Level of moral development in students at the Law School of San Ignacio de Loyola University (Lima - Peru) in the face of political corruption 2021

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Abstract

The level of moral development of the students at the Law School of the San Ignacio de Loyola University in Lima - Peru was determined with the Defining Issues Test - Short Form (DIT - SF) questionnaire developed by J. Rest based on L. Kohlberg's evolutionary theory of moral development. The questionnaire was applied to 87 students, in a cross-section, corresponding to 70% females and 30% males. Moral development was analyzed by gender and socio-economic profile. The predominant level of moral development was the conventional or norm-maintaining schema, and the average "P" index of the sample was 6.4 with no statistical difference between males and females. None presented a post-conventional moral development characterized by the recognition of ethical principles with autonomy and responsibility, the level needed by civil servants and public officials to avoid corruption.

1. Introduction

Corruption is the abuse of authority and power for private gain; it is determined by the way of life, political and social organization, civil liberties taken, and the pursuit of wealth by politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen in every corner of the world. Corruption undermines the very foundations of society itself and ends the legitimacy of public institutions. It can affect our right to equality and justice and is responsible for many of the ills that afflict numerous countries around the world, such as poverty, hunger, lack of employment, and low levels of education and health (Zavala, 2013).

"Corruption" is closely related to the term "culture of impunity" (Zavala, 2013), which shows that perpetrators feel no guilt in continuing to commit such acts because it is predictable that they will not be held accountable for their actions. According to Alfonso Quiroz (2013) in his book, History of Corruption in Peru, he defines corruption as the misuse of bureaucratic political power by cliques of officials colluded with petty private interests to obtain economic or political advantages contrary to the goals of social development through the misappropriation or diversion of public resources and the distortion of policies and institutions. In other words, corruption is the abuse of public resources to benefit a few people or groups, it explicitly involves power and politics, the public and private sectors and its effect on policies, institutions, and the progress of the country. According to the Corruption Perception Index (2020), a figure closer to 0 indicates more corruption, and if it is closer to 100, less corruption. In the South American and Caribbean region, countries such as Venezuela, Haiti, and Nicaragua with scores of 15, 18 and 22 respectively, are the worst. In the case of Peru, it has a score of 38.

Corruption in Peru's history has several precedents. In the last 30 years, six presidents have been accused of corruption. From Alberto Fujimori to Martín Vizcarra, all of whom are undergoing judicial proceedings, investigations, convictions, and dismissals from congress. At regional and district levels, several regional governors and mayors are under arrest for the same reason. This means that corruption in Peru has been a recurrent topic in society for the past three decades, which means that the population has normalized immoral and unethical acts daily. This non-stopping context had not only caused the weakening of Peru's institutions and public policies but also caused a severe political crisis shown in the increasingly antagonistic relationship between the executive and legislative branches. Stein (2020) Due to the problems mentioned, there is in Peru's society a widespread rejection of the political establishment and embrace of populism.

Morality is the set of principles that highlight and vindicate the dignity of the human being. It works in unity with the values and virtues of an individual to determine what is ethical behavior or not. This constant decision between right and wrong provides a learning opportunity, known as moral development (Kohlberg, 1994). Individuals understand and therefore behave according to the rules that govern a moral and civic-minded society autonomously and responsibly. It is important to recognize that a high level of moral development and virtues are not innate traits, hence the importance of moral education. This idea has been developed by L. Kohlberg (1994 [1958]) and J. Rest (1999), who proposed models for determining the stage and level of moral development of individuals. These models will be used in the present research and are described below:

