

Factors affecting moral development

[Sociology](#), [Moral Development](#)



Academic interest in the ethically worthed decision making capability of individuals has produced a stable stream of research addressing the responsibility of education in nurturing moral behavior. Studies relating to ethics education have principally focused on measuring students' capability for moral decision-making. The rationale of this study is to evaluate Pakistani under-graduate students' moral development and how that development is influenced by three different demographic variables which are the age, gender and religious inclination of the business graduate students. It also evaluates the relationship of moral development with moral intensity and moral behaviour of students and also the effect of moral intensity on moral behaviour of students. The data was collected through a self developed questionnaire from the under-graduate students, specifically students enrolled in BBA programs. Structured Equation Modeling was applied for data analysis. This is study has very important implications from the academic perspective. It can help institutions to better understand their standing in terms of student's morality. Higher the student's moral standards, more responsible and ethical future professionals they would prove to be and thus cater to the economy's needs.

Scholastic significance to the morally judgments of individuals has led to the production of considerable amount of research concentrating on the role of education in nurturing moral behavior. Studies relating to ethics education have principally focused on assessing students' capability for ethical decision-making, which can also be referred to as their cognitive moral development. Although advanced levels of moral development which is also known as moral reasoning, should commonly end up in more ethical

judgments, theory advocates and research has shown that characteristics of a moral matter may also impinge the course of ethical decision-making (Brandon, Kerler III, Killough & Mueller, 2007).

Originally right actions are verdict of right or wrong actions in circumstances where there is no single right regulation on the basis of which the dilemma can be resolved. The capability to make moral judgments builds up through education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005a). Branson (2007) recommends that business schools need to take responsibility of ensuring that students are prepared with ethical veracity and honesty to meet up the challenges in the practical business world.

The business education of today sturdily centers on inculcating strong intellect of morality. Therefore it is the academicians' responsibility to facilitate students become proficient in thinking and acting morally based on the standards of integrity, honesty, genuineness, respect and morality (Chow & Ding, 2002).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate Pakistani graduate students' moral development and how that development is influenced by three different demographic variables which are the age, gender and religious inclination of the business graduate students. It also evaluates the relationship of moral development with moral intensity and moral behaviour of students and also the effect of moral intensity on moral behaviour of students.

The study is particularly important to the educational institutes and universities. Educational institutes would be able to assess the current state

of moral development of their students and thus be to revise and upgrade their teaching methodologies and curriculum on the basis of tested model. This can help the institutions to develop and produce morally responsible cadre of students who would be future professionals. These morally responsible individuals would be better able to serve the societal and organizational purposes and work efficiently for their betterment. So the scope of the study is societal.

Research in the area of association between education and moral judgments has focused on moral development which is also known as moral reasoning and/or moral judgment, refers to an individual's way of inferring moral problems, defining the significant issues of a dilemma, and deciding a response to it. A number of studies in a variety of fields such as education, marketing, medicine, psychology etc., making use of diverse subject-types e. g., students, practitioners and general public, have found individuals' decisions and actions to be influenced by moral reasoning (Brandon et al, 2007). Moral development has been acknowledged most by receiving the greatest interest because research has shown that it is highly correlated with consequent moral decisions (Bay & Greenberg, 2001).

Debatably the most influential moral theorist associated to the contemporary moral education movement, Lawrence Kohlberg formulated and proposed a presumption of progressive moral development embodied in three stages. An individual's stage of moral development illustrates the various ways in which an individual conceptualizes the need and later the

solution of a moral dilemma. Kohlberg (1979) proposed three levels of moral development are illustrated in Table1.

(Source: Thorne (1999), p. 160)

An individual's moral development is in any of the three levels elaborated in the table above. Every single person has a different moral focus, orientation and has a different definition of morality. This perspective is developed and influenced by different factors.

