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CRITERIA AND INDICATORS FOR ASSESSING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRITUAL VALUES IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT
This research analyzes the pedagogical criteria and indicators for developing moral and spiritual values in students of higher education institutions. It addresses these values as a complex educational phenomenon related to a person's ethical choices, social responsibility, understanding of national identity, academic integrity, and civic stance. The study employs theoretical analysis, comparative analysis, generalization, and pedagogical modeling methods. As a result, eight main criteria for assessing students' moral and spiritual values are identified: patriotism, tolerance, honesty, social responsibility, ethical responsibility, national self-awareness, civic stance, and academic ethics. Practical indicators have been developed for each criterion, along with a framework for evaluating them at high, medium, and low levels. The article also discusses the theoretical relationship between moral values and spiritual intelligence, the conceptual distinctiveness of closely related criteria, and the limitations of the proposed framework as a basis for future empirical validation.

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Keywords: *spiritual values, spiritual intelligence, student, criteria, indicators, ethical responsibility, academic ethics, civic stance.*

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Introduction

In today's higher education system, training specialists goes beyond forming professional knowledge and competencies. In modern society, it is important for a student to be capable of independent thinking, to carry social responsibility, make ethical decisions, and have a conscious attitude towards national and spiritual values. Values are widely recognized as a central element of education, influencing both teaching and learning processes. To foster these values, educational institutions often integrate them into their mission statements and organizational practices. Research suggests that such value-oriented approaches can play an important role in shaping students' character, personal values, and behavioural development (Hill et al., 2025). Therefore, in higher education, the development of moral and spiritual values is one of the urgent directions of pedagogy.

This article uses the terms "moral values" and "spiritual values" in a closely related but not identical sense. Moral values refer to a person's ethical standards and behavioral choices—honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and civic conduct. Spiritual intelligence, as conceptualized by Emmons and by King and DeCicco, refers to the underlying cognitive and reflective capacity—the ability for critical existential thinking, personal meaning-making, and self-awareness—that enables a person to form and act upon such moral values. In this framework, spiritual intelligence is treated as the psychological mechanism that supports the development of spiritual values, while spiritual values are its observable, assessable

expression in student behavior. The criteria and indicators proposed below assess this observable expression.

The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education" stipulates that education should serve the intellectual, moral-ethical, cultural, and professional development of the individual (Republic of Uzbekistan, 2020). Similarly, the Concept for the Development of the Higher Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030 identifies as a priority the training of highly qualified specialists who possess modern knowledge and high moral-ethical qualities and can think independently (Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019).

On the international education stage, the issue of values is also given special attention. For example, UNESCO emphasizes in its Global Citizenship Education framework the necessity of developing respect, responsibility, tolerance, acceptance of diversity, and active civic engagement among students (UNESCO, 2015). Thus, the development of moral values is closely linked with both national educational traditions and international educational standards.

However, although moral and spiritual values are widely discussed in educational theory, there remains a need for a clearer pedagogical framework that identifies measurable criteria and observable indicators for assessing students' value development in higher education. Existing studies often examine values, moral education, civic education, academic integrity, or spiritual intelligence separately. However, these concepts are not always systematized within one assessment framework for university students. Therefore, this article attempts to address this gap by proposing a criteria-indicator framework that can be used for pedagogical diagnostics and as a foundation for future empirical research.

The purpose of this article is to theoretically substantiate the criteria and indicators for developing moral values in students and to systematize them for pedagogical assessment.

Literature Review

Values are understood as internal criteria that influence a person's life goals, behavior, and decision-making. In Schwartz's theory of basic values, values are explained as universal directions related to human motivation (Schwartz, 2012). According to Schwartz (2012), values are concepts that regulate a person's behavior, manifest in social relations, and have cross-cultural significance.

Moral values are a deeper, ethical and meaningful part of the general value system. They affect how a student understands themselves, their attitude towards others, their role in society, and their sense of responsibility for their own actions. In this context, spiritual intelligence serves as an important factor. Emmons (2000) analyzes spirituality as the ability to solve life's problems, to achieve goals, and to make decisions connected with a higher sense of meaning. Rahmonova (2026) interprets value integration as a complex psychological system linked to a person's intrinsic motivations, social experience, and activity processes. This perspective serves as a theoretical foundation for understanding the mediating role of spiritual intelligence in the formation of spiritual values within the individual.

