

Examining the Relationship between Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development and Language Learning among Iranian Elementary Students

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Abstract: Moral development has been considered the most important social issue over the centuries. Great theorist of the early twentieth century took into account ethics as a means of social development. Kohlberg as Piaget believes that his stages unfold in an invariant sequence. Children always go from stage 1 to stage 2 to stage 3 and so forth. They do not skip stages or move through them in mixed-up orders. Holiday believes that language has three roles, which include learning system and establishing a relationship between language and learning. In addition, he believes that children select several linguistic data. In other words, the children select those categories of communicative aspects of language they may understand at each stage of learning. It seems that there is a strong relationship between elements of language learning and four stages (two levels) of Kohlberg's theory of moral development.

Keywords: Kohlberg's theory of moral development, language learning, Persian, elements of language learning

Introduction

Nowadays, language learning is one major issue discussed in Iranian education system, which can resolve many educational problems for the elementary school students. On the other hand, moral development is a wide area, which covers many behaviors and interactions of the elementary students. The interaction between two domains of language learning and moral development is discussed and studied in the area of education.

Ethics and environmental ethics are the most important, controversial and most vibrant areas in contemporary discussions. Various experts in different disciplines conducted research on this area due to undeniable importance and role of ethics in individual behavior, social relations and even international relations. Nowadays, ethics is interpreted differently from the one defined in traditional view. In the traditional approach, the function and role of ethics are limited to providing ethical guidelines and strict and undeniable orders. In addition, scholars of ethics are no longer mentors and do not merely give ethical advices (Sheikh Rezaei, 2010).

National education system is not only an institution, which teaches children the necessary updated knowledge and empowers them to meet their future needs, but also the key institution, which develops and nurtures students' moral values. The children are morally judged based on overt and covert program of training schools (Marashi et al., 2010).

Moral development has been considered the most important social issues over the centuries. Great theorist of the early twentieth century took into account ethics as a means of social development. Thus, moral development is a major issue in social psychology (Javidan et al., 2012).

Our daily observations on how children grow and establish moral powers consistent with the psychologists shared the common point that the internal and external factors are the first source of shaping children's moral character. These factors include command and prohibition, parental instructions and the means to control the children such as punishment, punishment and reward. In other words, the children are affected by external factors before he is able to independently use moral reasoning and analyze their moral positions. Therefore, the children realize whether their actions were right or wrong according to the responses received from these sources. For example, the children may be punished or threatened by the surrounding sources (e.g. parents) if they had lied. This is the first source of developing ethics (Sheikh Rezaei, 2010).

Teaching language to children requires continuous and adequate attention in order to provide a solid structure for teaching language and speech to the children. In this regard, pre-school education is one environmental variable, which has an important role in the overall development of children. These programs were designed to provide suitable grounds for growth in all physical, emotional, social and cognitive aspects, in particular speech and language development. Furthermore, these programs help the children to experience real-life situation, so that the treasure of their spoken words and vocabulary would be richer than usual (Mofidi and Sabze, 2009).

Thus, the present article sought to explain the relationship between Kohlberg's theory of moral development and language learning using descriptive and analytical approach and resolve language learning problems for elementary school students.

Kohlberg' Theory of Moral Development

The psychological findings on moral development presented by Piaget and Kohlberg were used in counseling psychology in education system and other psychological centers within the country since half a century ago. The disciplines relevant to this aspect of growth of children and adolescents in teacher training institutions and at bachelor and master and doctoral degrees and various fields of psychology and education in all universities and higher education centers in Iran are often based on the views of these two scientists. On the other hand, ethical issues are typically addressed in religious, philosophical and pedagogical work written in half a century ago. These works cannot be counted among the scientific research on moral development. The research has so far been conducted at universities and higher education centers. Theorizing and scaling in moral development area were not considered seriously. Studies on identifying reliable sources in order to assess moral development showed that a suitable local test was not prepared and standardized in the field of assessing moral development in our country so far (Lotf Abadi, 2005).

