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Moral Reasoning Stages of Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to determine the elementary school students' levels and stages of moral reasoning. Main objectives of the study were to measure the moral reasoning stages and to find out the gender differences in relation to moral reasoning. 200 students were selected as sample of the study. 100 students (50 boys, 50 girls) were selected from 5th and 8th grade from boys' and girls' schools. The responses of the students were interpreted to identify their stage of moral reasoning and it was found that, with a little variation, majority of the fifth graders, both male and female, was found to be at stage 2. While most of the students of class 8 were found at stage 4. No gender differences were found in moral reasoning among fifth and eighth grade students.

Introduction

The Humans are social animals that cannot live in social vacuum. So, for successful living they develop social systems. Morality forms the basis of that system as it is concerned with concept of fairness, honesty, and human rights. It has three domains i.e. cognitive, affective, and behavioral domain. Moral reasoning falls in the cognitive domain of moral development. Dukerich, et al (1990) define moral reasoning as cognitive skills and concepts a person utilizes to settle moral problems. To Ormrod (2011), for guiding moral reasoning different standards are constructed by children and adolescents.

A person who is given much more importance and is followed at the time when students passing through the elementary grade age, is a teacher. His/her words and deeds are copied and followed by the students. So being able to get an important position in the life of students he/she may be able to influence their moral decision making. For that very reason, knowing the moral reasoning stage of the students is important for the teacher as it enables him/her to best teach the moral concepts in accordance with their level of moral judgement (Pervaiz, 2005). (Farooq, Farooq, Tabassum, & Khan, 2018) were of the view that teachers should discussed moral issues in the classroom so that students' moral reasoning stage can be developed.

For measuring moral reasoning, Kohlberg's theory is considered an important and valid means due to its vital position in the area of moral psychology. A world wide research has been generated by this theory (Farooq, Farooq, Tabassum, & Khan, 2018). According to Ormrod (1998) Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning has three levels (preconventional reasoning, conventional reasoning, and post conventional reasoning).Each of his level has two stages. At his 1st level (preconvintional reasoning) personal needs as well as rules of authority figures form the basis of judgments. Rules, at stage one, are obeyed for the sake of avoiding punishment (Sanders, 2019). At stage two of this level, judgments are made realizing the needs of others. But favors' are retained following the rule, "You scratch my back, I will scratch yours".

To Woolfolk (2004) laws of society and loyalty to country are considered by the people while making judgments at Kohlberg's second level, conventional morality. At stage III- good boy / nice girl- right or good is that pleases others. Social approval determines behavior (Sanders, 2019). At stage IV- law and order orientation-persons are of the opinion that laws of society cannot be changed and we will have to respect the persons who have authority. They have concerned for the order in the society.

At the highest level- post conventional reasoning- morality is completely internalized. Individuals develop their own abstract principles. They believe that if rules do not meet the standards, they should not be obeyed. At his stage V- social contract- social consensus is required for determining something as right or good. Hence they consider rules as flexible. If they do not protect human rights they should be changed. Behavior is determined by some one's rights at stage 5 (Sanders, 2019). Justice and human rights form the basis of reasoning at stage VI of Kohlberg's theory. Here right and wrong is decided by one's conscience (Santrock, 2006).

To Kohlberg, virtues like justice and human rights are focused in all cultures. And he also believed that all individuals grow up to moral persons passing through the same stages of moral reasoning. The order of stages remains the same too. (Zanden, 1997).

Researches have been conducted in the area of moral reasoning in many countries of the world. But in Pakistan this area of moral psychology has been neglected. So, there was an immense need to conduct a research in this area, resultantly this study was designed to investigate levels and stages of moral reasoning among students of 5th and 8th grades.

In order to achieve objective 3, following null hypothesis were tested;

H_o: There is no significant correspondence between frequencies of male and female students at each stage of moral reasoning among 5th grade students.

H_o: There is no significant correspondence between frequencies of male and female students at each stage of moral reasoning among 8th class students.

The level of significance for rejecting or accepting the above null hypothesis was .05.

Material and Methods

Population

The students of 5th and 8th grades studying in all the government schools in Tehsil Hazro constitute the target population. The accessible population comprised

on 790 elementary grade students i.e 290 boys, 70 girls of above 8th grade and 200 boys and 250 girls students studying in government high schools for boys and girls located in Hazro town of district Attock, Pakistan.

Sample

Data were collected from 200 students (100 boys, 100 girls), who were selected as sample of the study from the above mentioned population.

Research Instrument

An Urdu version of the following famous moral dilemma " Heinz and the druggist" was used as research instrument: it was renamed as " Shehzad and Hakeem".

"In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to make. He paid $400 for the radium and charged $4,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money and tried every legal means, but he could only get together about $2,000, which was half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying, and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said, "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So, having tried every legal means, Heinz gets desperate and considers breaking into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife."

The purpose of translating the dilemma in Urdu was that, Urdu is the national language of Pakistan which is easy to comprehend as compared to English, particularly by the students of govt. schools where medium of instruction and examination is Urdu.

In order to standardize the responses at the end of Urdu version of the dilemma, a question was asked: Was Shehzad right to steal the drug? There were two options 'Yes' or 'No' to respond and for each option, six reasons were given, each of these reason an example relating one of six stages of moral reasoning. The options were also translated from English into the national language.

Data Collection

In order to collect data, the students were individually interviewed in a separate room. The students were asked that the interview was just for the sake of entertainment so that they could give their opinion freely. First, whole moral dilemma was read out in front of the student. Who was asked to concentrate on the interview form containing this story and to read and then answer the question, **"Was Shehzad right to steal the drug?".** The answer to the said question could be Yes or No. After getting 'yes' or 'no' response to the question, the student was asked to select one reason which supported his view. Students were told that they could select only one option and they were also briefed that they could write their own reason too, on the back of the form if they did not agree with the reasons given in it. The same procedure was repeated for all the participants.

