Teachers' Perspectives on the Cultivation of Moral Values among Twenty-First Century College Students

Hamna Naseer[1], Naeem Arshad[2] & Dr. Yaar Muhammad[3]

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perspectives on the need to cultivate moral value among college students, their lived experiences in doing so, and the challenges faced by them in the context of twenty-first-century students. For this, researchers on the basis of availability and purposive sampling technique recruited four male Islamic Studies college teachers in Lahore. In-depth and detailed interviews were conducted, resulting in the collection of rich data, which was then analyzed using phenomenological methods in order to develop patterns and themes and extract the essence of all the lived experiences, which developed our understanding of the perspectives of teachers regarding the core phenomenon. The analysis revealed that the interviewed college teachers' saw an immense need to cultivate moral values, especially among college boys, being more reluctant to ethical development due to social media challenges of this century. Moreover, teachers' lived experience enlisted three major moral values to be inculcated for developing distinctive moral character, that is, truthfulness, respect, and modesty (Hayah). However, this study highlighted the need for combining teachers' own moral values, parents' awareness, and students' willingness for effective nurturing of moral character.
Keywords: Moral values, college students, twenty-first century, teacher's perspectives

Introduction

Education is considered a process through which learners learn about life skills, that is, the skills essential to living a better,

1. MPhil Scholar, Department of Education, University of Management and Technology, Lahore. Hamnanaseer30@gmail.com
2. MPhil Scholar, Department of Education, University of Management and Technology, Lahore. f2018262001@umt.edu.pk
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Management and Technology, Lahore. Yaar.muhammad@umt.edu.pk

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complete, and successful life. Along with that, it is a process of getting equipped and receiving knowledge in a particular bounded system such as schools. Students are the ones getting knowledge or information, understanding the concepts and learning skills, while teachers are the ones not only giving that specific knowledge but also working as role models, mentors, and guides, trying hard to inculcate life skills—and ethical and moral values related to character building of their students. Therefore, if we consider education as an enlightening experience, it is the process through which a person develops an insight into right and wrong, creates awareness and knowledge, and refines one's behaviors and attitudes.

Noddings (2013) stated that "the primary aim of all education must be nurturance of the ethical ideal" (p. 6), whereas, by an ethical ideal, he means the idea of oneself to be caring towards others and maintaining a strong relationship. By which, we can say that a person who wants to be at that point of morality to serve others and be kind, generous, and caring must seek "education" in its true sense as moral development is the main purpose of it. However, this development of kindness and care can be considered as one aspect of morality.

Morality is much more than a kind behavior. It is best defined as "morality is a totality of rules; it is like so many molds with limited boundaries, into which we must pour our behavior" (Durkheim, 2012, p. 26) and those boundaries are the preserved values of the society which suggests one's character-building (Edington, 2002). These norms or a set standard directs one to build his character and morality. The provision of knowledge regarding such moral development is considered a duty of schools. Therefore, the chief purpose or aim of the school is to develop the character of the child, along with developing him or her as an intellectual being (Arthur, 2014).

Teachers are the ones taking care of giving information and knowledge through a designed curriculum to the students. Nevertheless, focusing on the above purposes of education, teachers serve as role models or the main source of applying some kind of hidden curriculum for their concern of a student's moral development. This task of teachers is well stated by Lumpkin (2008): "As teachers interact with students, it is vital for them to serve as role models of character by making professional judgments

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and decisions based on societal and moral values" (p. 45). This is not an easy task. Rather, it is a challenging one. Therefore, teaching like this is not just a matter of the brain, intelligence, and knowledge. It involves both the brain and the heart (Day, 1999).

Aim and Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of teachers' perspectives on the need for cultivating moral value among college students, their lived experiences in doing so, and the challenges faced by them in the context of twenty-first-century students. This study was guided by the following research objectives:

1. To explore college teachers' perspectives on the need for cultivating moral value among twenty-first-century college students.
2. To explore college teachers' lived experiences in relation to cultivating moral value among twenty-first-century college students.
3. To explore college teachers' perspectives on the challenges faced by them in cultivating moral value among twenty-first-century College students.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach, and phenomenological research design was used to explore the lived experiences of different individuals regarding a common phenomenon (Creswell, 2007) since this study was concerned with the description of "essence" of that phenomenon (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015), which demands a need for a detailed and rich data collection (Nicholls, 2009).

