

Enhancing Morality among Saudi University Students in View of Reward and Punishment Philosophy

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this study was to address enhancing morality among Saudi university students in view of the reward and punishment philosophy. The study used philosophical analysis to reveal the concept of morality in view of reward and punishment strategies to form a clear theoretical perspective. In addition, it is sought to design methodical and analytical steps that would empirically improve the measures available. Also, the study uses a descriptive methodology to depict the existing conditions of Saudi college students. According to the results, appreciation and self-confidence are among the self-rewards granted by the individual to him- or herself when making judgments. Moreover, universities must work on developing the ability to think critically among university students. It is necessary to pay attention to the cultural development and the system of values in Saudi universities.

INTRODUCTION

Social upbringing plays a pivotal role in creating morality, with parents typically spearheading the initiative. Morality is the driving force directing humans toward the distinction between right and wrong, good and bad behavior. Unethical acts are met with guilt or regret such as a hurt conscience. Educational and psychological literature is fraught with arguments, trade-offs, and preferences (for example, reward to punishment, or vice versa).

This study discusses the student's moral conscience and the principles used in reward and punishment. Arguments abound regarding deterrence as a result of punishment. Some scholars stress the need for more punishment and fewer rewards, while others stress the opposite. A third school of thought eliminates punishment entirely, and a fourth sees genuine education as devoid of punishment or reward (Hassan 1999:70). Multiple views, however, perceive morality as the cornerstone of education.

According to AlSaidi and Issa (2018), conscience is the inner feeling or voice viewed as a guide to the rightness or wrongness of one's be-

havior. It is strengthened through education and weakened through negligence. Societies, in setting laws and statutes, create conscientious individuals with tremendous human potential.

Additional studies have noted that unethical behavior is closely connected to selfishness, bias, partisanship, arrogance, greed, lust, and other perversions (George 2019: 95). Therefore, Saudi educational institutions, regulated or unregulated, emphasize both morality and upholding the law. Al-Isawai (1999) discussed that reviving morality is required to realize social security.

This study believes that awareness of conscience is the main driver of morality. Moreover, conscience is the true source of psychological reward and punishment without external interference.

Kilic and Mutluer (2023) discussed the relationship between Social Emotional Learning skills, which helps develop basic skills for life efficiency of students, and the sensitivity created using reward-punishment in educational processes on students. Ishak and Hussain (2013) noted that universities naturally seem to enjoy a pivotal role in reinforcing morality, protecting college students, and providing ethical solutions to pressing problems with practical answers, away from theoretical clichés. University students are thus qualified to absorb critical ethical norms, consistent with le-

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gitimacy and not conflicting with others' rights within the framework of morality.

Reviews of related literature on the university environment reveal the association between morality and certain variables. For instance, Al-Nawajaha (2018) demonstrated a direct relationship between religious commitment and conscientiousness among Al Aqusa university students. Hashim (2015) showed a statistical function between motivation and conscientiousness among Baghdad university students. Furthermore, Mostafa and Makalda (2014) found a significant positive relationship between ethical governance and optimism and pessimism, as expressed by the study scale. Al Obedi (2013) revealed a relationship between college student traits in Iraq and discipline, as well as self, in which control led to efficiency. Other studies have cited the importance of morality among university students (Al Haroun 2013). Cunha et al. (2016) found that students' behavioral actions center on individualism, with the ethical codes and behaviors of themselves and their relatives forming the basis. The study of Murray et al. (2022) indicated the need to motivate students in schools and universities to self-monitor and raise awareness of moral conscience. This study believes that awareness of conscience is the main driver of morality. Moreover, conscience is the true source of psychological reward and punishment without external interference.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to research ethics within the framework of the philosophy of reward and punishment, especially among university students as they are the most active sector in society. Moreover, emerging scientific and technological trends around the world require individuals who are fully aware of their rights and duties, and of the laws that regulate public and private life within an ethical framework. This study examines whether conscience is the main driver of morality or not. How can conscience be the source of reward and psychological punishment without external interference? The study also seeks to determine statistical differences between the responses of the study sample members at the level of moral conscience due to the variables: gender, specialization, and university. Environment shapes identity, with upbringing and parenting styles contributing to mo-

morality. Environment also gives individuals the desire to carry on living or cease it (Amir and McAuliffe 2020). Lack of morality could lead to despair and hopelessness, with students under this category consciously or unconsciously seeking moral identity (for example, asking questions such as "Who am I?" "Where do I go from here?" "What's the final station?"). To answer these questions, students need to understand self-efficacy assessment (Al-Dabagh 1982: 8).