Kohlberg believes that his stages unfold in an invariant sequence. Children always go from stage 1 to stage 2 to stage 3 and so forth. They do not skip stages or move through them in mixed-up orders. Not all children necessarily reach the highest stages; they might lack intellectual stimulation. However, to the extent they do go through the stages, they proceed in order (Fadaei, 1988).

Kohlbergian stages of moral development can be summarized as follows:

In stage 1, the children assume that powerful authorities hand down a fixed set of rules they must unquestioningly obey; otherwise, they would be punished. In stage 2, the children are not affected by a single source of power. They decipher different dimensions of each case. Since everything is relative in individual perspective, the individual is free to make decision in accordance with his – hedonic – demands. In steps 3 and 4, the adolescents judge on behaviors and tendencies in relation to conventional society. In Step 3, children assume that proper members of society confirm individual behaviors as far as the individual incentives were pure and honest. In step 4, the main focus is on compliance with the law for social order. In steps 5 and 6, the individual assume the rights and principles, which are beyond social values and the need to for discipline and order. In step 5, the respondents pointed to a brief description of individual values precedence over the law. However, the individual keeps in mind definition of such values as abstract and universal principles in Step 6 (Ibid).

Based on the above discussion, Kohlberg' steps to moral development are briefly as follows:

Level 1: Pre-complimentary Ethics (by mental age of ten years)

The First Step, paying attention to punishment and obedience

The Second Step, paying attention to self-interest

Level Two: Complimentary Ethics (by mental age of thirteen years)

The Third Step: observing ethics to respect collective traditions and rules and conforming to the crowd

The Fourth Step: observing ethics for proximity to sources of authorities

Level Three: post complimentary ethics

The Fifth Step: paying attention to social pact

The Sixth Step: adherence to ethical principles (universal principles)

Language Learning

Holiday believes that language has three roles, which include learning system and establishing a relationship between language and learning. In addition, he believes that children select several linguistic data. In other words, the children select those categories of communicative aspects of language he may understand at each stage of learning (Pahlevan Najd and Najafi, 2008)

Jean Piaget, the contemporary Swiss psychologist, considered and widely studied cognitive development of the child. In her vision, language as a secondary phenomenon is the general growth trend of knowledge. Thus, Piaget only considers language development as a partial reflection of cognitive development. Therefore, she does not directly consider language learning. In the field of cognitive development, she totally denies empiricism and innate idealism and of knowledge or understanding. Piaget believes that human knowledge is not provided through recording observations in the brain; however, an effective transition plan activities in individual mind should process experiences and observations in order to provide knowledge. On this basis, Piaget believes that no prior inherent design is required for cognitive and language development in humans.

Hence, epistemological findings should be consistent with growth data relevant to constructive and mental states. These findings are neither necessarily empiricist nor subjective and based on previous plans. This data is only based on knowledge creation orientation (Mashkuh AL-Dini, 2001).

One goal in teaching native language during the school year lies in the fact that the child should know that language is the most important means of establishing relationship with his peers (Pahlevan Nejad and Najafi, 2008).

Holliday argues about how children develop language. The child learns language with semantic expansion by gradually getting familiar with language functions in various stages of development. He used his child, Nagel, as a case study and identified three stages in children's speech.

Step 1: one-role stage: children's segmented speech vs. adults' multi-role speech

Step 2: application of certain roles extends to children's speech, which include two types of language roles: the first one lies in allowing the children to observe the surrounding universe. The second one allows the children to enter the world. The second step is associated with a growing increase in children's vocabulary. In Step 3, two observer and interfering roles gradually approach interpersonal and experimental roles in the world of adults.

The three steps above can be interpreted as follows:

Step 1: The primary role of the child (Holliday called the language roles in this period as Intaglio.

Step 2: transition from intaglio to adult role system.