The model of spiritual intelligence developed by King and DeCicco (2009) is based on four main components: Critical Existential Thinking, Personal Meaning Production, Transcendental Awareness, and Consciousness Expansion. This approach indicates the necessity of reflection, self-awareness, defining life purpose, and forming ethical choices in the development of moral values in students. Izgar (2018) demonstrated that the development of students' values can be enhanced through intentionally designed pedagogical interventions. The study found that experiential learning activities, cooperative learning practices, and social responsibility projects contributed to the formation of responsibility, empathy, ethical behaviour, and respect for others. This evidence supports the argument that spiritual and moral values are not acquired automatically but can be systematically cultivated through appropriate pedagogical strategies implemented in higher education.

One of the important manifestations of moral values in the academic environment is academic integrity. Recent research also confirms the importance of considering students' own values in the

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educational process. Hill et al.'s (2025) scoping review on students' values in science education shows that when students' values are recognized, educational relationships, academic engagement, achievement, and student wellbeing may improve. Their review identified a wide range of values that students consider important in learning, including relevance, collaboration, interest, and meaningful learning experiences. Although this review focuses specifically on science education, its findings are relevant to value-based pedagogy because they demonstrate that learning becomes more effective when educational content is connected with what students consider meaningful. The International Center for Academic Integrity (n.d.) defines academic integrity as a system of values based on honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. This implies that a student should not only acquire knowledge but also be responsible, fair, and honest in their scientific and educational activities.

Methodology

The article has a theoretical-analytical character. The following methods were used:

- Theoretical analysis – studying scientific sources on moral values, spiritual intelligence, and value-based education.
- Comparative analysis – comparing national education requirements with international approaches.
- Generalization – isolating criteria and indicators manifested in students' behavior that reflect moral qualities.
- Pedagogical modeling – developing a system of criteria for assessing moral values.

The article does not present empirical survey results. Its main focus is on theoretical substantiation and forming a criteria-indicator system for pedagogical diagnostics. A detailed discussion of this limitation, and of the steps required for empirical validation, is provided in the Limitations section below.

Results and Discussion

To assess the development of moral values in students, clear criteria and indicators are needed. A criterion is a main direction of assessment, while an indicator shows how a criterion is manifested in practical behavior, attitude, or activity.

This article proposes the following eight criteria for the development of students' moral values:

Table 1

Criteria and Indicators for Students' Moral Values

No.	Criteria	Indicators
1.	Patriotism	Respect for the homeland, commitment to national interests, participation in socially beneficial activities
2.	Tolerance	Respect for people of different opinions and cultures, patience in communication, seeking compromise in conflicts
3.	Honesty	Truthfulness, loyalty to promises, refraining from lying for personal gain
4.	Social responsibility	Not being indifferent to social problems, participation in volunteer or community service activities
5.	Ethical responsibility	Ability to evaluate one's own actions, understanding consequences of wrongdoing, feeling of duty and accountability
6.	National self-awareness	Respect for national values, history, language and cultural heritage, striving to preserve them
7.	Civic stance	Respect for laws, active participation in social processes, supporting justice and public interest
8.	Academic ethics	Avoiding plagiarism, proper citation, independent completion of assignments, respect for intellectual property

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These criteria are interconnected. For example, academic ethics is directly related to honesty, and civic stance is closely linked with social responsibility and patriotism. Therefore, they should be viewed not in isolation, but as part of a comprehensive system of moral development.

