

**Dr. Ghulam Dastgir¹, Dr. Naveed Azmat², Sana Khan³**

1. Lecturer, Department of Education University of Narowal, Punjab, Pakistan.

2. Controller Examination Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Sahiwal, Punjab, Pakistan.

3. Lecturer, Department of Education, Government College Women University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

How to Cite This Article: Dastgir, G. & Sarfraz, R. (2026). Ethical and Moral Values in Higher Education: A Mixed-Methods Study of Universities in Punjab. *Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy*. 4 (01), 310-324. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71327/jssrp.41.310.324>

ISSN: 3006-6557 (Online)

ISSN: 3006-6549 (Print)

Vol. 4, No. 1 (2026)

Pages: 310-324

Key Words:

Curriculum, Ethical Principles, Equity, Higher Education, Moral Values, Thurstone Scale

Corresponding Author:**Dr. Ghulam Dastgir**Email: ghulam.dastgir@uon.edu.pk**License:**

Abstract: *This study investigates the ethical and moral principles highlighted in higher education in Punjab, analysing the integration of these values into academic and social learning environments. A mixed-methods approach was utilised: a Thurstone scale-based survey was conducted with 95 university students to quantitatively evaluate their perceptions of fundamental ethical and moral principles, while semi-structured interviews yielded qualitative insights into their lived experiences. The results show that honesty, respect, responsibility, and social justice are the most important values. Interviews also showed that students were worried about the differences between what they learn in school and how it applies to their lives. These results together show how important colleges and universities are in teaching values that promote fairness, inclusion and responsible citizenship. The study provides actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers to enhance ethical and moral education at the university level, ensuring that academic excellence is accompanied by the cultivation of socially responsible individuals.*

Introduction

Education not only imparts knowledge and cultivates skills but also shapes the moral character of students and promotes responsible citizenship. In this regard, moral education holds a pivotal position in institutional objectives, particularly in higher education. In Punjab, enhancing higher education has been prioritized to address global challenges and facilitate socio-economic development (Barber et al., 2012; Fägerlind & Saha, 2016). Nonetheless, rising literacy rates and academic success have not consistently resulted in ethical conduct; educated individuals have occasionally been involved in white-collar crimes, highlighting a deficiency in character development (Vis, 2018). In numerous instances, moral character, encompassing values such as honesty and responsibility, seems to be subordinate to academic achievement—a trend that necessitates immediate attention (Dahl, 2019).

Moral education includes both formal curricula and the hidden curriculum, which is the ethics that students learn through the culture of the school, role models, and the rules of the institution (Siddiqui & Soomro, 2022). In Pakistan, moral education is fundamentally grounded in Islamic teachings; however, it has frequently been overlooked in curriculum development and teacher training (Asif et al., 2020). Document analysis in Punjab indicates that secondary school curricula inadequately prioritize ethical

and moral values, failing to implement these concepts effectively (Alvi et al., 2020). At the tertiary level, research indicates that university students recognize a disjunction between curricular content and practical ethical application, highlighting deficiencies in moral education (Amina et al., 2024).

Comparative studies highlight the essential function of teachers as moral agents. Many teachers in Pakistan said that teaching morals was mostly about teaching religious values and loyalty to the country (Asif et al., 2020). Extensive literature substantiates the role of educators and curriculum in the cultivation of moral character, indicating that institutions that deliberately integrate moral values into both formal and informal curricula produce graduates with heightened ethical awareness (Iqbal, 1908; Lickona & Davidson, as cited in Tabassum et al., 2024).

The objective of this study is to examine the incorporation of ethical and moral values into the university curriculum in Punjab, employing a mixed-methods approach. The study focuses on student perspectives, assessed via a Thurstone-scale survey, and qualitative insights derived from lived experiences. It seeks to ascertain the values esteemed by students, including honesty, respect, responsibility, and social justice, and evaluate the effectiveness of curricular support for these values in higher education institutions.

Literature Review

Around the world, people are starting to see moral and ethical education as an important part of higher education. In a time of globalization, technological change, and social and political problems, universities are expected to do more than just teach students academic and professional skills (Makhdom & Mian, 2012; Faisal, et al., 2023). They are also expected to teach students values like honesty, responsibility, fairness, respect, and social justice (Arthur et al., 2021). The focus on ethics and morality in higher education shows a bigger worry that just doing well in school isn't enough to make people responsible citizens. For developing nations like Pakistan, the incorporation of moral and ethical principles into higher education is especially crucial, considering the issues of inequality, corruption, social division, and youth disengagement (Hassan & Sulaiman, 2022).

This literature review analyses theoretical and empirical research regarding ethical and moral education, student perceptions of values, curriculum integration, and the influence of universities in cultivating responsible citizenship. It also puts the conversation in the context of higher education in Punjab, Pakistan.

