

Exploring the Relationship Between Moral Reasoning and Cognitive Development Among Secondary School Students

Dr Aminah Qayyum

aminahqayyum@gcwuf.edu.pk

Lecturer Education Department Government College Women University Faisalabad

Dr Fizzah Aslam

fizzahaslam1@gmail.com

Lecturer, Tesol Department, Lahore College for Women University Jail Road Lahore

Mamuna Maria

mamuna.edu@mul.edu.pk

Lecturer at School of Education, Minhaj University Lahore

Dr. Asifa Younas

ayeshahfa8@gmail.com

PST at Government Primary School 67 GB, District Faisalabad

Tayyaba Mehmood

Tayyabau46@gmail.com

Phd Scholar Lahore College for Women University Jail Road.

Corresponding Author: *Dr. Aminah Qayyum aminahqayyum@gcwuf.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to Exploring the Relationship Between Moral Reasoning and Cognitive Development Among Secondary School Students. Most of the study that has been done on education so far has been about how well students do in school. There hasn't been much research on how students' morals and minds improve. So, the main goal of this study was to explore the relationship between these two important areas of student growth. The study's main goal was to find out what moral reasoning and cognitive growth are made up of in high school students and how they are related to each other. To do this, a validated and modified questionnaire was utilized to find out how students thought about moral reasoning. A group of 1,000 students was chosen from four districts in the Punjab province. Four secondary schools were picked from each district. Two were for girls and two were for boys, and they were chosen at random from both urban and rural areas. Correlation and T-Test were done for results. There was a strong positive relationship between moral reasoning and cognitive development among the students, according to correlation analysis. These results show how important schools are for helping students grow morally and mentally. The study's findings suggest ways to improve teaching methods that support the overall growth of students.

Keywords: Moral reasoning, cognitive development, secondary school students.

INTRODUCTION

In the last quarter of the 20th century, developmental psychologists became more interested in studying morality. This sudden rise in interest created new opportunities for research on moral development. Morality is a very important part of what makes a person who they are (Hart & Carlo,

2005). Khanam (2008) says that morality is a set of rules that people in a group follow, including their ideas, acts, interactions, and other elements of their behavior. Vess and Halbur (2003) stress that teaching kids morals means helping them develop values and practices that will make them morally upright. They also say that both the formal curriculum and the unspoken ethos of schools should have a lasting effect on students' personalities. There is evidence from real life that schools have a big effect on how kids develop their morals and behavior (Khanam, 2008).

A person's moral development is affected by both their own internal tendencies and the outside world. Parents and teachers are two of the most important people who shape children's and teens' morals (Hart & Carlo, 2005). A lot of research has shown how important parents, instructors, friends, and the school environment as a whole are in determining the moral growth of teenagers. Boyes and Allen (1993) say that how parents and children interact with each other is a big part of how children acquire their morals. Kadivar et al. (2016) also found that the moral climate of the family has a big effect on how quickly children grow morally. Kohlberg (1976) says that moral development is much better in places where everyone's opinions and treatment are recognized and respected.

Eccles et al. (1993) say that the moral climate of a school has a big impact on how teens act and think about morals in real life. This is mostly because peer approval is very important during this time of growth. Studies in a variety of cultural settings have shown that the moral atmosphere of schools can have lasting effects on how pupils develop their morals (Andreou, 2000; Blankemeyer, Flannery, & Vazsonyi, 2002; Reinke & Herman, 2002). Power, Higgins, and Kohlberg (1989) say that the moral atmosphere is a common culture or understanding of what is right and wrong that is formed by how people in a group interact with each other. In this setting, there are shared rules that affect how people think about and act on moral issues (Ommundsen et al., 2003; Stephens & Bredemeier, 1996).