According to Kohlberg, moral development is made up of three continuous levels, each of them are composed of two stages. The *preconventional level*, typical in those under 10 years old whose criteria for moral decisions are based on the punishment or reward received (punishment-obedience orientation and instrumental relativist orientation). The *conventional level,* typical of adolescents and adults who guide their actions based on what is established by the majority (interpersonal concord orientation and law and order orientation), and the *postconventional level, which is* developed by very few people, generally from the age of 25 and above, it is based on compliance with universal ethical principles, overcoming the need for a regulatory body or the opinion of the majority to act appropriately. It represents the autonomous, free, and responsible participation of the individual in society (legalistic contract orientation and universal ethical principles orientation). For Rest (1999), moral development is divided into three schemas based on Kohlberg's three levels described above: the primary interest schema (stages 2 and 3), the norm maintenance schema (stages 4 and 5A) and the postconventional schema (stages 5B and 6). In this way, Rest uses a strategy in his DIT survey to capture the attention of respondents, where "M" represents the tendency of subjects to support statements by their apparent spontaneous responses (explain). And "A" typifies an "anti-establishment" orientation, emphasizing the rejection of tradition and the existing social order for alleged arbitrariness and corruption. Finally, and according to Barba & Romo's (2005) study, the questionnaire recognizes the "P" or "principled moral reasoning" index. This is elaborated with the sum of the scores obtained in stages 5A, 5B and 6; it calculates the importance that the individual gives to the considerations of moral principles when facing moral dilemmas.

It is a reality that the problems of both developed and developing societies are mostly due to low levels of moral judgement. It is, therefore, necessary to educate citizens at home about values, public ethics, and morals so that honesty always prevails in decision-making. To propose initiatives to improve moral education, it is important to first determine the current level of moral judgement of a given group. Thus, the main goal of this research is to analyze and determine the moral development index by applying the DIT - SF questionnaire on how the students at the Law School of the San Ignacio de Loyola University will be identified in relation to political corruption.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Population and sample

The sample was taken from the students of the Faculty of Law of San Ignacio de Loyola University, since students face moral and ethical dilemmas, like every other young student from early stages of their education, for which many times the academic preparation is insufficient. This situation makes the improvement and continuous evaluation of the integral formation programs even more necessary. There is also the need to consider the fact that most of the students from this institution will take on future public or private leading positions, so it is important to know the preponderant percentage of the university students. The sample was obtained considering a confidence level of 95%, an accepted error of 10%, the total of 1200 students registered in the Law School studied, a proportion of 50% and an adjusted sample of 89 students, but due to the time in which the questionnaire was applied (summer vacations) we obtained a sample of 87.

The aspects considered in the slope have been key to the conclusions we drew from the results because we considered three important ones. (1) Age, which has always been a determinant when making decisions, since the more adult we become, the more our ethics evolve with the different events that happen in our lives. We also considered (2) the sex of the person, which was also a factor of analysis in the survey because in the conclusions we can see that it was women who gave a higher result of morality, and finally, (3) the socio-economic profile of each respondent has also been a key factor, since each of them developed a different morality based on their social circle, and this has been a determinant for our conclusions. To understand the socio-economic profile of the students surveyed we used the classification made by the "Peru National Institute of Statistics and Informatics" with the 2017 national census and the results of the national household survey made in 2018.

Table 1 - Classification of the socioeconomic profile according to the infrastructure of the home

Socio-economic Level	Number of Rooms in the House	Predominant Materials
A	5	Floors made of parquet or polished wood.
B	4.6	Floors made of tiles and terraces.
C	3.8	Floors made of cement.
D	3.2	The ceiling is made of calamine, fiber cement or similar.
E	2.7	Floor made by land and ceiling made by calamine.

2.2. Procedure

Regarding the procedure of this research work, it is essential to detail certain aspects that will allow the reader to fill any gaps that may arise. First, with regard to our population and sample, we focused mainly on students of the law school at the San Ignacio de Loyola University in Lima, Peru -where we can find the courses of International Relations and Law-, because (1) the COVID-19 pandemic limited us from increasing that number; and (2) we already had direct contact with the same faculty. Secondly, the director of the International Relations program provided us with the necessary contacts to carry out our research work without any inconvenience. In addition, we had advice from several professors of the Faculty of Law and a methodologist, who gave us their views and advice at a professional level.

Third, with the support of the above-mentioned authorities of the Faculty of Law and the permissions granted, we sent the link of the questionnaire – which contained the corresponding questions that the students had to answer and which allowed us to compile our statistical data – to the institutional emails of all the students belonging to that faculty, giving us greater validity as regards the fact that there was no error or confusion in our population and sample. Finally, we used Google Forms where the questionnaire "Defining Issues Test – Short Form (DIT – SF) made by J.