Ethical and Moral Education: Conceptual Foundations

Ethics denotes the principles that direct behavior according to concepts of right and wrong, whereas morality embodies the socially accepted norms and values that influence individual conduct (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999). Both concepts are interconnected and essential in shaping an individual's character and decision-making process. Kohlberg's theory of moral development delineates the sequential stages individuals traverse in their moral reasoning, highlighting education as a pivotal force in facilitating progression to elevated tiers of ethical judgment (Kohlberg, 1984). Likewise, Rest's Defining Issues Test (DIT) quantified moral reasoning and established a framework for evaluating students' ethical cognition (Rest et al., 1999).

Scholars contend that moral education extends beyond classroom instruction, significantly shaped by institutional culture, peer interactions, and overarching social contexts (Nucci, Narvaez, & Krettenauer, 2014). In higher education, ethical development is regarded as an integral component of "whole person education," which prioritizes the simultaneous cultivation of intellectual, emotional, and moral faculties (Lickona, 2019).

Ethics in Higher Education: Global Perspectives

Universities around the world have tried to improve their moral and ethical education programs by adding new classes and activities. For example, ethics is often a part of professional degree programs in the U.S. and Europe, like business, medicine, and engineering (Keenan, 2015). In Asian contexts, moral education is frequently integrated into cultural and religious traditions, associating ethical instruction with social harmony and collective responsibility (Tan & Ng, 2018).

Research indicates that ethical education increases students' awareness of social justice, inclusivity, and integrity (Arthur et al., 2021). For instance, students who took ethics classes in their professional studies were more morally sensitive than those who didn't (Chan & Leung, 2019). Nonetheless, difficulties persist in the effective implementation of ethical principles. Universities may stress ethical awareness but not encourage real-world application (Kreber, 2016).

The Role of Curriculum and Pedagogy in Moral Education

Curriculum design is a key part of making ethics a part of higher education. Berkowitz and Bier (2005) assert that character education must be deliberate, holistic, and uniformly exemplified in both academic and extracurricular contexts. Problem-based learning, case studies, debates, and reflective journals are all great ways to help students think about morals and make good choices (Killen, 2015).

Additionally, faculty role modeling profoundly influences students' perceptions of moral values (Bandura, 2001). When teachers show fairness, respect, and honesty, students learn these values and use them in their personal and professional lives (Wang & Calvano, 2015). On the other hand, inconsistencies between what is taught in school and what is done in practice may make students doubt the sincerity of ethical commitments (Kreber, 2016).

Research in Pakistan has revealed a disparity between the moral principles outlined in policy documents and their actual application in universities (Naseem & Khan, 2020). The Higher Education Commission stresses the importance of teaching ethics, leadership, and citizenship, but these ideas are often not very important in the classroom.

Student Perceptions of Ethics and Morality

Students' perspectives are essential for comprehending the valuation and application of ethical principles. Research indicates that students rank honesty, fairness, and respect as fundamental ethical principles (Brady & Waller, 2016). At the same time, they are worried about the widespread corruption, discrimination, and unfairness in social and educational systems that make it hard to follow moral rules (Hassan & Sulaiman, 2022).

In South Asia, students frequently link moral values to religious doctrines and cultural customs (Iqbal & Mahmood, 2021). But globalization and being exposed to different points of view have helped them understand more, which has led to calls for moral education that includes everyone, regardless of their religion or culture (Tan & Ng, 2018). Importantly, empirical studies indicate that students desire universities to offer secure, inclusive environments that actively promote respect for diversity (Kaya & Kaya, 2020).

Ethical and Moral Education in Pakistan's Higher Education System

Pakistan's higher education sector struggles to systematically integrate ethics and morality into institutional practices. The National Education Policy (Government of Pakistan, 2017) talks a lot about values like honesty, respect, and responsibility, but they aren't always put into practice. University settings frequently mirror pervasive societal challenges, such as nepotism, insufficient accountability, and gender disparities, which hinder moral development (Shah & Shah, 2021).

In Punjab, the largest province of Pakistan, universities enroll a significant proportion of the country's

youth. Research indicates that although students express the significance of ethics and morality, they frequently harbor doubts regarding the capacity of institutions to exemplify these values (Iqbal & Mahmood, 2021). For example, students say that teachers don't always show fairness and impartiality, which makes moral instruction less credible (Shah & Shah, 2021).

Recent research underscores the necessity for curricular reforms that transcend rote memorization and promote critical thinking, empathy, and ethical reasoning (Naseem & Khan, 2020). Furthermore, initiatives like ethics seminars, student-led community service projects, and cross-cultural dialogue programs are suggested to connect theory with practice.

Universities as Agents of Social Transformation

Universities serve a more significant function as catalysts for social transformation, in addition to fostering individual development. Moral education helps create graduates who are socially responsible and can deal with problems in society like corruption, inequality, and intolerance (Arthur et al., 2021). The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) stresses the importance of good education that teaches values like equality, inclusion, and global citizenship (UNESCO, 2017; Makhdum, et al., 2023).