Data Analysis

The moral reasoning stages of the students were decided on the basis of their responses to the presented moral dilemma. The responses from the subjects were categorized and tabulated into six categories of the Kohlberg's theory of moral development. To find out the gender differences in moral reasoning of the students of different grade levels, the chi-square technique of statistical analysis was applied.

The level of significance for testing the null hypothesis relating to gender differences in moral reasoning stages was set at .05

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Moral reasoning stages of male 5th grade students

Levels	Preconventional		Conventional		Postconventional		
Stages	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Number	10	13	09	09	03	06	50
Percentage	46%		36%		18%		100%

Table 1 shows that 46 percent of the total male students of the 5th class were at preconvention level, 36 percent at conventional level and 18 percent were found at post conventional level . This means that 5th class boys most frequently responded at preconvention level.

Table 2
Moral reasoning stages of male 8th grade students

Levels	Preconventional		Conventional		Postconventional		
Stage	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Number	3	-	12	14	09	12	50
Percentage	6%		52%		42%		100%

Table 2 shows that 6 percent of 8th graders were at preconventional level , 52 percent were at conventional level and 42 percent were at postconventional level. This means that 8th class boys most frequently responded at conventional level.

Table 3
Moral reasoning stages of female 5th grade students

Levels	Preconvention		Conventional		Post conventional		
Stages	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Number	10	15	07	08	03	07	50
Percentage	50%		30%		20%		100%

Table 3 shows that 50 percent female students of grade 5 were at preconventional level, 30 percent and 20 percent were at conventional level and postconventional level, respectively. This means that girl students of 5th class most frequently responded at preconventional level.

Table 4
Moral reasoning stages of female 8th grade students

Levels	Preconventional		Conventional		Postconventional		
Stages	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Number	7	-	11	13	12	07	50 100%
Percentage	14%		48%		38%		

Table 4 shows that 14 percent female students of 8th class were found at preconventional level, 48 percent conventional level and 38 percent were at postconventional level. This means that 8th class girls most frequently responded at conventional level.

The findings from the data mentioned above in Table No 4 and 5 regarding stages of female students show that there was a shift to higher level of moral reasoning.

Table 5
Significance of correspondence between stages of moral reasoning and gender among 5th grade students

Stage	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	χ^2	Level of Significance
Male	10	13	09	09	03	06	50		
								0.54	0.05
Female	10	15	07	08	03	07	50		
Total	20	28	16	17	06	13	100		

d.f = 5 $\chi^2_{0.05(5)} = 11.07$

Table 5 shows the χ^2 value of 0.54 is less than the critical χ^2 value. Therefore the probability of the null hypothesis being false is greater .05. So there was no correspondence between stages of moral reasoning and gender among grade 5 students. It means that gender differences did not exist in moral reasoning among 8th grade students.

Table 6
Significance of correspondence between stages of moral reasoning and gender among 8th grade students

Stage	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	χ^2	Level of Significance
Male	03	00	12	14	09	12	50		
								3.23	0.05
Female	07	00	11	13	12	07	50		
Total	10	00	23	27	21	19	100		

d.f = 5 $\chi^2_{0.05(5)} = 11.07$

Table No 6 shows the χ^2 value of 3.23 which is less than the critical χ^2 value. Therefore the probability of the null hypothesis being false is greater .05. So there was no correspondence between stages of moral reasoning and gender among grade 8 students. This means that gender differences in moral reasoning did not exist among 8th grade students.

Discussion

This study aimed to determine the moral reasoning stage of 5th and 8th class students and also to investigate the gender differences in moral reasoning. Majority of the 5th, 8th were found to be at preconventional level stage 2 of individualism and exchange, conventional stage 4 of law and order orientation and postconventional level stage of universal ethical principle, respectively. This result supports the Kohlberg's theory that moral reasoning grows with age. Isaksson (1979) also described in his article that moral reasoning grows with age. As for as gender differences are concerned, no gender differences were found in the reasoning of 5th and 8th grade students. But it does not support Kohlberg's theory whose studies revealed that girls were inferior to boys in moral reasoning, who mostly remained at stage 3 of moral reasoning.

The results of the study show that the sample of this study was at better in their moral thinking as compared to Kohlberg's American sample. It is in accordance with the Kohlberg's theory as cited by Colby & Kohlberg (1987) that claim of universality of these stages allows for the possibility of differences in the rate and end point of development. The main reason for better reasoning of Pakistani sample may be the instrument, in which the options were given for all the moral stages and the respondents had to select one out of six alternatives that might have provided the sample an opportunity to select better options.

Time factor may also be considered as the cause to affect the results of the study. Kohlberg's studies were carried out before 1987. So the gap of more than two decades is vital in developing the moral values across the world, as the world has become a global village. More recent studies on Kohlberg's theory also tend to reject the earlier results that girls lag behind boys in moral reasoning.

The results of this study require further confirmation through future research.

Conclusions

1) With a little variation, majority of the fifth graders, both male and female, was found at stage 2 of preconventional level, namely, stage of individualism and exchange of moral reasoning.

2) Most of the students of class 8, both boys and girls, institutions were at stage 4 of conventional level, namely, law and order orientation of moral reasoning.

Keeping in view the above mentioned conclusions drawn from the findings of the data, it was concluded that moral reasoning grows with age and no gender differences were found among children of younger age groups.

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