

# Moral Reasoning Stages through *Hikmah* (Wisdom) Pedagogy in Moral Education

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## Abstract

Moral Education in Malaysia emphasizes on moral reasoning, moral feeling and moral action. The purpose of the study is to examine the evidence in students' homework that shows improvement in moral reasoning during *Hikmah* Pedagogy. The total number of students was twenty seven, consisting of thirteen males and fourteen females. There were nineteen Indian students and eight Chinese students. The analysis of the homeworks used the pre-set categories of Kohlberg moral development. The findings from students' homework indicated that the students had a positive improvement in moral reasoning stages from Homework One to Homework Three in which most of the students moved from pre-conventional to conventional stages, or from pre-conventional to post-conventional stages. The students managed to make decision independently and give reasons for making decision.

**Keywords:** Moral Education, Moral Reasoning, *Hikmah* Pedagogy

## Introduction

In Malaysian schools, Moral Education is taught to non-Muslim students, while Islamic Education is taught to Muslim students. Malaysia is constituted of several major ethnic groups: Malay, Chinese, Indians, Iban and Kadazan among others. These groups believe in certain religions and practice a certain way of life. The social climate in Malaysia is pluralistic in nature. Other than the mentioned ethnic groups, there are also the Orang Asli (aborigines) and other small groups practicing their rich, cultured ways of life in Malaysia. In such settings, it is very important for members of all ethnicities to understand and respect each other's norms as norms can differ from one culture to another (Balakrishnan, 2009).

The ethnic and religious diversity in Malaysia has influenced the formulation of the National Philosophy of Education as the foundation in the Malaysian education system. The National Philosophy of Education is:

“Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and a devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standard and who are

responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal wellbeing as well as being able to contribute to the betterment of society and the nation at large" (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1989, p. 5)

To meet the goal of the National Philosophy of Education (NPE), Islamic Education is offered to Muslims student and Moral Education for non-Muslim students. Islamic ethics or *akhlaq* (plural of *khuluq*) is defined as character, nature, and disposition. *Khuluq* (akhlaq) or character has been referred as the state of the soul that determines human actions. It is neither the soul nor the action. Such character could be acquired through training and practice. Character or *akhlaq* is the inner cause while action is its outer consequences. A good character hence causes good action whereas a bad character yields bad actions (Omar, 2003).

Islamic Education consists of fundamental knowledge or the basic teachings of Islam (*fard al-'ain*), such as *ibadah* (worship), *aqidah* (belief) and *akhlaq* (ethics/moral) as well as the ability to read the Quran in Arabic. According to Tamuri (2007), the emphasis on *Akhlaq* is to develop students with the personality of a Muslim and a *Mu'min* (believer).

However, for non-Muslim students, who include students from different ethnicities as mentioned earlier, they are required to learn Moral Education as a core subject in the education system (Balakrishnan, 2010). The focus of the subject is on cultivating, appreciating, and practicing the "noble virtues" of Malaysian society (Ministry of Education, 2000). It is hoped that the subject will deliver students who are knowledgeable, have noble personalities, and who are polite and willing to contribute productively towards their society and their country (Balakrishnan, 2009).

The main objectives are to enable pupils to: (i) understand and internalise noble values that are needed for good character; (ii) be aware and accept the importance of harmony between man and environment and to strive to sustain it; (iii) have an enhanced understanding and cooperation by sustaining a peaceful and harmonious life in a democratic Malaysia; (iv) develop mature thinking based on moral and spiritual values in making moral decisions and solving problems; and (v) develop commitment to act morally, based on justice and altruism in line with the noble values of Malaysian society (Ministry of Education, 2000).

Moral education in Malaysia focuses on three domains that are taught and instilled among students which are moral reasoning, moral feeling and moral action. The New Primary School Curriculum (NPSC) was implemented in 1983 for Year One students in stages on a yearly basis and was completed in 1989. In 1989, with the implementation of the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary School, Moral Education was extended to all secondary schools as well on an annual basis until 1993 (Balakrishnan, 2010).

The syllabus of the moral education in primary schools contains twelve moral values namely, cleanliness, mental health, moderation, industry, gratitude, honesty, justice and fairness, love, respect, public-spiritedness, modesty and freedom based on the beliefs, multicultural nature, and traditions of the Malaysian society. There are sixteen main values that are taught in secondary schools. The twelve values for primary school students are added with four additional values which include courage, cooperation, self-reliance and rationality (Balakrishnan, 2010; Hashim, 2007; Hoon, 2013).