In Pakistan, where problems with governance and moral leadership are still very important, colleges and universities have a very important job to do: to make sure that their graduates have both professional skills and moral integrity (Shah & Shah, 2021). By putting ethics and morality first, universities in Punjab can have a big impact on the future leaders and workers of the country. The literature indicates that ethical and moral education is a worldwide imperative and a fundamental aspect of higher education. Theoretical frameworks underscore the significance of ethics in cultivating students' character and citizenship; however, practical application frequently falls short. In Pakistan and Punjab, the incorporation of moral values in higher education encounters systemic challenges while simultaneously offering opportunities for reform. Comprehending students' perceptions is essential for harmonizing institutional policies with practical application, thereby enhancing higher education's function in cultivating socially responsible graduates.

Gaps in the Literature

There is a lot of research on moral and ethical education around the world, but there aren't many studies that focus on Pakistan, especially Punjab. There are not many empirical studies that look at how students actually experience and think about moral education in universities. Additionally, there is inadequate examination of the implementation of curricular policies and the ways in which institutional cultures facilitate or obstruct ethical learning. Filling in these gaps could help Pakistan's higher education system become stronger.

This inquiry examines critical questions: How proficiently do universities cultivate moral values within their academic and social frameworks? Do college students think that there is a strong connection between their academic education and their moral awareness? The hypotheses propelling this inquiry are:

- **H1:** Honesty, respect, responsibility, and social justice are the top ethical and moral values recognized by university students in Punjab.
- **H2:** There is a perceived gap between curricular inclusion of moral values and their application in real-life contexts.

The research presents three fundamental contributions. First, it contributes to the body of literature on moral education in higher education, especially in Pakistan, where such research is scarce. Second, it provides empirical evidence to advocate for policy and curriculum reform in universities, integrating

ethical education as a fundamental component of academic instruction rather than a supplementary consideration. Third, it stresses student-centered approaches to value education by focusing on what students think, which is in line with the ideas of equity, inclusion, and responsible citizenship.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the key ethical and moral principles emphasized by university students in Punjab.
2. To analyze how these principles are integrated into academic and social learning contexts within higher education institutions.
3. To explore students' perceptions regarding the gaps between formal curriculum and real-life application of ethical and moral values.
4. To suggest practical recommendations for policymakers, educators, and curriculum planners to strengthen ethical and moral education in higher education.

Research Questions

1. What ethical and moral principles are most valued by university students in Punjab?
2. How are ethical and moral principles integrated into the academic and social learning environments of higher education institutions?
3. What concerns do students express about the differences between the formal curriculum and its real-life application?
4. How can higher education institutions better promote ethical and moral education to foster responsible citizenship?

Significance of the Study

This study is important for many areas of higher education and society. For colleges and universities, it gives them important information about how to effectively incorporate core values like honesty, respect, responsibility, and social justice into both academic and extracurricular activities, which helps students grow in a well-rounded way. The findings provide policymakers and curriculum designers with a significant framework for integrating value-based education, ensuring that moral and ethical development aligns with academic achievement. For teachers, the study shows how important it is to teach in ways that encourage students to be fair, inclusive, and aware of ethics. By helping students figure out what values are most important to them, the research shows that they can play an active role in making societies more fair and just. Finally, the study stresses how important it is for society as a whole to produce graduates who are not only academically competent but also socially aware and able to deal with and solve modern social problems.

Kohlberg's Theory: It directly addresses moral reasoning, values, and ethical decision-making. It has three stages of development (pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional) that can help explain how college students understand and use moral values. It works for both the quantitative (scale survey) and qualitative (interviews) parts of your mixed-methods design.

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, which offers a structure for comprehending the advancement of moral reasoning in individuals. Kohlberg (1981) asserts that moral development transpires through three fundamental levels. At the pre-conventional level, an individual's moral compass is predominantly shaped by external rewards and punishments, evaluating actions based on their personal repercussions. The conventional level represents moral reasoning influenced by social norms, approval, and compliance with established rules and laws, prioritizing conformity and the preservation of social order. At the post-conventional level, individuals engage in reasoning grounded in universal ethical principles, including justice, equality, and human rights, frequently placing these

principles above particular rules or societal expectations. Utilizing this theoretical framework, the study investigates the perception and internalization of ethical and moral values among university students, offering insights into the cultivation of socially responsible and morally aware individuals in higher education settings.

Within the realm of higher education, this theory serves as a framework to examine the perceptions and internalization of ethical and moral principles, such as honesty, respect, and social justice, among university students in Punjab. The quantitative survey (Thurstone scale) assesses students' positioning within these tiers of moral reasoning, whereas the qualitative interviews elucidate practical applications and discrepancies between theory and practice.

