

Relationship between Peer Pressure and Moral Competence among University Undergraduate Students in Karen Region, Nairobi Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Decline in moral standards is an issue that continues to affect society in many sectors ranging from politics, education and religion among others. This study investigated the relationship between peer pressure and moral competence among undergraduate students in Karen region, Nairobi. The study was anchored on Kohlberg's (1958) moral development and Bandura's (1977) social learning theories. The study used explanatory sequential mixed methods research design. A sample of 410 participants from a total population of 4,229 students was used. First, the researcher collected quantitative data and analyzed it, after which the researcher selected ten participants for qualitative data. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and Pearson correlation while qualitative data were coded and analyzed thematically. The findings indicated that there was weak positive and significant correlation between peer pressure and moral competence. Based on these findings, the researcher recommended inclusion of moral competence in the curriculum. Finally, more studies on moral competence in the light of other variables such as self-awareness, self-efficacy, emotional and social competence may be done.

Keywords: *Peer Pressure, Moral Competence*

In this 21st century, the world is seriously concerned about the issue of moral competence among university graduates (Hornsby, 2007). Universities and their curriculum do not show remarkable progress to foster moral competence among the graduates. For instance, in the United States, the quality of moral competence is at risk (Friedman, 2006). Hornsby (2007) asserted that in the United States, national initiatives also stress the importance of principled moral reasoning as a core component of civic responsibility. According to Zegwaard and Campbell (2011), moral competence is one of the key objectives of higher educational institutions.

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Some countries such as Japan, New Zealand, Pakistan, and Australia, have essentially introduced morality in their curriculum studies. In Australia, the National Framework calls for schools to educate students around moral values such as integrity, respect, honesty and tolerance (Ministry of Education, 2007; Sakamoto, 2008; Klenk, 2014). Australian Ministers of Education, Klenk and Sakamoto further noted that this moral competence supports students' ability to investigate core values held within the workplaces and readiness to practice the skills. Goodman and Lesnick (2001) stated that higher education in intellectual knowledge and skills would be incomplete without building character in students. They argued that students should not only know what is technical or skillful, but they should also develop the moral competence to do what is right.

Ofsted (2003) described moral competence as a building framework of moral values for students, which becomes a guide for personal behavior and for understanding society's shared values. In agreement, Erricker (2000) stated that moral competence is gaining a sense of moral values from experience and learning, enabling individuals to think and act responsibly, and to show compassion towards oneself and others.

A research carried out by Zubairu (2016) showed that in Malaysia, two decades of financial scandals seriously damaged the credibility of accountants as guardians of financial information. To repair this credibility, the Malaysian government released a blueprint that mandated Malaysian educational institutions to produce morally competent professionals. This study sought to assist the accounting department at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) to achieve its mandate by evaluating the moral competencies of second year students enrolled in the department. However, the results of the survey revealed that according to IIUM's own grading system, the current cohort of second year accounting students were not sufficiently morally competent to deal with the inevitable moral dilemmas they would face in the work place.

Thompson (2002) shows that since education began, moral competence has been an intrinsic value. To date, however, the intrinsic objectives of education are yet to be fully realized. In the current situation, some of the main problems of intellectual and moral competence seem to be linked to the influence of peer pressure.

In the same way, Santor, et al. (2000) added that peer pressure is one of the main factors that affects individuals either positively or negatively in personal moral competence. In their view, peer pressure is the influence of other people on an individual, to act in a certain way. In other words, if one is with friends who are doing something that a person typically would not do and they convince the individual to do what they are doing. They further added that peer pressure influences the moral competence of individuals in different ways.

In a regional context, a research conducted by Ajidahun (2011) in Nigeria found that peer pressure among the factors that affects the moral competence of adolescents. Peer pressure can be either positive or negative. Ajidahun observed, that the negative aspect of peer pressure strives more than the positive aspect. Adolescents belong to one peer group or the other as a source of identity and social support. Conforming to the ideas, beliefs and judgment of peer pressure is another factor that affects the behavior of the adolescents.

Chimwamurombe's (2011) study in Namibia revealed that a conducive college social atmosphere affects students' moral competence. He found that when students enter colleges,

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the peer group functions as an important socializing agent for them. In circumstances where peers socialize within their different groups, individuals are forced to conform to the practices and opinions of the group. This peer conformity is usually counterproductive and clashes with parents' as well as lecturers' expectations. At the end of the day, students engage in different socially unacceptable behaviors due to peer pressure. Thus, if a university setting fails to address issues related to peer pressure, then students' moral competence is also affected.