Step 3: learning adult role system (ibid.).

Thus, language development process is strengthened through three major sources according to Holliday

1. The children enter the world of experiences;
2. Linguistic expression of these experiences;
3. Using language texts as a resource for changing language development system (Lukin, 2006)

The General Approach to Persian Curriculum

Language learning specific approach is based on teaching linguistic, metalinguistic skills or training process. Therefore, two areas of reading and writing skills as well as metalinguistic skills (thinking, criticism and analysis) are discussed simultaneously. The Persian students enter the school at age of seven years old and use the Persian language to understand and transmit the messages. Therefore, two reading and writing skills are highlighted as the real needs. At this time, the training begins. The education goal is fulfilled when the learner is able to read a text aloud correctly and fluently without spelling errors. This style of governing education is highly superficial and does not exceed the earliest stages of language skills. The education mainly aims to strengthen language skills based on Persian Curriculum (Akbari Sheldare et al., 2014).

Persian Curriculum Objectives

The objectives of Persian Curriculum are similar at all grades in elementary school. The objectives only differ in details. Thus, the objectives of the fourth grade curriculum (the decisive moment in language learning of elementary students) are extended to all grades in order to determine the general direction of language learning in elementary school.

The objectives of Persian Curriculum in the fourth grade are based on four elements of the National Curriculum as follows:

Thinking and reasoning

- Recognizing the contradictions, the similarities and differences between the words
- Logical argument by observing consistency in speaking and writing
- Logical argument by understanding the integrity of audio and written messages
- Intellectual discipline and right thinking by providing a classification of concepts based on scientific and rational processes
- The ability to analyze texts and statements using performance judgment
- Creative imagination capability using humor processing
- Ability to distinguish and identify Mainstream phenomena
- Faith, beliefs and interests
- Positive attitude to doctrinal, cultural, educational, national, artistic and social issues
- Acknowledging the feelings and thoughts of others
- Expressing appropriate and effective feelings, emotions and thoughts
- Creating beliefs in valuable effects of Islamic Revolution
- Interest in writings and simple and convenient stories
- Interest in aesthetic aspects of speech in speech and writing
- Positive attitude to participation in public and working with groups

Science

- Developing familiarity with doctrinal, cultural, educational, national, artistic and social issues
- Identification of appropriate signs and meanings
- Deepening familiarity with the Persian language criteria
- Familiarity with the structure of poetry and prose and relevant samples
- Getting familiar with several types of writing and reading skills
- Getting familiar with artistic effects of language
- Getting familiar with reading and writing practices
- Getting familiar with thinking styles and research methods
- Getting familiar with ways of looking, listening, speaking, reading and writing
- Recognizing symptoms of formal coherence of text propositions
- Recognizing several prominent scientists
- Getting familiar with importance of studying and reading books

Ethics

- Adherence to religious and valuable teachings in language skills

- Adherence to religious and valuable teachings in individual and social behaviors
- Paying attention to moral values
- Compliance with ethical model of religious leaders

Action

- Observing (distinguishing between written and visual symbols of language; focus and increased visual attention, increased visual inference power; paying attention to nonverbal behavior in transmitting message, understanding the visual message)
- Listening (increased concentration on the tone of words in texts; enhanced attention to tone in accordance with context; understanding explicit information of the visual text; inference according to the audio text; integration and interpretation of audio visual content; discussion and comment on the contents of the audio text)
- Remarking (using an appropriate tone and intonation; using various types of language; coherence and discipline in transmitting the message; discussions and comments on the content of audio text)
- Remarking (using an appropriate tone and intonation; using various types of language; coherence and discipline in transmitting the message; speaking in accordance with the context and audience; speaking in front of a crowd; understanding and speaking about the visual message, storytelling)
- Reading (the capability to read the text appropriate to content and tone; reading a prose and poetry with appropriate tone and intonation; interpreting content of the text; getting familiar with conjunctions as means of linguistic coherence; getting familiar with causal conjunctions means of linguistic coherence; familiarity with contrastive conjunctions means of linguistic coherence; familiarity with symptoms of rhetorical structure)
- Writing (development the ability to interpret vocal and written signs; expanding application of punctuation marks; fine writing and legible writing; familiarity with clauses in the desired sentence; the ability to select a paragraph; familiarity with the descriptive paragraph; familiarity with the narrative paragraph; familiarity with the introductory paragraph, familiarity with the conclusion paragraph; familiarity with the body paragraphs, writing ability; various paragraphs, the ability to produce a coherent written text in compliance with the components) (Ibid.)