Phenomenology is explained by Creswell (2007) as "it is an attempt to approach a lived experience with a sense of 'newness' to elicit rich and descriptive data" (p. 269). Therefore, it is a method to seek the understanding and awareness of one's reality and its subjective meanings of the outside world in which that phenomenon occurs.

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Sample

Participants were selected on the basis of availability and purposive sampling technique, which were four male teachers of Islamic Studies, which is a subject related directly to the ethical and moral development of students. All four teachers had a teaching experience of more than ten years and were expert teachers of different colleges. Two of them were taken from the specific group of colleges whose mission is explicitly mentioned regarding inculcating moral values among students (PGC, 2018).

Bracketing

Bracketing is a process of setting aside the researcher's preconceived notion regarding that phenomenon so that no prior personal judgments could interfere with the phenomenological inquiry. Streubert and Carpenter (2011) well elaborated the process as:

Once the researcher has explicated his or her thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about phenomena, it is recommended that the researcher bracket those thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. Bracketing is the cognitive process of putting aside one's own beliefs, not making judgments about what one has observed or heard, and remaining open to data as they are revealed. (p. 27)

In this study, bracketing of authors' own beliefs and feelings regarding the phenomenon were written down. Therefore, the difficult process of bracketing one's perceptions regarding the phenomenon to be studied became somewhat easy for the authors before the study and throughout the data collection and analysis process. However, it is obvious that complete bracketing cannot occur; rather, explicitly writing down the assumptions and judgments as much as possible is the task (Churchill & Wertz, 2015).

Procedure

The researchers asked open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews to explore the real lived experiences of teachers while applying diverse teaching strategies to cultivate moral values among college students and the challenges faced by them in the twenty-first century. The interview guide was constructed, keeping the research objectives in view. The final draft of the interview guide contained 20 questions falling under the areas like lived experiences while dealing with students of the twenty-first century, facing challenges and results, inculcating moral values

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and attributes, applying different teaching strategies, and developing distinctive personality characteristics among college students. The first two researchers did the fieldwork, and for this, they took appointments from the four male teachers and went to them to take detailed interviews as per the dates and venue decided. Before the interviews, the participants were asked whether to disclose their identity, on which they gave permission to mention their real names in the paper. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes, and questions other than the interview guide were also asked where it was found to be necessary for the emergence of a new theme. Recorded interviews were then transcribed, resulting in thick and rich data, perfect for doing an in-depth study.

Materials and Measures

As stated above, the instrument used for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide based on themes identified through the literature review. This semi-structured interview guide incorporated "both open-ended and more theoretically driven questions, eliciting data grounded in the experience of the participant as well as data guided by existing constructs in the particular discipline within which one is conducting research" (Galletta, 2013, p. 45). The questions of the interview guide were developed under the categories: Dealing with students of the twenty-first century, moral values and attributes, teachers and teaching strategies, challenges and results, distinctive characteristics, and the impacts of surroundings.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed on the basis of seven steps related to Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method, as cited in Morrow et al. (2015). For this, firstly, all the transcriptions were read multiple times to familiarize ourselves with the data. After the complete familiarization of data, the researchers identified significant statements from each participant, which were directly relevant to the process of cultivating moral values among college students. Those significant statements were studied so that meanings related to them could be interpreted without involving the researchers' own beliefs. The constructed meanings were then used

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to extract a collection of common themes describing that phenomenon. The researchers then wrote the description of the whole phenomenon under the respective themes, which resulted in the production of the detailed description referred as 'exhaustive description' by Creswell (2007) which was then condensed, and the essence was extracted as the findings of the study. Due to some limitations, the last step of going back to the participants and seeking the verification of the phenomenon structure was missed. However, validity was ensured by taking expert opinion.

Results

Diverse perspectives and stories of participants' lived experiences were obtained. Out of four interviews, 40 significant statements were taken, which were then analyzed and resulted in the production of 9 themes. Themes explained the perspective of teachers regarding different aspects of cultivating moral values among college students and their lived experiences in doing so along with the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Theme 1: *Individual differences matter* was supported by four significant statements and the meanings formulated by them. All four teachers agreed that the individual differences of students matter in academic performance and inculcating moral values. One participant, Shoaib Sarwer, stated, "Every kid is individually different, and this cannot be neglected while teaching," and the other named Waseem Iqbal, mentioned his experience as "I acknowledge the individual differences of students and take them along with the class." This suggested that teachers were well aware of the different personalities of their students, their learning styles, backgrounds, intellectual level, and individuality. Therefore, teaching strategies applied in order to cultivate moral values among students depends on teachers' awareness regarding their students. Like one teacher being very emotional and felt the sensitivity of this phenomenon stated that "there is a need to win the hearts of your students," which is obviously possible when a teacher acknowledges the individual difference and capability of a student and tries to inculcate ethical values in a soft manner.

