



KOHLBERG THEORY OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND SECONDARY STUDENTS REASONING

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ABSTRACT

Kohlberg theory of moral development explains the stages of moral development with connection to the growth of an individual. The theory stipulates that as a child grows in age, the ability to reason morally should also increase. Moral reasoning is important it enables students to distinguish between right and wrong. Kenyan secondary schools moral reasoning is taught through Christian Religious Education (CRE). Despite exposure to moral reasoning content, moral judgement of students is generally unsatisfactory. This is reflected in immoral behaviour such as drug abuse and destruction of school property among others. This suggests that moral education imparted through the carrier subjects has not achieved its objectives. This study investigated the influence of Christian Religious Education Curriculum on secondary school students' moral reasoning. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. A sample of 386 students was selected using stratified, proportionate and simple random sampling techniques. CRE Students' Moral Reasoning Test (CRESMRAT) was used to collect data. Qualitative data was summarised and described using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. The results of the study indicated that moral reasoning content coverage in the CRE curriculum and students moral reasoning level were average. The results of the study can be used by Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) to enhance moral reasoning content of the CRE curriculum while teacher training institutions can use them to strengthen moral education and methodologies in their programmes. The results can also be used by teachers to enhance moral education content delivery. Lastly, the results can be used by the society to mould young people into responsible citizens.

Key Words: Moral reasoning, Christian Religious Education

INTRODUCTION

Every school has a responsibility to develop the moral reasoning competencies of its students (You & Penny, 2011). It is important to provide students with moral reasoning competencies because it equips them with the ability to distinction between right and wrong and make right judgments (Dimana, 2012). Sober (2009) asserts that the type of moral training provided to student determines the quality of adults they become to their families, community and nation at large. Moral reasoning is defined as the conscious effort to make informed and responsible judgment about matters of moral importance (Straughan, 2000). Mensch (2009) provides a more detailed definition of moral reasoning as specific aspects of development that focuses on cognitive ability of the individual to understand morality in context of situation he/she is in. Indicators of moral reasoning include; integrity, self-control, honesty, respect, patriotism,

peaceful resolution of conflicts (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 1998) among others. Moral reasoning can thus be considered as the process of determining right and wrong in a given situation.

According to Myyry (2003), for one to be morally mature and correct, one must possess four key moral components, namely; moral sensitivity, moral judgement, moral motivation and moral implementation. Moral sensitivity is the consideration of what actions are possible in a situation while moral judgement is concerned with what is morally right and fair. Moral motivation is the drive to do what is morally right while moral implementation is having courage and skills to carry out a line of action even under pressure. All the four components work together to influence a person's moral behaviour (Gardiner, 2000). These phases form the basis for moral education.

In Kenya, moral education is provided to secondary school students to equip them with moral reasoning skills to foster good morals (KIE, 2002). Xaxx (2014) asserts that people with a solid sense of right and wrong are less easily coerced by others particularly where peer pressure is intense, hence the need for moral education. CRE has been viewed for many years as one of the means of restoring morals and social order in society. According to Kowino, Agak and Kochung (2012), CRE curriculum exposes learners to critical thinking which is essential for moral reasoning. However, many secondary school graduates are still unable to use their critical faculties well to make responsible moral choices. Mwalulu (2007) noted that it is the school leavers who are normally used by politicians to cause mayhem in the society. Oyaro (2009) adds that Kenyan reform institutions are full of the students who should belong to secondary schools rather than penitentiary. Many problems in schools are therefore attributed to students' bad behaviour, negative attitudes and lack of moral (Ming'yue, 2013).

Meaning of Moral Reasoning

The word moral comes from a Latin root, *mos* or *moris* and means standards, principles and habits of behaviour that are applicable to the distinction between what is right and wrong (Dimana, 2012). Morals are therefore regarded as desirable and held with high esteem by the society. They are codes or customs that define how individuals should live together. Morals are principles or standards of good behaviour. According to Dombeck and Wells-Moran, (2008), morals define the pattern of behaviour that the society wants from the people. Certain behaviours are considered to be desirable or undesirable.