Kohlberg's theory not only facilitates the assessment of ethical and moral perceptions but also aids in the interpretation of students' lived experiences regarding values in both academic and social contexts.

Diagram (Theoretical Framework)

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

↓

University Students' Moral Reasoning

↓

Perceptions of Ethical & Moral Values

(Honesty, Respect, Responsibility, Justice)

↓

Academic & Social Learning Contexts

↓

Outcomes: Equity, Inclusion, Responsible Citizenship

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to achieve a thorough comprehension of the incorporation of ethical and moral principles into higher education in Punjab. The quantitative aspect comprised a survey utilizing the Thurstone scale, aimed at assessing students' perceptions of fundamental ethical and moral principles. The qualitative aspect involved semi-structured interviews designed to obtain a more profound understanding of students' lived experiences concerning the application of these values in academic and social settings. Using a mixed-methods approach made sure that the data was both broad and deep, which made it possible to triangulate and confirm the results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Population

The study's target population consisted of university students attending higher education institutions in Punjab, Pakistan. This population was chosen because university students constitute a vital segment of society where ethical and moral values are anticipated to be cultivated and upheld, both in academic pursuits and in wider social engagements (Shahid & Mahmood, 2020).

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 95 students was chosen from various public universities in Punjab. The sampling method used was purposive sampling, which made sure that the participants came from a wide range of academic fields and backgrounds. Purposive sampling was suitable as the study specifically necessitated individuals actively involved in higher education capable of providing substantive reflections on the significance of ethics and morality in academic and social contexts (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

Furthermore, for the qualitative aspect, 12 students were solicited to engage in comprehensive semi-structured interviews. These participants were chosen for their willingness and capacity to express their viewpoints, thereby yielding profound qualitative insights.

Research Instrument

The quantitative data were gathered via a Thurstone scale questionnaire designed to assess students' perceptions of ethical and moral values in higher education. The scale contained items that reflected values like honesty, respect, responsibility, and social justice. Participants were requested to express their degree of agreement with each statement, facilitating the prioritisation of principles according to student perceptions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). For the qualitative component, semi-structured interview protocols were developed. The interview guide included open-ended questions that let people talk about their own experiences, thoughts, and worries about how universities incorporate moral and ethical principles. The questions were about how values are used in school activities, both in and out of the classroom, and in the way the school runs.

Data Collection

There were two steps to the data collection process. The Thurstone scale survey was given to 95 college students in the first stage. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, guaranteed confidentiality, and requested to give informed consent prior to responding. The survey was self-administered and available in both paper and digital formats to make it easy for everyone to take.

In the second stage, 12 students were interviewed in a semi-structured way. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes each and were done either in person or over the internet, depending on what was easiest for the participants. The interviews were recorded on audio tape with the participants' consent and then transcribed word for word for analysis.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, such as means, frequencies, and rankings, were used to look at the quantitative data from the Thurstone scale survey. These analyses assisted in determining the ethical and moral principles most esteemed by university students. We used SPSS software to enter the data and do the statistical analysis (Pallant, 2020). Thematic analysis was utilized for the qualitative data, adhering to the framework established by Braun and Clarke (2019).

We coded the interview transcripts inductively to find common themes, subthemes, and patterns about moral and ethical values in higher education. The analysis concentrated on students' lived experiences and their perceptions of the discrepancies between curriculum-based values and practical applications.

Ethical Considerations

Before collecting data, ethical approval was obtained. Everyone who took part in the study was told what it was about and that they could leave at any time without any problems. Confidentiality was upheld through the anonymisation of participants' identities, and the data were utilized exclusively for research purposes.

In summary, the study's methodology integrated a Thurstone scale survey and semi-structured interviews within a mixed-methods framework. This method gave the study both quantitative breadth and qualitative depth, which helped it find out how university students in Punjab think about, value, and experience moral and ethical principles. The use of three different methods made the results more reliable and valid, making sure that the study gives useful information to teachers, policymakers, and curriculum planners.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained from the Thurstone scale survey sought to assess students' perceptions

of fundamental ethical and moral principles in higher education. Descriptive statistics like frequencies, means, and standard deviations were used to look at the answers from 95 university students. This helped find out which values were most important and practiced.

Honesty, respect, responsibility, fairness, and social justice were some of the moral and ethical values. Scores that were closer to 1 meant that people didn't agree as much, while scores that were closer to 11 meant that people did agree more with the importance of each principle (Thurstone, 1928).

Table 1: Mean Scores of Ethical and Moral Principles

Principle	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Rank
Honesty	9.40	1.12	1
Respect	8.95	1.23	2
Responsibility	8.62	1.45	3
Social Justice	8.12	1.58	4
Fairness	7.88	1.67	5

Source: Survey data (N = 95)

Students rated honesty (M = 9.40, SD = 1.12) as the most important moral value, followed by respect (M = 8.95) and responsibility (M = 8.62). Fairness got the lowest mean score (M = 7.88), but it was still above the middle of the scale. These results indicate that students regard personal integrity and respect for others as fundamental to higher education values, corroborating previous research that recognized honesty as a principal ethical guide in academic settings (Kuther, 2017).

