

## GENDER DIFFERENCES AND ACQUIRED STAGES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOLS

Dr Fozia Gulab<sup>1</sup>, Munir Lalani<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

*Decline of morality in a society is an important issue faced by the world today. Moral values are the code of conduct and standards of life set by a particular society and international community in general and school is an important social institution to indoctrinate moral values in students.*

*This research study explores the acquired stages of moral development by male and female students who had completed first ten years of schooling from the selected private schools of Karachi and Lahore. It was retrospective causal-comparative research. The accessible population of this study comprises 297 students. A sample of 69 students were randomly selected from the total population. Moral development interview inventory containing ten dilemmas was used as a tool to measure the stages of moral development. Data analysed indicate that no significance difference was observed between the acquired stages of moral development by male and female students. Students have shown the tendency of remaining between 2nd and 5<sup>th</sup> stage of moral development proposed by Kohlberg. The findings of the study narrate that first ten years of schooling has transformed students into morally developed beings who believe in practicing values and taking fair and neutral actions at the time of temptations. The findings further state that morally developed students are empowered to differentiate between right and wrong, to make the right decisions when faced with complex choices and have the freedom and courage to act in line with the right choices.*

**Key words:** Gender, moral development, values, students, schooling

### Introduction

Values are not inherited biologically but are nurtured, fostered and inculcated through an individual's interaction with the social environment and from the activities, opportunities and experiences which come across through various institutions including schooling in the process of receiving education (Narvaez, 2006; Subotnik, et al. 2011).

Education is a moral activity with the purpose to inculcate intellectual and moral virtues in students (Kohlberg, 1975; Kotzee, et al. 2021). School and society are related to each other in a multi-leveled and multifaceted ways. School is a mini society in nature where students are prepared to be the efficient members of society through the transmission of desirable values and ethical attitudes to be fostered in the society for upcoming generations. Hence, schools are expected to provide multiple opportunities to students around moral decision making by fostering an environment that expedites their social, emotional, intellectual and moral development to adjust in a society (Berkowitz & Grych, 1998; Crowther, 2011). The formal/informal curriculum, school policies and rules/regulations pertaining to the attitude and behavior of the students contribute to their moral growth and development (Resh & Sabbagh,

<sup>1</sup> Deputy Director, Notre Dame Institute of Education, Karachi. [fozia.gulab@ndie.edu.pk](mailto:fozia.gulab@ndie.edu.pk)

<sup>2</sup> Teaching Faculty, Notre Dame Institute of Education, Karachi. [munir.lalani@ndie.edu.pk](mailto:munir.lalani@ndie.edu.pk)

2017; Dewantara, et al. 2021). Teachers play an important role in the character building of students and are the key stakeholders in this transmission process through the implementation of prescribed curricula and by encouraging, motivating, challenging and appreciating students to live and practice the moral values learned as an outcome of officially prescribed curricula and schools' learning gained from the experiences encountered through various activities of unofficial curricula. The purpose of moral education is to teach values, and mannerism for facilitating moral development of students (Thambu, et al. 2021; Oser, 1996). Hence schools must recognize that one of the purposes of education is the advancement of moral development with determination of fair practices in the school and society at large (Murray et al. 2002).

Obliviousness of moral education in schools could result into demoralized society. Hence, in general, schools in the Pakistani society are expected by the society in large, to attempt to bridge realms of faith and world with the aim to prepare individuals that can contribute positively in the society. In contrast, the research studies have shown that the behavior and attitude of the students in schools and outside schools is alarming. Physical and verbal abuses, use of drugs, bullying, and dishonoring school administration, teachers, peers and parents have increased among the adolescents in the recent years (Asante & Kugbey, 2019; Malik et al, 2019; Masath, 2013). It is critical therefore to identify the impact of schooling, if at all, to foster moral values among students, as expected, through formal and informal curricula. The scope of this study is limited however to the students who have completed ten years of schooling from the selected schools of a private school system. Private school system is one of the important modes of education in Pakistan (Rahman, 2004; Shah, 2006). These schools are expected to provide quality education to students coming from different socio-economic backgrounds with better physical and human facilities (Andrabi et al. 2002). Private school systems have diverse philosophies which influences their curriculum, this study explores the acquired stages of moral development of students who have completed their first ten years of schooling from selected private schools, which by virtue of their mandate, as evident in the mission statements, strive to serve beyond the boundaries of caste, color, creed or race by enabling students to become self-reliant, who are developed morally and ethically too, along with other important dimensions of development.