In 2000, the Moral Education (ME) syllabus was revised and the primary school curriculum was reorganised around values related to five areas: (i) self-development; (ii) self and family; (iii) self and society; (iv) self and the environment; and (v) self and country (Balakrishnan, 2009). According to Hashim (2007), values relating to country or citizenship

include respect and obedience to the king, leaders and country, respect for rulers and the law, love for the country, and peace and harmony.

In 2010, the Ministry of Education introduced the Standard Curriculum for Primary School (known as KSSR) to restructure or “transform” the national primary school curriculum to ensure that the students have the relevant knowledge, skills and values to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The KSSR was formulated in the form of a statement of standards. The statement of standard comprised of content standards and learning standards which students need to achieve in a specific period of schooling, covering the areas of knowledge, skills and values. The learning standards are a set of criteria or indicators of educational quality and achievements which can be measured for each content standard.

The Ministry of Education (2010) further restructured the national primary school curriculum for all subjects including Moral Education (ME). As a result, there are six themes covering Year 1 to Year 6, starting with self, family, school, neighbourhood, society, and nation. Each theme will be taught during one year of schooling. To illustrate, in Year 1, the values would focus on thematic issues of the self, Year 2 on thematic issues of family and the self, Year 3 on thematic issues of school, Year 4 on the self and neighbourhood, Year 5 on the self and society, and lastly, Year 6 on the self and nation (Document Standard Curriculum for Primary School, 2013a).

The Standard Curriculum for Primary School (SCPS) was implemented in 2011 for Primary 1 and in 2016 for Primary 6. The Standard Curriculum for Secondary School was implemented for Form 1 students in 2017 (Hoon, 2013). There are seven themes covered from Form 1 to Form 5, starting with (i) introduction of moral, (ii) self, family and friendship; (iii) the relationship with self, community, society; (iv) moral, rules and laws; (v) moral person; (vi) moral identity; and (vii) moral and citizenship. For a clearer picture, for Form 1 until Form 3, the values would focus on thematic issues of introduction to moral, self, family and friendship, the relationship with self, community, society and moral, rules and laws. Meanwhile, for Form 4 and Form 5, the focus will be on thematic issues of moral person, moral identity, and moral and citizenship (Document Standard Curriculum for Secondary School, 2013b).

However, there have been several problems relating to teachers’ competence in the implementation of the curriculum. According to Hashim (2007), the majority of ME teachers are those who are not familiar with the field of Moral Education. Making it worse is the issue of insufficient ME teachers. Normally, the school would assign any teacher who has a lighter teaching load to teach ME. It is thus assumed that every teacher is capable. Consequently, the subject taught did nothing to enhance reasoning skills and a study found that ME teachers frequently employed the lecture method rather than the Community of Inquiry approach (Hashim, 2007).

### **Moral Reasoning**

Moral reasoning can be defined as the level where a person sees the difference between himself and the others, which also defines his values based on their self-chosen moral principles (Kohlberg, 1981). Velasquez (2006) on the other hand, defines moral reasoning as the reasoning process where moral principles have a connection with how human behaviours are judged. Moral reasoning can also be defined as the capability of judgment through choices and making judgment about specific cases (Bancroft, 2003; Finger & Brand, 1999).

Moral reasoning is the level where an individual is able to think through alternatives and make judgments about particular cases according to moral standards and principles

(Finger et al., 1999). Essentially, code of conduct of moral deals with human behaviour which is related to what is morally good and bad, right and wrong and, moral reasoning is the analytical process that judges human behaviours in relation to the violation of moral principles (Velasquez, 2006). Moral reasoning is a process whereby “an individual reaches a decision on what he/she ought to do during a moral dilemma (Rest, 1975).

Moral dilemma plays an important role in enhancing students level of moral reasoning however in Malaysia, teacher are neither given exposure to moral dilemma episodes, nor given guidance on how to conduct Moral Education lessons using moral dilemma episodes (Appo, 2009). By introducing moral dilemma episodes in classrooms, teacher will be able to guide students to enhance students’ level of moral reasoning.

Malaysia faced a lot of moral issues especially social problems among adolescents such as bullying, crimes, cigarette smoking and stealing. According to Yusof and Mahmud (2019), the dominant factors that contributed to bullying were students themselves and peer influence. Besides that, family, school, community and media can influence bullying cases and other moral problems (Sahat & Mahmud, 2019).