Graphs: Mean Scores of Ethical and Moral Principles

- 1. **Bar Chart** – Mean Scores of Ethical Principles
- 2. **Pie Chart** – Proportion of Emphasis by Principle

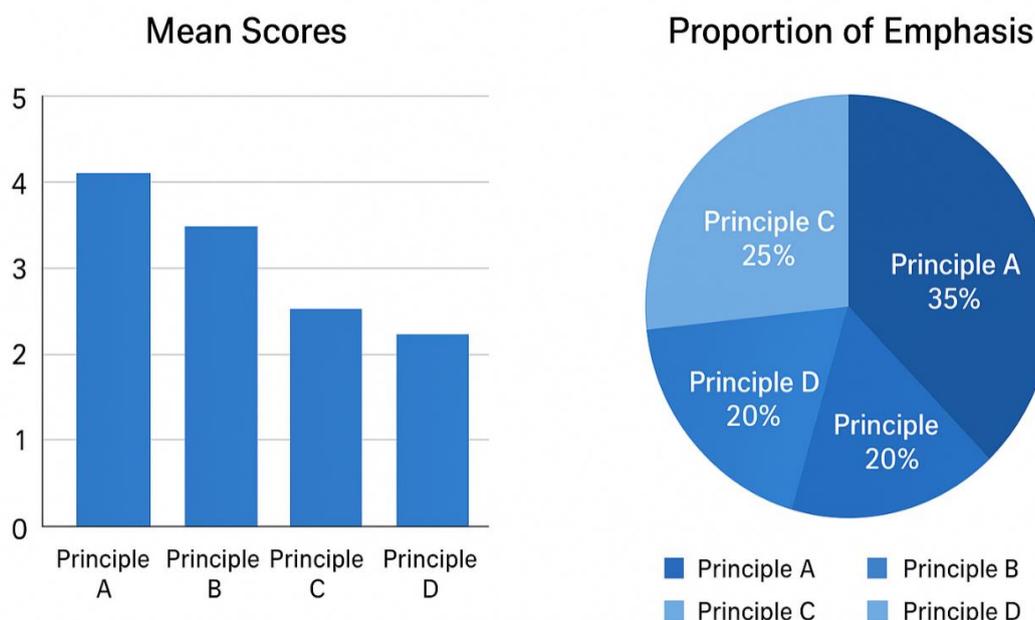


Figure 1. Bar chart showing mean scores of each ethical principle, Figure 2. Pie chart showing the proportion of emphasis on each ethical principle.

The bar chart makes the ranking of principles clearer by showing that honesty and respect are the most important values. This shows that students care about doing well in school and also stress being honest in their personal and social lives.

Frequency Analysis

To better understand how strongly students agreed on the importance of each principle, we put their answers into three groups: High Agreement (9–11), Moderate Agreement (6–8), and Low Agreement (1–5).

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Agreement Levels

Principle	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
Honesty	82.1	14.7	3.2
Respect	78.9	16.8	4.3
Responsibility	74.7	20.0	5.3
Social Justice	69.5	23.2	7.3
Fairness	65.3	25.3	9.4

Most of the students (82.1%) agreed that honesty was very important, and most of the students (78.9%) agreed that respect was very important. Fairness had the lowest percentage of students who agreed that it was very important (65.3%). These findings corroborate the perspective that honesty and respect are enduring foundations of moral education (Nucci, 2016).

Graph 2: Pie Chart: High Agreement with Ethical Principles

Pie chart showing percentages for honesty, respect, responsibility, social justice, fairness in “high agreement” category. . The pie chart shows that honesty has the highest agreement (82.1%), while fairness has the least (65.3%). This shows that there may be a gap in how fairness and justice are understood or put into practice in colleges and universities.

Qualitative Data Analysis

To add to the survey results, semi-structured interviews were done with a group of 15 students. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) was utilized to discern recurring patterns in participants' narratives regarding their experiences with ethical and moral principles in university life.