Such questions were routinely cited by early thinkers and philosophers, who reached a major question: "What prompts people to act morally?" The answer to this question could have a massive social impact (Al-Saidi and Issa 2018). It has been said that ethical and unethical behavior among students is closely related to education and behaviors such as reward or punishment. Consequently, the study of morality in view of reward and punishment seems to answer a crucial question, as there are numerous variables involved.

The following are the research questions:

- ♦ Q1: What is the self-reported morality level among university students in Saudi universities?
- ♦ Q2: Are there significant differences at $P = 0.01$ regarding answers by study subjects on morality level that are attributable to gender, major, or university variables?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study uses philosophical analysis to unveil the concept of morality in view of reward and punishment strategies to develop a clear theoretical perspective. In addition, in the current study, it is sought to design methodical and analytical steps that would empirically improve the measures available. The study uses a descriptive methodology to depict the existing conditions of Saudi college students. The results of the study should be used to provide some suggestions and recommendations to boost morality among university students.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of "ethics" is complex, as it entails multiple integral concepts, such as vocational ethics, duty, and virtue (Wattfa 2011). Greek and Roman philosophers realized that widespread acts

could harm public interest (George 2019: 32). Deeds are thus valued due to the conscience, whether they result in relief and satisfaction or guilt, regret, failure, or shame (Ziada 1986:544). A hurt conscience therefore represents an incessant feeling of pain and sorrow (Wattfa 2011).

The educational sociology perspective on conscience is that an individual receives cues from her surroundings on what is right or wrong, with ethics being the resultant experience (Farak 1998; Mashkour 2014).

Sigmund Freud touched on the issue of repressed emotions, later called "morality" and Freud believed that morality is the inner perception that some of our desires must be renounced (Al-Hefny 2005: 149). Conscience, on the other hand, refers to humans' function in the ethical domain, with behaviors being either accepted or rejected (Al-Issawi 1980).

Freud's analysis of personality argues for the presence of three subsystems: the id, the ego, and the superego (Al Zoubi 2015). The superego represents conscience (that is, the most sacred region of individual psychology that controls ethical judgments, guiding humans toward what is right) (Wattfa 2011). Mainly, it is the deterrence. Conscience here refers to ideals, values prevailing within a group, with blame directed at those who fail to abide by these ideals (Kaffafi and Salem 2007).

Conscience is measured in the educational field in several ways such as:

- ◆ **Efficacy:** competence, wisdom, effectiveness, equipped to deal with life events
- ◆ **Order:** being thorough and orderly, keeping things tidy
- ◆ **Dutifulness:** compliance with a code of ethics, being trustworthy, caring about self and others (Abu Hattab: 1980)
- ◆ **Achievement:** high ambitions, hard working to attain such goals, aware of life directions, persistent
- ◆ **Discipline:** able to initiate tasks and achieve them despite boredom and other distractors, the determination to get things done
- ◆ **Thoughtfulness:** tendency to think carefully and consider the consequences before taking on a task (Zaki 2017)

Reward and Punishment

Reward and Punishment from an Educational Perspective The notion of reward and punishment

draws conflicting views. Reward, as defined by (Ibn Manzour et al. 1955: 243). It is the result of obedience. Mainly, reward carries reinforcement for a good deed. Some scholars use the term to promote the good commend and praise through giving material or any kind of reward approved (Al Ottebi 2001).

Punishment refers to the harm inflicted on an individual due to a wrong committed (Asfahani 1992). It is the suffering felt by the one who did the harm (Abu Zahra 1972). According to McAuliffe et al. (2022), people have a strong aversion to receiving less than others, which is disadvantageous inequity aversion. Cao and Yang (2024) explored the sensitivity to reward and punishment in relation to the influence of power on cognitive flexibility within real organizational settings, which is of paramount importance.

