# METHODOLOGICAL MODEL OF REASON-BASED MORAL CAPABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## Abstract

The researcher's interest to construct the research objectives (1) to review the methodological models of ethics and values education and (2) to measure the significant difference between the 4 education groups of students in higher education, according to their level of education. The population participating in this study were students of the faculties relating to Sociology and Anthropology from the 8 National/Autonomous University in Bangkok. The sample size of 268 was calculated from Taro Yamane Formula. They were equally drawn from four groups according to their level of education. Multi-stage random sampling was applied. To answer the first (qualitative) research objective, the content analysis was applied to analyze the Relation to Moral Development and the Demonstration of Use for each methodological model of ethic. To answer the second (quantitative) research objective, the Defining Issues Test (DIT) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. The found most impact methodological models of reason-based morality were (1) Critical thinking in ethics education (2) Using ethical dilemmas, conflict cases, thought experiments, and (3) Moral Decision Making. Results of the analysis of variance indicated that there was no significant difference between moral reasoning scores for the four educational groups. The obtained F test 0.38 indicated a non-significant difference at the level .05.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Reason-based morality capability, Methodological model for morality

## Introduction

A considerable amount of quantitative data has been collected on the development of students during the college years, especially numerous studies that have examined factors that might influence the development of moral reasoning. Many findings show that although age would be associated with the stage of moral reasoning, the best predictor is level of education. A number of studies have found formal education in university to have a significant positive correlation with moral reasoning and also find that completion of an ethics course in college has a positive impact on reason-based moral capability. (Eynon, Hill, & Stevens, 1997; Perez-Delgado & Oliver, 1995; Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999). Although people frequently debate whether morality could be taught without teaching religion, there are few who would deny that morality without teaching religion and there are few who would deny that morality should be taught in school. Society generally agrees that morality not only could but ought to be taught. It also accepts that the teacher is the one best qualified for the task (Ayeni, 2012; Perez-Delgado & Oliver, 1995; Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, and Thoma, 1999).

Formal education is a predictor of more complex moral reasoning because individuals who seek higher education tend to be people who enjoy learning, are interested in self-growth, prosper in intellectually and socially stimulating environments, and are more interested and involved in community and societal issues. Several studies suggest that the majority of moral development occurs during the first year of college (Loxley & Whitely, 1986; Menkowski &

Strait, 1983; Rest, 1986; Rest & Thoma, 1985). Rational or reason-based moral capability must be preferred to religious or traditional morality. The reason-based ethics make students see the whole point to morality, why they must be moral and how they can develop and progress morally. The role of the teacher is most influential, and there arise the demands requesting that they should be first morally sensitive and educated before transferring it to their students.

Although there was a large number of researches regarding morality, the reason-based moral capability in higher education was limited. In addition, many kinds of research were mostly done in Western countries; however, there were limited in regional Asian, especially very limited in Thailand in particular. Therefore, it attracts the researcher's interest at a significant degree to initiate the research question, to construct the research title, to set up the research objectives, including to design the research methodology.

## Research of Objective

The objectives of this research were stated accordingly:

(1) to review the methodological models of ethic and values education and

(2) to measure the significance difference between the 4 education groups of students in higher education, according to their level of education: Freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors.

## Research Methodology

Population participating in this study were students from the faculties relating to Sociology and Anthropology of the 8 National/Automonous University in Bangkok. Sample size of 268 were calculated from Taro Yamane Formula. They were equally drawn from four groups according to their level of education: Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors. Multi-stage random sampling was applied.

To answer the first (qualitative) research objective, the content analysis was applied to analyze the relation to moral development and the demonstration of use for each methodological models of ethic. And to answer the second (quantitative) research objective, the Defining Issues Test (DIT), developed by James Rest (1979), was used as the measured instrument to assess the reason-based moral capability. This instrument has played a major role in shaping our understanding of the development of moral judgement among college students. The DIT presents several moral dilemmas to test-takers, who are asked to respond to questions about each dilemma. A P-Score is calculated from the results and represents their current level of moral reasoning development. DIT is strong with test-retest correlations ranging from .78 to .83 and Cronbach alpha ranging from .82 to .87. To ascertain the significance of the differences on moral scores for the four education groups, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed.