Thorne (1999) explains the characteristics of people lying in the three stages as; " For pre-conventional moral reasoners, the moral acceptability of alternative ways to resolve an ethical dilemma is defined by the rewards and punishments attached to various outcome choices. Thus, external authority defines morality for pre-conventional reasoners. For conventional moral reasoners, the moral acceptability of alternative actions is based upon their interpretation of the group norm. Thus, the social group defines morality for conventional moral reasoners. Post-conventional or principled moral reasoning is influenced by complex notions of universal fairness and is defined according to an individual's internal sense of responsibility or justice" (p. 160).

Moral development is found significantly related with the moral intensity of an individual, which is another important variable of this study. As elaborated by Brandon et al (2007), " Moral intensity is the sum of the characteristics that make moral issues more salient and vivid, where salience is the degree to which an issue stands out and vividness is the degree to which the issue evokes emotional interest" (p. 62). It is the

characteristics of the moral issue itself. Notion of moral intensity was proposed by Jones (1991) and has six components which are as follows:

" Magnitude of consequences: the sum of the harms (or benefits) done to victims (or beneficiaries) of the moral act in question" (p. 374).

" Social consensus: the degree of social agreement that a proposed act is evil or good" (p. 375).

" Probability of effect: is a joint function of the probability that the act in question will actually take place and the act in question will actually cause the harm (or benefit predicted)" (p. 375).

" Temporal immediacy: is the length of time between the present and the onset of consequences of the moral act in question (shorter length of time implies greater immediacy)" (p. 376).

" Proximity: is the feeling of nearness (social, cultural, psychological, or physical) that the moral agent has for victims (beneficiaries) of the evil (beneficial) act in question" (p. 376).

" Concentration of effect: is an inverse function of the number of people affected by an act of a given magnitude" (p. 377).

The dissimilarity in morality among males and females has been long questioned by academicians. Published studies demonstrate no significant relationship between gender differences and moral development and behaviour of students (Walker, 1984). Hegarty & Sims (1979) also found no relationship between gender difference and moral development leading to

subsequent moral behaviour. Derry (1989), Tsalikis & Ortis-Buonofina (1990), Sikula & Costa, McCuddy & Perry (1996), Rawwas, Swaidan and Khatib (2006) and Chang & Leung (2006) all concluded from their studies that there is no significant relationship between gender difference and moral development and consequent moral behaviour of individuals. On the contrary, research shows significant relationship between the gender differences and moral intensity. Moral intensity in this situation helps in acknowledgment and valuation of a moral issue and thus defines a relationship between gender difference and moral intensity (Glover, Bumpus, Sharp & Munchus, 2002).

Cognitive-developmental theory deduces that an individual gets morally developed with an increase in age, atleast up to a certain point in the development process. Varied propositions exist on the subject of the association between students' moral development and age. Wide-ranging longitudinal studies give explanation that with the change in time people change and so does their level of moral development (Ponemon & Glazer, 1990; Shaub, 1994; Thorne, 1999; Wimalasiri, 2001).

Former theologians and philosophers put in efforts to relate the concept of morality with religious orientations of people. This was done because moral values were understood eternal and absolute because the belief on God's existence was absolute by its followers. Therefore different studies have found an customary relation between the religious orientation and moral development of individuals (Wimalasiri, 2001). Research found that those who possessed high religious beliefs attained greater happiness, positive

approach and purpose in life. Thus moral intensity and religious orientation were also found related (Davis, 2003).

But research didn't find significant relationship or effect of religious inclination of individuals and their resulting behaviours. People might devotedly hold on to religious values in family life settings but might do not take them into account when performing their activities at college or at work. In other words, moral values take a backseat when people carry out their daily activities outside home (Scott, 2002).

Longitudinal studies show that undergraduate students have a low moral development across the four years of studies. There is a moral predicament in the businesses and in the business education which is primarily due to insufficient moral development of individuals. These are the very pertinent issues that need to be addressed as it would helpful for the society at large. This necessitates research with business students because they should graduate as a moral person who has strong moral beliefs about life (Chow, Ding, 2002).