Relationship between Morality and Reward and Punishment Philosophy

It is evident that the relationship between morality and reward/punishment is based on an educational set of values, as the latter creates the logic behind these values. It is the buffer in the face of violence, aggression, corruption, obscenity, lewdness, cheating, greed, and racism tainting contemporary societal life (Al-Nemri 1999). The pressing question is now whether the reward and punishment philosophy lead to the development of morality. Plato believed that in humans, there are three powers that, if they are moderate, virtues arise from them, and these powers are: the rational power, which, if it is moderate, the virtue of wisdom arises from; the anger power, from which courage arises if it is moderate; and the lustful power, from which chastity and purity result if it is moderate (Wattfa 2011).

According to AlSaidi and Issa (2018), conscience is the cornerstone of ethical commitment, and it entails reward and punishment. In psychology, the subconscious is the momentum that enables an individual to seek recourse. Based on this, reward and punishment are perfected, or it is reassurance, security, and peace of mind or else anxiety, unhappiness, and despair (AlAffifi 1988; Baksh 1991).

The research question thus warrants further discussion (that is, "How could reward and punishment develop morality?").

Reward Impact

A reward embodies reinforcement and recognition, as it represents what an individual receives when performing a righteous act. Rewards urge individuals to exert more effort toward the sought objectives. It also motivates the individual to perform positively in daily tasks. Positive reinforcement calls for the repetition of such acts, while low self-esteem and decline of morality result from lack of reinforcement (Hashim and Habib 2018). According to Leng et al. (2021), to invest effort into any cognitive task, people must be sufficiently motivated, which is called incentives or rewards, and these incentives will determine when and how a given person decides to invest mental effort.

Abu Hattab and Sadek (1983) and Fakhry (1981) noted that to enhance morality:

- ◆ Excessive reward for a good act might be viewed as a bribe, leading to complacency and conformity.
- ◆ A consistent reward leads to the end justifying the means.
- ◆ Rewards during student competitions frustrate losers; thus, morality plunges.

Punishment Impacts

Punishment is the flip side of reward to dissuade an individual from repeating undesirable acts to avoid punishment (Rabie 2008). Punishment may take the form of hurt conscience, blame, or scolding.

Ozbiel and Thorndick argue that this might result in repression (Abu Hattab and Sadek 1983). Plato called for deprivation as a way of inflicting punishment. However, others see this strategy as futile because deprived individuals grow irate and vindictive. The following are three reservations in terms of developing morality:

- ◆ Decisiveness, not cruelty, must be employed when inflicting punishment.

- ◆ Punishment is by far less effective than rewards, and it must be proportionate with the crime committed (Abu Alam1978)
- ◆ Skinner believed that punishment ramifications are unpredictable and may result in worsening the situation (Azam 2015)

According to Heininga et al. (2017), daily experiences are accompanied by feelings of positive affect and negative affect without conscious processing, and individuals learn about the reward and punishment value of each context and activity.

Study Subjects and Samples

The study population consisted of all students in the 2022 academic year from three universities (Hafr Al Batten, Bisha, and Jeddah) n. 17407, 15491, 12153, respectively. A random sample of 10,043 male and female students was used, accounting for 22.30 percent of the entire population of the three universities.

Table 1: Study sample distribution based on variables and percentages

S.No.	Study variables	Repeat	%
1	Gender Male	3,738	37.20
	Female	6,305	62.80
2	Major Literary	4,730	47.10
	Scientific	5,313	52.90
3	Univer- Hafr Al Batten	3,851	38.30
	sity Bisha	2,803	27.90
	Jeddah	2,389	33.70

As shown in Table 1, there were twice as many female students as male students. Additionally, the number of female students in scientific majors was 5,313, while the number of male students in literary majors was 4,730.

Table 2 supports a high level of validity.