The relationship between language learning and Kohlberg's theory of moral development among elementary students

The first two levels of Kohlberg's theory of moral development correspond with the elementary school. Examining the relationship between Kohlberg's theory and language learning in elementary school is limited to these two levels. The third level (post complimentary ethics) of Kohlberg's theory was not investigated in this study. The relationship between the steps to Kohlberg's theory of moral development and language learning in elementary students is presented in a holistic review in the table below:

The steps to Kohlberg's theory Total objectives of language learning	The first step (paying attention to punishment and obedience)	The second step (paying attention to personal interest)	The third step (observing ethics to respect collective traditions and disciplines)	The fourth step (observing ethics to proximate to sources of authorities)
Thinking and reasoning	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Science	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Ethics	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Action	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)

Each item in the above table is explained as follows:

- 1) At this stage, there is a thinking and reasoning mechanism at the primary level to escape punishment due to biased individual behavior
- 2) At this stage, thinking and reasoning are stronger in order to gain interest
- 3) At this stage, although intensified thinking power is expected, the idea of conformity to the crowd makes no room for thinking
- 4) At this stage, there is a moderate (not high nor low) relationship between individual thinking and totalitarianism.
- 5) At this stage, there is no conceptual science and only appearances and tangibles are seen in the individual.
- 6) At this stage, the exploratory nature of science emerges because of interest
- 7) At this stage, a proper context emerges for teaching social science
- 8) The abstract knowledge grows and flourishes at this stage
- 9) At this stage, proper ethics has no inherent aspect and only emerges to escape punishment.
- 10) At this stage, proper ethics has no inherent aspect and only emerges to gain profits.
- 11) At this stage, proper ethics has an inherent aspect, which is somehow affected by the society.
- 12) At this stage, proper ethics has an inherent aspect, which is somehow affected by the source of power.
- 13) At this stage, any action is affected by punishment avoidance.
- 14) At this stage, actions and behaviors are formed in order to gain profits
- 15) At this stage, actions are formed in order to adjust individual behaviors with other members of society.
- 16) At this stage, individual behavior is shaped because of proximity to sources of power.

Conclusion

According to the above table and afore-mentioned materials, it seems that there is a relatively strong relationship between elements of language learning and four stages (two levels) of Kohlberg's theory moral development. Since each element of language learning has different meaning regardless of language learning discussion, each element should be discussed as a

subcategory of language. For example, the “action” term has different meaning regardless of language discussion, which defines actions as verbal actions and behaviors.

Based on above-mentioned material, following solutions are presented in order to facilitate Persian language Education in elementary schools:

1. Persian language curriculum planners should attempt to highlight the prominent objectives and indicators of the curriculum based on components of Kohlberg’ theory of moral development
2. Persian language Curriculum Planners should try to explicitly explain the relationship between components of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development and objectives of Persian language curriculum in order to minimize personal biases on components of this theory.
3. Persian language curriculum planners should try to provide accurate and scientific definitions on elements of Persian language (thinking, knowledge, practice and ethics)
4. The difference between “ethics” term in two area of Kohlberg’s theory and the objectives of the proposed Persian curriculum should be explained.
5. Scholars in the area of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development and language learning should try to explain the contradiction between the two areas and provide solutions for a constructive interaction between the two areas.

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