Rest" was developed to develop and obtain the samples that our own research needed; in addition, it should be noted that this questionnaire was programmed so that no student would take the questionnaire twice so that no mistakes would be made.

This is a quantitative, observational, descriptive, cross-sectional study. Taking this in consideration, the work started with the first 87 students who voluntarily answered the DIT - SF questionnaire sent to the mails of all students in the Law School. The Defining Issues Test (DIT) was developed by James Rest, based on Kohlberg's developmental theory of moral development. The original version of the questionnaire contains the analysis of 6 stories ("Heinz", "Students", "Prisoner", "Doctor", "Webster" and "Newspaper"); however, the one used in the present study is the DIT - Short Form (SF). This has been adapted by Guerrero et al. (2018) in their research "Validation of an instrument to measure moral development in the context of corruption-related situations", which consists of 3 stories ("Eduardo's Buildings", "Luis and the aqueduct" and "Mr. Rojas and his banana exporter") validated with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.809.In this research the Cronbach's Alpha result obtained for the validation of the instrument was 0.761, considered adequate, and the confidence level considered was $p < 0.05$. The results were tabulated using Google Sheets and IBM SPSS Statistics 25. To determine the level of moral development. It was carried out a case-by-case analysis using the procedure for correcting the DIT questionnaire. The applied questionnaire consists of 3 stories, each of which has three developmental parts. Only the last question is considered for the above-mentioned procedure, in which the participants list the 4 statements for each story in order from the 1st most important to the 4th most important. These are scored from 4 to 1 in decreasing order respectively and are classified according to Rest stages (2, 3, 4, 5A, 5B and 6), including M which does not correspond to a stage of moral development. Each of the 12 statements in part two of each story is classified according to the stages mentioned above and further identified in table A.1.

Table 2 - Standard moral development stages assigned to each story

N° Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Eduardo's buildings	4	3	2	M	3	4	M	6	A	5A	3	5A
Luis and the aqueduct	3	4	A	4	6	M	3	4	3	4	5A	5A
Mr. Rojas and his banana exporting company	4	4	2	4	M	5A	3	3	5B	5A	4	3

Table 2 presents our Case analysis model, with the understanding that the 4 statements chosen for each story are the following: Story N° 1 (6, 4, 1, 12), Story N° 2 (1, 3, 6, 7) and Story N° 3 (1, 2, 4, 5). The moral stage with the highest raw score and percentage is the one that determines the level of moral development of the case, according to the example that person would have a moral development located in the Standards Maintenance Schema and his "P" index is 0. An example Questionnaire can be found in table A.2.

3. Results

Of the 87 respondents, 61 were female (70%) and 26 were male (30%). The average age of all participants was 19.9 ± 3.4; the average age of men was 19.7 ± 2.7 and the average age for women was 20.1 ± 3.7. There was no significant difference in the ages of men and women. On the other hand, in terms of socio-economic profile, 46% of the respondents belonged to classification A, 32.2% to B, 18.4% and 3.4% to profiles C and D respectively. An overview over these descriptive statistics can be found in table A.3 and Figure A.1.

Applying the analysis through the procedure for the correction of the DIT questionnaire, we found that 69% of the sample has a moral development corresponding to the Standards Maintenance Schema, 23% to the Primary Interests Schema and none to the Postconventional Schema according to the levels of moral development established by James Rest. However, 8% were identified as having a moral development corresponding to a mixed schema, in this case, the Primary Interests Schema and the Standards Maintenance Schema.

The results found have been applied to Kohlberg's 6 stages of moral development, which are grouped into Rest's 3 schemas. 61% of the respondents were found to belong to the Orientation of Interpersonal Concord stage, 23% to the Relativistic Instrumental Orientation stage, and 3% to the Orientation of Law-and-Order stage. As in Rest's Schemas, in Kohlberg's stages, a group of respondents were identified as being in the mixed stages of moral development: 2% of them belong to the mixed level composed of the stages R. Instrumental Orientation and O. of Law and Order, 6% to the level composed of R. Instrumental Orientation and O. of Interpersonal Concord and 5% to the conventional level of moral development (O. of Interpersonal Concord and O. of Law and Order). A graphical overview over these results is presented in the figures A.2 to A.4.