Table 2: Pearson coefficients item and total score correlates

Axis (1)		-2		-3		-4		-5		-6	
S.No.	Correlate	No.	Correlate	No.	Correlate	No.	Correlate	No.	Correlate	No.	Correlate
1	0.65	5	0.74	9	0.73	13	0.74	17	0.73	21	0.72
2	0.62	6	0.66	10	0.72	14	0.78	18	0.86	22	0.73
3	0.6	7	0.71	11	0.69	15	0.83	19	0.78	23	0.69
4	0.63	8	0.73	12	0.68	16	0.77	20	0.69	24	0.75

** Statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Questionnaire consistency was determined by two methods: Cronbach's alpha and fragmentation, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Consistency coefficients of the morality axis and the entire axes

Axis	Cronbach's alpha	Fragmentation
Efficiency	0.86	0.81
Organization	0.77	0.75
Duty	0.79	0.76
Achievement	0.8	0.78
Self-control	0.89	0.87
Ponderation	0.72	0.7
Morality totality	0.9	0.88

Table 3 shows high consistency coefficients, affirming morality consistency as well.

Statistical Processing

Three-point Likert scales (3 = high, 2 = medium, 1 = low) were used, and an SPSS package consistent with the nature of the study was applied to test the hypotheses. To verify the questionnaire, the following methods were used:

- ◆ Pearson coefficient to determine natural validity
- ◆ Cronbach coefficient to determine questionnaire consistency
- ◆ Spearman fragmentation to determine the questionnaire consistency
- ◆ Results and interpretation of the field study addressing the following research question: What is the morality level among students at Saudi universities?

To determine the level of moral conscience, the following statistical methods were used. Frequen-

cies, percentages, and relative weights were used to identify the reality of the moral conscience from the point of view of the study sample to reach descriptive data, and the estimates of the study sample members were classified into three levels so that if the average was between 2.34 and 3, it would be high, from 1.67 to 2.33 it would be medium, and from 1 to 1.66 it would be low.

To calculate the significant differences between the responses of the study sample according to the variables, the following statistical methods were used: a T test for independent samples for two of the variables (type, specialization) and a one-way analysis of variance for the remaining variable.

RESULTS

The answer to the first question ("What is the level of moral conscience among the students of Saudi universities?"), the frequencies, percentages, and arithmetic averages of the responses of the study sample in the axes of the questionnaire were extracted, and the results are shown in Table 4.

It is clear from Table 4 that the sample members saw the efficiency axis in general as being at a high level, as the arithmetic average for the axis as a whole was 2.55, which included six statements whose arithmetic averages ranged between 2.67 and 2.38.

The highest score in terms of the mean of the two statements was number five (2.67). This may be due to the potential for achieving success in every action, which confirms that individuals tend to repeat behaviors that lead to positive outcomes, with success being a result of the rewards. This finding is consistent with the study by Mei Yu et

Table 4: Frequencies, percentages, and averages for efficiency

S.No.	Item	Low		Medium		High		Average	Level
		R	%	R	%	R	%		
1	Judge things rationally	549	5.47	2,732	27.2	6,762	67.33	2.62	High
2	Aware of what's going on	651	6.48	3,180	31.66	6,212	61.85	2.55	High
3	Proud that my judgments are appreciated	921	9.17	2,840	28.28	6,282	62.55	2.53	High
4	I am trying to be effective when it comes to community issues	824	8.2	2,757	27.45	6,462	64.34	2.56	High
5	I can be successful while performing assigned tasks	555	5.53	2,250	22.4	7,238	72.07	2.67	High
6	My self-confidence grows when I pass insightful judgments	948	9.44	4,302	42.84	4,793	47.72	2.38	High
Total axis value								2.55	High

al. (2024), which suggests that the relationship between children’s intelligence and prosocial behavior could be influenced by sensitivity to rewards or punishments. Statement one also had a high mean (2.62). This may be because rationality is part of a personality with a conscious conscience as the source of judgments because it becomes an internal deterrent force when judging situations. Therefore, when the individual fears falling into taboos, even in the absence of authority, he is more realistic in issuing judgments.

The two lowest-scoring statements were number six (2.38, which is still high) and number 3 (2.53, which is still high). This illustrates that whenever a person’s attitudes are satisfactory, a reward is achieved, including an increase in self-confidence. Therefore, educators must reinforce this act after the individual performs the correct actions. It is seen that appreciation and self-confidence are among the self-rewards granted by the individual to him- or herself when making judgments. They are mental acts in which the moral conscience plays a major role because the individual is the master of him- or herself in all circumstances.