Many studies shows that, moral behavior of students depended on their level of moral reasoning. The students displayed a lower level of moral reasoning in reality as students who were involved in disciplinary cases were lower in their moral reasoning while students who are not involved in disciplinary cases had a higher moral reasoning (Che Hassan, 1999; Bear & Richard, 1981; Campagna & Harter, 1975).

Thus, students need to be catered with a pedagogy that provides the opportunity to enhance their level of moral reasoning. So far not many researches have paid attention to the usage of philosophical inquiry as alternative methods in Moral Education, in order to enhance moral reasoning. The philosophical inquiry method in Malaysia is called *Hikmah* Pedagogy.

### **Hikmah (Wisdom) Pedagogy**

*Hikmah* Pedagogy have been introduced by Professor Dr. Rosnani Hashim after she received a formal training of the Philosophy for Children Programme from IAPC’s founder, Matthew Lipman. According to Hashim, (2017), philosophy can help in connecting thoughts or ideas through each other’s usage of language, making judgement, making a good conclusion and searching for meaning in life.

The objectives in Moral Education are to cultivate, appreciate and practice noble virtues of Malaysian society as to focus upon the three domains to be taught and instilled among students such as moral thinking, moral feeling and moral action. Moral Education also aims to develop mature thinking based on moral and spiritual values in making moral decisions and solving problems.

This objective needs a suitable pedagogy that provides students a guide in making wise decisions and have mature thinking as well as have a good character. Thus, the *Hikmah* Pedagogy is suitable to be infused in a Moral Education classroom as *Hikmah* Pedagogy of Philosophical Inquiry provides a regimen for thinking, so that the logical aspects of the moral situation can be dealt with by the child who has learned how to unravel the logical aspects of a situation and can see the need for objectivity, consistency, and comprehensiveness in their own approach to such situations (Lipman et al., 1980; Hashim, 2013).

Besides that, Philosophy for Children involves not only reasoning about moral behavior, but also the devising of opportunities to practice being moral. This contrasts, with a program that stresses decision-making or the making of choices by the child, in that it seeks to prepare children for a moral life by developing those competencies that they need in order

to do what they choose to do. The exercises in moral practice that form an integral component of the philosophy for children program give children an opportunity to act out how they would engage in the forms of behavior that often have moral dimension, such as consoling, caring, advising, honoring, sharing, and other similar aspects (Lipman et al. 1980; Hashim, 2013).

Based on the evidence given, *Hikmah* Pedagogy give benefits to students to enhance moral reasoning. Therefore, this study aims to examine the evidence in students' homework that shows improvement in moral reasoning.

### Methodology

This study used quantitative research design. The total number of students was twenty seven consisting of thirteen males and fourteen females. There were nineteen Indian students and eight Chinese students. The samples were chosen due to the diversity of non-Muslim students in the school, the ability of the study to attain cooperation from the school administrator and the conducive environment for teaching and learning offered in the school.

The analysis of the homeworks used the pre-set categories of Kohlberg moral development. The students learned Moral Education using the *Hikmah* Pedagogy of Philosophical Inquiry approach by reading a text, observing pictures or watching videos, followed by a question-answer session and discussion. Finally, the students did some exercises or homework. For homework, the students were asked to answer a moral dilemma task on a provided sheet of paper. The purpose of this homework was to evaluate the students' stages of moral reasoning. The students needed to answer all the questions and provide reasons for their answers.

For the purpose of the study, three sets of homework were selected and the researcher randomly chose ten students for the analysis. The analysis of the homework used Kohlberg moral development. Kohlbergian research identifies three levels of moral development: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional (see Table 1). Each level comprises two stages of reasoning. At the primary level (pre-conventional), the individual understands the notions of "right" and "wrong" in terms of consequences of action (punishment, rewards, exchange of favours). Right action is defined in stage 2 (Instrumental Relativist Orientation) as that which satisfies one's own needs. Next, at the conventional level, stage 3 (Good Boy Nice Girl) emphasises behaviour that will please or help others, thus gaining approval from others for the decision maker. At stage 4 (Law and Order) the individual takes the perspective of a generalised member of the society. Finally, as the individual emphasises the possibility of changing laws based on open rational consideration of social unity, the individual is at post-conventional level, specifically at stage 5 (Social-Contract Legalistic Orientation). Stage 6 (Universal Ethical Principle Orientation) is defined by the decision maker's conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality and consistency (Elm & Weber, 1994).