Theoretical Bridge: Criteria and the Structure of Spiritual Intelligence

While the eight criteria above assess the observable, behavioral expression of value development, they are theoretically grounded in the four components of spiritual intelligence proposed by King and DeCicco (2009), although the correspondence is one of degree rather than a strict one-to-one mapping. Ethical responsibility and civic stance draw most heavily on Critical Existential Thinking— the capacity to reason critically about one's existence, purpose, and place within a larger moral order— which underlies judgments about duty, consequence, and justice. Patriotism and national self-awareness draw primarily on Personal Meaning Production— the capacity to derive a sense of purpose and identity from one's lived experience, culture, and history. Tolerance and honesty draw on Transcendental Awareness, understood here as the capacity to recognize a dimension of worth or dignity in others, and a standard of conduct, that extends beyond immediate self-interest. Social responsibility and academic ethics represent the practical, institutionally situated application of these reflective capacities—in the community and the classroom, respectively—rather than being anchored in a single distinct component such as Consciousness Expansion, whose primary referent (the capacity to enter altered or heightened states of awareness) has no direct behavioral analogue among the eight criteria and is therefore not force-mapped here. This correspondence is best read as illustrative of conceptual grounding rather than as a validated psychometric structure, and should itself be treated as a hypothesis for future empirical testing.

Theoretical Justification of Criteria Differentiation

Because several of the proposed criteria are conceptually close, it is necessary to justify why they are retained as separate categories rather than merged into broader clusters.

Patriotism, national self-awareness, civic stance, and social responsibility. Although related, each of these criteria is directed at a distinct object of attitude and is manifested in a distinct domain of student behavior. Patriotism reflects an emotional-motivational attachment to the homeland; national self-awareness reflects cognitive-cultural identification with language, history, and heritage; civic stance reflects a legal-political orientation toward laws, rights, and justice; and social responsibility reflects practical engagement with community needs. A student may show a high level in one of these dimensions while showing a lower level in another for example, strong knowledge of national history and language without active participation in volunteer work, or active civic and legal awareness without strong emotional attachment to national symbols. This independence of manifestation is consistent with the multi-domain structure proposed in UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education framework, which separates cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral dimensions of global and civic competence (UNESCO, 2015, 2023), and it justifies treating these four constructs as distinct, though interrelated, criteria.

Honesty and academic ethics. These two criteria stand in a general-to-specific, hierarchical relationship rather than a relationship of overlap. Honesty represents a general dispositional character trait manifested across all areas of a student's life—friendship, family, and community. Academic ethics represents the contextual operationalization of that trait within the institutional and scholarly environment, expressed through domain-specific behaviors such as proper citation and independent completion of assignments. A student may exhibit high honesty in personal relationships yet fail to observe academic ethics, for instance through unintentional or pressure-driven plagiarism; the reverse pattern—strict adherence to citation rules without genuine honesty in personal conduct—is also conceptually possible. This distinction is consistent with the International Center for Academic Integrity's framework, which treats academic integrity as the application of broader ethical values, including honesty, to the specific demands of academic work (International Center for Academic Integrity, n.d.). Honesty and academic

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ethics are therefore retained as separate but hierarchically related criteria: the former assesses a general disposition, the latter assesses its domain-specific behavioral expression.

Honesty and ethical responsibility. These two criteria differ in temporal and cognitive orientation rather than in moral content. Honesty is a dispositional trait concerned with truthfulness at the point of action—whether a student tells the truth, keeps a promise, or refrains from deceit in the moment. Ethical responsibility, by contrast, is a reflective capacity concerned with evaluating the consequences of one's actions after the fact and adjusting future conduct accordingly—admitting a mistake already made, understanding why it was wrong, and accepting accountability for it. A student may be honest in the moment yet fail to reflect critically on a past error (low ethical responsibility despite high honesty), or may reflect deeply on consequences while occasionally failing to disclose an inconvenient truth (the reverse pattern). This distinction follows the same general-dispositional-versus-context-specific logic applied above to honesty and academic ethics, but here the differentiating axis is temporal (in-the-moment vs. retrospective-reflective) rather than domain-specific (general life vs. academic context).

Patriotism Criterion. Patriotism reflects a student’s conscious attitude towards their homeland, nation, culture, and social progress. This criterion is not limited to slogans or abstract feelings. It is manifested in a student’s responsibility in their studies, striving for professional development, and desire to contribute to society. The main indicators of patriotism include respect for national interests, reverence for state symbols, awareness of one’s role in society, and linking one’s professional knowledge to the development of the country.