It is clear from Table 5 that the sample members saw the organization axis in general as being at a high level, as the arithmetic mean of the axis as a whole was 2.56, including six statements whose arithmetic averages ranged between 2.29 and 2.71.

The two highest-scoring statements in terms of mean were ten (2.71), which may be because the sample was keen to maintain order and follow this behavior voluntarily out of respect for customs and values, for which there are many positive reinforcers, and number nine (2.69). This may be because caring for possessions is part of the society culture, and not being careful about them is linked to societal punishment.

The two lowest-scoring statements in terms of mean were number eight (2.29), which was at an average level, and number seven (2.43), which was at a high level. This is due to the latter representing one of the morals and qualities that must exist in a person.

As shown in Table 6, the sample members saw the axis of duty in general as being at a high level, as the arithmetic mean of the axis of duty as a

Table 5: Frequencies, percentages and averages of organization

S.No.	Item	Low		Medium		High		Average Level	
		R	%	R	%	R	%		
7	Report on time to work and out.	1,059	10.54	3,575	35.6	5,409	53.86	2.43	High
8	I keep everything neat around me.	1,250	12.45	4,644	46.24	4,149	41.31	2.29	High
9	Make sure I check things in after use.	369	3.67	2,376	23.66	7,298	72.67	2.69	High
10	I make sure my moves are carefully studied.	398	3.47	2,229	22.19	7,466	74.34	2.71	High
11	Careful planning of my affairs ahead of time.	432	4.3	3,146	31.33	6,465	64.37	2.6	High
12	I take on my responsibilities regularly.	546	5.44	2,387	23.77	7,110	70.8	2.65	High
	Total value							2.56	High

Table 6: Repetitions, percentages, and average, based on duty

S.No.	Item	Low		Medium		High		Average Level	
		R	%	R	%	R	%		
13	I try as hard as I can to accurately get missions accomplished.	540	5.38	2,615	26.04	6,888	68.59	2.63	High
14	I honestly fulfill my duties.	405	4.03	3,666	36.5	5,972	59.46	2.55	High
15	My credit is good; financial obligations are paid on time.	837	8.33	4,196	41.78	5,010	49.89	2.42	High
16	I make good on my promises in regard to assignments.	816	8.13	3,329	33.15	5,898	58.73	2.51	High
17	I feel that I am trustworthy.	978	9.74	3,756	37.4	5,309	52.86	2.43	High
18	A code of ethics guides my practices.	729	7.26	3,044	30.31	6,270	62.43	2.55	High
	Total value							2.51	High

whole was 2.51, including six statements whose arithmetic averages ranged between 2.42 and 2.63.

The highest-scoring statements in terms of mean were number 13 (2.63), which was at a high level (the more accurate the costs, the more vigilance there is for the human conscience, and the more likely one relying on one's conscience is to appreciate the reward for these actions), number 14, and number 18, the latter two with the same high arithmetic mean (2.55). This may be because moral principles in the Islamic religion play an important role in the lives of individuals, directly affecting their behavior, including their duties, since morality works on the process of guidance and follow-up to achieve the purpose of human existence. This outcome is consistent with Shah et al. (2022), which highlights that Islamic education is fundamentally linked to the cultivation of students' morals within the educational system.

Table 7 shows that the sample members saw the achievement axis in general as being at a high level, as the arithmetic average for the axis as a whole was 2.49, including five statements whose arithmetic averages ranged between 2.30 and 2.65.

The highest-scoring statements in terms of mean included 20 at a high level (2.65). The reward of excellence comes from achieving individual satisfaction, and the individual increases the amount of effort expended when competing with others, especially when this is related to societal appreciation. Its arithmetic mean (2.54) was high, which may be due to the individual having to help him- or herself in facing life's difficulties by accepting the possible consequences of things, regardless of whether they are useful or unhelpful, and dealing with it as a life experience.

The lowest-scoring statements included 23 (2.30), which was at an average level. This is due to the sample members understanding that frustration leads to aggression. According to Qazi (2023), frustration alone is not the sole predictor of aggression; it arises from social learning and involves multiple instigators. In contrast, overcoming the frustration of others helps the individual develop and achieve and not be disrupted. There are many skills that contribute to helping a person eliminate frustration, and the level of need for achievement is expected to affect the individual's behavior from where it bears the initiative and the demand for it and the development of performance.