Table 1  
Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development

Level of Moral Development	Stages	Explanation
Level 1: Pre-Conventional Focus on Self	Stage 1 Stage 2	Punishment and Obedience Orientation Instrumental Relativist Orientation
Level 2: Conventional: Focus on Others	Stage 3 Stage 4	“Good Boy-Nice Girl” Orientation Law and Order Orientation
Level 3: Post conventional	Stage 5 Stage 6	Social- Contract Legalistic Orientation Universal Ethical Principle Orientation

**Results and Findings**

The following is an example of the homework on moral dilemma.

**Homework One**

The students were required to answer the task on moral dilemma in 10 minutes individually and respond in the worksheets provided. The following is an example of Homework One (Figure 1).

Since this was the first time the students ever experienced a lesson using philosophical inquiry, it was observed that the students were quite confused on how to answer the moral dilemma. It was also observed that in the first three minutes, the students simply stared at the moral dilemma question, looked at each other or looked at the ceiling.

According to them, this was the first time they had to answer a moral dilemma question that needed them to make a decision (whether they should or should not do the action). Therefore, the teacher gave several examples to break the confusion. After that, they managed to answer the moral dilemma question.

**Figure 1** Homework One

In the state of Selangor there is a woman, Melissa, who suffers from cancer. There is a medicine which can save her life but it is very expensive. Callen Ong, Melissa’s husband, cannot afford to buy the medicine. He tries to borrow money from people he knows but to no avail. Callen Ong asks to buy the medicine at a reduced price or to be allowed to pay later. The pharmacy owner refuses to do so. As a result, Callen Ong steals the medicine.

Question  
Should Callen Ong steal the medicine?

Should  Should Not

Give your reasons.

Table 2 shows the answers to Homework One done by ten students, who were randomly selected. Seven students posited that Callen Ong should not steal the medicine, while three students believed that Callen Ong should steal the medicine. It was found that

50% of the students who had the highest number were at Stage Two in giving reasons, followed by 10% of the students in Stage Three. The lowest number of students was both at Stage Three and Stage Four who were at 1%. This means that the students can make a decision but had a lower level of moral reasoning of Kohlberg's.

Table 2

*Analysis of Students' Answers in Homework One*

No	Decision	Student's Answer	Stages
1.	Shouldn't	Stealing is a bad attitude. The police can arrest Callen Ong because of stealing the medicine. Actually, Callen Ong can get the money from the good way.	Stage 2
2.	Should	It is because if Callen Ong does not steal the medicine, his wife Melissa will be in danger and will die. If he steals the medicine, may be Melissa will alive.	Stage 2
3.	Should	It is because the action taken by Callen Ong is suitable to cure his wife by stealing.	Stage 3
4.	Shouldn't	It is because, may be the medicine cannot save Melissa and he can be caught by the police.	Stage 1
5.	Shouldn't	Callen should plead from the government or he can get a donation.	Stage 4
6.	Shouldn't	Stealing is a bad attitude and the authorities can arrest Callen Ong. He shouldn't do that.	Stage 1
7.	Shouldn't	It is because Callen Ong should work to buy the medicine and save Melissa from cancer.	Stage 2
8.	Shouldn't	Even though we have a problem, we cannot steal.	Stage 1
9.	Should	Callen Ong steals the medicine to make his wife alive.	Stage 2
10.	Shouldn't	Callen Ong shouldn't steal because stealing is bad. Callen Ong can work hard to find the money for his wife.	Stage 2

**Homework Two**

In this session, it was observed that the students were more familiar with the moral dilemma question and did not take a long time to answer the question. The students seemed confident in answering the question and gave reasons for their decision. Homework Two is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Homework Two

Unfortunately, the medicine has no positive effects and Callen Ong's wife is still very sick. Doctors have informed them that she has not long to live. Because she cannot stand the pain, Callen Ong's wife asks the doctors to give her a type of drug that can quickly end her life.

Question

Should the doctors give Callen Ong's wife the drug that she requested so she can end her life?

Should

Should Not

Give your reasons.