Theme 2: *Moral education is developing into a better person* gives us another definition of moral education. Our participants, being Islamic Studies teachers, had great experience and strong perspectives regarding the need, importance, and strengths of moral

education. A comprehensive definition of moral education by making patterns of all the four participants statements can be stated as "Morality is about setting some rules and regulations, character building and developing those characteristics which can make one a better person regardless of any religion while moral education is teaching that humanity to humans which will take them beyond materialistic approach and survival of the fittest concept." One of the participants, Nasir Qayyum, found inculcation of "Respect element" in students as another name of giving them moral education.

Theme 3: *Truthfulness, Respect, and Modesty (Hayah) are three major moral values* that formed the main theme extracted, which provided the most important finding of this research. Perspectives and lived experiences of our participants being qualified expert teachers suggested three main core values to be inculcated in students can bring an immense change in students ethically. As a result, a teacher needs to focus on these three major moral values in order to develop their students with better human beings. Many significant statements supported this theme, like "truthfulness is the major value," "Having respect element is another name of moral education" and "Divine leads it, but I think whatever the religion, core moral values: truthfulness, honesty, and *Hayah*." One teacher shared his experience as "I focus on truth, even if the truth is against me, I must have the ethical courage to listen to and acknowledge that" which also suggested that in order to inculcate these major moral values, teachers need to develop those in himself as well. A teacher, Waseem Iqbal, shared his perspective, summarizing the whole phenomenon of morality in a statement, as "Fundamental value is to realize that I am a human, so I have to obey certain rules. The highest moral value is Truthfulness."

Theme 4: *Actions are more important than words* was the theme followed by the above-mentioned themes that the one who has to inculcate moral values must have his personality and actions in accordance with the words he speaks. One participant explained his strategy to create a moral culture in his class as "I create a moral culture in class, through my own actions, as actions are more influential than words." Other statements also supported the concept

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of "actions speak louder than words" and the importance of morality being part of teachers' personalities. A teacher stated his perspective as "Alignment of actions and words is necessary. A teacher's link is not only with the syllabus. Students are continually observing; moral values are not taught; they are inculcated through actions." Therefore, "character is most important" as "kids learn through a teacher's personality," as stated by a participant, was another important finding.

Theme 5: *The teacher is a role model.* All four participants mentioned one basic characteristic of a teacher, that is, being a role model. It is not necessary that kids of this twenty-first century may consider a teacher as an employee hired by their parents. A participant argued, "when parents lack the worth and respect of teachers as they pay them, that gets shifted into their child, but generally, every kid sees a role model in his/her teacher if he sees a moral spark in that teacher." A participant teacher shared his reasoning as: "It is not necessary to give an extra 10 minutes for students' moral training; the teacher himself is a role model." However, another related this to the 'being a role model' approach as his teaching strategy: "My teaching strategy is to be a role model. Secondly, whatever I teach, I relate that to moral education or at least keep a few minutes in a lecture to talk about moral values."

Theme 6: *Boys are more reluctant to develop moral values* led to an interesting finding regarding this study that if individual differences matter, gender differences also matter, especially in the context of Pakistan. Participant teachers had a strong view of boys being more reluctant and hesitant in developing moral values as they have more exposure to media and society than girls. A participant, Shafaqat Ali, gave another reason for boys being difficult to handle when it comes to ethics and ethical development: Naturally being soft and kind, girls obey the rules and show submissiveness easily. But boys are more difficult." Though significant statements supported the theme here, an outlier existed who stated, "I feel girls are more reluctant as I think boys develop a certain level of maturity at the college level and use their moral reasoning skills to develop, but girls are not mature enough." However, most were of the view that inculcation of moral values among male students is more difficult than girls.

