TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF MORAL REASONING AMONG BASIC SCHOOL CHILDREN IN ILORIN SOUTH, KWARA STATE

By

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Abstract

The study investigated teachers' perception of moral reasoning among basic school children in Ilorin South, Kwara State, in response to increasing societal concern over moral decline and the crucial role of teachers in shaping ethical behaviour. Previous studies have largely focused on behaviour management and emotional intelligence, with limited attention to how teachers perceive pupils' moral reasoning. This study therefore aimed to identify teachers' perceptions of children's moral reasoning and to determine whether such perceptions differ based on gender, teaching experience, and educational qualification, as well as to examine any interaction effects among these variables. A descriptive survey design was adopted, targeting a population of 1,994 basic school teachers in Ilorin South. A total of 100 teachers, representing 5% of the population, were selected through simple random sampling. Data were gathered using a validated researcher-designed questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.78. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and Factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to analyse the data and test two hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that teachers generally held positive perceptions of pupils' moral reasoning (grand mean = 2.99). Significant differences were found based on gender ($F(1,86)=5.227$, $p=.025$) and teaching experience ($F(4,86)=3.397$, $p=.013$), while the interaction effect among gender, experience, and education was also statistically significant. The study concluded that teachers' perceptions vary by personal characteristics and recommended that teacher training programmes should emphasise strategies for fostering moral reasoning through empathy-based and discussion-oriented pedagogies.

Keywords: Moral reasoning, teachers' perception, basic school children

Introduction

Moral reasoning is a fundamental aspect of children's cognitive and emotional development, influencing their ability to make ethical decisions, interact with others, and contribute to society. That is, moral reasoning refers to the cognitive process by which individuals determine what is right or wrong, just or unjust, based on their understanding of ethical principles and values. It involves the ability to reflect on various moral dilemmas, evaluate different perspectives, and make decisions that align with moral or ethical standards. Gui et al. (2020) opined that, the concept is central to the development of moral values and guides individuals in making judgments about the fairness or morality of actions and behaviors. In another position by Bentahila et al. (2021), moral reasoning is influenced by personal values, cultural norms, and societal expectations, which can vary across different contexts, guiding individuals through ethical decision-making processes. The stages of moral development, as proposed by Kohlberg, suggest that individuals' moral reasoning progresses through different stages, from a focus on obedience to authority to more abstract considerations of justice and human rights.

According to McLeod (2024), children's moral reasoning evolves as they mature, moving from a heteronomous stage, where they follow rules imposed by others, to an autonomous stage, where they develop their own sense of justice. Teachers' perspectives on children' moral reasoning can significantly impact how they address ethical dilemmas in the classroom. Educators can foster the development of moral reasoning in their children by encouraging critical thinking and promoting moral discussions (Meyer, 2023). Furthermore, children' moral reasoning abilities can vary significantly depending on their developmental stage, environment, and personal experiences, making it a dynamic and essential aspect of their social and emotional growth.

Teachers, as key agents in the educational process, are tasked with fostering not only academic skills but also moral values in their children. Having the knowledge of the teachers' perceptions of children' moral reasoning is crucial as the perceptions can significantly influence how the teachers engage with the children, approach moral education, and handle moral dilemmas in the classroom (Bello, Yusuf, & Amali, 2017). The way teachers perceive the children's moral reasoning tends to shape the teachers' teaching strategies, classroom management practices, and overall approach to character education (Rohmah & Diana, 2023). The increasing societal

concerns about the moral development of children, coupled with the undisputable role of teachers in this development, highlights the need for a clearer understanding of how teachers perceive the moral reasoning of their children. Without such an knowledge, it becomes difficult to formulate effective strategies for enhancing moral education in schools (Zhang et al., 2022).

Several studies have examined various aspects of teachers' perceptions and the techniques they employ to address moral and behavioral issues in classrooms. One significant study by Abdulwahab, Oluwafemi, Sulaimon, and Khosiyono (2023) focused on the techniques employed by basic school teachers in managing undesirable behaviours in classrooms. This research primarily explored behaviour management strategies, such as reinforcement and token economies, used to address disruptive behaviours. However, the study did not specifically investigate how teachers perceive the moral reasoning of children, nor did it consider the role of teachers' personal characteristics in shaping these perceptions. Although it provides a valuable understanding of behavioural management techniques, it misses a critical dimension by not exploring teachers' views on the moral development of their children.