### **Problem statement**

The world at large is facing the challenge of declining moral values from the society. Moral values are decided by the global society in general and local society in particular. These define the standard of life for the individuals of a particular society and help them to choose between good and bad while monitoring those choices and behaviors. The moral values of individuals are monitored by the society, government, religion and self. In general individuals develop their moral values at home under the influence of parents (Javed, et al., 2014). The crumbling of moral behavior from society leads to many problems including growing crime rates (Crain, 2016). Throughout history, moral education has been the recurrent aim of education but industrialization crushed it with its demands of the capitalist economy center for the provision of skilled human power. Thus, moral goals of education were gradually suspended and vocational

goals came to the forefront (Stromquist, 2002). In contemporary times, the return of moral education to the limelight can be attributed to the fact that modern societies deal with alarming trends within schools and society. Rising discipline glitches in schools result in culminating violent outbursts. Parents consider schools and the society at large as responsible for the deterioration of moral values.

It is widely argued that schools in Pakistan are not adequately providing for the moral education of students. Though, as far as curricula is concerned, in Pakistan moral education has been embedded in the subject matter of various academic disciplines including languages (English, Urdu, Sindhi), Social Studies /Pakistan Studies and Islamiyat/Religion. Nevertheless, considering the growing tendency of immoral and unethical practices in society in general and specifically in the schools, the need of the time is that moral education should be dealt independently as a subject to be an essential part of formal curricula. There is an increased interest towards character education; therefore, invariably education is expected, along with other purposes, to develop moral values in students.

The School environment, teacher interaction with students, socio economic background of students, teaching strategies used by teachers, strategies used to tackle behavior problems, school policies, rules, code of conduct, ethics, curriculum and co-curricular activities all contribute to the moral development of students (Corbett, 2011; Weissbourdet et al, 2013). But children do not seem to be morally groomed, this could be because of demeaning of morality from the society and social institutions such as schools (Sharma, 2013). Research by Reed et al. (1996) has indicated that administrators', teachers' and parents' concern is generally towards the cognitive development of students at the cost of moral development.

The academicians, educationists and policy makers in the country have stressed on embedding morality and ethics within the school curriculum. The importance of embedding morality in the school curriculum cannot be overlooked as it is of significant importance to cultivate pro-social behaviors in the students to nurture a value-based society (Akram et al., 2021; Javed et al, 2018).

Though the occurrence of moral decision making at the individual and societal level cannot be undervalued, the need of the time is to widen it and examine gender differences in moral reasoning. The study intends to explore and investigate the acquired stages of moral development by male and female students who have completed ten years of schooling from the chosen private schools across two cities (i.e. Karachi & Lahore) in Pakistan. These schools, like many other schools in Pakistan, aim to foster moral values among students, as is evident in the school's policy documents and mission statements. The objectives of this study was to probe the acquired stages of moral development of male and female students after the completion of their first ten years of schooling.

The questions that guided this research were:

What stages of moral development are acquired by the students of selected private schools after the completion of first ten years of schooling?

Do male and female students acquire like or unlike stages of moral development after the completion of first ten years of schooling?

The null hypothesis for this study was as such:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference between the acquired stages of moral development of male and female students of the selected private schools in Karachi and Lahore after the completion of first ten years of schooling.

### Literature Review

Social interaction is important to build rapport between different individuals. They learn to adapt in the society and progressively gain maturity in understanding and responding to situations. Social interaction is highly influenced by the moral development of the individuals (Berger, 2005; Koenig et al., 2004). Moral development is described as follows: when people encounter complex situations, they are able to differentiate between right and wrong and experience the freedom to make the right choice (Javed, et al., 2014).

Moral education is an area of significant importance in the school curriculum to shape the behavior of students. It is generally blended with religious education or character education. Various research studies have emphasized the importance of moral education in schools (Braspenning, 2010; Halstead & Pike, 2006; Larson & Capra, 2009; Oladipo, 2009 etc.). In many countries moral education is a core subject in the school curriculum with a focus to advance students in moral development (Balakrishnan, 2010). In Pakistan, Muslim students are given moral education through the teaching of Islamiyat and non-Muslim students are morally educated through teaching of Ethics and / or religious studies (of their specific faith) in schools. Through the teaching of Islamiyat/Ethics/religious studies Muslim and non-Muslim students are educated around goodness and attributes of moral well-being.

