

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

According to Report of the Cabinet Committee to Review the Implementation of National Education Policy, (1985), it is stated that in order

to build a disciplined, cultured and united society, it is recommended that while Muslim pupils study Islamic Religious Knowledge, and this includes other pupils who choose to follow this subject, non-muslim pupils should be taught moral and ethics education. All pupils who study this subject, Moral and Ethics Education, must take it in the examination. In both these subjects, respect for individual freedom to embrace any religion in a multi-religious society must be cultivated (Para 127. 1, p. 49).

The Report stresses the importance of Islamic Religious Knowledge for Muslim pupils, while non-Muslim pupils should be taught Moral Education. With this recommendation, Moral Education was introduced in the school system in 1982 with the main objective of building a united, disciplined and cultured society, (1979, Cabinet Report, para 127. 1, p. 49). The Moral Education programme was then implemented progressively beginning with year 1. In 1988, it was introduced in the secondary schools with the implementation of the new Integrated Curriculum for Secondary School (KBSM). Specifically, the objectives of Moral Education are to enable students:

- i. To strengthen and enhance habitual practice in accordance with those moral values and attitude instilled at primary level;

- ii. To be aware of, understand and internalize the norms and noble values of Malaysia society;
- iii. To develop rational thinking based on the moral principles.
- iv. To give rational reasons based on moral judgement when making a decision; and
- v. To make judgement based on moral principles as a guide in daily life practices. (Translated from Ministry of Education, Malaysia, Syllabus for Secondary School, Moral Education, 1988, pp. 1-2).

The above objectives thus imply the importance of moral reasoning by the students and hence a need to have a deeper understanding of this aspect of Moral Education. In view of the importance of moral reasoning, Kohlberg's theory of moral development was initially used as a starting point for this study on moral maturity.

Kohlberg's Theory on Moral Development

Kohlberg (1975) in his theory of moral development focuses on the ability to rationalise and make decision on a moral dilemma. This theory introduces three levels and two stages per level on moral development (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Kohlberg's Theory on Moral Development

Level	Stages	Description
Level 1 Pre-Conventional	1	Heteronomous Morality
	2	Individualism, Instrumental purpose and Exchange
Level 2 Conventional	3	Mutual Interpersonal Expectations, Relationships and Interpersonal Conformity.
	4	Social System and Conscience
Level 3 Post-Conventional	5	Social Contract or Utility and Individual Rights
	6	Universal Ethical Principles

Source: Kohlberg, L. (1984). The Psychology of moral development : Essays on moral development

These stages of moral reasoning represent the different concepts and perception of oneself and society which requires an interaction of the individual with the environment (Kohlberg, 1984). The following section, gives further description on the stages of moral reasoning.

Level I: PRE-CONVENTIONAL

At the pre-conventional level, the individual is responsive to cultural rules and labels of "good" and "bad", "right" and "wrong". These labels are related to the physical consequences such as punishment, reward and exchange of favours. At this level, there are two stages of moral development:

Stage 1: Heteronomous Morality

According to Kohlberg (1984), at this stage the individual tries to avoid breaking rules and is obedient for his or her own sake. He or she tries to avoid physical pain to person and damage to property. The individual assumes that the powerful authorities hand down a fixed set of rules which the individual must obey (Crain, 1985). The individual is thus influenced by the reactions of the authority figure and whether or not he or she will be punished or rewarded. The physical consequences determine whether the action is good or bad and the ultimate “wrong” is getting into trouble.

Stage 2: Individualism, Instrumental Purpose and Exchange

According to Kohlberg (1984) Stage 2 is defined as:

Following rules only when it is to someone's immediate interest; acting to meet your own interests and need and letting others do the same. Right is also what's fair, and equal exchange, a deal, an agreement (p. 175).

Crain (1985) further elaborates that at this stage an individual will try to avoid punishment from the authorities but recognises the concept of fair exchange or fair deals. The individual begins to apply the concept “if you scratch my back, I'll yours”.