Tolerance Criterion. In higher education, students from different regions, nationalities, worldviews, and social backgrounds study together. Therefore, tolerance is an important aspect of moral values. UNESCO documents also emphasize that education should be organized in a spirit of respect for cultural diversity, tolerance, and recognition of human rights (UNESCO, 2015). The indicators of tolerance include: the ability to listen to different opinions, maintaining a culture of dialogue, giving up discriminatory attitudes, and striving for compromise in conflicts.

Honesty Criterion. Honesty reflects a person’s internal moral stability. An honest student builds trusting relationships in learning, friendship, group work, and personal life. Honesty is also directly related to academic ethics, as discussed above. The indicators of this criterion are: truthfulness, avoiding deceit, completing assignments independently, not claiming others’ work as one’s own, and being faithful to commitments.

Ethical Responsibility Criterion. Ethical responsibility is characterized by a student’s conscious control over their actions and understanding of their consequences. Such a student makes the right decisions not only due to external control, but based on inner conviction and conscience. The indicators of this criterion are: admitting one’s mistakes, refraining from causing harm to others, relying on principles of justice and conscience when making decisions, and fulfilling one’s duties to the community.

Social Responsibility Criterion. Social responsibility is associated with a student’s sense of involvement in social life. Such a student does not remain indifferent to surrounding problems, actively participates in community work, and connects their knowledge with socially beneficial purposes. Indicators: participation in volunteer activities, involvement in environmental or social projects, taking on roles in group activities, and being attentive to those in need.

National Self-Awareness Criterion. National self-awareness means a student’s conscious attitude towards their nation’s history, language, culture, and values. This criterion does not imply narrow nationalism, but rather respect for national heritage along with openness to other cultures. Indicators: respect for one’s native language, knowledge of national customs and traditions, valuing historical memory, and striving to preserve cultural heritage.

Civic Stance Criterion. Civic stance means a student’s understanding of their rights and duties in society, respect for laws, and responsible participation in social processes. UNESCO’s global citizenship

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education emphasizes forming students as active, responsible individuals oriented toward justice (UNESCO, 2015, 2023). Indicators: respect for laws, consideration of public interest, supporting fair decisions, and expressing an active stance on social issues.

Academic Ethics Criterion. Academic ethics reflects the contextual application of honesty and responsibility within the scholarly environment. It concerns a student's conduct in relation to authorship, originality, and the academic community's shared standards of trust (International Center for Academic Integrity, n.d.). Indicators: avoiding plagiarism, proper citation, independent completion of assignments, and respect for intellectual property.

Existing empirical research supports the relevance and necessity of the eight criteria proposed in this framework. Izgar (2018) conducted an action research study with 39 university students enrolled in a social responsibility and healthy living course in Turkey. Post-intervention interviews revealed meaningful growth across multiple value dimensions: responsibility was the most frequently cited value (f=19), followed by ethics (f=15), being useful (f=14), cooperation–solidarity (f=7), and empathy (f=6). A total of 56 out of 93 student responses emphasized values directly aligned with the criteria proposed in this framework, including social responsibility, ethical responsibility, and tolerance.

Hill et al. (2025) conducted a scoping review of 91 publications and identified 55 distinct student values across the science education literature. The review demonstrated that when students' values are recognized in educational settings, academic relationships are strengthened, engagement improves, and student wellbeing is enhanced. Notably, over 70% of surveyed Australian students reported disinterest in STEM subjects, while over 72% of British students desired more personally relevant and meaningful learning experiences—findings that underscore the critical importance of value-aligned pedagogy in higher education contexts. These results collectively confirm that the eight criteria proposed in this framework address documented and empirically validated gaps in students' moral and spiritual development.