Crain (2016) asserts that moral development is not a natural process, rather it is an outcome of various learning experiences students encounter at school, home and in the neighborhood. The moral behavior of students is developed through continuous efforts of teachers and parents. The behavior and attitude of students towards other members of the society following specific cultural and social norms, laws and rules are advanced through the process of moral development. Schools are considered to play a significant role in the moral development of the students. Mehdi and Gupta as cited in Gupta (2014) have stated that schools are accountable for the development of moral attitude in their students by providing them with various learning opportunities aligned with official and unofficial curriculum. Through intended and unintended curriculum, the schools facilitate students to learn to respect themselves and others, have self-control, be honest in their words and deeds, and be duty conscious, compassionate, truthful and righteous. Some of the moral qualities such as love, self-control, truthfulness and sacrifice can be stressed by the teachers as they teach different subjects such as social studies, ethics, languages (English, Urdu), science, art, religion and so on.

Education for morality invite students to realize the importance of social goodness. The moral character of individuals influences their actions (Balsi, 2004). Renowned psychologists

such as Freud, Piaget and Skinner have proposed that morality is a social cognitive phenomenon that helps individuals to understand the concept of right and wrong. Individuals clarify their understanding through social interactions within a specific community as they experience the consequences of the actions and reactions of their interactions. Children are affected by societal changes (Kolucki & Lemish, 2011). Kant's theory of moral development is centered on the establishment of moral rules to be followed whereas Piaget's theory is grounded on cognitive development concentrating on unique and significant levels for morality (Pressley & McCormick, 2007). Having been inspired by the work of previous and contemporary psychologists, Kohlberg proposed his theory based on the regular observations of a group of boys' thorough-out various stages of development. The culmination of his observations was that the understanding of the boys about moral development is having the knowledge of good and right. Kohlberg also concluded that the boys gained the knowledge of goodness and righteousness having been passed through three levels and six stages. Kohlberg named the first level as pre-conventional, having two stages, namely avoiding punishment and exchange of interest; the second level namely conventional related with stages of interpersonal harmony and compliance and the third stage namely post conventional had the stages namely social contract and universal moral principle. Through his theory of moral development Kohlberg emphasized that people grow through various stages of moral reasoning and each growing stage lays foundation for the next stage. Kohlberg used and proposed the "dilemma discussion method" for eliciting moral reasoning from participants to identify the achieved level and stage of moral development (Kohlberg, 1975; Kohlberg, 1984; Blasi, 2004). Further studies by Gilligan informed that males and females differs in their moral development owing to different factors such as gender roles as nurtured in the societies (Gilligan, 1977). In this manner, Gilligan's research findings differed from the work of Kohlberg (1975) who articulated moral development in the form of a linear pattern of advancement through different stages. Disregarding the rationalist approach and universal pattern of moral development, Gilligan differentiated between the male and female orientation for moral development by characterizing males as orienting towards justice and females towards care (Murray et al, 2002).

Several research studies in different contexts have found evidences that supports or contradicts Gilligan's findings. For instance, Friesdorf et a. (2015) on the basis of re-analyzing forty studies on moral development with over 6100 participants assert male orientation towards the ethics of justice contrasting with female positioning towards the ethics of care in their moral judgement. In the Pakistani context, there is a deficiency of research studies that inform the similarities or differences in male and female orientation of moral development. One recent study carried out by Bilwani and Anjum (2022) on a group of equal number of male and female participants (n = 24) from Karachi between 19 and 32 years of age, supports the link between gender and moral development. The findings of the study indicate female participants showing more concern towards ethics of care as compared to males in their moral decision making. Bilwani and Anjum (2022) argue that the difference between males and females in terms of their moral judgment is influenced by a number of contextual factors including cultural and societal norms and traditions. With major household responsibilities including upbringing of children,



Pakistani women in general gain more experiences of exhibiting ethics of care as compared to males. However, the study being a qualitative research, does not claim to generalize its findings beyond the sample of the study. Therefore, more research studies in Pakistan are needed to find out, the existence of differences, if at all, in the male and female orientation towards moral development in Pakistan particularly, among young adults.