Level II: CONVENTIONAL

At this level, the individual begins to show concern for “others” and also respects the laws (Kohlberg, 1984). The individual's decision is influenced by his or her concern for the feelings of “others” and what “others” expect and approve

(Crain, 1985). The word “others” refers to the individual’s family, friends, associates, community or the nation. There are two stages at this conventional level:

Stage 3: Mutual Interpersonal Expectations, Relationships and Interpersonal Conformity

Stage 3 refers to:

Living up to what is expected by people close to you or what people generally expect of people in your role as son, brother, friend etc. “Being good” is important and means having good motives, showing concern about others. It also means keeping mutual relationship, such as trust, loyalty, respect and gratitude (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 175).

At this stage, the individual begins to please others so as to maintain good relationships. The individual has “good motives and interpersonal feelings such as love, empathy, trust and concern for others”. (Crain, 1985, p. 115). It is also known as the “good boy or nice girl” orientation.

Stage 4: Social System and Conscience

Stage 4 is described as fulfilling the actual duties which one has agreed. Laws are to be upheld except in extreme cases where they conflict with other fixed social duties. Right is also contributing to society, the group, or institution (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 176).

At this stage the individual is aware of the society and begins to think from the perspective of what is best for the society. The individual begins to emphasise on “obeying laws, respecting the authority and performing one’s duties so that social order is maintained” (Crain, 1985, p. 115).

Level III: POST-CONVENTIONAL

At the post-conventional level, the individual becomes concerned with “personal and social contracts, personal conscience and universal principles” (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 176). The individual is concerned with “maintaining respect of equality in the community and concern about self-condemnation of violating one’s principles” (Rest, 1986, p. 28). There are two stages (stage 5 and stage 6) at this post-conventional level:

Stage 5: Social Contract or Utility And Individual Rights

At stage 5 an individual basically believes that different social groups within a society will have different values. The individual believes that all rational people will agree on two points. First, the need to have certain basic rights such as liberty and life to be protected. Second, the individual would want some democratic procedures for changing unfair laws and for improving the society (Crain, 1985). In short, stage 5 refers to :

Being aware that people hold a variety of values and opinions, that most values and rules are relative to your group. These relative rules should usually be upheld, however, in the interest of impartiality and because they are social contract. Some non relative values and rights like life and liberty, however, must be

upheld in any society and regardless of the majority opinion (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 176).

At this stage the individual has the ability respect the impartial laws and also agrees to abide by them. The individual will try to ask about “what makes for a good society?” (Crain, 1985, p. 121).

Stage 6: Universal Ethical Principles

At this stage the individual is more concerned with the universal principles and values that make for a good society (Crain, 1985, p. 121). It is described as:

Following self-chosen ethical principles. Particular or social agreements are usually valid because they rest on such principles. Principles are universal principles of justice: the equality of human rights and respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 176).

In elaborating the stages on moral development, Kohlberg (1984) identified several characteristics. They are:

- (i) Moral development occurs in stages.
- (ii) Everyone passes through the same stages of moral development.
- (iii) Stages are sequential. However some individuals may achieve higher stages than others.
- (iv) The environment is an important factor in an individuals decision making.
- (v) Interaction or discussion on moral dilemma or issue is necessary for moral growth.

However, it has been identified that the above criteria were not followed strictly. Kohlberg's moral development theory was found to be not an invariant sequence. For instance, Kohlberg's own longitudinal work in the 1960's showed that some students who scored at stage 5 or 6 during high school, were scored at stage 2 when retested in college. This thus contradicts his own argument that stage regression does not occur.

Furthermore, in his study over a 20-year period Kohlberg found that the moral reasoning of his sample of 72 boys (20 - 30 years old) were at stage 4. Stage 5 only appeared in the mid-20's and not any earlier (Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, J.C., & Lieberman, 1983). Reimer (1988) in his review of Kohlberg's research also found that the majority of the individuals in the 10 to 12 years age group were at stage 1 or 2 while those in the 13 to 15 years age group were more inclined to stage 2 or 3 reasoning. Subsequently those in the 16 to 18 age group were at stage 3 or 4. None of these three groups (10 - 12, 13 - 15, 16 - 18 years old) however reached stage 5 or 6.