There have been studies that show how schools affect the mental and social development of teens (Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost, 2002; Murray & Murray, 2004; Estevez, Musitu, & Herrero, 2005) and how interactions with peers and teachers shape attitudes and behavior (Jessor, 1991; Werner, 2004). However, there are still no empirical studies that look at how the school environment affects the moral development of secondary school students in Pakistan. This lacuna in the literature is what led to this study, which aims to look at how the moral climate of schools affects the moral growth of Pakistani high school students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Why Moral Reasoning Is Important in Today's World

There has been a scary rise in crimes like murders, violent robberies, and suicide assaults in today's world. This increase in bad behavior, especially among young people, is bad for society. People are not the only ones that are affected; their families and communities are too. Religious organizations used to be seen as the main source of moral direction, but they have been pushed to the outside of society, which has led to a decline in moral standards. Because of this, the loss in morals has become a major barrier to progress in the country.

The decline of moral instruction in households and schools has been a major factor in this society's decline. Teenage pregnancies, rape, violent crime, and corruption are all signs of this degradation. The moral crisis of today is so bad that even the strongest bonds of trust, like those between parents and children and spouses and wives, have been broken. The family used to be a place where you could get emotional support and moral advice, but now it causes tension and distrust.

We need to think about and act on this serious issue right away. Some of the reasons are that schools don't teach morals, families are having a hard time making ends meet, and parents don't pay enough attention to their kids. Many parents are too busy making money to teach their kids right from wrong (Kilton, 2017). This imbalance has led to a generation that doesn't know anything about ethics. Some people say that this decline is due to technical progress, but it's evident that many social, cultural, and economic forces are at work. To solve this difficult problem, we need to make a full effort to bring back moral education and encourage people to act ethically.

What is moral education and what does it do?

Moral education is the process of educating people how to tell right from wrong and how to treat others in a responsible and moral way. It affects a child's morals and how they respond in different social situations. Moral education is different from religious education and is more focused on teaching values like honesty, accountability, empathy, and respect.

People who support moral education say it is important in today's fast-paced, media-saturated culture. Different social factors, such as information and communication technology (ICT), television, social media, inadequate leadership, and materialism, have a big effect on the values and actions of young people (Moral Education, 2015). So, moral education is very important for giving children the values and abilities they need to make good decisions in tough situations.

Lawrence Kohlberg

Lawrence Kohlberg is one of the most important moral education academics. His work in the 20th century changed the way people thought about moral growth. Kohlberg created a cognitive-developmental theory that is still very important to moral education today by combining psychology and philosophy (Samada, Ruiz, & Bara, 2018). His theory, which is based on Dewey's ideas about progressive education and Piaget's stages of child development, explains how people move through different stages of moral reasoning. Many schools now use this concept to help students learn how to think about ethics and grow morally (Zhang & Zhao, 2017).

According to Kohlberg's thesis, moral development happens in stages that can't be changed, and ethical maturity is tightly linked to cognitive progress. People's moral development depends on how they earn self-esteem and respect from others via their good deeds.

Pakistan's school curriculum includes moral education.

Even though more and more people throughout the world are interested in moral education, there is still not much research on it in Pakistan. There haven't been many research on how to include moral education in the national curriculum, especially in basic schools. Saddique (2021) did a study that looked at the moral content in the Sindh curriculum, but no analogous research has been done in Punjab. This discrepancy shows that we need to look into how moral education is currently being taught in Punjab's primary schools.

This study tries to fill that vacuum by looking at how moral education is taught in Punjab's primary schools. It also wants to find out how moral students are right now and, based on what it finds, provide a workable way to teach morals to young children. These kinds of measures will help make sure that moral instruction is in line with national educational goals and will help students grow in all areas.

Recent Studies on Moral Education

Recent research backs up the link between moral education and building character. Krettenauer and Anderson (2022) stress how closely moral and character education are related, and these two terms are becoming more and more interchangeable. Researchers have also looked into how moral education can help people develop values like nationalism (Pradana et al., 2020).

Birhan et al. (2021) looked into how instructors and parents can teach kids good morals. Parents put the most emphasis on accountability and honesty, while teachers put the most emphasis on respect and caring. Both of them gave counsel verbally, which was the most typical way. The survey also found that moral education was not taught as a separate subject, but was instead built into other subjects. Also, both parents and instructors had a hard time being good moral examples.