Cognitive-developmental theory deduces that an individual gets morally developed with an increase in age, atleast up to a certain point in the development process. Varied propositions exist on the subject of the association between students' moral development and age. Wide-ranging longitudinal studies give explanation that with the change in time people change and so does their level of moral development (Ponemon & Glazer, 1990; Shaub, 1994; Thorne, 1999; Wimalasiri, 2001).

The hypothesis HA2 is accepted on the basis of significant p-value ($p < 0.05$) and positive regression weight (0.175). The values show that there is a relationship between the gender of the graduate students and their moral intensity. The regression weight shows that gender and the moral intensity of students are directly proportional to each other, and differs for male and females.

Research illustrates significant relationship between the gender differences and moral intensity. Moral intensity in this situation helps in acknowledgment and valuation of a moral issue and thus defines a relationship between gender difference and moral intensity (Glover et al, 2002). Men are more justice-oriented and women are more care-oriented and this explains their level of moral intensity and corresponding responses to ethical situations faced.

HA3: The relationship between gender and moral development of students.

The hypothesis HA3 is rejected on the basis of insignificant p-value ($p > 0.10$). The analysis shows that there is no significant relationship between the gender difference and resulting moral development of the graduate students.

Published studies exhibit no significant relationship between gender differences and moral development and behaviour of students (Walker, 1984). Hegarty & Sims (1979) also found no relationship between gender difference and moral development. Various studies including Tsalikis & Ortis-Buonofina (1990), Sikula & Costa, McCuddy & Perry (1996) and Chang &

Leung (2006) all concluded from their studies that there is no significant relationship between gender difference and moral development. The reason could be that gender is significantly related with how the students react or respond to situations requiring moral solutions. Moral development is affected by different factors such as parents, significant elders, peers, culture, religion and education.

HA4: The relationship between gender and moral behaviour of students.

The hypothesis HA4 is rejected on the basis of insignificant p-value ($p > 0.10$). The analysis shows that there is no significant relationship between the gender difference and resulting moral behaviour of the graduate students.

Published studies show evidence of no significant relationship between gender differences and moral behaviour of students (Derry, 1989). Sikula & Costa (1996) also found no relationship between gender difference and subsequent moral behaviour of students. Rawwas et al (2006) concluded from their studies that there is no significant relationship between gender difference and moral behaviour of individuals.

The underlying reasons might be that gender do not plays part in formulation of a specific behaviour of an individual rather it can be a play vital part in the cognitive processes that lead to a particular behaviour by an individual.

HA5: There is a relationship between religious inclination and moral development of students.

The hypothesis HA5 is accepted on the basis of significant p-value ($p < 0.05$) and positive regression weight (0.197). The values show that there is a relationship between the religious inclination and the moral development of students. The regression weight shows that the religious inclination and the moral development of students are directly proportional to each other, and more the student is religious in nature or has strong religious beliefs more he is morally developed.

Former theologians and philosophers put in efforts to relate the concept of morality with religious orientations of people. This was done because moral values were understood eternal and absolute because the belief on God's existence was absolute by its followers. Therefore different studies have found an customary relation between the religious orientation and moral development of individuals (Wimalasiri, 2001). Thus religious rights and wrongs play an important role in morally developing individuals.

HA6: The relationship between religious inclination of students and moral intensity.

The hypothesis HA6 is accepted on the basis of significant p-value ($p < 0.05$) and positive regression weight (0.104). The values show that there is a relationship between the religious inclination and the moral intensity of students. The regression weight shows that the religious inclination and the moral development of students are directly proportional to each other, and more the student is religious in nature or has strong religious beliefs more strongly he will respond to the ethical situations.

Research found that those who possessed high religious beliefs attained greater happiness, positive approach and purpose in life. Thus moral intensity and religious orientation were also found related (Davis, 2003). More a student is religious in beliefs, greater emphasis he would put to the situations requiring ethical decision making and more serious efforts he would put in while taking a decision.

HA7: The relationship between religious inclination and moral behaviour of students.

The hypothesis HA4 is rejected on the basis of insignificant p-value ($p > 0.05$). The analysis shows that there is no significant relationship between the gender difference and resulting moral behaviour of the graduate students.