Kalsoom, Behlol, Kanyani and Kaini (2012) defines moral reasoning as the conscious effort to make informed and responsible judgements about matters of moral importance. It is the judging of what actions are morally right and wrong, also referred to as moral judgement (Falade, 2015). Mensch (2009) provides a more detailed definition as the specific aspects of moral development that focuses on the cognitive ability of the individual to understand morality in the context of the situation. According to You and Penny (2011) therefore, moral reasoning is a process of determining right and wrong in a given situation. The school has an integral part to develop moral reasoning in students. The type of moral, religious and social training offered to the student by the school determines the quality of adults they would become to their families, community and nation at large (Sober, 2009).

According to Gallagher (2011), moral reasoning enables the students acquire desirable moral qualities, enriching their life and facilitating their identity-building in the domain of family,

society, country and world. It also emphasizes the development of students' independent thinking and autonomy that they are able to distinguish between right and wrong and make informed decisions in a caring and reasonable manner. Hence morality is a department of life concerned exclusively with a person's interest in reference to the interest of others. Zhang (2013), stressed that morality which emanates from moral reasoning is an important part of human interaction because it maintains a relatively central aspect of the sense of self control which is referred to as moral competence. Moral competence is defined as the ability to solve conflicts on the basis of shared moral principles or ideals through thinking and discussion rather than through violence, deceit and power (Wachira, 2014).

Kohlberg Theory of Moral Development

Kohlberg has built the most complete theoretical model, which has served as touchstone for all the subsequent theories of moral reasoning. In his model, moral development is structured through a hierarchical and invariant stage organization evolving from a selfish and instrumental viewpoint to the perspective based on interdependence and mutual respect to get to the point where morality identifies with the sense of justice. Kohlberg modified and elaborated Piaget's work, and laid the groundwork for the current debate within psychology on moral development. Consistent with Piaget, Kohlberg proposed that students form ways of thinking through their experiences which include understandings of moral concepts such as justice, rights, equality and human welfare. Kohlberg identified six stages of moral reasoning grouped into three major levels. The classification can be outlined as;

- Pre-conventional level
 - i Obedience/avoid punishment
 - ii Individualism, Instrumentalism and exchange
- Conventional level
 - iii Good boy/ girl
 - iv Law and order
- Post Conventional
 - v Social contract
 - vi Principled conscience

Each level represented a fundamental shift in the social-moral perspective of the individual. At the first level, the pre-conventional level, a person's moral judgments are moralized by a concrete, individual perspective. Within this level, a Stage 1 heteronomous orientation focuses on avoiding breaking rules that are backed by punishment, obedience for its own sake and avoiding the physical consequences of an action to persons and property. At Stage 2 there is the early emergence of moral reciprocity. The Stage 2 orientation focuses on the instrumental, pragmatic moral of an action. Reciprocity is of the form, "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." The Golden Rule becomes, "If someone hits you, you hit them back." At Stage 2 one follows the rules only when it is to someone's immediate interests. What is right is what is fair in the sense of an equal exchange, a deal, an agreement. Individuals at the conventional level of reasoning, however, have a basic understanding of conventional morality, and reason with an understanding that norms and conventions are necessary to uphold society. They tend to be self-identified with these rules, and uphold them consistently, viewing morality as acting in accordance with what society defines as right in terms of moral reasoning.

Within post-conventional level, individuals (stage 3) are aware of shared feelings, agreements, and expectations which take primacy over individual interests. Persons at Stage 3 define what is right in terms of what is expected by people close to one's self, and in terms of the stereotypical roles that define being good. Being good means keeping mutual relationships, such as trust, loyalty, respect, and gratitude. The perspective is that of the local community or family. There is

not as yet a consideration of the generalized social system. Stage 4 marks the shift from defining what is right in terms of local norms and role expectations to defining right in terms of the laws and norms established by the larger social system. This is the "member of society" perspective in which one is moral by fulfilling the actual duties defining one's social responsibilities. One must obey the law except in extreme cases in which the law comes into conflict with other prescribed social duties. Obeying the law is seen as necessary in order to maintain the system of laws which protect everyone.