The government of the United Arab Emirates, for instance, set up an organized moral education program to teach students how to behave morally and get them ready to serve their country. The study of this project (Sbai, 2019) found that it had good results, such as making future people accountable and prosperous.

There has also been more interest in the link between moral education and sustainable development. Uwazuok (2020) said that adding three to four moral courses a week can greatly improve pupils' skills in sustainable development. The study also showed how important it is for curriculum content and teaching practices to properly teach moral principles.

Research Objective

1. To look into the link between moral reasoning and cognitive development in high school students.
2. To find out what the most important parts of moral reasoning and cognitive growth are for high school students.
3. To find out how demographic factors (gender, district, and school location) affect how students think about moral reasoning.

Research Questions

1. How do moral reasoning and cognitive growth affect each other in high school students?
2. What are the main parts of moral reasoning and cognitive growth that can be seen in high school students?
3. What do students of different genders, districts, and school settings (urban vs. rural) think about moral reasoning?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

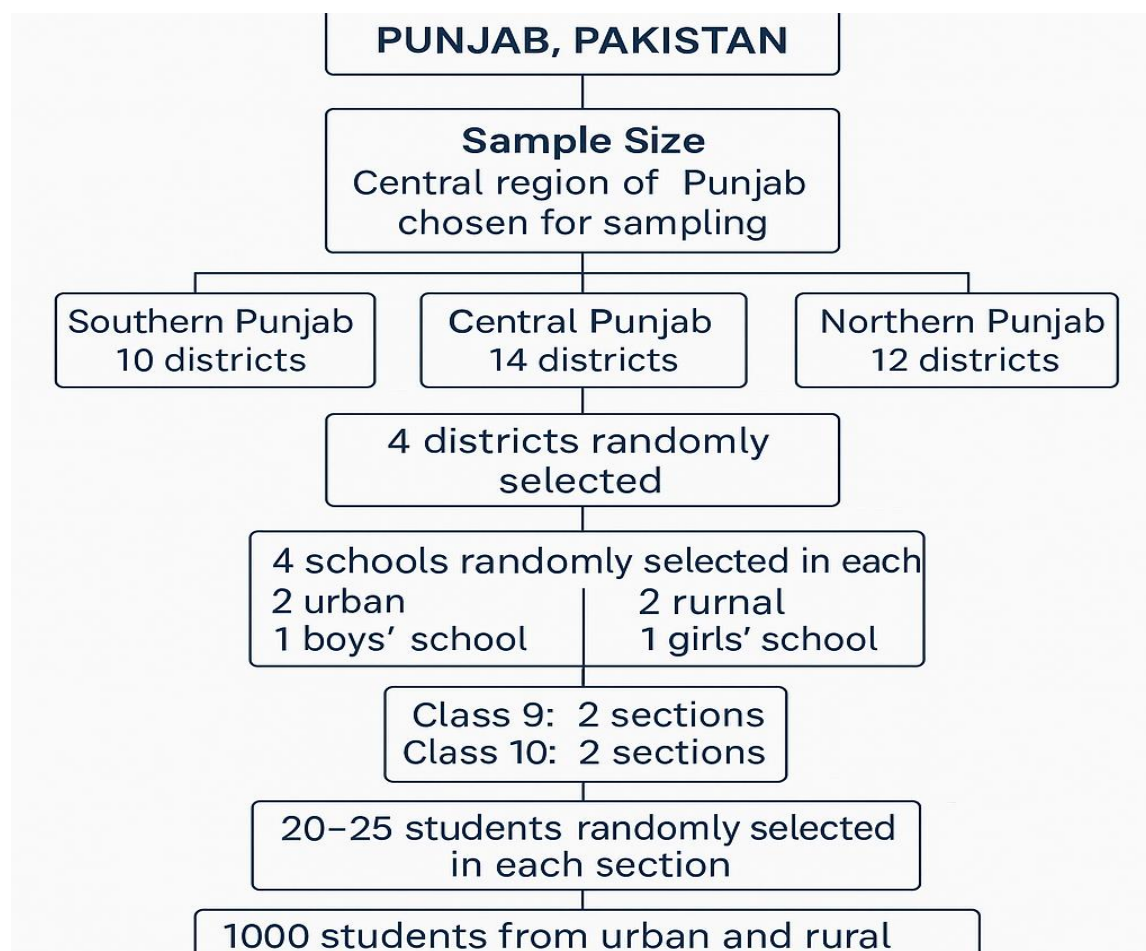
This study used a correlational research design and a quantitative approach to look at the link between moral reasoning and cognitive growth in high school students. The design was designed so that statistical analysis could find out how strong and what direction the association was between the two variables.