In the Kenyan context, research findings clearly show that the expected moral competence of graduates is not adequately achieved (Evaline, 2017; Korir & Kipkemboi, 2014; Kassim, 2012; Douglas, 2012; Nyambura, 2011). This means that Kenyan universities are facing challenges in generating morally competent graduates. Likewise, the State of Education in Africa (2015) reported that there is a deeper crisis of moral competence in students at higher levels of education in Africa.

Evaline (2017) revealed that peer influence among secondary students, which may include adopting a type of behavior, dress, or attitude in order to be accepted as part of a group, affects them either positively or negatively. When discussing how peer pressure affects students' choices, Castillo (2010) stated that the kind of friends that students in higher education make differ according to students' gender, social class, race, ethnicity and academic background. Consequently, some students are more likely to have friends who are careless about learning and are less likely to associate with peers who care about school.

Kassim's (2012) research finding revealed that the issue of moral decadence and secularization among the youth cannot be ignored in Kenya today. For Kassim, the moral conditions of competence call for an urgent solution. He strongly believes that moral instruction should be incorporated into education systems. William's (2009) research findings reveal that education is expected to change the behavior of the learners positively, yet according to him, studies and experiences revealed the existence of educational principles, which include teaching moral competence, yet the implementation of such principles is wanting. William stated that, cases such as strikes, drug addiction, truancy, stealing, corruption, and imprudent sexual activities are indicators of a moral crisis in schools and universities.

In addition to the above assertions, Douglas (2012) stated that traditional African customs upheld strong moral competence among African societies. However, the research findings reveal that currently, African traditional moral competence has eroded due to corruption, disrespect and nepotism. The study highlighted that the disintegration of moral and national values among university graduates is contributing towards the eradication of moral competence among the African societies. In relation to the above, a research carried out by Nyambura, (2011) illustrated that learners were not well prepared and equipped to address the relationship of peer pressure and students' moral competence. According to him, this could be the reason why most secondary school students resort to risky behaviors such as drug abuse, rioting, violence, dropping out from school and engaging in pre-marital sex.

METHODOLOGY

The study used mixed methods explanatory sequential research design, which employs both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The purpose of explanatory sequential design is to use the qualitative approach to explain quantitative results (significant, non-

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significant, outliers and surprising results) or to guide the formation of groups based on quantitative results. In this mixed research design, the cluster sampling technique was used to select research participants from different faculties. Simple random sampling technique was used to select research participants. Extreme case sampling technique was used to select the research participants for qualitative data collection.

To get the required sample for this study, Yamane's formula was employed (Yamane, 1967). Yamane's formula is:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + n(e)^2}$$

Where n = desired sample size

N = the population size

e = error

In this study the population size is N = 4229 for students and e = 0.05.

$$n = \frac{4229}{1 + 4229(0.05)^2} = 399.9$$

$$n = 399.9$$

The total sample size for this study was 400 students, who were selected using simple random sampling technique after grouping them in terms of faculties. Participants for the qualitative data collection were taken from those who scored lowest and highest in their moral competence. From both groups ten Students (five individual from each group) were selected for qualitative data. Therefore, the true sample for the study was 410 students.

The rationale for this decision was based on the criteria that even 10% of an accessible population is enough for a descriptive study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2009). According to Crossman (2017), a proportionate sample size of the population is one selected to provide a diverse range of cases relevant to a particular phenomenon or event being studied.

The study used the Peer Pressure Inventory (PPI) (Clasen & Brwon, 1985) which was adapted in the context of the current study, and self-formulated moral competence questionnaires. This instrument has three parts: the first part contains peer pressure items, the second part popularity items, and the third part conformity items. However, the researcher in the current study did not use the questions as they were, but selected some questions that were compatible with the current study.

On the other hand, the researcher formulated moral competence questionnaire, which contains 12 items. In addition to the above peer pressure inventory questions and moral competence questions, the researcher also added 6 questions of interview guide and demographics of the students. The questionnaires contain the following characteristic. The first section, contain the demographic information, while marriage status, and religion. The second section contains 13 peer pressure questions. The third section contains 12 moral competence questions and the last section has six interview guide questions. This strategy was preferred in this study so that the data collection instrument would facilitate a better understanding of the study. Questionnaires were administrated by the researcher to the participants in person.

