The Level of Moral Competence Among Sample of Hashemite University Students

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the level of students' about moral competence at Hashemite University in Jordan. A total of 909 university students participated in the study by completing the moral competence questionnaire. Results indicate that university students showed medium level of moral competence. Additionally, results indicated that there were significant differences in participants' level of moral competence based on the demographics of gender, academic level and academic performance. The study ends by suggesting a number of practical and theoretical recommendations for a number of stakeholders.

Key words: Moral competence; Integrity; Impression Management; Responsibility; University students

INTRODUCTION

Moral intelligence refers to the ability to apply ethical principles to goals, values and actions. However it has the potential to improve understanding of learning and culturally acceptable behavior. Moral intelligence is newer and less studied than the more established cognitive, emotional and social intelligences, (Coles, 1997; Hass, 1998; Clarken, 2009).

Lennick and Kiel (2005) define moral intelligence as "the mental capacity to determine how universal human principles —like those embodied by the "Golden Rule"— should be applied to our personal values, goals, and actions". Their construct of moral intelligence consists of four competencies related to integrity, three to responsibility, two to forgiveness and one to compassion.

Moral behavior is the result of at least four component processes: (1) identifying a situation as a moral problem, (2) figuring out what one ought to do and evaluating possible plans of action, (3) evaluating how the various courses of action serve moral and no moral values and deciding which action will be pursued, and (4) executing the plan of action (Rest, 1983).

To define the moral competence concept one has to understand how the term "competence" is defined in general. The concept of competence includes, at least, two levels: competence can be understood as a possession of any knowledge, as the ability to reason on a certain problem. Competence can also be considered as an experience in a certain sphere, ability to act, or behave in a proper way (Sadokova, 2001; Weinert, 2001).

Petrovskaya (1989, 1996) defines three components of communication competence: 1) self-competence, that is orientation in their own communicative abilities and features, in own psychological potential; 2) competence of communication partner is an orientation in psychological features and abilities of other people; and 3) competence of situation, that is adequate situation and its tasks recognition.

Moral competence refers to the orientation to perform altruistic behavior and the ability to judge moral issues logically, consistently and at an advanced level of development. Promotion of moral competence fosters the development of a sense of justice and altruistic behavior in adolescents. There are two key concepts of moral competence: altruism and moral-judgment development. For Ma (1997), altruistic behavior refers to the acts carried out voluntarily without expectation of a reward.

Ma suggested that the most important goal of altruism is one of the following: increasing one's Darwinian fitness; facilitating the development of higher stages of cognition, morality, ego and so forth; assisting in attaining new psychological abilities; increasing the gratification of basic psychological and self actualization needs; and assisting in restoring and maintaining emotional stability. According to the theory of Kohlberg (1981, 1984), moral judgment mainly refers to the delineation of rule and law orientation, personal autonomy, moral conscience, social contract, basic rights and universal justice. There are three moral levels in Kohlberg's theory (1971), and each level consists of two stages. These six stages of moral development start with children blindly obeying an authority's commands to avoid punishment gradually developing into upholding the social law and carrying out one's duty to maintain social order, and finding fruition of a foundation of distinguishing right and wrong with the understanding of universal-justice principles.

Lennick and Kiel (2005) define moral principles as values that cut across all cultural boundaries. Lennick and Kiel argue that people overwhelmingly prefer to follow leaders who exhibit integrity, integrity with being a universal human (extant across time and cultures) moral principle. Other moral principles they claim and attempt to measure in their moral competency index are responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness.

The process of decision-making plays a part in, or may even define moral competence. Accordingly, one has to take into consideration its five fundamental skills: structuring decisions, assessing beliefs, assessing values, combining these beliefs and values into coherent choices, and having a meta-cognitive understanding of one's abilities. For each skill, performance can be defined in terms of either accuracy related to an external criterion or consistency among responses (Yates, 1990).

In the Kohlberg's theory of moral development framework the concept of moral competence is presented as a certain cognitive structure, that is a skill to argue on moral issues, to provide own grounds of a moral choice and to explain the situations containing moral dilemmas (Bratus, 1985, 1994). Kohlberg defines moral competence as "the capacity to make decisions and judgments which are moral (i.e., based on internal principles) and to act in accordance with such judgments" (Kohlberg, 1964; Colby & Kohlberg, 1984; Kohlberg, 1987; Walker, DeVries & Trevethan, 1987; Krebs, Vermeulen, Carpendale, & Denton, 1991).