Population of the Study

The people who took part in this study were all secondary school students (classes 9 and 10) who went to government schools in the Punjab state of Pakistan. There were 4,425 schools in all, including: 1,086 students in urban schools (526 girls and 550 boys) There are 3,339 rural schools, including 999 girls and 2,340 boys. The 36 districts of Punjab province are divided into three geographical zones, and these schools are in those regions. Ten districts make up Southern Punjab. 14 districts make up Central Punjab. 12 districts in Northern Punjab

Sample Size

We chose the Central region of Punjab for sampling. four of the fourteen districts in this area were picked at random. In each district that was chosen: randomly picked four schools, two in cities and two in the country. One boys' school and one girls' school from urban area and one girls school and one boy school from rural area. Two parts of Class 9 and two sections of Class 10 were chosen at random from each school. Twenty to twenty-five pupils were chosen at random from each section. The survey included 1000 students from both urban and rural government secondary schools, which made sure that there was a wide range of gender and geographic backgrounds.



Instruments of the Study

Moral Reasoning Questionnaire (MRQ)

This questionnaire comprised of 37 statements to know the perceptions of students regarding moral atmosphere of school. School moral reasoning questionnaire was related to teachers and peers of students at secondary school level. Moral Reasoning questionnaire (MRQ) was developed by herself and its reliability was determined through pilot testing (Cronbach alpha=.795).

Data Collection

Before collecting data, the research supervisor gave their written approval. The principals of the chosen schools were also sent consent letters to ask for permission to do the study at their schools. Students were also told that the research procedure would be kept secret. They were told that they didn't have to take part and that their answers and names would be kept secret.

RESULTS

Table 1

Correlation Between Teachers' Moral Behavior and Students' Cognitive Development

Variables	N	r-value	Significance (p-value)
Teachers' Moral Behavior and Cognitive Development of Students	1000	0.230	0.000

Note: The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a **positive and statistically significant relationship** between the moral behavior of teachers and the cognitive development of secondary school students ($r = 0.230$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that teachers' moral conduct has a meaningful influence on students' cognitive growth.

Table 2

Correlation Between Moral Behavior of Students and Cognitive Development of Secondary School Students

Variables	N	r-value	Significance (p-value)
Students' Moral Behavior and Cognitive Development	1000	0.342	0.000

Note: The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This table shows the findings of a Pearson correlation analysis that looked into the link between students' moral behavior and their cognitive growth. The letter N = 1000 means that 1000 high school students

were used as the sample for this study. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.342$) shows that there is a moderate positive association between the two variables. This suggests that when students act more morally, their brains also tend to grow. The p-value (0.000) is less than 0.01, which means that the association is statistically significant at the 1% level. This means that there is a very good chance that this association is not just a coincidence. In conclusion, the results show that students who act more morally are more likely to have superior cognitive growth. This shows how important it is to teach pupils moral principles in school to help them grow intellectually as a whole.