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RESULTS

Moral Competence of Undergraduate Students in Karen

The moral competence questionnaire had four sub-scales which computed concern for common good, avoiding punishment, integrity and conformity to peer groups. The score was obtained by getting the mean and standard deviation of the respective items. The lowest possible score was zero and the highest was four.

Table 1 Level of Moral Competence

Scale of Moral Competence	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Concern for Common Good	385	2.5359	.90360
Avoiding Punishment	385	2.2710	.80409
Integrity	385	1.6632	.57934
Conformity to Peer Group	385	1.3584	.91743

Table 1 shows that the most prevalent type of moral competence was concern for the common good, with a mean of 2.5359, and a standard deviation of 0.90360. This was followed by avoiding punishment with a mean of 2.2710, and a standard deviation of 0.80409. The following two scales of moral competence scored below a mean of 2. For instance, integrity with mean of 1.6632 and standard deviation 0.57934, followed by conformity to peer group, with a mean of 1.3584 and a standard deviation of 0.91743. This shows that majority of the research participants scored medium in moral competence, followed by low moral competence. Only a few of them scored high in moral competence.

Gender Difference in Moral Competence of Undergraduate Students in Karen

Table 2 shows the moral competence of research participants in terms of gender differences.

Table 2 Gender differences in Moral Competence of Undergraduate Students

Gender of Participants		Avoiding Punishment	Conformity to Peer Group	Concern for Common Good	Integrity
Male	Mean	2.1800	1.4151	2.4397	1.6748
	N	163	163	163	163
	Std. Deviation	.84070	.92228	.93529	.58438
Female	Mean	2.3378	1.3168	2.6066	1.6547
	N	222	222	222	222
	Std. Deviation	.77120	.91368	.87499	.57679
Total	Mean	2.2710	1.3584	2.5359	1.6632
	N	385	385	385	385
	Std. Deviation	.80409	.91743	.90360	.57934

Table 2 shows that majority of both gender have concern for the common good. In concern for the common good, females scored a mean of 2.6066, with a standard deviation of 0.87499; while males scored a mean of 2.4397 and a standard deviation of 0.93529. The second scale, which scored above a mean of 2, measured avoiding punishment. Even in avoiding punishment, females scored slightly higher than males with a mean of 2.3378, with a standard deviation of 0.77120, while males scored a mean of 2.1800 and a standard deviation of 0.84070.

In the other two scales, both genders scored below a mean of 2. In the scale of integrity, males scored a mean of 1.6748 and a standard deviation of 0.58438; while the mean for the females was 1.6547, and the standard deviation was 0.57679. Similarly, in the scale of conformity to peer group, males scored a mean of 1.4151 and a standard deviation of 0.92228, while females scored a mean of 1.3168 and a standard deviation of 0.91368.

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Age Difference in the Level of Moral Competence among Undergraduate Students

Table 3 shows the four categories of age and moral competence among the research participants. The scale includes avoiding punishment, conformity to peer group, concern for common good and integrity. The results were presented in terms of mean and standard deviation.

Table 3 Age Difference in the Level of Moral Competence

Age of Participants		Avoiding Punishment	Conformity to Peer Group	Concern for Common Good	Integrity
15 to 20	Mean	2.4190	1.3091	2.6164	1.6723
	N	179	179	179	179
	Std. Deviation	.76363	.88969	.84391	.55020
21 to 25	Mean	2.2434	1.3865	2.5419	1.6503
	N	163	163	163	163
	Std. Deviation	.78047	.89114	.91706	.55655
26 to 30	Mean	1.6508	1.2857	2.0952	1.7619
	N	21	21	21	21
	Std. Deviation	.94561	.99043	1.10123	.76116
31 to 35	Mean	1.8636	1.6212	2.2576	1.5909
	N	22	22	22	22
	Std. Deviation	.76053	1.23140	.95912	.78297
Total	Mean	2.2710	1.3584	2.5359	1.6632
	N	385	385	385	385
	Std. Deviation	.80409	.91743	.90360	.57934

Table 3 shows that avoiding punishment, the research participants between the ages of 15 to 20 and 21 to 25 scored above a mean of 2, while the research participants between ages 26 to 30 and 30 to 31 scored below a mean of 2. On the other hand, research participants of all age groups scored above a mean of 2, in terms of concern for common good. On the contrary, in conformity to peer group and integrity, all categories of age scored below a mean of 2.