The qualitative analysis uncovered several important themes regarding the incorporation and application of ethical and moral values in higher education. First, a clear gap between what is taught in school and what actually happens was found. Students said that even though ethics are formally taught in classes, teachers and administrators don't always model these values. People often talked about things like favouritism in grading, which went against the ideas of fairness and social justice. Second, the idea that teachers should be moral role models became very important. Participants stressed that teachers who show honesty, respect, and fairness have a positive effect on students. On the other hand, teachers who show bias or act unethically make students less trusting of the school and hurt their moral learning. Third, the effect of peers on responsibility was emphasised in the context of group work. Students were frustrated with free riding in group projects, where some members did less work than others, which made the idea of shared responsibility less valuable. Lastly, participants stressed the need for institutional policies that more consistently support ethical principles. They contended that universities ought to establish more explicit regulations regarding academic integrity, plagiarism, and equitable evaluation practices to guarantee that ethical standards are not merely taught but also consistently maintained throughout the institution. These findings together show how important

institutional culture, teacher behaviour, and peer relationships are in shaping students' moral growth. The mixed-methods analysis gives a full picture. Quantitative data indicates that honesty, respect, and responsibility are the highest values, whereas qualitative data uncovers significant deficiencies in fairness and justice. This corroborates prior research highlighting the necessity of integrating ethics not only into the curriculum but also into institutional culture and policies (Sharma & Clark, 2019). The integrated analyses indicate that students at Punjab universities highly prioritise honesty, respect, and responsibility, while simultaneously voicing apprehensions regarding fairness and social justice in practice. The quantitative findings yielded quantifiable insights into value hierarchies, whereas qualitative themes elucidated contextual difficulties. These findings underscore the necessity for universities to reconcile moral ideals with institutional practices, guaranteeing that higher education not only disseminates knowledge but also fosters ethical citizenship.

Findings

The study sought to examine the perception and application of ethical and moral principles within higher education institutions (HEIs) in Punjab through a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative findings from the Thurstone scale-based survey of 95 students indicated that honesty, respect, responsibility, and social justice were prioritised as the foremost ethical and moral principles. These results show that students are very aware of the values that support academic integrity and social harmony.

The survey data analysis showed that honesty was always rated as the most important value. This suggests that students understand how important it is to be honest in schoolwork, tests, and relationships with other people. Respect was the second most important value, which showed how important it is to recognize diversity, be tolerant, and treat everyone fairly on campus. Responsibility was rated third, which means that students are expected to be responsible for their schoolwork, group activities, and roles in society. Lastly, social justice was rated as an important principle, which shows how important fairness, equity, and inclusion are in higher education.

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews enhanced these findings by offering more profound insights into students lived experiences. Some participants said that even though universities stress moral values in their codes of conduct and curricula, they don't always put them into practice. Students said they saw plagiarism, favoritism, and unfairness that went against the values that were officially stated. They also found a gap between what students learn about ethics in theory and how they put it into practice in their daily lives. This suggests that universities may not be able to fully turn values into campus culture.

Another important theme that came up in the interviews was how faculty and peers affect moral growth. Students reported that faculty who exemplified ethical conduct such as equitable grading, punctuality, and courteous communication exerted a more significant influence on their moral perspective than formal lectures. On the other hand, when students saw faculty or administration acting unethically, like being biased or not being held accountable, their trust in the school was hurt.

In general, the results show that students care about honesty, respect, responsibility, and social justice, but they are still worried about the differences between what is taught in the classroom and what actually happens in universities.

Conclusion

The findings of this study emphasize the necessity of cultivating ethical and moral principles in higher education institutions throughout Punjab. University students recognized honesty, respect, responsibility, and social justice as the paramount moral principles, consistent with international

standards of character and values education (Arthur et al., 2017). Nonetheless, the research revealed a considerable disparity between the professed values in academic discourse and their actual implementation within institutional culture.

The research concludes that higher education institutions (HEIs) are essential in cultivating intellectual competencies and in fostering morally responsible citizens. Higher education may produce graduates who excel academically but lack the social and moral grounding necessary to contribute to equitable and inclusive societies if ethical values are not effectively integrated into both formal teaching and institutional practices.

The conclusion underscores the necessity for policymakers, curriculum developers, and educators to embrace a comprehensive strategy for moral education—one that encompasses curriculum reforms, ethical exemplification, transparent governance, and interactive platforms for value-oriented learning.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with prior literature highlighting the significance of ethics and values in higher education (Lickona, 2022; Nucci, Narvaez, & Krettenauer, 2014). Students' emphasis on honesty demonstrates the persistent significance of academic integrity, recognized as a fundamental element of quality education globally (Bertram Gallant, 2017). The finding aligns with Kohlberg's (1981) moral development theory, which asserts that individuals cultivate moral reasoning through interactions that compel them to reconcile personal interests with universal principles. The students' focus on honesty and responsibility indicates that they are at a developmental phase where principled reasoning is increasingly significant.

The study's focus on respect and social justice parallels Noddings' (2013) examination of care ethics in education. Respect and fairness in higher education settings foster individual growth and the establishment of inclusive, diverse, and tolerant communities. Students' recognition of these values signifies an increasing awareness of the overarching social responsibilities associated with education.

The findings also show that there is a gap between moral instruction that is based on the curriculum and how it is actually carried out. This corresponds with the criticism of "hidden curricula" in higher education, wherein institutional practices, unwritten regulations, and cultural dynamics frequently conflict with officially articulated values (Margolis, 2001). For example, when students feel like they are being treated unfairly or given bad grades, it shows how hidden curricula can break trust and hurt moral learning.