Table 3

Independent-Sample t-test: Gender-Based Differences in Students' Perception of Moral Reasoning

Group	Mean	SD	df	Mean Difference	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
Male	137.35	4.33	998	-0.65	-1.305	0.192
Female	138.00	4.14				

Table 3 illustrates that an independent-sample t-test was used to find out how male and female students felt about the school's moral culture. The results showed that there is no big difference in how male ($M = 137.35$, $SD = 4.33$) and female ($M = 138$, $SD = 4.14$) pupils see the moral climate of school $t(1000) = -1.305$ at $p = .192$. Based on these data, we accept the null hypothesis that "there is no significant difference between the perception of male and female students regarding moral atmosphere of school."

DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to look at the link between moral reasoning and cognitive development in high school students, with a focus on how teachers and students act in the moral environment of schools. The study also looked at how boys and girls thought about school moral reasoning differently. Table 1's results showed a favorable and statistically significant link between teachers' moral behavior and pupils' cognitive development ($r = 0.230$, $p < 0.01$). Even if the relationship is only mild, it shows that when teachers act morally—by being fair, empathetic, respectful, and honest—it helps children learn and grow. These results are in line with what other research has found, which says that a teacher's moral behavior can make the classroom a place where students can think critically, make moral choices, and build a stronger moral compass. Results demonstrated an even larger link between students' moral behavior and their cognitive growth ($r = 0.342$, $p < 0.01$). This research shows that pupils who are more honest, responsible, respectful, and compassionate are more likely to have better cognitive skills, such solving problems, thinking logically, and making decisions. The finding shows how moral and intellectual growth are linked, suggesting that teaching morals helps students deal with academic and social problems in a meaningful way. Results looked at how male and female students saw the school's moral climate differently. The independent-sample t-test showed that there was no statistically significant difference between male ($M = 137.35$, $SD = 4.33$) and female ($M = 138.00$, $SD = 4.14$) students ($t(998) = -1.305$, $p = 0.192$). This implies that boys and girls see the moral climate of their schools in the same way, which could mean that moral teaching is done in the same way in all sorts of schools and settings.

The results of this study have big effects on schooling in Punjab and other places. Because moral reasoning and cognitive growth are closely related, schools should focus on teaching students how to

behave ethically, not merely how to do well in school. The results also show how important teachers are, since their actions have a big effect on how children grow morally and intellectually. The fact that there are no distinctions between genders makes it even more clear that moral teaching tactics need to be the same for everyone and fair.

CONCLUSION

The study's results show that teachers' and students' moral behavior is linked to pupils' cognitive growth in a good way. Moral reasoning isn't just one thing; it's strongly related to how students think, learn, and make choices. By showing children how to act morally, teachers help them learn and grow their minds. Also, students who act morally likely to have better cognitive growth. The study also discovered that there were no big variations between boys and girls in how they thought about moral reasoning. This suggests that boys and girls in the schools that were sampled are experiencing moral awareness in the same way.

These results support the idea that moral education is an important part of a student's overall growth. Schools need to stop only focusing on academic results and start teaching moral and ethical values as a way to help students grow up and become responsible citizens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this investigation suggest the following:

For People Who Make Educational Policy

Make moral education a part of the curriculum: At the secondary level, moral reasoning should be a formal part of the curriculum. Every student should learn about civic duty, empathy, and making moral choices in school. Rework Teacher Training Programs: Professional development programs should include lessons on how to educate ethically and how to build character so that teachers can model good behavior in the classroom.

For School Leaders

Encourage a Good Moral Environment: School leaders should create an environment of respect, fairness, and honesty across the school, and they should encourage both teachers and students to help create a good moral environment.

Keep an eye on and help students' moral growth: Schools should regularly check on and help students' moral growth through activities like ethical conversations, reflective diaries, peer mediation programs, and character-building exercises.

For Parents and Caregivers

Work with Schools: Parents should take part in moral education programs and work closely with instructors to teach their kids virtues like honesty, accountability, and empathy at home.

For Researchers in the Future

Go to other areas: To get a better idea of how moral reasoning and cognitive development are related across the whole province, similar research should be done in different areas.

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