In a local study conducted by Loganathan (1995) on moral development among students from form three (age 15) and form five (age 17) in Malaysian schools, it was found that none of the 256 students attained stage 5 and 6. The highest stage achieved in Kohlberg's moral development by these students was stage 4.

The results from these studies including a local study imply that it is rather difficult for individuals to reach stages 5 and 6 in Kohlberg's moral development particularly among students below the age of 17 years in the Malaysian cultural context. In view of this difficulty at attaining post-conventional level another model on moral reasoning was then reviewed namely the Sociomoral Reflection measure (SRM) model.

Sociomoral Reflection Measure (SRM)

In the SRM model on moral development, Gibbs, Basinger and Fuller (1992) argued that moral development could be seen not in terms of three levels of moral development as postulated by Kohlberg but two levels of moral development namely: the immature and mature level. In each level there are two stages (see Table 1.2) as described in the following section.

Table 1.2

Level and Stages in the Sociomoral Reflection Measure (SRM)

Level	Stage	Description
Level 1 Immature Level	Stage 1	Unilateral and Physicalistic
	Stage 2	Exchanging and Instrumental
Level 2 Mature Level	Stage 3	Mutual and Prosocial
	Stage 4	Systematic and Standard

Level I: THE IMMATURE LEVEL

According to Gibbs et al. (1992) the individual at this level looks at the physical aspect in performing his or her reasoning. The individual perhaps will perform moral reasoning but either “always” or “never” turn towards the physically powerful person (p. 21). The individual will always help his or her friend because he or she needs to return the favour. The immature level consists of two stages (stages 1 and 2):

Stage 1: Unilateral And Physicalistic

At this stage, the individual will either “always” or “never” in his or her moral judgement turn towards the authority figure such as his or her parents, spouse or teacher. For example, an individual always keeps or follows his or her promises towards friends and strangers. One justifies moral reasoning because of traditional values. For example, saving a stranger’s life is important but sometimes the stranger can cause harm to that person. Thus saving a stranger’s life is regarded as not important because one should “never” go near a stranger due to one’s own self-protection against bad consequences (Gibbs et al., 1992, p. 23).

Stage 2: Exchanging And Instrumental

At this stage, Gibbs et al. (1992) describes one individual’s justification in dealing with others (p. 22). For example, helping a friend is important because he or she will help the individual in the future. The individual develops moral understanding due to exchange of ideas and interaction. Physical appearances have become secondary in one’s justification. The individual will be able to interrelate

physical appearances and interaction. For example, helping one's friends is important because they have done things for one (Gibbs et al., 1992, p. 60).

Level II: THE MATURE LEVEL

The mature level consists of stage 3 and stage 4. At this level, the individual thinks logically and can look at differences in his or her reasoning. Two important aspects underline the individual's reasoning namely: to maintain good relationship that appeals to intrinsic values such as life. Relationships are based on trust, honesty, truth and caring (Stage 3) and that society has become an important aspect of his or her life. There are two stages at this mature level:

Stage 3: Mutual and Prosocial

At stage 3, Gibbs et al. (1992) describes the individual as one who has reached the mature level and can reason and judge, not from external features but from his reasoning (p. 26). The individual is not influenced by physical features but rather from his mature ways of thinking. The individual thinks logically and can look at differences in his reasoning.

Gibbs et al. (1992) identified several characteristics of stage 3. First, the individual's justification is related to interpersonal expectations of prosocial feeling, caring and conduct. Mutual sentiments exist at this stage because the individual understands the interpersonal relationship. For example, keeping a promise is important for the sake of a good relationship. Second, it refers to the individual's ability to justify with reference to one's emotional welfare. For example, "not

stealing is important because people work so hard for their things and become very attached to them". Third, Gibbs et al. (1992) also explains that stage 3 includes normative expectations, that is if laws are broken, the normative expectations are chaos and confusion. Fourth, it also appeals to the antisocial intentions or personality. For example, "helping a friend is important, not in order to be "good" but rather in order to show love" (p. 28). Last, it also appeals to one to show that one cares. For example, "saving a life is important because one loves one's friend and enemy" (p. 28).