The behavior of faculty members became a significant influence on the moral development of students. Prior studies have shown that teachers who serve as ethical role models have a positive impact on students' ability to make ethical choices (Langlois & Lapointe, 2010). This study corroborates previous findings, indicating that students were more motivated by faculty who exemplified values in practice rather than by theoretical discussions of ethics. This aligns with Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, which emphasizes that individuals acquire behaviors through the observation of role models. Also, it's very important to recognize social justice as a key principle in the context of Punjab's higher education system. Because of the region's differences in wealth and social status, issues of equity, fairness, and inclusion are very important. The students' worries show that people all over the world are starting to realize that colleges and universities need to actively work to fix systemic inequalities in order to fulfill their social mission (UNESCO, 2021).

The study adds to the body of research by offering empirical evidence from Punjab, a setting where ethical and moral education has frequently been insufficiently examined in empirical studies. The results underscore that although curricula prioritize moral education, the execution gap continues to be a

significant obstacle. This supports the claim made by Althof and Berkowitz (2006) that character education must go beyond just teaching facts and become a part of students' daily lives.

Implications

The results have a number of effects on people who work in higher education. Policymakers ought to incorporate explicit ethical standards into quality assurance frameworks, guaranteeing that values are both imparted and enacted. To connect theory and practice, curriculum developers should include ethics in hands-on, case-based learning. To create a culture of respect and fairness, faculty training programs should focus on role modeling and reflective teaching. Moreover, universities ought to create platforms for dialogue, mentorship, and ethical leadership initiatives to institutionalize moral education.

Limitations and Future Research

This study provides valuable insights, yet its limitations must be recognized. The sample size of 95 students, while sufficient for a mixed-methods design, may not comprehensively represent the diversity of higher education institutions throughout Punjab. Subsequent research ought to augment the sample size and integrate longitudinal methodologies to evaluate the evolution of students' moral perspectives over time. Comparative studies across provinces or between public and private institutions would yield a more comprehensive understanding of ethical practices in higher education.

References

- Althof, W., & Berkowitz, M. W. (2006). Moral education and character education: Their relationship and roles in citizenship education. *Journal of Moral Education*, 35(4), 495–518. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240601012204>
- Alvi, S. T., Khanam, A., & Kalsoom, T. (2020). Document analysis of secondary school curriculum regarding ethical and moral education in Punjab. *Global Regional Review*, 5(1), 191–206. [https://doi.org/10.31703/grr.2020\(V-I\).23](https://doi.org/10.31703/grr.2020(V-I).23)
- Amina, R., Sittar, K., & Khalid, S. (2024). A study of moral behavior of university students. *Regional Lens*, 4(1), 71–78. <https://doi.org/10.62997/rl.2024.31037>
- Arthur, J., Kristjánsson, K., Harrison, T., Sanderse, W., & Wright, D. (2017). *Teaching character and virtue in schools*. Routledge.
- Arthur, J., Kristjánsson, K., Harrison, T., Sanderse, W., & Wright, D. (2021). *Teaching character and virtue in schools*. Routledge.
- Asif, T., Guangming, O., Haider, M. A., Colomer, J., Kayani, S., & Amin, N. u. (2020). Moral education for sustainable development: Comparison of university teachers' perceptions in China and Pakistan. *Sustainability*, 12(7), 3014. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12073014>
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1>
- Barber, M., Donnelly, K., & Rizvi, S. (2012). *Global education: A new teaching and learning agenda for schooling*. Hodder Education.
- Berkowitz, M. W., & Bier, M. C. (2005). *What works in character education: A research-driven guide for educators*. Character Education Partnership.
- Bertram Gallant, T. (2017). *Academic integrity in the twenty-first century: A teaching and learning imperative*. Jossey-Bass.
- Brady, L., & Waller, R. (2016). Students' perceptions of ethics in education. *Ethics and Education*, 11(3), 256–270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2016.1230902>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport*,