Based on the stages described and the results shown, moral development profiles have also been made based on the arithmetic averages of stages 2 to 6, making a distinction according to moral development in the total sample, in men and women. Table 3 shows the averages scores for each stage of moral development, as well as the values of the P index. The mean "P" index for those over 22 years of age was 4.6 ± 3.3. The data obtained shows that the 87 students surveyed and classified by gender have a similar moral development profile. Thus, there is an increase in the mean scores from stages 2 to 4 and a decrease from stages 5A, 5B and 6 onwards. Stage 4 has a higher preeminence than the rest, which reaffirms what is shown in the bar graphs, that students with an average of 10.39 have a level of conventional moral development (according to Kohlberg) or a norm-maintaining schema (according to Rest). On the other hand, the stages of lower preeminence for males and females are 2, 5B and 6, corresponding to the pre-conventional level (according to Kohlberg) or the schema of primary interests (according to Rest) and the post-conventional level of moral development.

Table 3 - Distribution of averages by stage and "P" index for the sample and both sexes

Stages/Index	Sample	Men	Woman
Stage 2	3,39	3,57	3,24
Stage 3	8,37	8,04	8,52
Stage 4	10,39	10	10,56
Stage 5A	4,9	4,69	5
Stage 5B	2,36	3,5	1,9
Stage 6	2,89	3,2	2,79
Index P	6,4	6,54	6,34

Comparative factors such as sex show that the transition from stage 4 to stages 5B and 6 corresponding to the post-conventional level of moral development was slightly higher in males. Despite the decrease in values from stage 4, males have outperformed females at stages 5B and 6 with values of 3.5 and 3.2 respectively, in contrast to 1.9 and 2.79 for females. According to the Mann Whitney U-test for independent samples, there is no significant difference for the P-index value for both sexes.

As for the socioeconomic profile factor, presented in table 4, we observe a similar behaviour of growth and decrease to what was identified in the analysis with the classification by sex. Also, the pre-eminence of stage 4 in both analyses shows that neither sex nor socio-economic profile is determinant in the level of moral development for our study, as 68.97% of the surveyed are between 18 and 22 years old, which shows that the correct exercise of their autonomy is in development and therefore their level of moral development is conventional.

Table 4 - Distribution of averages by stage and "P" index for the socio-economic profile

Socio-economic profile/ Index	A	B	C	D
Stage 2	3,23	3,27	3,25	2,5
Stage 3	8,47	8,08	7,94	12
Stage 4	9,88	12,36	9,47	6,33
Stage 5A	5,26	4,3	5,19	4,33
Stage 5B	2,33	1	4,6	1
Stage 6	2,84	2,69	3,11	0
Index P	6,87	5,39	7,63	4,67

4. Discussion

In our study, the moral development behaviour found according to Kohlberg and Rest corresponds to the level of conventional moral judgement. This means that the students at the Law School of the San Ignacio de Loyola University (Lima - Peru) base their moral judgement on the norms and expectations established by the majority, considering morally correct what is established by their parents or friends. Also, students based their decisions not due to their autonomy, but because of the law and its meaning for establishing social and moral order. Furthermore, at the university, there was evidence of an upward trend in the moral development profile of the students surveyed, with a rise in the averages for stages 2 to 4 and a fall in stages 5A, 5B and 6. This coincides with the findings of the research *"Development of moral judgement in higher education"* by Barba and Romo (2005) carried out in Mexico. This study compared the moral development of students belonging to different institutions (public and private) who were classified by: gender, academic semester, and professional major. In this study, it was determined that the moral development behavior of men and women follows a growth behaviour from stage 2 to 4 and a decrease from stage 5A to 6. As well, there is a notorious pre-eminence of stage 4 or conventional moral development level.

In the study mentioned above, there was a significant statistical difference between the averages of the "P" index for men and women, in which it was women who gave greater importance to moral principles in deciding according to the moral dilemmas presented. However, in our study no such significant difference was identified; this could be due to the female to male ratio in our work of 70% to 30% respectively, compared to Barba and Romo's research of 58.6% to 41.4%.