Stage 4: Systematic And Standard

At stage 4, the individual has reached the highest stage in the SRM. According to Gibbs et al. (1992), stage 4 extends to, firstly, a complex social system whereby the individual justifies his or her decision because it is a requirement for society. For example, "obeying the law is important to keep the society in order, otherwise the system will break down" (p. 29). Secondly, the individual also appeals to basic rights and values applicable to any society. For example, "life is important because everyone has something to offer to society" (p. 30). Thirdly, the individual also appeals to societal responsibilities or contractual obligations. For example, "sending lawbreakers to jail may be evaluated as important because the judge is sworn to uphold the law" (p. 31). Fourthly, the individual also appears to uphold responsible character or integrity. For example, "keeping promises to one's children may be evaluated as important because parents should provide a model of integrity, honour and character" (p. 31). Fifthly, the individual also appeals to the standard practice of normative moral values. For example, "not stealing is

important because otherwise “theft can be rationalised by anyone who steals” (p. 32). Lastly, justification by the individual also appeals to standards of individual or personal conscience, such as one’s self-respect, sense of self-worth, dignity, honour and integrity (p. 33).

Moral Development and Age Level

According to Gibbs et al.(1992), the SRM model has the advantage over Kohlberg’s as it is felt to be more “realistic” than Kohlberg’s theory as the latter’s maturity level only begins at stage 5 while stages 1 to 4 are considered to be at the immature level. In addition various research on moral development based on Kohlberg’s moral stages has shown that although stage level increased with age it was difficult to achieve stage 5, particularly among the adolescents as illustrated in the following cases:

- (a) Colby et al. (1983) in their longitudinal studies for a period of 20 years on 50 men found that moral development varied with age. In their findings based on Kohlberg’s moral development, men were found to develop higher stages as age increased.
- (b) Reimer (1988) in his review of Kohlberg’s research found that majority of the subjects in the 10 to 12 years age group appealed to stage 1 or stage 2. The majority in 13 to 15 years age group were more inclined to stage 2 or stage 3. The majority of the subjects in the 16 to 18 years age group appealed to stage 3 or stage 4. However none of the three different age groups reached stage 5 or stage 6.

- (c) Park and Johnson (1984) used the Defining Issues Test (DIT) developed by Rest conducted a research on moral development, with 480 boys and girls in grades 6, 8, 11 and at colleges in Korea. In their findings, college students achieved higher stages than those from the grades 6, 8 or 11.
- (d) Chui (1990) also used the Defining Issues Test on 260 boys and 255 girls from the United States and 267 boys and 253 girls from Taiwan. The samples were taken from grade 8 and 11 students of both countries. In his findings, grade 11 students achieved higher moral stages than grade 8 students for both countries.

The local research on moral development using Kohlberg's stage theory has indicated the following results:

- (a) Chandrasegeran's (1979) conducted a research in two schools in Kampar, Perak. His samples consisted of 90 students ranging from 11 to 17 years old. His findings showed that moral development among the students increased from age 11 to 17.
- (b) Chuah (1989) in his research on 347 standard 6 pupils (age 12) found that majority of his samples were at pre-conventional level, that is, 84.6% of his samples were at stage 1 or stage 2 of Kohlberg's moral development theory.
- (c) Loganathan (1995) found that different age group have different levels of moral development. His study on form three students (15 year-old) and form five students (17 year-old) showed that the latter achieved higher moral stages. 17 year-old students managed to reach stage 4 compared to 15 year - old students. The majority of the form three students achieved stage 2 and 3

while a few achieved stage 4. In addition, he found that the same age group had different levels of moral development.

