as seen in "kahit nahihiya ako" (even though I feel shy), but they saw it as a sensitivity that needed to be managed, and not an excuse for being silent, which is similar to Lasquety-Reyes's (2016) interpretation of *hiya* as a virtue of attentiveness towards others.

These accounts also combine two ethics that are often treated as opposed. Students justified their choices with fairness and honesty, concerns of an ethic of autonomy, but acted on them within relationships and with care for the other person's dignity, concerns of an ethic of community (Shweder et al. 1997). Ochoa and Dela Cruz (2025) observed a similar combination among urban Filipino young adults. Our students showed it in ordinary classroom situations, which suggests that tension between Western and Filipino ethics may be handled not by choosing sides but by bringing principles of fairness into relationships.

Students also named real tensions between traditions. Several found Kant's strict duties hard to square with a culture that weighs relationships, and were uneasy that utilitarianism could sacrifice the few. Such issues are similar to objections that arise in moral philosophy and can be used as a basis for class discussion instead of being considered misconceptions. The survey question about the conflict between Western theories and Filipino values was supported by most students, but since the rating increased along with all other ratings, it is not a reliable indicator of such conflict and must be considered together with the written answers.

What students ask for

The suggestions from the students were clear: learn through situations that Filipino students face, mention Filipino values directly, and utilize discussion, role playing, and scenario. Few (4.0%) explicitly asked for less Western theory; the more common request (57.1%) was for real-life, local examples that bring theory closer to their lives. Their own examples supply ready-made cases, such as the non-contributing groupmate, the request to be marked present, or the offer to pay for examination answers. Contemporary issues they raised, such as *padulas*, nepotism, and online bashing, offer further cases where *utang na loob* and *pakikisama* may conflict with fairness.

These requests match the logic of culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching, which uses students' own cultural knowledge as a route to academic content rather than a substitute for it (Ladson-Billings 1995; Gay 2018). Students did not ask to replace the frameworks; they asked to meet them through situations they recognize. The same point has been made for ethics education across Asia, where cultural context is argued to shape how ethics should be taught (Shamim et al. 2018). The public issues students named, such as *padulas* and nepotism, also connect personal values to public life, where *pakikipagkapwa* has been described as a public ethic and not only an interpersonal one (Tiangco et al. 2026). Cases drawn from these issues could show students how *utang na loob* and *pakikisama* can serve fairness in public life or undermine it.

Data quality as a finding

Over a third of respondents (35.2%) were flagged for straight-lining or for duplicated or AI-generated written answers. Including them raised agreement on all subscales and raised the values–application correlation from .90 to .94, so careless and copied responses inflated the very overlap this paper examines. This matters for ethics education research, which relies heavily on online self-report surveys of students. Careless responding is well documented (Meade and Craig 2012; Curran 2016), but AI-generated answers are a newer problem that standard screening may miss. Researchers using open-ended survey questions should check for duplicated or AI-generated text, report how many responses were excluded, and show whether their results depend on the exclusions.

Implications

Theoretically, the results suggest that studies of ethics education should distinguish students' perceived understanding of theory from their sense of its cultural and practical relevance, since a course may succeed on one and not the other. They also add student voices to a debate conducted so far mainly in philosophical terms. When asked, these students described Filipino values as something they could reason with rather than only as obstacles, consistent with philosophical defenses of *loob*, *kapwa*, and *hiya* (Reyes 2015; Lasquety-Reyes 2016), and they brought fairness into relational practice (Shweder et al. 1997; Ochoa and Dela Cruz 2025). Because the prompt invited these values, this support is suggestive rather than conclusive.

Practically, the findings suggest four directions for teaching, each of which should be tested before wider adoption:

1. **Pair each framework with a local dilemma.** Teaching utilitarianism and deontology through the same Filipino case, such as covering for a groupmate, may help address both the confusion between theories and the felt distance from local values.
2. **Teach the healthy and distorted forms of Filipino values.** Students already distinguish real *pakikisama* from going along with wrongdoing. Making this distinction explicit may give them language for what they are already doing.
3. **Treat cultural tension as content.** Students' objections to Kant and utilitarianism can be used as discussion prompts rather than treated as errors.
4. **Check understanding directly.** Because confidence in theory was lowest, short low-stakes checks on distinguishing frameworks could catch confusion before major assessments.

The findings may also be useful for guidance and counseling in colleges, although the study was not designed to evaluate counseling practice. Students described ordinary peer dilemmas, such as covering for a groupmate, being asked to mark an absent classmate present, or witnessing cheating, in which *hiya* and *pakikisama* shaped what they felt able to do. Some acted despite *hiya*, which suggests that pressure to stay silent can be worked through. Such situations could serve as material for group guidance and values-clarification sessions on speaking up respectfully. Framing honesty as a way of caring for *kapwa*, rather than as separation from the group, fits the place of *kapwa* and *pakikiramdam* in Filipino relations (Enriquez 1992; Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2000), but whether such framing helps students would need to be tested.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations qualify these findings. First, all measures were self-reports of perceived understanding and use, not tests of knowledge or observed behavior. Second, the values and application factors lacked discriminant validity, so the two-factor model was preferred, and a strong general factor ran through all items; this may reflect a real general attitude toward the course, acquiescence, or common-method variance (Podsakoff et al. 2003). The values items were evaluative statements, so the instrument does not measure the affective side of moral experience. Future versions should add values items that do not refer to the course, items that tap moral feeling directly, and some reverse-worded items. Third, the CFA used a modest sample (n = 107) for 15 ordinal items, so its estimates should be confirmed in a larger sample. Content validity was also documented only as an overall expert rating, because item-level ratings were not retained. Fourth, 35.2% of respondents were excluded for straight-lining or for duplicated or AI-copied answers; the straight-lining rule may have removed some genuine uniform agreement, although the main patterns held when these cases were restored and in the full sample. Fifth, although no author taught or assessed the participants and responses were anonymous, students knew the survey concerned a course they were taking, which may still have encouraged favourable answers. Sixth, the sample came from two programs at one university, and program was confounded with year level. Seventh, the open-ended question on application named *pakikisama* and *hiya*, which shaped what students wrote about. Finally, coders did not reach adequate agreement on why Ethics is required or where students applied it, so no frequencies are reported for these questions, and the themes drawn from them rest on the authors' reading and the quoted accounts.