The post-conventional level is moralized by reasoning based on principles, using a "prior to society" perspective. These individuals reason based on the principles which underlie rules and norms, but reject a uniform application of a rule or norm. While two stages have been presented within the theory, only stage 5, has received substantial empirical support. Stage 6 remains as a theoretical endpoint which rationally follows from the preceding 5 stages. In essence this last level of moral judgment entails reasoning rooted in the ethical fairness principles from which moral laws would be devised. Laws are evaluated in terms of their coherence with basic principles of fairness rather than upheld simply on the basis of their place within an existing social order. Thus, there is an understanding that elements of morality such as regard for life and human welfare transcend particular cultures and societies and are to be upheld irrespective of other conventions or normative obligations. These stages (1-5) have been empirically supported by findings from longitudinal and cross-cultural research (Power et al., 1989).

Kohlberg (1969) used these findings to reject traditional moral education practices. These approaches are premised in the idea that virtues and vices are the basis to moral behaviour, or that moral is comprised of a "bag of virtues", such as honesty, kindness, patience, strength, etc. The goal of moral education is to encourage individuals to develop from one stage of moral reasoning to the next. Kohlberg theory emphasize the application of thinking skill to the development of moral reasoning based on the increased complexity of moral concepts. Secondary school students are at the post conventional stage where they should be able to make responsible moral decisions. However, the stages if moral development are not automatically delinked at a when a person attains a certain age. Ellenwood (2007) observed that implementing moral education in schools using Kohlberg's model as a theoretical framework would help to produce an educated citizenry by teaching moral reasoning through content-integrated dilemma-based discussion, modeling a democratic environment through shared leadership, and facilitating growth through the stages of moral development. Teachers therefore must provide students with the opportunities of personal discovery through problem solving rather than indoctrinating them with preconceived norms and morals (Devries & Zan, 1999). This would enable students to reflect what has been learnt in religious education to their daily lives. There is therefore need to determine the influence of CRE curriculum and CRE teachers' perceptions on secondary school students acquisition of moral reasoning.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A research design is the overall operational pattern or framework of a project that stipulates what information is to be collected, from which sources and by what procedures (Green & Tull, 2009). Orodho (2005) considers it as a scheme, outline or plan that is used to generate answers to research questions. Selection of a research design is influenced by factors such as the focus of study, the unit of analysis (the person or object of data collection) and the time dimension (Bless & Hiqson-Smith, 1995). The descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study.

Sampling

The sample sizes of CRE students was determined using Slovin’s formula (Dionco-Adetayo, 2011) for determining a sample of a finite population.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+NE^2}$$

- Where: n = sample size
- N = population size
- E = margin of error or error tolerance
- 1 = is a constant value

The sample sizes of the students when the error margin is 5% was 386, given that their accessible populations was 10603. The study adopted the stratified sampling procedures to ensure that all the sub-counties participated in the study.

3.6 INSTRUMENTATION

CRE students Moral Reasoning Test (CRESMRAT) was used to measure the students’ moral reasoning levels. The test had four parts; respondents’ characteristics, multiple choice, defining issues and a section that contained open ended items. The multiple choice test measured the students’ knowledgeability on moral issues whereas defining issues was for determining their moral reasoning levels under given phenomena. The section contained seventeen multiple choice items which were developed by the researcher from topics in the secondary school CRE syllabus. Response to an item was awarded 1 point for a correct answer and 0 for a wrong answer response.

The Defining Issue Test (DIT) section was used to measure how well a student could make moral decisions in a given situation. It comprised of 15 moral issue cases from which the student was required to make decisions. The responses were awarded 2 points for a correct answer with a logical explanation, 1 point for an answer and a 0 for an incorrect answer or failure to respond to the item. The open-ended items were used to generate qualitative data. The section had two items, the first one was for soliciting data on students’ reasons for choosing CRE as an optional subject. The second item was used to gather data on suitability of the CRE curriculum in equipping learners with knowledge and skills to help them make correct moral judgments. The data was keyed into the data file and analysed using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations Data generated by the open-ended items were organized into themes pertinent to the study and then summarised and described using frequencies and percentages.

Results

The students’ characteristics were examined and summary of the profiles is given in Table 1.