Table 3 presents the analysis of homework two. Nine students said the doctors should not give Melissa the drug and one said the doctor should give Melissa the drug. It was found that 40% of the students who had the highest number was at Stage Two followed by Stage Five which was 30% of students. In contrast, the lowest number of students was at Stage Six, Stage Four and Stage One, which carry a total of about 10%. Overall, in this session, the majority of students were able to make decisions and were still at Kohlberg's lower level of moral reasoning but managed to show a slight increase in a higher level of moral reasoning in Stage Five.

Table 3

*Analysis of Students' Answers in Homework Two*

No	Decisions	Students Answer	Stages
1.	Shouldn't	If the doctor gave the drug, it is like murder. Besides, no one has the right to end a person's life except God.	Stage 6
2.	Shouldn't	It is because God give life to Callen Ong's wife. If she ends her life may be she will lose her life.	Stage 2
3.	Shouldn't	It is because Melissa cannot afford to live longer and she doesn't want to suffer from cancer.	Stage 2
4.	Shouldn't	It is because she has to live, may be the disease will be cured.	Stage 5
5.	Shouldn't	The doctor has no right to end someone's life even if the patient agrees.	Stage 5
6.	Shouldn't	If the doctor gives the medicine, it is similar to giving poison to Melissa.	Stage 2
7.	Shouldn't	It is because the doctor is a knowledgeable person compared to Callen Ong wife.	Stage 4
8.	Shouldn't	As a doctor, he should take care of the patient and not give the medicine to end someone's life.	Stage 5
9.	Should	It is because when his wife suffers from the cancer, she cannot live peacefully	Stage 2
10.	Shouldn't	It is a wrong attitude because Melissa will die	Stage 1

**Homework Three**

The students managed to answer the third homework properly. They gave relevant reasons for solving the dilemma. Homework Three is shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3** Homework Three

In the end, Callen Ong's wife passes away. Callen Ong is then jailed for five years for stealing the medicine. After several years, Callen Ong escapes from jail. He disguises himself by using another name and living in a different place.

After saving up enough money, Callen Ong builds a large factory. He pays high salaries to his workers and uses the profits to build a hospital dedicated to treating cancer patients.

Twenty years have passed. One day, a tailor recognises the factory owner as Callen Ong who is wanted by the police.

Question

Should the tailor report to the police about Callen Ong?

Should

Should Not

Give your reasons.

Table 4 presents the analysis of Homework Three. Six students agreed that the tailor should not report Callen Ong to the police, and four students agreed that the tailor should report him to the police. The highest number of students was at Stage Four which was about 40%, followed by Stage Five with the total of about 30%. In contrast, the lowest number of students was at Stage Two which was 10%. Overall, the students can make decisions and it was found in this session the students had a higher level of moral reasoning stages.