Statement 21 also scored comparatively low (2.43), although at a high level, with the conviction that goals describe the behavior patterns that the individual is expected to practice and issue with an appropriate degree of efficiency, quality, and empowerment. Increasing self-confidence and self-esteem improves quality of life.

It is clear from Table 8 that the sample members saw the control axis in general as being at a high level, as the arithmetic mean of the axis as a whole was 2.50, including five statements whose arithmetic averages ranged between 2.25 and 2.70.

The highest-scoring statements in terms of mean included number 25 (2.70), which was at a high level. Individuals are less likely in all periods of their lives to indulge in foolish acts (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990), and this result refers to the ability to understand oneself and others and how to deal with them. Another high-scoring statement was 24 (2.54). This may be because individuals tend to do what they feel is good, and they are looking for an interesting way to do it. Therefore,

Table 7: Repetitions, percentages, and average based on achievement

S.No.	Item	Low		Medium		High		Average Level	
		R	%	R	%	R	%		
19	I do my best to achieve sought objectives	728	7.25	3,294	32.8	6,021	59.95	2.53	High
20	I seek distinction when it comes to high achievements	438	4.36	2,613	26.02	6,992	69.62	2.65	High
21	I set future goals to meet my ambitions	909	9.05	3,906	38.89	5,228	52.06	2.43	High
22	I don't run away from life difficulties	720	7.17	3,204	31.9	6,119	60.93	2.54	High
23	Others' failures do not throw me	1,389	13.83	4,301	42.83	4,353	43.34	2.3	High
	Total value							2.49	

Table 8: Frequencies, percentages, and averages of self-control

S.No.	Item	Low		Medium		High		Average Level	
		R	%	R	%	R	%		
24	I am enthusiastic about performing the assigned tasks.	663	6.6	3,305	32.91	6,075	60.49	2.54	High
25	I am capable of adapting to whatever task is assigned.	360	3.58	2,283	22.73	7,400	73.68	2.7	High
26	I dedicate enough time to studying.	1,989	19.8	3,572	35.57	4,482	44.63	2.25	High
27	I can survive the hardships of doing school work.	513	5.11	3,660	36.44	5,870	58.45	2.53	High
28	I adhere to the customs and traditions of society.	849	8.45	3,359	33.45	5,835	58.1	2.5	High
Total value								2.5	High

self-discipline here is linked to the internal deterrent function of the moral conscience, and it prevents the individual from falling into prohibited actions because it entails punishment.

The two lowest-scoring statements were 26 (2.25), which was at an average level and represents an educational source of immediate pleasure and comfort, and 28 (2.50), which was also at a high level. This is because customs and traditions play an important role in Saudi daily life, influencing every action we do, directing our views toward others, and constituting our awareness, our intellectual core, and the way we deal with situations and people. Adherence to customs and traditions protects the individual from societal punishment, which society has accepted as an effect of shameful acts.

It is clear from Table 9 that the sample members saw the ponderation axis in general as being at a high level, as the arithmetic mean of the axis as a whole was 2.47, including five statements whose arithmetic averages ranged between 2.18 and 2.65.

The highest-scoring statements in terms of mean included 33 (2.65), which was at a high level. This may be due to planning that helps the learner organize and distribute his or her time in study. Statement 31 was another high scorer (2.64), which may be due to God’s creation of minds and making them the reason for thinking, through which a person can adapt to his or her environment. Consequences are a behavioral rule that entails reward and punishment. Thinking about behavior before practicing it is an important step in preventing punishment because, in this case, it is a legitimate mat-

Table 9: Frequencies, percentages and averages of ponderation

S.No.	Item	Low		Medium		High		Average Level	
		R	%	R	%	R	%		
29	Haste makes waste is my belief.	855	8.51	3,492	34.77	5,696	56.72	2.48	High
30	I usually avoid making quick decisions.	1,995	19.86	4,217	41.99	3,831	38.15	2.18	High
31	I consider the outcome of my actions carefully.	459	4.57	2,685	26.74	6,899	68.69	2.64	High
32	I think twice before answering any question.	927	9.23	4,152	41.34	4,961	49.4	2.4	High
33	I plan things ahead of time when taking on any assignment.	420	4.18	2,751	27.39	6,872	68.43	2.65	High
Total value								2.47	High

ter as long as there is eligibility for the individual before practice.