Moral development also differs among the students of different age groups and the schooling experiences they have. For instance, an empirical study by Iqbal et al. (2017) showed a significant difference in levels of moral development among the students from the mainstream private schools and those who studied from madrasahs. The study indicates that students of private schools are way ahead of the students studying in madrasahs when compared for the levels of moral development. This was because of too much emphasis on rote memorization in madrasahs with less space for critical thinking and reflection (Iqbal et al., 2017). Similarly, another study in Peshawar by Ahmad and Reba (2018) compares the moral development of elementary grade students who had taken their early years education from the Montessori system with the students who had taken their early years education from other systems. Data collected from hundred participants of elementary school students through stratified sampling was analyzed using the independent t-test that highlighted the difference between the two groups. The students having experience of Montessori schooling were found to have better moral development as compared to other early year systems. The study recommends the need of further research in the local context to identify the impact of schooling on moral development, particularly by taking into consideration gender-based exploration. The current study attempts to address this gap by investigating the acquired stages of moral development of male and female students after the completion of first ten years of schooling.

## **Methodology**

This research was an attempt to investigate the obtained levels of moral development as an outcome of education provided by selected private schools. It was a retrospective causal-comparative research as it explored the existing differences in the acquired stages of moral development of male and female students who have studied for ten years in the selected private schools of Karachi and Lahore with similar formal and informal curriculum, school culture and environment. The targeted population of the study consisted of all the students of two specific schools of Karachi and Lahore having the following characteristics:

Male and female students who had completed first ten years of schooling.

Male and female students within the age bracket of fifteen and sixteen years.

Male and female students registered/admitted in the specific schools in grade one.

The study intended to compare the acquired stages of moral development of male and female students of selected private schools of Karachi and Lahore therefore purposive sampling was considered as an appropriate technique for participant selection. The total number of selected schools for this study was two, having one boys' and one girls' school. For the generalizability of the findings of this study, the researchers selected an equal number of

participants from both the schools under study. From each school fifty students were randomly selected to participate in the study however thirty male and thirty-nine female students (n=69) voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Moral Development Interview Inventory (MDII), a contextually developed and standardized research tool designed by Khanam (2010) was used for data collection purposes. MDII consisted of ten moral dilemmas, each dilemma containing maximum six marks responding to the six stages of moral development prescribed by Kohlberg. The students were expected to read and understand the given stories and choose the most appropriate response. The answers were scored according to the key provided.

The data was collected through direct administration, numbers were assigned to each questionnaire to avoid possible errors in data entry and to rectify the pointing errors in the cleaning process. Further, the data was analyzed through an available version of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 22) software.

### **Data Analysis**

The scores on the standardized instrument were analyzed with the help of univariate analysis and independent sample t-test on SPSS for comparing the group mean. A t-test was used to compare the mean differences between the responses of male and female students. For the purpose of data analysis a template was developed in SPSS. The demographic variables were coded such as males as 1 and females as 2 and so on. Students' responses were also coded with numbers from 1 to 6 whereas the missing response was coded with a value of 0. All the data were entered into SPSS for further processing. The data were cleaned by running frequency through SPSS in order to identify errors. Moreover, the range of values was also checked. Some typing errors were identified through data cleaning and corrections were made by looking into the specific number of the questionnaire.

**Table 1 Group statistics**

| Gender | N  | Mean    | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| male   | 30 | 38.5000 | 7.60104        | 1.38775         |
| female | 39 | 39.4103 | 7.27547        | 1.16501         |

From a total of sixty-nine research participants thirty were male and thirty-nine were female as shown in Table 1, making more or less equal participation of both the genders in this study.

**Table 2 Acquired stages of moral development**

|         | N  | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---------|----|---------|---------|------|----------------|
| Valid N | 69 | 2       | 5       | 3.90 | .738           |

Analysis of data obtained for the study, explains that the acquired stages of moral development of male and female students ranged between two and five with two being the lowest and five being the highest stage, leaving students at an average stage of four. Supposedly students have learnt about obedience and punishment which are the characteristics of stage one during their upbringing at home. Schools further strengthened it through various curricular and co-curricular activities and uninterruptedly exposed and immersed students into a variety of educational experiences that contributed in their moral development. The students were oriented to the first stage of moral development namely obedience and punishment mostly at home or through pre-school education. The selected schools further built on it by actively engaging students in multiple activities to be competent in individualism and exchange, good interpersonal relationships, maintaining the social order and social contract and individual rights. However the majority of the students achieved stage four of the moral development at the completion of ten years of formal schooling which is highlighted with becoming aware of the wider rules of the society and making judgments concerned with obeying the rules to uphold the law and avoid guilt. The results of the study describe that ten years of education in the selected private schools become the source of acquiring the fourth stage of moral development for most of the students involved in the study. Though the selected schools foster the values in facilitating students to develop morally, societal standards do not endorse it.