Two basic components, causing process of understanding can be defined (Sadokova, 2001). The first one is the goals of the subject of understanding, and the second one is the system, hierarchy of values and norms, which the person counts comprehensible in a certain society.

Thus moral competence, as an object I examine, based on norms, values, purposes, intentions, interests, motives, and feelings. of moral situation comprehension, may be defined by its three components (Sadokova, 2001):

Self-competence : the ability to adequately perceive oneself as a subject of moral interaction, to realize one's interests, intentions, aims, motives, feelings and value definitions caused by moral conflict and possible ways of behaving in a situation involving a moral choice.

Competence in partner: an ability to perceive other individuals participating in that situation, to understand their aims, interests, motives, feelings, system of values and possible actions adequately.

Competence in situation: assumes an ability to have an integrated view of the situation, to analyze consequences of events, to comprehend the values and norms, which participants of that situation are guided by and to take into account all the peculiarities of the conflict and the individuals involved in it.

The studies about moral competence in Brazil conducted by Bataglia (1998, 2001), in addition to our pilot study (2001) showed that students in Brazil have moral competence scores (C-scores, MJT) lower than those of students in Europe (Lind 2000), but similar to students in Mexico. Taking a closer look at this problem, we came to the conclusion that the lower scores are connected to an interesting phenomenon: subjects presented different levels of moral competence according to the different dilemmas, part of the MJT. This phenomenon - denominated "moral segmentation" - was also observed by Moreno (2000) in Mexico, but was not reported in previous studies involving other cultures. In our sample, mean C-score of 18,7 and C-scores of 26,7 for the doctor's dilemma and 39.5 for the worker's dilemma seem to indicate that students in Brazil could react similarly to those in Mexico.

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Moral competence refers to the affective orientation to perform altruistic behaviors toward others and the ability to judge moral issues logically, consistently, and at an advanced level of development. Promotion of moral competence means fostering the development of justice judgment and altruistic behavior in adolescents. Moreover, moral competence is an area of research in Jordan that has been largely ignored. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to determine the level of university students in Jordan regarding moral competence.

1.1 Research Objectives

The following research objectives were pursued in this study:

a. To determine the level of moral competence among students at Hashemite University;

b. To determine the differences in students' related to moral competence based on gender, academic level and academic performances.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The basic goal of this study is to determine the level moral competence among students at the Hashemite University.

In addition, this study is very important for many reasons: (1) Moral intelligence is newer and less studied than the more established cognitive, emotional and social intelligences, but has great potential to improve our understanding of learning and behavior (2). The benefits of developing greater moral intelligence to the universities and the society will result in having organizations that are more positive, improved relationships and students who are both smart and good and value universal human principles and rights, and (3) To development of the moral competence measure in the Jordanian environment.

2. METHOD

2.1 Population and Sample of the Study

The population of this study consisted of 15230 undergraduate students, who were enrolled in the faculties of Hashemite University in the academic year 2012/2013, who represent all levels of study at (HU). For the purpose of this study, a random sample was chosen from the population, consisting of 909 and their ages ranged between 18 and 22 years. The sample distribution was 360 male, and 549 female, first year 252, second year 333, theird year 207 and fourth year 117.

2.1.1 Instruments

Moral Competency Questionnaire (MCQ)

The Moral Competency Inventory developed by Daniel and Benjamin (2010) contains 38 items descriptive of their types of moral competence (Integrity/Honesty/ Authenticity (9) items, Impression Management (20) items and Responsibility (9) items). The items on a 5-point scale (1) Very Inaccurate, (2) Moderately Inaccurate, (3) Neither Inaccurate nor Accurate, (4) Moderately Accurate, (5) Very Accurate. A cronbach alpha of (0.73) was reported for the moral competence questionnaire. In terms of the moral competence dimension, a reliability estimate of 0.72 was reported for integrity/honesty/authenticity, a 0.55 was reported for the impression management, and a 0.66 was reported for the responsibility.