Table 1

CRE Students’ Characteristics

Scale	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender n = 352	Male	180	51.1
	Female	172	48.9
Location of the school n = 341	Urban	144	42.2
	Rural	197	57.8

The results in Table 1 reveal that slightly more than a half (51.1%) of the students who participated in the study was males. The gender distribution of the sample is comparable with

data from the ministry of Education, Science and Technology which indicate that overall enrolment in secondary schools in 2014 was 51.7% for males and 48.3% for females (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2014). However, a study carried out by Ombati (2012) on factors influencing enrolment in Christian religious education in public secondary schools in Nyamachi division, Kisii county, Kenya, showed that female (54.3%) students enrolment in CRE was higher than that (45.7%) of their male counterparts. This suggests that enrolment in CRE may differ from one county to another.

The results in Table 1 also indicate that more than a half (57.8%) of the students who participated in the study were from schools located in rural areas. The results support those of Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2014) which indicates that 61.5% of the population of Nakuru lives in rural areas. The results conflict with those of a study conducted in China by Liu, et al(2009). They noted that access to high school education was limited in rural areas. Poor regions in rural areas record low enrolment of between 20 % and 30%, while in large cities, more than 80% of junior high school graduates progress to high schools. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Education Sector Report, (2005) also noted large regional disparities in enrolment of students by provinces in Kenya. For instance, Nairobi province had an enrolment of 2,130,000 secondary school students while North Eastern had 76,100.

Moral Reasoning of the Secondary School Students

The first objective aimed at examining the level of secondary school students’ moral reasoning. A moral reasoning achievement test was administered to the sampled students. The test had two sections; A which had 17 multiple choice items and B which had 15 open ended dilemma issue items. The items measured moral reasoning in areas of personal, family, social, national and global domains. A correct response to a multiple choice item was awarded one(1) mark whereas an incorrect response was awarded a zero(0). A wrong answer to a defining issue test item was awarded a zero while a correct answer was awarded a point. A correct answer to a defining issue test item with an explanation was awarded two points. The test mean scores are in Table 2.

Table 2
Moral Reasoning Test Means and Standard Deviations (SD)

Test	N	Percentage	
		Mean	SD
Multiple Choice, maximum = 17	363	13.21	1.99
Defining Issues, maximum = 30	362	16.26	6.22
Moral Reasoning, maximum = 47	362	29.50	7.26

The results in Table 2 reveal that the students’ multiple choice test mean (M = 13. 21, SD = 1.99) was fairly high given that it was marked out of 17. The mean (M = 16.26, SD = 6.22) score on the defining issue test was average as it was marked out of 30. The overall moral reasoning mean (M = 29.50, SD = 7.26) score was rated average given that it was measured out of 47. On the basis of the results, the students’ moral reasoning level was rated average. The results support those of Gallagher’s (2011) study that was conducted among pharmacy students in United Kingdom. The results showed that moral reasoning scores increased with years of study. However, the scores were generally low as they ranged between 11% to 18% percent. Maiyo’s (2015) study conducted in Nandi Sub-County Kenya demonstrated that CRE plays an important role towards moral development of students in secondary schools. However, it is not effective in

developing learners' moral reasoning as schools place more emphasis on science subjects and students pursue CRE only for academic purposes.

The results observed above showed that the students' moral reasoning level was moderate despite exposure moral education curriculum. The unsatisfactory moral reasoning level can be attributed to several factors. Ming'yue (2013) asserts that the methods used to teach moral reasoning influence the capacity of learner to reason. Kowino, Agak and Kochung (2012) recommend that the teacher should adopt instructional methods that emphasis logic and appeal to precision in reasoning. There are researches which show that peer interaction influences students' moral development (Zhang, 2013; Walker, Hennig & Krettenauer, 2000). Students who interact with peers are more likely to advance in their moral reasoning than those who do not.

Social norms, culture and traditions have also been associated with moral reasoning. Piaget in (Herbutzki, 2014) argues that moral reasoning is a process based on how people interact with the environment and hence must be affected by actions of the society. Haidt (2008) adds that moral reasoning is grounded on principals and beliefs that are universal or specific to a group. These factors could perhaps explain the average moral reasoning level of the students.