## Research Results

Ethics and Values Education (EVE)

The main aims of EVE are the following: to stimulate ethical reflection, awareness, responsibility, and compassion in children, provide children with insight into important ethical principles and values, equip them with intellectual capacities (critical thinking and evaluation, reflection, discovery, understanding, decision-making, non-cognitive abilities like compassion) for responsible moral judgment, to develop approaches to build a classroom or school environment as an ethical community, and to reflectively situate individuals into other local and global communities with a mission to contribute to the common good. All this enables pupils to overcome prejudice, discrimination, and other unethical practices and attitudes.

Students are taught one or more ethical theories are then taught to apply these theories to resolve, or at least inform, ethical dilemmas.

The Defining Issues Test

The Defining Issues Test (short form) was administered to 90 students during the class. includes three dilemmas: "Heinz and the Drug", "Escaped Prisoner", and "The Doctor's Dilemma". The data were collected in one session ranging fi-om 30 to 40-minutes.

The participants were asked to rate and rank a set of twelve statements for each dilemma. Participants respond to three sets of questions for each dilemma. The first set of questions required the participants to decide if the character in the dilemma a) should take action or b) should not take action. Participants are also given option c) cannot decide. The second set of questions contains 12 forced-choice questions about the dilemmas. The final set of questions required that the participants rank what they view as the four most important statements in the previous section.

The P-score (The principled moral reasoning (P) scale) assesses the extent to which individuals believe that laws represent social contracts between individuals and society or that there are universal principles (justice, equality of human rights, and respect for dignity of individuals) that are sometimes not compatible with existing laws. The Principled Morality Percentage Score (P% Score), the most widely used index of moral judgment, was employed as the primary criterion measure in this study.

Chalmers, P., Dunngalvin, A., Shorten, G. (2011) studied regarding "Reflective Ability and Moral Reasoning in Final Year Medical Students: A semi-qualitative Cohort Study" and found that moral reasoning and reflective ability are important concepts in medical education. To date, the association between reflective ability and moral reasoning in medical students has not been measured. This study tested the hypotheses that, amongst final year medical students, (1) moral reasoning and reflective ability improve over time and (2) positive change in reflective ability favorably influences moral reasoning. With Institutional Ethical approval, 56 medical students (of a class of 110) participated fully both at the beginning and end of the final academic year. Reflective ability and moral reasoning were assessed at each time using Sobral's reflection-in-learning scale (RLS), Boenink's overall reflection score and by employing Kohlberg's schema for moral reasoning. The most important findings were that (1) Students' level of reflective ability scores related to medicine decreased significantly over the course of the year, (2) students demonstrated a predominantly conventional level of moral reasoning at both the beginning and end of the year, (3) moral reasoning scores tended to decrease over the course of the year and (4) RLS is a strong predictor of change in moral reasoning over time. This study confirms the usefulness of Sobral's RLS and BOR score for evaluating moral development in the context of medical education. This study further documents regression and levelling in the moral reasoning of final year medical students and a decrease in reflective ability applied in the medical context. Further studies are required to determine factors that would favorably influence reflective ability and moral reasoning among final year medical students.

Andre, S., James, R. R., & Stephen, J. T. (1985) reviewed the conduct of 55 studies of education interventions designed to stimulate development in moral judgment. All studies used the Defining Issues Test. Various subject groups were involved (junior and senior high school students, college and graduate students, adults), various types of programs were employed (group discussion of moral dilemmas, psychological development programs, social studies and humanities courses), and the duration of the programs varied (a few hours to a year-long program). The principal findings from meta-analysis indicate that the dilemma discussion and psychological development programs produce modest overall effect sizes, that treatments of

about 3 to 12 weeks are optimal, and that programs with adults (24 years and older) produce larger effect sizes than with younger subjects; however, significant effect sizes are obtained with all groups.

## Discussion of Research Results

The ANOVA was tested at the level .05 for significant results. Figure 1 displayed the data for the analysis of variance. Results of the analysis of variance shown in Table 3 indicate that there is no significant difference between moral reasoning scores for the four educational groups. The obtained F test 0.38 indicates a non-significant difference at the level .05 [$F (4, 89) = .38, p < .O5$]. The lack of significant impact of education on moral reasoning in the present might be attributed to several factors. One factor cold be the unequal distribution of participants in the four educational levels.

## Suggestions

In Western Asian, especially very limited in Thailand in particular. Therefore, it attracts the researcher's interest at a significant degree to initiate the research question, to construct the research title, to set up the research objectives, including to design the research methodology. That should have education in Reason-Based Moral Capability in Higher Education In-depth interviews are also a great way to get answers from stakeholders.

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