It is clear from Table 10 that the sample members viewed level of moral conscience in general at a high level (mean of 2.51). The organization axis is in first place with an arithmetic mean of 2.56, where organization leads to the assimilation of the values facing the human situation. Here, the person defines the value relations, emphasizes the most sovereign values, and deals with them in an ethical framework. This was followed by the competency axis with an arithmetic mean of 2.55. Efficiency appears by creating the best synergy between the psychological and social activity of students, and this achieves the enhancement of human behavior.

Table 10: Arithmetic averages of the axes of the moral conscience in general

Axis	Mean value	Order
Efficiency	2.55	2
Organization	2.56	1
Duty	2.51	3
Achievement	2.49	5
Self-control	2.5	4
Ponderation	2.47	6
Morality as a whole	2.51	

Next was the axis of duty, with an arithmetic mean of 2.51. It can be said that the conflict between conscience and passions stems from the actual principle of duty imposed on students, obliging them to act in a certain way even if it contradicts their desires. Duty represents commitment, respect for the law, and moral conscience. Then, came the axis of self-control (2.50), through the students' ability to choose the best alternative from another choice that is lower in value and can be satisfied quickly. Self-control depends on rationality in preference.

Second-to-last was the axis of struggle for achievement (2.49). Lasts, the ponderation axis, with an arithmetic mean of 2.47. Perhaps this gives us an indication of the extent to which there is a high de-

gree of moral conscience in Saudi society, perhaps due to socialization in the extended family.

Differences According to Gender, Specialization, and University

To determine whether there are statistically significant differences at the 0.01 level between students due to the variables of gender, specialization, and university, a t test for independent samples and one-way analysis of variance were used. The significant differences between the averages of the subgroup responses, their statistical significance, and the trends of statistical significance were determined.

Gender

Arithmetic means, standard deviations, and t tests for independent samples were calculated to determine the statistically significant differences in the level of moral conscience among emerging Saudi university students according to gender (male or female).

It is clear from Table 11 that there are statistically significant differences between males and females in all axes of the questionnaire; all t values were statistically significant at the level of 0.01 in favor of males. This may be due to the prevailing culture in Saudi society (responsibilities are placed on males more than females) and power relations within the family educational system in general. This result is similar to those of Rostom and Khashman (2018) and Al Nawajaha (2018), whose results indicated that male students have a higher level of conscientiousness than female students. However, these results differ from Hashim (2015), whose results indicated that the level of conscientiousness among female students is higher than that of their male counterparts.

Major

Arithmetic means, standard deviations, and t tests for independent samples were calculated to

Table 11: The averages, standard deviations, and the value of t and its significance in the axes of the questionnaire as a whole according to gender

Major	No.	Mean value	S.D.	T value	P.
Male	3,738	84.14	12.26	6.32	P = 0.01
Female	6,305	82.47	13.08		

determine the statistically significant differences in the level of moral conscience among emerging Saudi university students according to specialization (literary or scientific).

It is clear from Table 12 that there are statistically significant differences between the literary and scientific disciplines in all the axes of the questionnaire; the *t* values were all statistically significant at the level of 0.01 in favor of literary disciplines. This may be because theoretical and humanistic studies allow students to conduct ethical discussions more than scientific disciplines. This is similar to the results of Hashim (2015), who found a statistically significant difference with conscientious vitality averages according to specialization in favor of humanistic specializations.

Universities

A one-way analysis of variance was calculated to determine statistically significant differences in the level of moral conscience among emerging Saudi university students according to university (Hafir Al-Batin University, Bisha University, and Jeddah University).