2.1.2 Instrument Translation Process

To ensure equivalence of meaning of the items and constructs between the Arabic and English versions of the Moral Competence Questionnaire, a rigorous translation process was used that included forward and backward translation, subjective evaluations of the translated items, and pilot testing. The goal of the translation process was to produce an Arabic version of the(MCQ), with items that were equivalent in meaning to the original English version. The Arabic version of the (MCQ) was then pilot tested with a group of 30 students to collect feedback about instrument content

and usage. The feedback from students emphasized that the instrument has both face and content validity.

2.1.3 Instrument Standardization

The Arabic version of the Moral Competence Questionnaire was tested with a sample of 30 students different from that of the study but withdrawn from the same population (Hashemite University students). Reliability coefficients for the (MCQ) established for the eight scales are as follows: integrity/honesty/authenticity (0.64), impression management (0.83), and responsibility (0.72). Based on the translation process and the reliability estimates, the Arabic-translated version of the (MCQ) seemed to be valid and a reliable measure for use with a Jordanian population.

2.2 Procedures

The instrument was administered to the participants in their regular classrooms by the researcher. The researcher explained to the participants the purpose and the importance of their participation in this study. In addition, the researcher assured the participants of the confidentiality of their response and that their response would be used only for research purposes.

Then, the question booklets were distributed and instructions were given to the participants on how to answer them. The participants' responses were scored by the researcher and were entered into the computer for statistical analysis. The data were analyzed using the SPSS package.

3. RESULTS

The data collected from all participants were coded, entered into the SPSS spreadsheets, and analyzed using software package SPSS version 17. Descriptive statistics for all variables in this study were examined using SPSS frequencies. The minimum and maximum values of each item were examined for accuracy of data entry by inspecting any out-of-range values. No out-of-range values were found. Missing subjects were not detected either. The results of the study are addressed by each objective.

3.1 Results Pertaining To Objective 1

Objective 1 was to determine the level of moral competence among students at Hashemite University. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to achieve this objective. Analysis of the data in the first question involved the tabulation of the mean of level moral competence. The total mean score was calculated based on student responses to each item in the selected scale using the 5-point Likert-type scale. Thus, the levels of moral competence were interpreted using the following categories: below 3 = low level; 3-4 = medium level; and above 4 = high level. As can be observed in Table 1, the mean for overall moral

competence was 3.86, in terms of the moral competence dimension, a mean of 3.89 was reported for integrity/honesty/authenticity, and a mean of 3.58 was reported for the impression management, and a mean of 4.13 was reported for the responsibility. These results indicate that in terms of moral competence the students at Hashemite University. Furthermore, the lowest mean of moral competence was 2.56 and the highest mean was 4.59. This result reveals that items concerning moral competence were rated at a medium level.

Table 1
Mean and Standard Deviations of Students' Moral Competence

Dimension	Items	Mean	SD
Integrity/Honesty/Authenticity	Am trusted to keep secrets.	4.46	.73
	Keep my promises.	4.36	.62
	Believe that honesty is the basis for trust.	4.59	.64
	Can be trusted to keep my promises.	4.27	.79
	Am true to my own values.	4.11	.90
	Lie to get myself out of trouble.	2.94	1.19
	Am hard to understand.	2.88	1.18
	Feel like an imposter.	3.90	1.22
	Like to exaggerate my troubles.	3.48	1.23
Total		3.89	.94
Impression Management	Would never take things that aren't mine.	4.26	1.17
	Would never cheat on my taxes.	4.19	1.07
	Believe there is never an excuse for lying.	3.54	1.14
	Always admit it when I make a mistake.	3.78	1.02
	Rarely talk about sex.	3.73	1.25
	Return extra change when a cashier makes a mistake.	4.58	.79
	Try to follow the rules.	4.16	.92
	Easily resist temptations.	3.83	.96
	Tell the truth.	4	.87
	Rarely overindulge.	3.23	1.36
	Have sometimes had to tell a lie.	2.56	1.27
	Use swear words.	3.47	1.34
	Use flattery to get ahead.	2.77	1.26
	Am not always what I appear to be.	2.90	1.32
	Break rules.	3.63	1.21
	Cheat to get ahead.	3.71	1.17
	Don't always practice what I preach.	3.21	1.18
	Misuse power.	3.67	1.22
	Get back at others.	3.11	1.30
	Am likely to show off if I get the chance.	3.28	1.36
total		3.58	1.16

