



## Research Article

# Character Education and Moral Concepts from Lichona's and Kohlberg's Perspectives

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### Abstract

This study aimed to explore the moral concepts developed by Lichona and Kohlberg, analyzing their relevance and application within character education. Through a literature review and comparative analysis, this study examined the key principles of both Lichona's and Kohlberg's theories, particularly in relation to character development and moral education in educational settings. By employing a qualitative approach, the study explored how the core ideas from both theorists can be effectively integrated into character education curricula and teaching practices. The findings suggested that, while there are differences in the theoretical underpinnings of the two theories, both provided valuable insights for teaching morality in schools. The study proposed that an integrated approach, combining the strengths of both Lichona's and Kohlberg's frameworks, can offer a richer and more comprehensive model for fostering moral development and character education in schools.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the context of modern education, the development of students' morals and characters is an essential aspect that cannot be overlooked. Morality serves not only as a foundation for shaping positive behavior but also as a compass that guides students in navigating various dilemmas and challenges in daily life. Amid the diversity of moral theories, those developed by Lichona and Kohlberg provide rich and profound perspectives on morality and character education. Although differing in certain respects, both theories share a common objective of understanding how morality evolves within individuals and how education can play a pivotal role in this process (Ambarwati et al., 2023).

This study aimed to explore the concept of morality from the perspectives of Lichona and Kohlberg, as well as its application in character education. Through a literature review and comparative analysis approach, this study aimed to compare and examine the moral theories developed by both thinkers. Specifically, the study focused on how the moral principles of Lichona and Kohlberg can be applied in character education within schools. Using a qualitative approach, the study identified the key principles of both theories and considers their integration into curricula and effective character education practices.

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In addition, this study also highlighted the importance of moral education in the context of contemporary education, which is increasingly confronted with the complexities of moral and ethical challenges. By understanding and integrating the concepts from Lichona and Kohlberg's theories, it is expected to provide new insights into the development of character education that is not only effective but also relevant to the needs of students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The results of this study are expected to demonstrate that, despite differences in some aspects of the theories of the two thinkers, both make significant contributions to the understanding and teaching of morality in education. By combining the strengths of both theories, it is hoped that a more comprehensive and profound character education framework can be developed, one that equips students with a strong moral understanding and the ability to apply it in real-life situations.

## METHOD

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach to explore and compare the moral concepts in the perspectives of Lichona and Kohlberg, as well as their applications in character education. The qualitative method was chosen due to its ability to deeply understand social phenomena from the internal perspective of the subjects involved, particularly regarding the concepts of morality and character education.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Morality is ingrained in an individual's soul through a long process and is difficult to change. Character, or morality, is a condition of the heart that readily prompts actions without clear thought. The nobility of human beings lies in the elevation of their morals, which is reflected in their everyday behavior. The goodness of morals is centered on four main aspects: a good soul, a healthy body, external goodness, and the goodness of guidance. Moral thinking is a crucial aspect in the development of character and individual personality. Two prominent figures in moral thought are Thomas Lichona and Lawrence Kohlberg. The following is an in-depth explanation of the moral thinking of Lichona and Kohlberg.

### Discussion of Moral Concepts from Lichona's Perspective in Character Education

The moral concept promoted by Lichona plays an important role in character education, focusing on the development of ethical values and individual integrity. Lichona emphasizes that moral education must be rooted in a deep understanding of oneself and the surrounding society, as well as the importance of building a strong character. In his work, Lichona highlights that morality is not just about distinguishing right from wrong, but also includes the development of a character that can make a positive contribution to society (Setyabudi, 2020). This reflects the view that moral education should aim to shape individuals who not only understand moral values but are also capable of applying them in everyday life through tangible actions.

In the context of education, Lichona's moral concept is applied through an approach that integrates character education into the school curriculum. Lichona argued that character education should not only teach students about norms and values but also encourage them to actively engage in social activities that strengthen their understanding of social responsibility (Setyabudi, 2020). This type of education aims to create a learning environment that focuses not only on academic achievement but also on the development of empathy and the ability to understand others' perspectives. According to Lichona, moral education should serve as a tool to build a more inclusive and tolerant society, where every individual can appreciate differences and collaborate for the common good (Setyabudi, 2020).

However, Lichona's moral approach is not without criticism. Some critics argue that his idealistic approach may overlook the complex social realities and challenges individuals face within society (Setyabudi, 2020). They assert that moral education focused solely on character development may neglect the importance of cultivating critical and analytical skills necessary to address broader social issues. This critique emphasizes the need for a more pragmatic approach to moral education, one that not only emphasizes character but also fosters critical thinking skills essential for tackling complex issues (Setyabudi, 2020).

Despite the criticisms, many of Lichona's supporters continue to argue that character-based moral education is highly relevant in shaping individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also possess integrity and strong social concern. They believe that moral education integrated into character education has the potential to create a generation capable of thinking critically while remaining committed to strong ethical values (Setyabudi, 2020). This suggests that, although Lichona's approach may require adjustments and balance, its foundational principles remain important and beneficial in the context of modern education.

The application of Lichona's moral concept in character education carries significant implications for educational policy. A curriculum designed based on Lichona's principles emphasizes the holistic development of students, where academic knowledge and character building progress hand in hand (Setyabudi, 2020). This approach necessitates schools to create environments that encourage students to develop moral awareness through reflection, dialogue, and participation in community activities that foster positive character formation. Such an educational framework transforms schools into platforms not only for knowledge transfer but also for cultivating a generation that is ethical and socially responsible.