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Theme 7: *Media is the biggest challenge.* When researchers explored the biggest challenge faced by teachers while providing moral education to their students in the twenty-first century, all the four respondents agreed on one challenge, that is, Media. Findings revealed that excessive use of social media and electronic devices made students resistant towards any moral talk or effort coming from teachers or else. A teacher stated, "The major challenge is media. Penetration needs space, which is filled by our media." This means that moral values are directly linked to the openness and purity of one's heart. If that space is occupied by the irrelevant or wrong stuff from media, it would be very challenging for teachers or parents even to replace that with the pure ethical doings and moral values.

Theme 8: *Hayah is the main concern.* Lack of *Hayah* and shamelessness among college students is of major concern for twenty-first-century teachers. Participants focused on the importance of the *Hayah* element to be inculcated in students and gave their perspective as "Growing media and bad company affect directly on *Hayah*. Teachers need to inculcate the concept of shame and *Hayah* with its limitations and boundaries." Thus it can be interpreted as both the two challenges "Media and increasing shamelessness" of the twenty-first century faced by teachers while cultivating moral values among college students are interdependent on each other.

Theme 9: *Praying is power.* A finding of this study clearly suggests the importance of the spiritual bond between students and teachers. All four teachers, after sharing their lived experiences related to building the character of their students, referred to the power of praying to *Allah* Almighty regarding their students. For example, a participant stated, "Sometimes, I had such experiences where I felt helpless. I think in this situation, teachers should be aware of the student's nature, pray for him, and give freedom with supervision." Another participant highlighted, "50% is teaching (morality) with softness and wisdom (*Hikmah*), and 50% is praying for the students."

All the 9 themes formulated from the meanings interpreted by perceptions, statements, and significant statements showing lived

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experiences of the participants were the main finding and results of this study, which gave detailed and diverse information of the core phenomenon of cultivation of moral values among college students of the twenty-first century.

This study was thematically structured and focused on the commonalities of the participant's statements. However, there were some important statements showing the diverse and unique experiences of the participants. The differences in opinions are as essential as finding commonalities to get a better understanding of the phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004). For example, a participant faced another challenge "dysfunctional family's kids." This suggested a teaching strategy for moral education, that is, to teach students with "care and love." He believed that softness could melt anyone's heart; therefore, teachers need to win the hearts of students. Another participant, while talking about challenges of media, emphasized the teachers' knowledge to be updated: "Teaching is challenging at all times. But more the changes occur due to progress in science and technology, the more the teacher should be well aware of the changes to meet the challenges." In addition, two participants focused on parents and the family system who need to be aware of their kids' grooming (*Trbiyah*). As one participant said, "The teacher is not responsible for everything. Parents have an immense effect on a kid's personality, and in our context (Pakistan), we have a family system which should play a vital role in a child's grooming."

Discussion and Conclusions

Keeping in view the gaps identified in the literature, this study tend to explore the lived experiences of teachers falling under the theme of *actions are more important than words* and *the teacher is a role model*—which beautifully elaborated that students of the twenty-first century should focus more on moral reasoning rather than blind obedience. Once a teacher develops an ethically strong personality through his actions, he may be able to win the heart of students, which is necessary to make students learn and follow. This in-depth study of teachers' perspectives brought another definition of moral education: *Moral education is developing into a better person* and three core values to be cultivated in the students: *Truthfulness, Respect, and Modesty (Hayah).* The study was also able to bring out two major challenges: *Media role and increasing*

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shamelessness. While discussing the development of distinguished characteristics among college students, teachers always had positive results. Especially when they meet any of their students succeed in practical life, they feel happy and satisfied to see them earning with honesty, stating the truth, and living with modesty.

Focusing the most important and unique finding of this research fell under the theme of *Praying is power,* which states that a teacher must have a pure heart, a strong bond and deep concern for his students to nurture his character. As teaching is a very noble profession, the argument of teaching ethics or teaching ethically must be answered as it is necessary for the teacher to love his profession, be loyal and teach ethically, along with that take the responsibility of developing moral values among his students, which can only be possible through wisdom, softness, and prayer.

Concluding the study, it can be mentioned in light of this research that it is not only the teacher's duty to inculcate moral values in students. In this challenging era of the twenty-first century, developing a moral culture among boys and girls will be a combined effort of parents and teachers. However, students' willingness and moral understanding cannot be ignored. Therefore, this study highlights the need for combining the teacher's own moral values, parents' awareness, and students' willingness for effective nurturing of moral character.

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