To be continued

Continued

Dimension	Items	Mean	SD
Responsibility	Try to forgive and forget.	4.01	1.07
	Like to be of service to others.	4.08	.96
	Act according to my conscience.	4.24	.87
	Anticipate the needs of others.	4	.86
	Take others' interests into account.	4.06	.78
	Am polite to strangers.	4.25	.93
	Am able to cooperate with others.	4.27	.74
	Appreciate people who wait on me.	4.39	.79
	Try not to think about the needy.	3.92	1.20
total		4.13	.91
Total		3.86	1

3.2 Results Pertaining to Objective 2

The second research question presented in the study asks about any differences by gender in the level of moral competence of participants. A t-test was run on each of the eight scales. A summary by gender of each scale is shown in Table 2. A significant difference ($p<0.05$) was found on the level of moral competence. The female reported a significantly greater level of moral competence than the male ones did.

Table 2
Mean and Standard Deviations and T-Test of Student's Moral Competence (N Male= 360, N Female= 549)

Sex	Male		Female			
Moral competence	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	Significant
Integrity	3.75	.47	3.98	.48	-7.057	0.000
Impression management	3.46	.57	3.66	.54	-5.092	0.000
Responsibility	3.97	.60	4.25	.40	-8.264	0.000

*Significant at $p<0.05$.

On the other hand, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized to identify whether the variances between the four academic performances of university students at Hashemite University were equal or significantly different. Table 3 shows that there were significant differences among the four academic performances in terms of their level of moral competence.

Table 3
The Differences Among the F Academic Performance Groups on the Level of Moral Competence

Moral competence		Sum of squares	df	F	p
Integrity	Between groups	28.017	3		
	Within groups	194.529	905	43.448	.000
	Total	222.546	908		
Impression management	Between groups	35.398	3		
	Within groups	255.192	905	41.844	.000
	Total	290.590	908		
Responsibility	Between groups	5.291	3		
	Within groups	235.006	905	6.792	.000
	Total	240.297	908		

*Significant at $p<0.05$.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized to identify whether the variances between the four academic levels of university students at Hashemite University were equal or significantly different. Table 3 shows that there were significant differences among the four academic levels in terms of their levels of moral competence in dimension (impression management and responsibility) and that there were no significant differences among the four academic levels in terms of their levels of moral competence in dimension integrity.

Table 4
The Differences Among the F Academic Level Groups on the Level of Moral Competence

Moral competence		Sum of squares	df	F	p
Integrity	Between groups	1.268	3		
	Within groups	221.277	905	1.729	.159
	Total	222.546	908		
Impression management	Between groups	3.202	3		
	Within groups	287.387	905	3.361	.018
	Total	290.590	908		
Responsibility	Between groups	11.276	3		
	Within groups	229.021	905	14.852	.000
	Total	240.297	908		

*Significant at $p<0.05$.

DISCUSSION

Moral intelligence is presented as the ability to methodically apply universal moral principles to one's ethics, objectives, and dealings (Lennick and Kiel, 2005). One premise to such a definition is that morality is a priori, which means that individuals have an innate tendency to act with integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness. The primary purpose of this study was to determine the level of moral competence of university students at Hashemite University in Jordan. A sample of 909 students participated in the study by responding to the moral competence questionnaire. The results show that moral competence is at the medium, indicating that university students have not reached an acceptable level of moral competence. Duriez and Soenens (2006) found that the people processing religious contents in a symbolic manner show higher moral competence and tend to make a sharper distinction between moral arguments of the lower stages and higher stages of Kohlberg's model. Wankel, Stachowicz-Stanusch, and Tamtana (2011) conducted a study on 122 students from Poland, Indonesia, and the United States of America, and found that the average level of moral scales in the three countries was similar. Another strand of results regarding demographic variables reveals that gender, academic level and academic performance had an effect on students' levels of moral competence. This means that the level of moral competence is higher

than the level of moral competence from male university students. Which may be due to the nature of socialization society which has more restrictions on the female than on the male, Nor et al (2012) found that there is no difference between genders with regard to moral competencies. As for the variable of academic performance and academic level, the results of the study show that whenever a high academic performance and whenever a student's progress in the academic level whenever a high level of efficiency moral and logical outcome.

From the theoretical standpoint, the following line of research is suggested for future investigation: (a) The university needs to have a better role to increase the effectiveness of students' moral competence through academic and training programs, and (b) conducting other studies on other variables in a different university is recommended.

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