Religious Affiliation and Level of Moral Competence among Undergraduate Students

Table 4 shows that the level of moral competence among various religious affiliations. The level of moral competence was measured in four scales, such as avoiding punishment, conformity to peer group, concern for common good and integrity.

Table 4 Religious Difference in the Level of Moral Competence

Religion of Participants		Avoiding Punishment	Conformity to Peer Group	Concern for Common Good	Integrity
Catholic	Mean	2.2715	1.5056	2.6067	1.6835
	N	178	178	178	178
	Std. Deviation	.79503	.95157	.87522	.58788
Protestant	Mean	2.3219	1.2210	2.5276	1.6343
	N	175	175	175	175
	Std. Deviation	.79180	.85587	.87994	.54277
Moslem	Mean	1.9815	1.4444	2.1296	1.6667
	N	18	18	18	18
	Std. Deviation	.73629	.97686	.99764	.79212
Other	Mean	2.0000	1.0952	2.2619	1.7619
	N	14	14	14	14
	Std. Deviation	1.07814	.91920	1.28222	.64621
Total	Mean	2.2710	1.3584	2.5359	1.6632
	N	385	385	385	385
	Std. Deviation	.80409	.91743	.90360	.57934

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The research findings show that Catholic and Protestant participants scored above a mean of 2, in avoiding punishment, while Moslems and others scored below a mean of 2. On the other hand, in conformity to peer group and integrity, all religious affiliation scored below the average. On the contrary, in terms of concern for common good, the research participants from all religions scored above a mean of 2.

Peer pressure among Undergraduate Students in Karen

The peer pressure questionnaire had three sub-scales which, namely peer conformity, intrinsic pressure and extrinsic peer pressure. The score was obtained by getting the mean and standard deviation of the respective items. The lowest possible score was zero and the highest four.

Table 5 Level of Peer Pressure

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Peer Conformity	385	2.0623	.74215
Intrinsic Pressure	385	1.2643	.78465
Extrinsic Peer Pressure	385	1.0151	.73420

Table 5 shows that the most prevalent type of peer pressure was peer conformity, with a mean of 2.0623, and a standard deviation of 0.74215. This is followed by intrinsic pressure with a mean of 1.2643 and a standard deviation of 0.78465. The lowest prevalence was extrinsic peer pressure with a mean of 1.0151 and a standard deviation of 0.73420.

Relationship of Peer Pressure and Moral Competence among Undergraduate Students in Karen.

Table 22 clearly shows the correlation between peer pressure and moral competence among undergraduate students in Karen.

Table 22 Relationship between Peer Pressure and Moral Competence

Scales of both PP and MC		Avoiding Punishment	Conformity to Peer Group	Concern for Common Good	Integrity
Extrinsic Peer Pressure	Pearson Correlation	.167**	.285**	.135**	.038
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.008	.456
Intrinsic Pressure	Pearson Correlation	.196**	.246**	.153**	.097
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.003	.056
Peer Conformity	Pearson Correlation	.337**	.122*	.378**	.168**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.017	.000	.001
	N	385	385	385	385

The current research finding shows that there was correlation between the variables of peer pressure and moral competence among undergraduate students. The findings of the study reflect a weak positive, but a significant relationship between extrinsic peer pressure and avoiding punishment ($r = 0.167$, $P < 0.005$). Likewise, there was a weak positive but significant relationship between extrinsic peer pressure and conformity to peer group ($r =$

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0.285, $p < 0.005$). This implies that an increase in extrinsic peer pressure would lead to an increase in moral competence, including avoiding punishment and conformity to peer group. However, the study found a weak positive but insignificant relationship between extrinsic peer pressure and integrity ($r = 0.038$; $p > 0.005$). Likewise, there was a weak positive but insignificant relationship between extrinsic peer pressure and concern for the common good ($r = 0.135$, $p > 0.008$). An increase in extrinsic peer pressure would lead to a decrease in integrity and concern for the common good, even though this was as a result of chance.

In intrinsic pressure, the findings of the study reveal a weak positive but significant relationship with avoiding punishment, conformity to peer group and concern for the common good ($r = 0.196$, $p < 0.005$; $r = 0.246$, $p < 0.005$ and $r = 0.153$, $p < 0.005$) respectively. On the other hand, the study found a weak positive but insignificant relationship between intrinsic pressure and integrity ($r = 0.097$, $p > 0.005$).