In contrast, Bello, Yusuf, and Amali (2017) investigated the influence of emotional intelligence on teachers' ability to foster children' moral development. Their study suggested a positive relationship between teachers' emotional intelligence and their capacity to influence children' moral behaviours. While this highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in teaching, it does not fully explore how teachers perceive the moral reasoning of their children. Moreover, it overlooks other personal factors, such as teachers' age, teaching experience, or educational background, which might influence their perceptions of moral reasoning. The study's narrow focus on emotional intelligence limits its ability to comprehensively address the broader issue of teachers' perceptions of student morality.

Similarly, Karatu (2023) conducted research on the role of Islamic Studies in the moral development of primary school children in Ilorin South. The study found that religious education had a significant impact on shaping children' moral values, particularly in Islamic Studies. However, the research did not consider how teachers perceive children' moral reasoning beyond the scope of religious education, nor did it explore the role of teachers' personal characteristics in shaping these perceptions. This narrow focus on a specific subject area fails to provide a holistic understanding of how teachers perceive moral reasoning across different contexts.

Another relevant study by Ivoline, Daouda, and Nchenepoh (2021) examined the relationship between teaching methods and children' moral behaviour in Cameroon. The study demonstrated that teaching methods could influence children' moral behaviours positively, with certain methods resulting in improved moral behaviour. However, this study did not address how teachers' personal characteristics, such as experience or qualifications, influence their perceptions of children' moral reasoning. Moreover, it overlooked the influence of teachers' attitudes toward moral reasoning, which could significantly shape their teaching practices.

In addendum, Sanjo, Aransiola, and Awuya (2021) investigated the incidences of undesirable behaviours in classrooms among secondary school children in Kwara State. The study primarily focused on teachers' strategies for managing disruptive behaviours, without considering how teachers perceive the moral reasoning of their children. It did not account for how factors such as teachers' emotional intelligence, age, or educational background may influence their perceptions of student behaviour and morality. This lack of focus on teachers' perceptions of moral reasoning is a notable gap in the literature.

While the existing studies provide valuable knowledge into basic school teachers' practices for managing undesirable behaviours, there is a distinct gap in understanding the teachers' perceptions of basic school children' moral reasoning. Most of the reviewed studies focus on behaviour management strategies or the role of emotional intelligence in fostering moral development, without directly addressing how teachers perceive their children' moral reasoning. Furthermore, many studies fail to examine how teachers' personal characteristics, such as gender, teaching experience, and level of education influence these perceptions.

Literature often treats moral reasoning as an assumed construct without delving into how teachers themselves interpret and assess children' moral reasoning. This lack of exploration is critical because teachers' perceptions can significantly impact how they approach moral education and student development. Thus, there is a need for a focused investigation into how teachers perceive the moral reasoning of their children and how teachers' personal characteristics shape these perceptions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the teachers' perception of moral reasoning among basic school children in Ilorin South, Kwara state. Specifically, the study was guided by the following objectives:

a. Identify basic school teachers perception of children moral reasoning in Ilorin south;
b. Investigate difference in the teachers' perception of children moral reasoning based on gender, teaching experience, and level of education.
c. Examine the interaction effect among gender, teaching experience, and educational qualification on teachers' perception of children's moral reasoning.

Research Question

One research question was answered in the study. The question is presented below:

a. What is basic school teachers' perception of children' moral reasoning?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses would be tested in this study:

Ho_1: there is no significant difference in the teachers perceptions of children moral reasoning based on gender, teaching experience, and level of education.

Ho_2: There is no significant interaction effect among gender, teaching experience, and educational qualification on teachers' perception of children's moral reasoning.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design to examine the perceptions of basic school teachers regarding children' moral reasoning in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Kwara State. The design was selected as it was well-suited to explore and describe teachers' perceptions of the moral reasoning. The research focused on specific objectives, including identifying teachers' perceptions of children' moral reasoning and exploring differences in these perceptions based on gender, teaching experience, and level of education.

The target population for this study consisted of all 1,994 teachers in public primary schools in Ilorin South. One hundred (100) teachers were selected from the target population representing 5% of the population using simple random sampling (SRS) as the respondents. Data

collected via a structured and researcher-designed questionnaire created on Google Forms and administered through social media platform (WhatsApp) for efficient distribution and collection. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: one for demographic information and the other for eliciting information on the teachers' perceptions of children' moral reasoning. The instrument was subjected to both face and content validity, and to establish the reliability of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was administered to a set of 20 teachers in Ilorin west Local Government. The reliability test gave a score of 0.78 via Cronbach's alpha test.