According to Kohlberg's moral development theory, the level of conventional moral development is typical of adolescents and some adults. In our study the level of conventional moral development found may be related to the majority age range of 18 to 22 years of the surveyed. It is striking that in our study, those over 22 years of age had a mean P-index of 4.6 ± 3.3, which is much lower than the figure of 27.27 obtained in the above-mentioned study for students over 20 years of age. This could be due not only to the diversity of the sample and the origin of higher institutions but also to the

personal knowledge and particular experiences concerning the moral education that the respondents of that study may have received. The fact that we did not reach the level of post-conventional moral development in this research is worrisome and shows our sad political reality, as well as the need to provide scenarios of ethical and moral application to reinforce the autonomy and the adequate exercise of freedom of university students and future political actors. We understand this autonomy as the capacity of an individual to dictate our moral norms without the need to require a body to regulate or sanction our decisions. The post-conventional level is the one that civil servants and public officials need to attain. Because it implies the recognition of fundamental rights and universal ethical principles. Necessary aspects that positively motivate the attitude of public managers in activities such as accountability or the proposal of alternative solutions.

A limitation of the present study is that the results obtained cannot be generalized as the "level of moral development" of all university students in Peru. Given that this research work only focuses on the study of the level of moral development of the students at the law school of the San Ignacio de Loyola University, however, what was found in this research reveals a possible hypothesis of the level of moral development of other public and private universities in Peru, thus generating a new line of research for future studies.

5. Conclusion

The low levels of moral development in Peru correspond to a long-standing and ongoing problem that is a major cause of political corruption, which leads to the deterioration of the human development index, low economic growth, a decline in the competitiveness index and a lack of credibility in institutions. This low level of moral development of political actors is evidence of the lack of opportunities for ethical education at home, in the community and educational centers.

Kohlberg's theory used by Rest in his DIT-SF questionnaire responds to the different approaches to interpersonal relationships of individuals faced with moral dilemmas. Therefore, those who benefit from the findings of the present study are educational communities and political groups. Because they will not only be able to know and improve the moral development of those they educate, but also in the case of political parties they will have a generation of morally prepared young people.

In the preconventional level, the individualistic and expedient view of the individual in decision-making is shown. In the conventional level, the need to coincide with the collective and those particular interest groups reinforces the idea of "being on the right side". And in the post-conventional level, the autonomy of decision-making responds to the rational nature of human beings capable of recognizing right or wrong without any kind of influence, generating interpersonal and interinstitutional trust.

The analysis has shown that law school students have a conventional level of moral development. Law students as future leaders and pillars of our legal system, exhibit levels of moral development that are not suited for the positions targeted. If they do not aspire to evolve further into a postconventional level this could result in them being vulnerable to situations of corruption. There is a need for higher education institutions, specifically the university studied, to carry out campaigns to reinforce positive social values as an antidote to corruption.

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Appendix

Table A.1 - Moral development stages according to Rest (1999)

Moral Development Level Scheme (Rest)	Moral Development Stages
Primary Interests Schema	2 - 3
Standards Maintenance Schema	4 - 5A
Postconventional Schema	5B - 6

Table A.2 - Example of a questionnaire applied

Stages	2	3	4	5A	5B	6	A	M	A	M	P
Eduardo's Buildings			4 + 2	1				3		3	
Luis and the aqueduct		4 + 1					3	2	3	2	
Mr. Rojas and his banana exporting company			4 + 3 + 2					1		1	
Gross Score		5	15	1			3	6	3	6	0
Percentages (%)		16,7	50	3,3			10	20	10	20	0

Table A.3 - Distribution of the sample according to age and sex

Sex	Age group		
	< 18 years	18 - 22 years	> 22 years
Men	5,75%	19,54%	4,60%
Women	9,20%	49,43%	11,49%
Total	14,94%	68,97%	16,09%