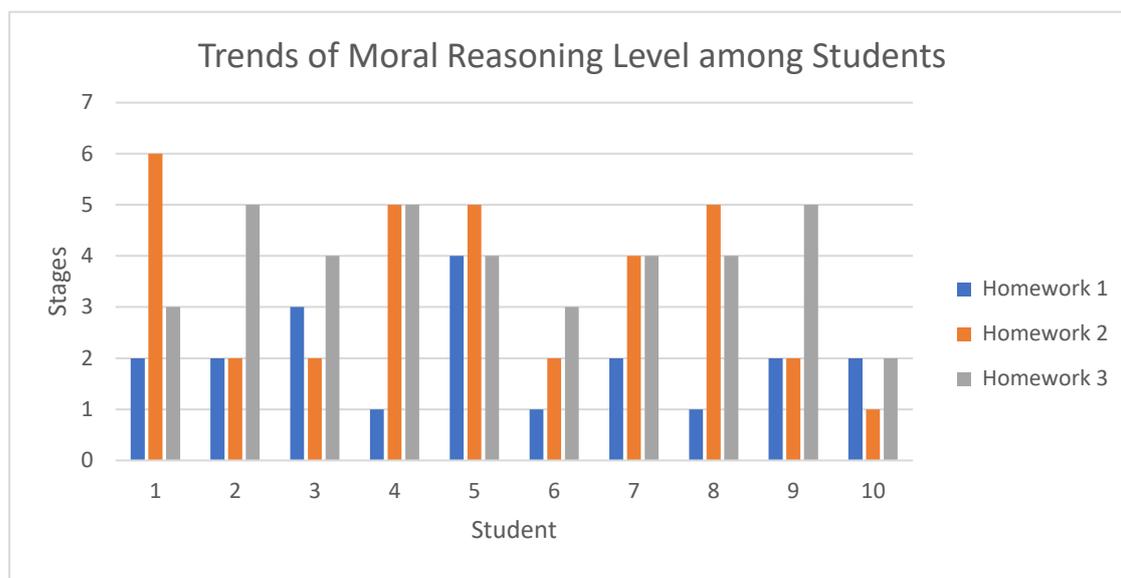
Table 4

*Analysis of Students' Answers in Homework Three*

No	Decisions	Student's Answer	Stages
1.	Shouldn't	It is because he gets a second chance to live. The tailor cannot ruin the second chance. In addition, Callen do a lots of things that benefits the community.	Stage 3
2.	Shouldn't	It is because Callen had save millions of life and if he in jailed, there is only a little life that can be save.	Stage 5
3.	Should	It is because Callen Ong action is wrong. It is wrong to break the law even he builds a hospital to heal the cancer patient.	Stage 4
4.	Shouldn't	It is because Callen Ong now is a good person and did not steal anymore.	Stage 5
5.	Should	The tailor need to be honest and responsible. Callen Ong must receive the punishment.	Stage 4
6.	Shouldn't	It is because Callen Ong steal the medicine for his wife.	Stage 3
7.	Should	It is because Callen Ong had break the law.	Stage 4
8.	Should	It is because Callen is wrong and the tailor should report about Callen Ong and receive the punishment.	Stage 4
9.	Shouldn't	After Callen Ong escape from the prison. He had changed his attitude to be good person.	Stage 5
10.	Shouldn't	It is because the tailor should take care of his business and leave Callen Ong peacefully.	Stage 2

**Summary of Trends on Moral Reasoning Levels among Students**

The trends of moral reasoning levels among the students indicated that there were six students who showed a significant improvement in their moral reasoning level from Homework One to Homework Two. Student One had a drastic improvement from Stage Two to Stage Six, followed by Student Four from Stage One to Stage Five. Student Five had moved one stage from Stage Four to Stage Five, student Six had also moved one stage from Stage One to Stage Two, Student Seven had a sharp improvement from Stage Two to Stage Four as well as student eight from Stage One to Stage Five. Interestingly, from homework two to homework three, there were four students who showed improvement, i.e. student two who increased from Stage Two to Stage Five, followed by Student Three from Stage Two to Stage Four. Student Nine also had a sharp increase from Stage Two to Stage Five, and Student Ten moved one stage from Stage One to Stage Two. Overall, the students showed a positive improvement in moral reasoning (Figure 4).

**Figure 4** Summary of Trends on moral Reasoning Levels among Students

### Discussion

The findings from students' homework indicated that the students had a positive improvement in moral reasoning stages from Homework One to Homework Three in which most of the students moved from pre-conventional to conventional stages, or from pre-conventional to post-conventional stages.

Research by Blatt and Kohlberg (2006) indicates that the resulting actual changes in moral judgement were relative to the child's own stage and were usually to the next stage upwards. For example, most movements by Stage 2 children was to Stage 3 and most movements by Stage 3 children were to Stage 4. The expectations were revealing and dramatic. Some Stage 2 (and one Stage 1) children displayed much Stage 4-thinking on the post-test, but they 'lost' this thinking a year later and displayed an original stage or one-stage-up (i.e. Stage 3) orientation on follow-up.

In addition, Kohlberg believed that progress through the stages of moral development occurs in an invariant succession where it was suggested that no stages are to be skipped and stages are to be mastered consecutively. It is believed that unless there is a presence of psychological trauma or brain injury, all individual progress forward, not backward (Kohlberg, 1980).

### Conclusion

*Hikmah* Pedagogy had helped ME students in improving student' level of moral reasoning. Students can move from lower level of moral reasoning to medium level of moral reasoning. The students inquire about the moral dilemma, thus, the students become critical thinkers that are able to rigorously question ideas and assumption from the dilemma rather than immediately accepting them without question. Students with critical ideas would manage to identify, analyze, and recognize any weaknesses or negative points from the evidence given when they are involved in a discussion about the given topic. They reflected on the consequences of the action or assumption they made and gave solutions to the dilemma given and make moral decisions. They could give pros and cons to the decision and evaluate

in order to decide on the best one. As a result, students managed to make decision independently.

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