In peer conformity, the findings of the study show a weak positive but significant relationship with avoiding punishment, concern for common good and integrity ($r = 0.337$, $p < 0.005$; $r = 0.378$, $p < 0.000$ and $r = 0.168$, $p < 0.001$) respectively. Nevertheless, the current study found a weak positive but insignificant relationship between peer conformity and conformity to peer group ($r = 0.122$, $p > 0.005$).

DISCUSSION

The findings of the current study showed that majority of the research participants' had concern for the common good. This is the Post-Conventional level in Kohlberg's (1958) theory of moral development stage five. The second group reflects those who fear punishment, and belong to the Pre-Conventional level of Kohlberg's theory. The third group with the scale of integrity belong to the Post-Conventional level, stage six. The last scale was conformity to peer group, which belongs to the Conventional level stage three and four.

Similar to the findings of the current study, a research conducted by Goethals (1999) also revealed that students' intellectual, social and moral competence is highly influenced by peers during college years. In addition, the findings of the current study agree with Kohlberg's theory in which those who scored high in moral competence belong to the post-conventional level, those of medium moral competence belong to the conventional level, and those of low moral competence belong to the Pre-Conventional level (Kohlberg, 1958). Kohlberg added that in the Conventional Level, (Stage Three) the individual's behavior is determined by social approval. The individual wants to maintain or win the affection and approval of others by being a "good person".

According to Kohlberg (1958), the Pre-Conventional level is externally controlled. Rules imposed by authority figures are conformed to in order to avoid punishment or receive rewards. This perspective involves the idea that what is right is what one can get away with or what is personally satisfying. In relation to the current study, the Pre-Conventional level of moral competence demonstrates that students who scored low in moral competence have external pressure in decision making for Kohlberg, conventional level conformity to social rules remains important for the individual. However, the emphasis shifts from self-interest to relationships with other people and social systems. The individual strives to support rules that are set forth by others such as parents, peers, and the government in order to win their approval or to maintain social order. Therefore, the findings of the current study and the

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Kohlberg's (1958) moral development theory agreed on one point, that is, the moral competence of majority of people appears to be at the Conventional level.

The findings revealed that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of females and males. Similar to the findings of the current study, a research conducted by Karamavrou, Mouratidou, Evaggelinou, Koidou, and Parisi, (2016) shows that gender difference does not affect the moral competence of individuals. Additionally, a research conducted by Abdel-Hadi (2017) revealed that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of female and male students on the level of moral competence.

A research conducted by Benware, Schuermyer, Ranganathan, Madge, Krishnamurthy, Tamarapalli, Tsai, and Rajsiki, (2003) reveals that moral competence is influenced more by the person's personality than by his age or one's level of education. Similar findings were realized by Duska and Whelan (1975), revealing that by and large the Pre-conventional level includes pre-adolescent children (10-13), although it may also include some adults who have been fixated in their development. In agreement to Duska and Whelan's findings, show that some of the current research participants may also be fixated in the Pre-conventional level, because a good number of the students scored low on moral competence.

Similar to the findings of the current study, Evaline (2017), Jarrar (2013), Jebungei (2013), and Githui (2009) found that peer pressure pushes young people to change their attitudes, values, feelings, thinking, decisions, and living styles in order to conform to their peer group. Those who feel accepted by their peer groups are more likely to feel good about themselves and those who were rejected by their peers feel less valued. This is clearly an example of extrinsic peer pressure and peer conformity. At the same time, this pressure can be positive or negative. If it is negative, it encourages negative attitudes, reduces the strength of a person and leads towards failure in all aspects of their lives (Akhtar & Aziz, 2011). Another conducted by Brox (2011) revealed that peer pressure is directly perceived as the ability of one person to cause a change of moral competence in another person. This direct perceived force affects the intellectual, social, and moral competence of students. This type of pressure is highly manifested during college years (Goethals, 1999). Likewise, a research conducted by Burns and Darling (2002); Ukwayi, Eja and Unwanede (2012) reveals the strong positive and significant relationship between peer pressure and students' moral competence. In the current study the finding reveals weak positive but significant relationship between the variables of peer pressure and students' moral competence. Especially, in the Kenyan context, the relationship of peer pressure and students' moral competence in high school and universities were manifested in terms of stealing, drug abuse, imprudent sexual activities, dropping out from schools, rioting, violence, and missing classes.

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Conflict of Interest

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