After ascertaining the suitability of the instrument for data collection, the researcher administered the instrument to all the 100-sampled teachers in Ilorin South Local Government. The elicited data were subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts and percentage distributions, were used to analyse the demographic information. To answer the research question, mean scores and rank orders were employed, allowing for a clear ranking of the perceived importance of various aspects of children' moral reasoning. Inferential statistical tool of Factorial Analysis of Variance (FANOVA) were used to test the hypotheses. The Factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in teachers' perceptions based on gender (sex), teaching experience (years), and educational qualification (level). Interaction effects between these variables were also explored. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Demographic Distribution of the Respondents

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents based on Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	72	72.0
Male	28	28.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

Table 1 presents the gender distribution of the respondents. Out of the total sample of 100 participants, 72 (72.0%) were female, while 28 (28.0%) were male. This indicates a higher representation of female respondents in the study compared to their male counterparts.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents based on Teaching Experience

	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1 year	3	3.0
1-5 years	42	42.0
6-10 years	37	37.0
11-15 years	10	10.0
16 years and above	8	8.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

Table 2 shows the teaching experience of the respondents. A majority of the participants (42.0%) had between 1 and 5 years of teaching experience, followed by 37.0% who had taught for 6 to 10 years. Also, 10.0% had 11 to 15 years of experience, and 8.0% had been teaching for 16 years or more. Only 3.0% of the respondents had less than one year of teaching experience. This distribution suggests that most of the respondents were relatively early- to mid-career teachers.

Table 3: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents based on Level of Education

Level of Education	Frequency	Percent
NCE/OND	3	3.0
First Degree/HND	73	73.0
M.Ed/M.Sc	21	21.0
PhD	3	3.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

Table 3 presents the educational qualifications of the respondents. The majority, comprising 73.0%, held a First Degree or Higher National Diploma (HND). Respondents with a Master's degree (M.Ed/M.Sc) accounted for 21.0% of the sample, while 3.0% each possessed either a National Certificate in Education (NCE)/Ordinary National Diploma (OND) or a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). This indicates that most respondents were academically qualified.

Research Question: What is basic school teachers' perception of children' moral reasoning?

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on Teachers' Perception of Children' Moral Reasoning

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
8	Pupils' ability to reason morally improves with age and experience.	3.42	.58913	1st

7	I believe pupils' moral development is influenced by how I respond to their behaviour.	3.31	.58075	2nd
2	I believe most pupils are capable of identifying morally right and wrong actions.	3.21	.55587	3rd
10	Pupils understand that helping others is a morally valuable behaviour.	3.13	.61390	4th
3	Pupils demonstrate empathy when interacting with their classmates.	3.09	.55222	5th
9	Pupils tend to question actions that seem unjust or unfair.	3.07	.57305	6th
11	Pupils often demonstrate a sense of responsibility in their daily classroom roles.	3.04	.44767	7th
6	Pupils in my class are able to express reasons for their choices during discussions.	3.03	.61060	8th
1	My pupils show an understanding of fairness when resolving conflicts.	2.96	.54901	9th
5	I observe that pupils often base their decisions on the consequences of actions.	2.88	.65567	10th
13	Pupils understand that rules are important for the well-being of everyone.	2.84	.50692	11th
12	Pupils recognise the importance of honesty even without being reminded.	2.83	.45070	12th
15	Pupils show awareness of how their actions impact the larger classroom community.	2.76	.65320	13th
14	Pupils are able to differentiate between intentional and unintentional harm.	2.70	.64354	14th
4	Pupils consider others' feelings before taking actions that affect them.	2.56	.67150	15th
	Grand Mean	**2.99**		