**Table 3 Independent sample t-test for comparisons of group means of male and female students**

|  |  |  |  |  |                 |                 | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|-----------------|-----------------|---|--|
|  |  |  |  |  | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference |   |  |



|                            | F    | Sig  | t     | df     |      |         | Lower    | Upper   |
|----------------------------|------|------|-------|--------|------|---------|----------|---------|
| Equal variance assumed     | .053 | .818 | -.505 | 67     | .615 | -.91026 | -4.50601 | 2.68549 |
| Equal variance not assumed |      |      | -.505 | 61.114 | .617 | -.91026 | -4.53331 | 2.71279 |

The scores obtained on the standardized instrument were analyzed using independent sample t-test for comparing the differences between the group mean of male and female students. The p value was greater than 0.05 which indicates that after the completion of first ten years of schooling no significant difference is observed in the acquired stages of moral development by male and female students. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted therefore it is assumed that schooling has equally contributed in the moral development of students and provided them with opportunities, experiences and challenges to share their opinion in judging the impact of specific actions in various circumstances, to live up to the social expectations, to abide by social norms and to respect differing values, opinions, and beliefs to make choices for the benefit of others.

### Findings

The findings of the study narrate that after completing first ten years of schooling from particular private schools of Karachi and Lahore the students acquired as lower as stage two and as higher as stage five resting overall at stage four while having the tendency of moving towards stage five of moral development. Schooling has contributed in molding the behavior of students to adjust and to abide by the norms of the society based on social acceptability and to follow the directed instructions and perform expected tasks due to the fear of negative consequences. Ten years of schooling has exposed students to various situations and circumstances where they were obliged to follow rules set by the society as these were endorsed by the schools. These rules must have been enforced through various formal and informal school policies. Hence the acquired stage was gradually managed through the process of moral development (Lodhi & Siddiqui, 2014). The school and classroom environment, various teaching styles adopted by teachers, relationship between teacher and students and modeling from teachers and parents significantly influenced the students in supporting them to acquire various stages of moral development (Feeney et al., 2016).

The study nullify gender differences in acquiring any stage of moral development. These findings are consistent with those of Lan et al. (2005) who investigated gender differences in moral reasoning, personal values and value types and found no statistically significant differences in the level of moral reasoning in girls and boys. This could have been due to multiple reasons such as meaningful messages received from the formal and informal curriculum, values embedded in the school environment, values experienced through excursions

and activities, values embraced through social awareness programs and modeling of moral values by the principal, teachers, and other staff in the school.

The findings of the study clearly relate that irrespective of gender the selected private schools have contributed in the moral development of students and have empowered them to understand the importance of their point of view, be competent in making judgments of adult actions in comparison to set standards by individual or society, learn to live up to social expectations in relation to various roles set by the society, to stand firmly to make social order after considering society as a whole while making judgments when encountered with decision making situations. Nonetheless schools need to make deliberate efforts in helping students to appreciate the diversity of values, opinions and beliefs others hold and to follow internalized principles of justice though conflicting with existing laws and rules (Javed, et al., 2018).

### **Conclusion:**

Students in private schools seem to be more moralistic because of larger opportunities to participate in excessive co-curricular activities, greater chances to work in teams, value laden school culture and environment, continuous monitoring and appraisal of the behavior and actions of school employees and enforcement of school rules and regulations.

The findings of the study are substantial as they significantly highlight that students have acquired the fourth stage of moral development at the completion of ten years of schooling and have shown great tendency of moving towards the fifth stage. Hence it is assumed that the schools under study nurtured moral and ethical grooming by providing an environment that is supportive of student teacher relationships, offering multiple chances for students to practice life skills, encouraging them to take leadership roles, enforcing discipline strategies, managing regular assessment for values and by handling students' issues intelligently. Students were encouraged, motivated and given sufficient opportunities to have their say and were provided with moral education training through curricular and non-curricular activities. However people in general are frustrated or dissatisfied about the moral development of the youth, hence from the two goals of education – making people smart and good, the moral enterprise has to be focused to make school and society a place where values such as helpfulness, honesty, truthfulness, justice, hard work, teamwork and being merciful are cherished, promoted and celebrated. Therefore, schools must strive to specify moral values in the teaching learning objectives, and provide tremendous opportunities to students to practice them through various programs with the purpose of strengthening the norms of the society.

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