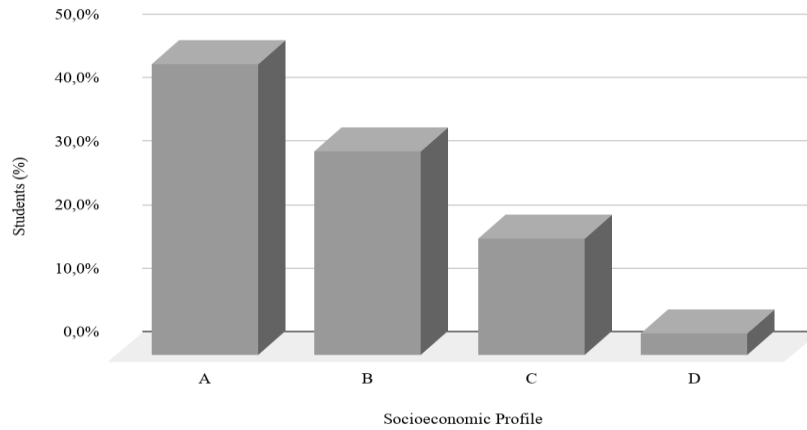Figure A.1 - Distribution of the sample according to socioeconomic profile

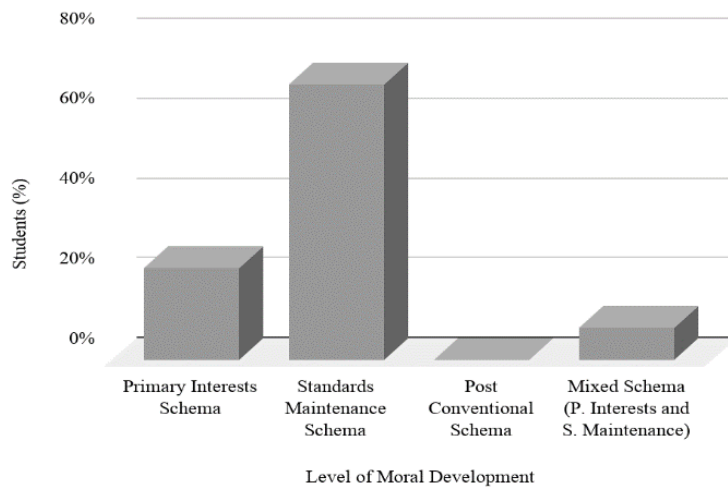Figure A.2 - Level of Moral Development Students of the USIL Law School (According to Rest)

Figure A.3 - Level of Moral Development Students of the USIL Law School (According to Kohlberg's stages).
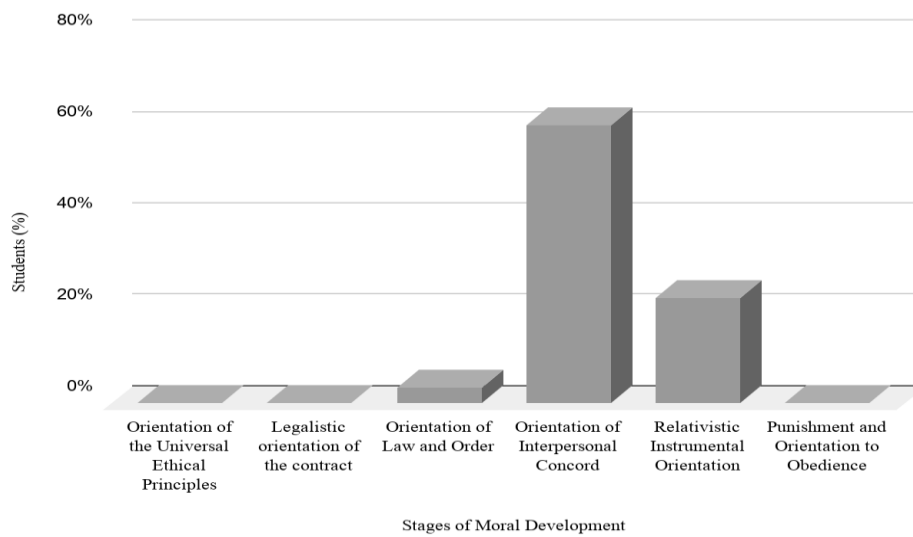

Figure A.4 - Mixed Levels of Moral Development of the Students USIL Law School (According to Kohlberg's stages)