Table 4 presents the perceptions of basic school teachers regarding children' moral reasoning. The item with the highest mean score (M = 3.42, SD = 0.589) indicates that teachers generally agree that pupils' ability to reason morally improves with age and experience. This is followed by the belief that teachers' responses to behaviour significantly influence pupils' moral development (M = 3.31, SD = 0.581), and the perception that most pupils are capable of distinguishing right from wrong (M = 3.21, SD = 0.556). Other highly rated items include the understanding that helping others is morally valuable (M = 3.13, SD = 0.614) and pupils demonstrating empathy in peer interactions (M = 3.09, SD = 0.552). Items with lower mean scores suggest more reserved perceptions: for example, the belief that pupils consider others' feelings before acting scored

lowest (M = 2.56, SD = 0.672), as did recognising intentional versus unintentional harm (M = 2.70, SD = 0.644). With a grand mean of approximately 2.99, it may be interpreted that basic school teachers hold a generally positive perception of children' moral reasoning, although some aspects (emotional awareness and understanding of broader moral principles) appear to be developing areas.

Ho_1: there is no significant difference in the teachers perceptions of children moral reasoning based on gender, teaching experience, and level of education.

Table 5: Factorial ANOVA Results for Teachers' Perceptions of Children' Moral Reasoning Based on Gender, Teaching Experience, and Level of Education

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	601.399[a]	13	46.261	4.321	.000
Intercept	38977.640	1	38977.640	3640.749	.000
Sex	55.957	1	55.957	5.227	.025
year	145.489	4	36.372	3.397	.013
Level	3.002	3	1.001	.093	.963
Sex * year	38.321	3	12.774	1.193	.317
Sex * level	55.744	1	55.744	5.207	.025
year * level	208.959	1	208.959	19.518	.000
Error	920.711	86	10.706		
Total	202495.000	100			
Corrected Total	**1522.110**	**99**			

a. R Squared = .395 (Adjusted R Squared = .304)

The results in Table 5 reveal that there are significant differences in teachers' perceptions of children' moral reasoning based on gender, teaching experience, and their interactions with educational level. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(13, 86) = 4.321$, $p < .001$, indicating that the combined variables had a notable effect on teachers' perceptions. A significant main effect was found for gender, $F(1, 86) = 5.227$, $p = .025$, and teaching experience, $F(4, 86) = 3.397$, $p = .013$, suggesting that both variables independently influenced perception. However, level of education did not yield a significant effect, $F(3, 86) = 0.093$, $p = .963$. Significant interaction effects were observed between gender and level of education, $F(1, 86) = 5.207$, $p = .025$, and between teaching experience and level of education, $F(1, 86) = 19.518$, $p < .001$, indicating that the influence of one variable depended on the level of another. The interaction between gender and teaching experience was not significant. Based on these findings, the null hypothesis (Ho_1), which stated that there is no significant difference in teachers' perceptions of children' moral reasoning based on gender, teaching experience, and level of education, is rejected.

Table 6: Bonferroni Post Hoc Test for Teaching Experience

(I) Teaching Experience	(J) Teaching Experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Less than 1 year	1-5 years	6.2381*	1.95539	.020	.6041	11.8721
	6-10 years	6.3243*	1.96418	.018	.6650	11.9836
	11-15 years	6.7000*	2.15389	.025	.4941	12.9059
	16 years and above	6.7500*	2.21515	.031	.3676	13.1324
1-5 years	Less than 1 yea	-6.2381*	1.95539	.020	-11.8721	-.6041
	6-10 years	.0862	.73774	1.000	-2.0394	2.2118
	11-15 years	.4619	1.15130	1.000	-2.8553	3.7791
	16 years and above	.5119	1.26220	1.000	-3.1248	4.1486
6-10 years	Less than 1 yea	-6.3243*	1.96418	.018	-11.9836	-.6650
	1-5 years	-.0862	.73774	1.000	-2.2118	2.0394
	11-15 years	.3757	1.16617	1.000	-2.9844	3.7357
	16 years and above	.4257	1.27577	1.000	-3.2502	4.1015
11-15 years	Less than 1 yea	-6.7000*	2.15389	.025	-12.9059	-.4941
	1-5 years	-.4619	1.15130	1.000	-3.7791	2.8553
	6-10 years	-.3757	1.16617	1.000	-3.7357	2.9844
	16 years and above	.0500	1.55204	1.000	-4.4218	4.5218
16 years and above	Less than 1 yea	-6.7500*	2.21515	.031	-13.1324	-.3676
	1-5 years	-.5119	1.26220	1.000	-4.1486	3.1248
	6-10 years	-.4257	1.27577	1.000	-4.1015	3.2502
	11-15 years	-.0500	1.55204	1.000	-4.5218	4.4218

Based on observed means.