Table 13: Comparative analysis based on university

Source of disparity	Square value	Freedom level	F value
Between-group	14,029	2	0.04
Intergroup	16,46,643	10,040	
Total	16,46,657	10,042	

It is clear from Table 13 that there are no statistically significant differences between the emerging Saudi universities in all the axes of the questionnaire; no *p* values were statistically significant. This is because the sample members fall within the stage of maturity, which is the stage in which the individual is characterized by a high level of cognitive, psychological, emotional, social, and spiritu-

al development, which increases the ability to reason, awareness, discrimination, and moderation.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the moral development of Saudi university students, focusing on the role of reward and punishment philosophies. The findings indicate a generally high level of moral values among the respondents, as reflected in the average scores across six key dimensions (mean = 2.51). However, significant differences emerged when considering gender and academic specialization.

Specifically, the study revealed statistically significant differences ($p < 0.01$) in morality scores between male and female students, with males exhibiting higher levels of moral values. This finding aligns with the research of Rostom and Khashman (2018) and Al Nawajaha (2018), who also reported higher levels of conscientiousness among male students. This may be attributed to the prevailing cultural norms in Saudi society, where responsibilities are often assigned differently to men and women, and power dynamics within families may reinforce these patterns. However, this observation contrasts with Hashim’s (2015) findings, which reported higher conscientiousness among female students; it is important to note, however, that this study was not conducted within a Saudi context. The differences in cultural context may explain this discrepancy.

Further analysis showed statistically significant differences ($p < 0.01$) in ethical scores based on academic specialization. Students pursuing literary studies demonstrated significantly higher ethical scores than those in scientific fields. This result is consistent with Hashim’s (2015) research, which found a significant positive relationship between conscientiousness and humanistic specializations. This suggests that the theoretical and humanistic nature of literary studies may provide more opportunities for ethical reflection and discussion than scientific disciplines.

Table 12: Averages, standard deviations, and the value of *t* and its significance in the axes of the questionnaire as a whole according to specialization

Major	No.	Mean value	S.D.	T value	P.
Literary	4,730	83.9	12.09	6.01	0.01
Scientific	5,313	82.37	13.37		

Interestingly, the study found no statistically significant differences in moral values across the three universities studied. The absence of significant differences across universities, despite differences in gender and major, suggests that other factors, such as broader societal and cultural influences, might play a more significant role in shaping the moral development of Saudi university students. The relatively high levels of moral development across all universities may indicate that students in this sample have generally reached a high level of maturity, characterized by advanced cognitive, psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual development.

The study operationalized moral conscience across six dimensions: efficiency, organization, duty, achievement, self-control, and deliberation. Statements associated with rational judgment, careful consideration of consequences, and a commitment to success received high scores, aligning with AlSaidi and Issa's (2018) conceptualization of conscience as an internal moral guide. This is also consistent with the research of Murray et al. (2022), which emphasized the importance of self-monitoring and awareness of conscience in promoting ethical behavior. Conversely, items related to self-confidence in judgment and the impact of others' failures received lower scores.

The study also touched upon the ongoing debate about the relative effectiveness of reward and punishment in moral education. The research notes that scholars hold diverse views on this topic, with some advocating for punitive measures while others support a reward-based approach (Hassan 2023). In addition, it cites McAuliffe et al. (2022) on the importance of inequity aversion, and Cao and Yang (2024) on the influence of reward and punishment sensitivity on cognitive flexibility. The current study suggests that a comprehensive approach incorporating both internal and external factors is necessary to promote ethical development. It highlights the role of universities in fostering practical ethical skills and moral reasoning (Ishak and Hussain 2013; Qazi 2023).

CONCLUSION

In summary, this discussion illustrates the intertwined nature of social upbringing, educational influence, and intrinsic moral awareness in shaping ethical behavior among university students.

The findings emphasize the necessity for educational institutions to implement comprehensive strategies that effectively integrate reward systems and moral education. Moving forward, future research should delve deeper into the nuanced dynamics of how gender, specialization, and institutional contexts influence moral development, building on the philosophical and psychological literature laid out in this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To summarize, the study recommends conducting further research in the field of values and ethics in Saudi universities, particularly in the context of the Internet and social networking. The study also advocates for the establishment of a national plan in partnership with Saudi universities, the public and private sectors, and the media to promote awareness and cultivate a moral culture, which may help enhance morality among students.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. SALEM: Contributed to the introduction/objectives/study sample/analysis of results.

Dr. Abdallah: Contributed to literature reviews and linguistic revision.

Dr. Ahmed: Contributed to statistical analysis.

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