Together, these limitations mean that the findings describe how one group of students perceive and narrate their ethical learning. They do not show how much students know or how they act, and they should be extended to other programs and institutions with caution.

Future research

Future studies may investigate whether matching the ethical theory with a local dilemma will enhance the learning of the theory by students, through measures of knowledge and through a comparison group. Replication of the factor structure may be carried out using large samples across various campuses and programs, including reverse-worded items and values items that do not mention the course. Peer guidance programs, which use students' own dilemmas among peers, may be studied to determine whether they impact students' readiness to voice their thoughts. Real-life situations of *pakikisama* and *hiya* may be observed through observational or diary studies.

CONCLUSION

The students in this study valued ethics and described using it mainly in everyday school situations. They rated it most relevant to their future professions and personal decisions, and these ratings were similar across the two programs. They felt least confident about the theories themselves, and this confidence formed a dimension distinct from their closely joined sense that ethics connects with Filipino values and is used in daily life. When asked about *pakikisama* and *hiya*, they described redefining rather than rejecting these values, treating honesty as part of being a good *kapwa*. What students asked for, and what the results point to, is ethics teaching that brings theory closer to students' lives by connecting Western frameworks with Filipino values and real dilemmas. Students' accounts of peer dilemmas may also give guidance counselors culturally grounded material for helping students act on what they believe is right. These conclusions rest on self-reports from one university and should be tested with knowledge measures and in other institutions before they inform curriculum policy.

Statements and Declarations

Ethics approval. The ethics committee reviewed the protocol and exempted it from full review because the survey was anonymous, minimal-risk, and collected no identifiers. Institutional authorization was also obtained to publish de-identified findings from the dataset. No author taught or assessed the participating students.

Consent to participate Informed consent was obtained electronically from all participants before they answered the survey.

Competing interests The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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Data availability The de-identified rating data and the analysis code are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request, subject to approval by the institution's data custodian. The open-ended responses are not publicly available because they could identify participants or instructors.

Author contributions: JRT: conceptualization, data collection, writing – original draft. NMC: methodology, formal analysis, writing – review and editing, supervision. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Appendix: Questionnaire items (original wording)

Closed items used a 5-point scale: 5 = Lubos na Sumasang-ayon, 4 = Sumasang-ayon, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Hindi Sumasang-ayon, 1 = Lubos na Hindi Sumasang-ayon.

Section 2. Conceptual understanding of ethics

1. Kaya kong ipaliwanag kung ano ang 'ethics' sa sarili kong mga salita.
2. Naiintindihan ko ang pinagkaiba ng ethics, morals, at batas (law).
3. Madali kong nauunawaan ang iba't ibang ethical frameworks (hal. Utilitarianism, Virtue Ethics) na na-discuss sa klase.
4. Madaling intindihin ang mga learning materials na binigay para sa subject na ito.
5. Confident ako na maipapasa ko ang mga assessments tungkol sa ethical theories.

Section 3. Ethics and Filipino values

1. Nakikita ko kung paano nakakonekta ang konsepto ng Kapwa sa mga ethical theories na pinag-aaralan natin.
2. Kapag gumagawa ako ng moral decisions, madalas akong nag-re-rely sa Pakikiramdam.
3. Nakakatulong ang discussions sa ethics para ma-critically analyze ko ang mga Filipino values tulad ng Utang na Loob at Hiya.
4. Naniniwala ako na ang ating sense of Dangal ay kasing-halaga ng Western ethical frameworks sa pag-solve ng moral dilemmas.
5. Minsan, nafi-feel ko na ang pag-apply ng Western ethical theories ay bumabangga (conflicts) sa ating traditional Filipino values.

Section 4. Practical application and relevance

1. Kaya kong i-apply ang mga ethical frameworks para i-analyze ang mga real-life situations at balita sa Pilipinas.
2. Nakakatulong ang pag-aaral ng ethics para makagawa ako ng mas thoughtful na personal decisions.
3. Naniniwala ako na ang subject na Ethics ay highly relevant at konektado sa magiging propesyon ko.
4. Na-challenge o nabago ng ethics discussions ang ilang mga dati ko nang paniniwala.
5. Madalas kong nagagamit ang mga concepts na natutunan ko mula sa klaseng ito kapag nakikipag-interact ako sa iba, online man o offline.

Section 5. Open-ended reflections

1. Sa sarili mong salita, bakit mo naiisip na required subject para sa college students ang Ethics?
2. Pwede ka bang mag-share ng specific na sitwasyon (sa personal na buhay, school, o trabaho) kung saan mo nai-apply ang isang concept na natutunan mo sa Ethics class? (Maaaring gumamit ng local examples na may kinalaman sa pakikisama o hiya.)
3. Anong specific topic o ethical framework sa subject na ito ang pinakanahirapan kang intindihin, at bakit?

4. Paano pa mas mai-improve ang pagtuturo ng Ethics para maging mas relatable at culturally relevant sa mga estudyanteng Pilipinong katulad mo?

Note The original form spelled "konektado" in Section 4, item 3 as "conected"; the typographical error is corrected here.