Research didn't find significant relationship or effect of religious inclination of individuals and their resulting behaviours. The under-graduate might devotedly hold on to religious values in family life settings because of the fear and acceptance of authority figures and significant elders but might do not take them into account when performing their activities at college or at work. In other words, moral values take a backseat when people carry out their daily activities outside home (Scott, 2002).

HA8: The relationship between moral intensity and moral development of students.

The hypothesis HA8 is accepted on the basis of significant p-value ($p < 0.00$) and positive regression weight (0.745). The values show that there is a relationship between moral intensity and moral development of students.

The regression weight shows that moral intensity and moral development of students are directly proportional to each other. More seriously the students respond ethically to a situation more they are morally developed. It can also be explained reciprocally that greater the people are morally developed, more emphasis they would give in taking an ethical decision seriously.

HA9: The relationship between moral intensity and moral behaviour of students.

The hypothesis HA9 is accepted on the basis of significant p-value ($p < 0.00$) and positive regression weight (0.272). The values show that there is a relationship between moral intensity and moral behaviour of students. The regression weight shows that moral intensity and moral development of students are directly proportional to each other. This means greater the emphasis an individual lays while responding to an ethical situation, more his behaviour would be morally appropriate.

HA10: The relationship between moral development and moral behaviour of students

The hypothesis HA10 is accepted on the basis of significant p-value ($p < 0.00$) and positive regression weight (0.250). The values show that there is a relationship between moral development and moral behaviour of students. The regression weight shows that moral development and moral behaviour of students are directly proportional to each other. This means a person will behave more ethically and in a morally right way if he is developed morally. Kohlberg's work basically defines and explains this relationship in detail.

Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

This study examined the relationship of demographic variables such as age, gender and religious inclination that is how much a person is religious or secular in belief, in developing the graduate students morally. Age and religious inclination of the Pakistani BBA students was found significantly related with the moral development of students whereas no relationship of gender was found. Gender also played an important role in the way how students undertake a situation that requires moral justification and response that is moral intensity. It is also concluded that greater the students are religious in beliefs greater role would be these beliefs playing in developing his personality into a morally right direction. If the students hold strong religious beliefs, more seriously they would cater the arising ethical situations.

Similarly Moral intensity was found related with moral development and behaviour because as a person is clear in what is deemed right and wrong, more attention and care he would give to the situations requiring appropriate responses and therefore behave in the ethical way.

Last but not the least it was found that if the graduate students are more developed morally that means if they have sense of right and wrong, it could be expected of them to behave in a more appropriate manner.

In future the model can be further improved by the addition and testing of relevant variables and then finding out the effect on the moral intensity, development and behaviour of the individuals. This study focused on the

under-graduate students but in future it could be further tested empirically on the other age groups and students at higher level of education.

Implications of the study

This study has vitally contributed in knowledge creation because the two conceptual frameworks, Brandon et al (2003) and Thorne (1999) were adapted and modified with the addition and deletion of few variables as per requirement of the study. Another key contribution is development of the research instrument that strictly adheres to the literal concepts and is supported by acceptable values of internal reliability and content validity from experts.

This study is very beneficial from the academic point of view because it can help in providing the educational institutes with new vistas to enhance the moral development of the under-graduate students from the very first year of their studies.. Educational institutes would be able to assess the current state of moral development of their students and thus be to revise and upgrade their teaching methodologies and curriculum on the basis of tested model. This can help the institutions to develop and produce morally responsible cadre of students who would be future professionals. These morally responsible individuals would be better able to serve the societal and organizational purposes and work efficiently for their betterment.

This study, besides its academic worth, has its practical and managerial implications as well. A study of this nature will not only add up in the literature with conflicting research findings but would also help in the provision of greater insights into the field of different businesses where the

under-graduates of today will be assuming professional positions in future. Professionals of the future would be more just, honest and ethical in their thoughts and actions which would lead to the overall benefit of the society. The study is particularly important to the social groups, and organizations.