- Exercise and Health, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Chan, K., & Leung, D. (2019). The impact of ethics courses on business students' moral reasoning. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 156(2), 493–505. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3551-8>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Dahl, A. (2019). [On the moral shortcomings of educated individuals]. *Journal of Social Studies*.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Fägerlind, I., & Saha, L. J. (2016). *Education and national development: A comparative perspective*. Pergamon.
- Faisal, A., Ahmed, S.E., Makhdum, M., & Makhdum, F.N. (2023). A Comparative Study of Predictive Supervised-Machine Learning Algorithms on Cardiovascular Diseases (CVD). *Journal of Population Therapeutics and Clinical Pharmacology*, 30(19), 1159-1177. <https://doi.org/10.53555/jptcp.v30i19.3661>
- Government of Pakistan. (2017). *National education policy*. Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training.
- Hassan, N., & Sulaiman, M. (2022). Youth perceptions of ethics and morality in Pakistan's education system. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 30(1), 45–60.
- Iqbal, H., & Mahmood, S. (2021). Students' perspectives on ethical education in Punjab universities. *Asian Journal of Education and Development Studies*, 10(4), 567–583. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AJEDS-03-2020-0019>
- Iqbal, M. (1908). *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam*. [Publisher].
- Kaya, H., & Kaya, O. (2020). University students' moral perceptions in multicultural contexts. *International Journal of Ethics Education*, 5(2), 213–229. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40889-020-00097-3>
- Keenan, P. (2015). Integrating ethics into professional education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 37(4), 421–432. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2015.1056600>
- Killen, R. (2015). *Teaching strategies for outcomes-based education*. Juta and Company Ltd.
- Kohlberg, L. (1981). *Essays on moral development, Vol. I: The philosophy of moral development*. Harper & Row.
- Kohlberg, L. (1984). *The psychology of moral development: The nature and validity of moral stages*. Harper & Row.
- Kreber, C. (2016). Ethical practice in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 21(1), 2–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1115970>
- Kuther, T. L. (2017). *Lifelong learning: Strategies for a successful college experience*. Cengage Learning.
- Langlois, C., & Lapointe, C. (2010). Can ethics be learned? Results from a three-year action-research project. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 48(2), 147–163. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231011027861>
- Lickona, T. (2019). *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility*. Bantam Books.
- Lickona, T. (2022). *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility*. Bantam Books.

- Makhdam, F.N., Khanam, A. & Batool, T. (2023). Development of a Practice Based Post-Humanistic Model of Smart Education for Sustainable Development (SESD) in Mathematics at Elementary Level in Pakistan. (PhD Country Directory Number: 31367) [Doctoral thesis, Retrieved January 4, 2024, from the department of STEM Education, Lahore College for Women University Lahore Pakistan].
- Makhdam, N.F., Mian, A. K. (2012). Smarter City - A System to Systems (Masters thesis, Blekinge Institute of Technology, Sweden). Retrieved from <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:831525/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Margolis, E. (2001). The hidden curriculum in higher education. Routledge.
- Naseem, F., & Khan, I. (2020). Ethical challenges in Pakistan's higher education: A critical analysis. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 7(2), 180–197. <https://doi.org/10.22555/joeeed.v7i2.3204>
- Noddings, N. (2013). Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education (2nd ed.). University of California Press.
- Nucci, L. (2016). Recovering the role of reasoning in moral education to address inequity and social justice. *Journal of Moral Education*, 45(3), 291–307. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2016.1167027>
- Nucci, L., Narvaez, D., & Krettenauer, T. (2014). Handbook of moral and character education (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Pallant, J. (2020). SPSS survival manual: A step-by-step guide to data analysis using IBM SPSS (7th ed.). Routledge.
- Rest, J. R., Narvaez, D., Bebeau, M. J., & Thoma, S. J. (1999). Postconventional moral thinking: A neo-Kohlbergian approach. Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Shah, A., & Shah, R. (2021). Ethical dilemmas in higher education of Pakistan: Student perceptions. *Pakistan Journal of Education*, 38(2), 25–42. <https://doi.org/10.30971/pje.v38i2.1075>
- Shahid, S., & Mahmood, N. (2020). Ethical awareness among university students: A study of Pakistani higher education institutions. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 7(2), 257–274. <https://doi.org/10.22555/joeeed.v7i2.3127>
- Sharma, R., & Clark, C. (2019). Ethical practices in higher education: Bridging the gap between theory and practice. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 41(6), 619–633. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2019.1665739>
- Siddiqui, R., & Soomro, K. A. (2022). Teachers' perceptions regarding moral education in private and public schools in Karachi: A comparative study. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 9(2), 229–252. <https://doi.org/10.22555/joeeed.v9i2.664>
- Tabassum, R., Yaseen, A., & Kashif, M. F. (2024). Relationship between school culture and moral development of students at secondary level. *Journal of Humanities & Educational Development Studies*, 4(1), 134–147. <https://doi.org/10.59219/jheds.04.01.52>
- Tan, C., & Ng, P. (2018). Moral education in Asia: Past and present. *Comparative Education*, 54(1), 91–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2017.1397277>
- Thurstone, L. L. (1928). Attitudes can be measured. *American Journal of Sociology*, 33(4), 529–554.
- UNESCO. (2017). Education for sustainable development goals: Learning objectives. UNESCO Publishing.
- UNESCO. (2021). Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education. UNESCO Publishing.
- Vis, B. (2018). [On white-collar crime among educated individuals]. *Criminal Behavior Journal*.

Wang, L., & Calvano, L. (2015). Faculty as moral exemplars in higher education. *Journal of Moral Education*, 44(2), 155–170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2015.1028919>.