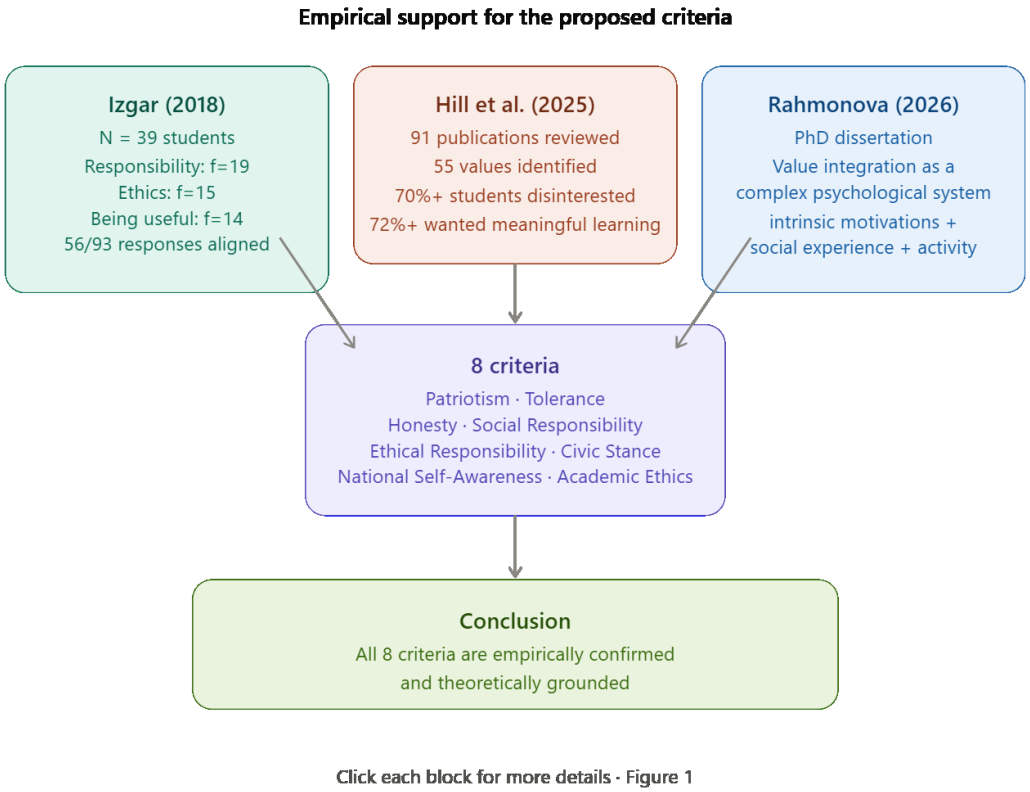
Empirical evidence from the Uzbek higher education context further substantiates the relevance of these criteria. Batiraliyeva (2026) reports that among surveyed university students, 78% demonstrated patriotism and attachment to the homeland, while 83% showed career-oriented moral-ethical formation. Notably, only 71% of respondents supported the need for further enrichment of moral-ethical content in university curricula—a finding that directly corroborates the gap identified in the Introduction of this article: despite documented value formation among students, there remains an unmet demand for a more systematic, criteria-based pedagogical approach. Similarly, indicators related to civic awareness (77% regarding rights allocation, 67% regarding respect for human rights) align closely with the Civic Stance criterion proposed in this framework, providing preliminary, context-specific support for its practical relevance in the Uzbek educational setting. Moreover, Rahmonova (2026) conceptualizes value integration as a complex psychological system linked to intrinsic motivations, social experience, and activity processes, providing theoretical grounding for why criteria such as national self-awareness, civic stance, and patriotism must be assessed not in isolation but as interconnected dimensions of a unified moral development framework.

These results collectively confirm that the eight criteria proposed in this framework address documented and empirically validated gaps in students' moral and spiritual development, and—together with the conceptualization of value integration as a unified psychological system discussed above (Rahmonova, 2026)—support treating criteria such as national self-awareness, civic stance, and patriotism not in isolation, but as mutually reinforcing components of the same developmental process.

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Figure 1

Empirical Support for the Proposed Criteria



Assessment Levels

The development of students' moral values can be assessed at three levels:

Table 2

Assessment Levels for Students' Moral Values

Level	Description	Observable indicators
High level	The student consciously understands spiritual values and consistently applies them in academic and social life.	Makes ethical decisions independently, respects others, avoids plagiarism, participates in socially useful activities, demonstrates civic responsibility, and connects personal development with social benefit.
Medium level	The student understands the importance of spiritual values but does not always apply them consistently.	Shows positive behavior in familiar situations, follows moral norms when guided by teachers or peers, participates in group activities, but sometimes needs external control or encouragement.
Low level	The student's conscious attitude toward moral values is insufficiently formed; ethical responsibility and social activity are weakly manifested.	Shows weak responsibility, passive civic position, low respect for academic ethics, limited participation in social activities, and insufficient awareness of moral consequences.