Moral education is crucial for schools as it provides students with skills needed to handle moral dilemmas that they encounter in their daily lives (Ellenwood, 2007). While the primary mission of schools is to promote academic excellence, there is nonetheless need to promote character development as well (Beane, 2002). Studies have shown that when students acquire high moral reasoning skills they are able to resolve conflicts peacefully, practice pro-social behaviours, and engage in service to the community (Dolph & Lycan, 2008). As a result, schools become better places due to decline in cases of unbecoming behaviour. Further, the study examined the distribution of students' moral reasoning levels by gender and location. A summary of the results is shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Distribution of Students' Moral Reasoning Levels by Gender and Location

Scale	Character	Levels		
		High	Average	Low
Gender	Male	35.6	56.7	17.8
	Female	53.2	43.9	2.9
Location	Rural	44.4	50.5	5.1
	Urban	44.2	46.6	9.3
Overall		44.5	50.3	5.2

The results in Table 3 indicate that the moral reasoning level of majority (56.7%) of the males was average while that of majority (53.2%) of the females was high. This is an indication that the moral reasoning level of the females is higher than that of the males. These results are in harmony with those of Miller (2008) who established that girls tend to make better moral judgments. Miller attributed this to the fact that women made moral judgments based less on justice and rights, and more on care and compassion. These results also support those of Kalsoom, Behlol, Kayani and Kaini (2012) who observed that the morals reasoning of female students was higher than that of their male colleagues.

The results also reveal that the reasoning level of majority of students in rural (50.5%) and urban (46.6%) areas was average. The results further reveal that a significant number of students from

urban (44.2%) and rural (44.4%) schools had high levels of moral reasoning. The results reveal that the moral reasoning level of students by school location is comparable. This may perhaps be due to the fact that all secondary school students are exposed to morals education through CRE which is compulsory in forms 1 and 2 (KIE, 2002)

The results in Table 3 indicate that the overall moral reasoning level of majority (50.3%) of the students was average. The results support those of Gallagher, (2011) who conducted an assessment of moral reasoning of pharmacy students in United Kingdom. The study established that the moral reasoning level of students was average with a significant growth with increase in the number of years in the university. Kowino, Kochung, Agak, (2011) noted that CRE students in Kisumu district did not possess high levels of moral reasoning skills such as conflict resolution, consensus building and negotiating among others. This was evidenced by the poor performance of the learner in questions which demanded that they show competence in identifying social relating skills and explaining their usability in social interactions. However, the results do not support those of O'Flaherty and Gleeson (2017) who noted that Irish student teachers moral reasoning levels were high. They attributed the high moral reasoning level to transitions year programme which prepares students socially to fit in society and their strong Christian family backgrounds.

The results in Table 3 also indicate that the overall moral reasoning level of students is average with the female students presenting higher reasoning levels than their male counter parts. This average moral reasoning level may explain the why there have been cases of lawlessness such as massive destruction of school property and disruption of social order by secondary school students. For instance, over 100 schools were torched in Kenya in the months of June and July 2016 (Mabel, (2016). The relatively low moral reasoning level can be attributed to several factors. Murphy-O'Connor (2003) contends that lack of proper moral reasoning development causes one to be a victim of emotions which may lead to immorality. The relatively low moral reasoning level may also be due to ineffectiveness of the curriculum and methods used to teach moral education (Ngunju & Wamukowa, 2013). Negative students' attitudes, peer pressure, family background and influence of an immorality society are also possible causes (Akaranga & Simiyu, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The results also indicated that majority (50.3%) of the students had a moderate moral rating. This could imply that their moral reasoning is not well formed even after interaction with moral reasoning content through the learning of CRE. This could be due to ineffectiveness of instructional methods used or content coverage is not adequate; or not well distributed over the four-year cycle. There is need therefore for CRE teacher to improve on content delivery through improved instructional methods which would awaken the reasoning faculties in the student.

RECOMMENDATION

The findings of the study show that secondary school student's moral reasoning level is average. This suggests that their moral reasoning is not well formed even after interaction with moral reasoning content through the learning of CRE. There is need therefore for CRE teacher to improve on content delivery through instructional methods mix which awaken the reasoning faculties in the student.

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