The error term is Mean Square(Error) = 10.706.

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

The Bonferroni post hoc test in Table 6 reveals that significant differences exist in teachers' perceptions of children' moral reasoning based on teaching experience, particularly between those with less than one year of experience and all other experience groups. Teachers with less than one year of experience reported significantly higher mean scores compared to those with 1–5 years (p = .020), 6–10 years (p = .018), 11–15 years (p = .025), and 16 years and above (p = .031). These results suggest that novice teachers tend to perceive children' moral reasoning more positively

than their more experienced counterparts. However, no significant differences were found among

the other experience categories (1–5 years, 6–10 years, 11–15 years, and 16 years and above), as all *p*-values exceeded the .05 constant value. This implies that the significant variation in perception is mainly driven by the least experienced group, while the views of more experienced teachers remain relatively consistent.

Discussion

The grand mean of approximately 2.99 suggests that, overall, teachers have a positive perception of their children' moral reasoning, recognising their ability to make moral judgements and exhibit ethical behaviour. However, the findings also highlight areas where moral reasoning is still developing, particularly in emotional awareness and a more comprehensive understanding of moral principles. This aligns with the idea that moral reasoning is not fixed but evolves over time, with more complex aspects, such as empathy and the ability to consider multiple perspectives, still in the process of maturing. Kohlberg's theory of moral development supports this, indicating that children progress through various stages, with higher-order moral reasoning, including abstract notions of justice and fairness, taking longer to develop (Cherry, 2025).

These findings suggest that teachers' perceptions are influenced by the educational and social environments in which they teach, which either facilitate or hinder the growth of more sophisticated moral reasoning skills. Teachers, as key agents in this process, are uniquely positioned to nurture these skills. As McLeod (2024) notes, recognising the developmental challenges that children face, such as in emotional awareness, can guide teachers to adapt their strategies accordingly.

The findings also reveal significant differences in teachers' perceptions of children' moral reasoning based on gender and teaching experience, while educational level did not appear to have a significant impact. These results support previous research, such as that by McLeod (2024), which suggests that teachers' perceptions may be influenced by gender, as societal expectations often shape how educators interpret children' moral behaviour. Additionally, the significant effect of teaching experience, with novice teachers viewing children' moral reasoning more positively than their more experienced counterparts, aligns with the findings of Bello, Yusuf, and Amali (2017), who highlighted the role of early-career teachers in maintaining high expectations of children due to less exposure to challenging classroom situations.

Furthermore, the interaction effects between gender and educational level, and between teaching experience and educational level, underscore the complexity of how teachers form perceptions of moral reasoning. This is consistent with the work of Gui et al. (2020), who emphasised that teachers' backgrounds and experiences play a significant role in shaping their approaches to moral education. However, the lack of significant differences based on educational level contrasts with studies such as Zhang et al. (2022), which suggested that higher levels of education could lead to more refined perceptions of moral reasoning. This inconsistency points to the influence of other mediating factors, such as teaching philosophy or pedagogical approaches.

In light of these findings, it is essential to consider how teachers' perceptions of moral reasoning affect their classroom practices. As noted by Rohmah and Diana (2023), a teacher's attitude towards moral education greatly influences their teaching strategies and classroom management. Given that gender and teaching experience were found to shape perceptions, professional development programmes that focus on these aspects could help teachers develop more inclusive and effective approaches to nurturing moral reasoning in children.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that while teachers generally hold a positive perception of their children' moral reasoning, certain areas, such as emotional awareness and understanding complex moral principles, still require development. These results reveal that moral reasoning is a dynamic process that evolves over time, with teachers playing a critical role in fostering this development. Teachers can enhance their pedagogical strategies to address specific gaps, such as empathy and the application of moral values in various situations. Moving forward, it is essential for teachers to remain mindful of the developmental stages of moral reasoning and adapt their approaches to ensure the holistic development of their children' moral skills.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward based on the findings of the study:

a. Teachers should incorporate lessons on empathy and emotional awareness into their curriculum.

b. Teachers should provide more opportunities for children to engage in discussions on complex moral issues.
c. Teacher training programmes should focus on strategies for fostering moral reasoning in children.
d. Schools should create an environment that encourages critical thinking and ethical decision-making.
e. Teachers should regularly assess and adapt their approaches to support the evolving moral development of their children.

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