The review of literature has indicated that the majority of secondary school students, particularly in non western culture, such as Malaysia generally do not attain Kohlberg's stage 5 and stage 6 level of moral development. Using Kohlberg's model on moral development stages would thus mean that it would be unlikely for students to achieve the mature level (stages 5 and 6) of moral reasoning. On the other hand, with Gibbs' SRM-SF model of moral development it would be possible for students to attain a higher level of moral reasoning because the mature level begins at stage 3 instead of stage 5. It is in this context that Gibbs' model was thus considered in this study on moral development.

Academic Achievement and Moral Maturity

Since 1993, students doing Moral Education at form five level have to sit for a centralised examination paper in the Malaysia School Certificate (*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* or SPM) known as *Pengetahuan Moral* (Moral Knowledge). Parents, students and teachers expressed concern for the *Pengetahuan Moral* paper as illustrated in the following letter to the editor of The Star.

I'm a Form Five student who will be sitting for the *Pengetahuan Moral* in a few days' time and I fully support the views of Future Leader of Malaysia ... I'd appreciate it very much if they do care enough to listen to our plight and rectify the situation immediately. On many occasions, even when the answer given is acceptable or even better than the one and only answer given by the examiners, you are wrong (December, 15, 1996, Sunday Star, p. 6).

This concern was further evidenced when the researcher, on further investigation, found that in the researcher's school, students who achieved grade one in their Malaysia School Certificate (*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* or SPM) in 1996, did not necessarily obtain distinctions in their *Pengetahuan Moral* paper in as shown in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3

Number of Students by Grade Obtained in *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) and the Moral Knowledge Paper in Researcher's School in 1996*

Grade in SPM	Grade in Moral Knowledge Paper					
	Distinction (n)	Credit (n)	Pass (n)	Fail (n)	Absent (n)	Total
One	2	25	11	1		39
Two		4	21	3		28
Three		2	25	3		30
GCE**			20	15	1	36
Fail			6	28	1	35

Note: *For purpose of confidentially the actual name of the school is not used.

**GCE refers to students having failed in *Bahasa Melayu* in the SPM.

As shown in Table 1.3, only two out of 39 students who obtained grade one in the SPM scored distinction in the Moral Knowledge paper. Students who obtained grade two and grade three in the SPM did not score any distinction in the SPM Moral Knowledge paper. The overall results thus perhaps indicate a relationship between academic achievement and performance in the Moral

Knowledge paper. It is with reference to this possible relationship between academic achievement and moral maturity that provides that focus for this research.

Research Questions

In this study, the researcher attempts to answer two research questions.

They are as follows:

1. What are the levels and stages of moral maturity among form four (16 years) students in a secondary school in Malaysia?
2. Is there a relationship between academic achievement and stages of moral maturity?

Significance of the Research

This research can perhaps be useful for the teachers of Moral Education to have a deeper understanding of the moral reasoning of students. This will enable teachers to help students to think and reason in relation to the values as stated in the Moral Education syllabus.

Since academic achievement can be improved, it is hoped that with this research it will further help the teachers in their teaching strategies to develop moral reasoning of students. Furthermore it may be helpful for teachers of Moral Education to select suitable materials that relate to moral reasoning.

This research may be useful to curriculum planners and evaluators. This research could help them to reassess the programmes that are relevant to students' level of moral maturity.

Glossary of Key Terms

In this report, the terms used are expressed as follows:

Moral development	Moral development is used interchangeably with moral reasoning. The moral development of an individual refers to the 3 levels and 6 stages of moral reasoning as postulated by Kohlberg (1987)
Moral Maturity	The moral maturity also refers to moral reasoning but it refers to the 2 levels and 4 stages of moral reasoning as postulated by Gibbs et al. (1992).
Moral Education	Moral Education refers to the compulsory school subject taught in the primary and secondary school in Malaysia for non-Muslim students.
Moral Knowledge	This is a public examination paper known as <i>Pengetahuan Moral</i> in the <i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i> (SPM). It is a compulsory paper for all non-muslim students.