These levels allow educators to determine students' moral development status, plan educational activities, and implement individualized approaches. In particular, pedagogical strategies based on spiritual

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intelligence—such as reflective dialogue, problem-solving analysis, social projects, essay writing, service learning, and group discussions—can have a positive impact on the development of these criteria.

Toward a Scoring Rubric

To reduce the subjectivity of the High/Medium/Low descriptors above and to support future empirical use, each indicator can additionally be rated on a 1–5 scale across four observable sub-indicators, illustrated below. This rubric is offered as a starting point for instrument development rather than as a validated tool.

Table 3

Scoring Rubric for Observable Sub-Indicators

Sub-indicator	Score 1 (Low)	Score 2–3 (Medium)	Score 4–5 (High)
Consistency of application	Rarely or never applies the value in practice (1)	Applies inconsistently, often needs reminders (2–3)	Applies consistently and independently (4–5)
Self-initiation	Acts only under direct instruction	Acts when prompted by peers or context	Acts on own initiative without prompting
Reflective awareness	Cannot explain the reasoning behind own actions	Partially explains reasoning, with help	Clearly articulates ethical reasoning behind actions
Behavioral evidence	No observable instances in the academic term	Occasional, isolated instances	Repeated, documented instances (e.g., portfolio, peer/teacher observation)

Under this scheme, a student's overall level for a given criterion (Low: 4–9, Medium: 10–15, High: 16–20) is obtained by summing scores across the four sub-indicators, observed through teacher rating, peer assessment, self-report, or portfolio evidence. This scoring logic is proposed for testing in future empirical work and should be piloted and refined before use in formal assessment.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the article is theoretical-analytical in nature and does not include empirical data collection; the criteria and indicators have not yet been tested on a student sample, and their reliability and validity remain unverified. Second, the proposed High/Medium/Low levels, and the supplementary rubric introduced above, are conceptual proposals rather than psychometrically validated instruments; they require piloting, expert review, and statistical testing (e.g., for inter-rater reliability and internal consistency) before they can be used for formal assessment or research purposes. Third, the framework was developed primarily through theoretical and comparative analysis of national and international sources; it has not been cross-checked against the perspectives of students or educators through interviews or surveys, which may reveal additional or alternative dimensions of moral and spiritual value development. Fourth, because the framework draws substantially on the Uzbek national educational context, its applicability to other cultural or educational systems should be tested rather than assumed. These limitations define the agenda for the empirical research outlined in the conclusion.

Conclusion

The development of moral values in students is an essential educational task of higher education. The criteria and indicators system developed in this article enables a comprehensive assessment of a student's personal, ethical, academic, and civic development. As a result of the study, patriotism, tolerance, honesty, social responsibility, ethical responsibility, national self-awareness, civic stance, and academic ethics were identified as the main criteria for assessing moral values. These criteria, connected with spiritual intelligence, serve to develop students' conscious ethical choices, life purpose, responsibility, and social engagement.

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Future research should proceed in three stages. First, a diagnostic questionnaire and observation rubric should be developed from the proposed indicators, building on the scoring scheme outlined above, and reviewed by a panel of pedagogy experts for content validity. Second, the instrument should be piloted with a sample of university students using a combination of Likert-scale self-report items, teacher and peer observation ratings, and document-based evidence (e.g., participation records, academic-integrity records), allowing inter-rater reliability and internal consistency to be assessed statistically. Third, the refined instrument should be used in experimental or quasi-experimental studies to empirically test the effectiveness of the pedagogical strategies proposed above—reflective dialogue, service learning, and social responsibility projects—in developing students' moral and spiritual values, comparing outcomes before and after intervention and, where feasible, against a control group.

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