However, implementing this concept also presents practical challenges. Schools may struggle to balance academic demands with the need to develop students' character. Additionally, there are concerns that an excessive focus on moral education could divert attention from other subjects that are equally crucial for intellectual development (Setyabudi, 2020). Therefore, it is vital for educators and policymakers to adopt a balanced approach, ensuring that moral education is an integral part of the curriculum without compromising other essential educational components.

In conclusion, Lichona's moral concept offers profound and valuable insights into character education, albeit requiring adjustments to address the challenges and complexities of the modern world. By integrating moral values into education, we can aspire to produce a generation that is not only knowledgeable but also ethical and socially responsible (Setyabudi, 2020). This underscores that effective moral education is not merely about teaching what is right and wrong but also about shaping character capable of functioning well within a diverse and complex society.

According to Lichona, moral education should involve deep reflection and constructive dialogue between students and educators. This process allows students to internalize moral values relevant to their lives and develop a deeper understanding of social responsibility (Setyabudi, 2020). In this context, moral education serves not only as a tool to instill ethical values but also as a means to empower students to become agents of change in their communities. Thus, Lichona's approach has the potential to cultivate a generation capable of critical thinking, acting with integrity, and making positive contributions to the world around them.

While examining the various perspectives and critiques of Lichona's moral concept, it is essential to recognize that no single approach to moral education is flawless. Each has its strengths and weaknesses, and the success of moral education lies in adapting these approaches to the social context and the needs of students. In this regard, Lichona's perspective provides a solid foundation for developing character education but requires adaptation and innovation to function effectively in diverse educational contexts (Setyabudi, 2020). By acknowledging this, a more holistic and inclusive approach to moral education can be created—one that emphasizes not only character development but also the intellectual and social growth of students.

### **Discussion on Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development in Character Education**

Kohlberg's theory of moral development provides a foundational framework for understanding how individuals progress in moral reasoning. This theory outlines six stages of moral development, grouped into three primary levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Each stage reflects a distinct approach to moral reasoning, ranging from self-interest to a deeper understanding of justice and ethical principles (Kuswandi, 2020). At the pre-conventional level, moral reasoning is primarily influenced by adherence to rules and external consequences. The conventional level focuses on meeting social expectations,

while the post-conventional level embodies moral reasoning based on universal and abstract principles, which guide ethical decision-making (Dakin, 2014).

The application of Kohlberg's theory in character education has significant implications, particularly in fostering structured approaches to enhance students' moral reasoning. Educators can utilize Kohlberg's stages to design curricula that encourage students to engage in moral dilemmas and ethical discussions, promoting advanced levels of moral reasoning (Dellaportas, 2006). A study suggests that interventions emphasizing ethical dialogue can positively impact students' moral development, guiding them toward higher stages of moral reasoning (Nemcov, 2018). Furthermore, integrating Kohlberg's framework into educational practices allows students to grasp the importance of ethical decision-making in real-life contexts, thus improving moral judgment and character development (Molina, 2015).

Despite its widespread acceptance, Kohlberg's theory has faced notable criticisms. A primary critique concerns its perceived gender bias. Carol Gilligan argued that Kohlberg's model reflects a male-oriented moral perspective that prioritizes justice over care (Jørgensen, 2006; Lourenço, 2019). This debate raises questions about the universality of Kohlberg's stages across cultures and genders, with some researchers suggesting that moral reasoning may vary depending on context (Moroney, 2006). These critiques highlight the need to adapt Kohlberg's framework to better account for diversity in moral reasoning across cultural and gender contexts, ensuring its relevance and applicability in varied educational settings.

Beyond the critique of gender bias, Kohlberg's theory has been scrutinized for its limitations in capturing the complexity of moral reasoning in real-life situations. Critics argue that Kohlberg's stages do not fully account for the dynamic nature of moral reasoning when individuals face conflicting values and complex ethical dilemmas (Moroney, 2006; Belgasem-Hussain & Hussaien, 2020). For instance, in scenarios where one must choose between two opposing values, Kohlberg's framework may fall short in explaining how moral decisions are made. This highlights the growing need to develop a more nuanced understanding of moral development that incorporates diverse perspectives and contexts.

Despite these criticisms, Kohlberg's stages of moral development remain a foundational element in the study of morality and character education. The framework not only facilitates an understanding of how moral reasoning evolves but also serves as a valuable tool for educators in designing interventions aimed at enhancing students' ethical decision-making abilities (Dellaportas, 2006). By applying Kohlberg's theory, educators can guide students to not only comprehend but also internalize ethical principles that can serve as a compass in various life contexts.

In educational practice, Kohlberg's theory can be implemented through diverse methods, such as classroom discussions centered on moral dilemmas, collaborative projects that require teamwork, and personal reflections that encourage students to evaluate their own moral values. These approaches not only help students grasp the stages of moral reasoning outlined by Kohlberg but also motivate them to progress to higher levels of reasoning through meaningful learning experiences (Molina, 2015). Consequently, moral education grounded in Kohlberg's theory can effectively nurture students' intellectual growth while fostering strong moral character, equipping them to navigate ethical challenges with confidence and integrity.

While Kohlberg's theory provides a valuable framework for understanding moral development, its application in education requires careful adjustments to align with students' social and cultural contexts. For instance, in settings where communal values are prioritized over individual rights, Kohlberg's emphasis on individual-based moral reasoning might need to be adapted to reflect collective values more effectively (Jørgensen, 2006). This demonstrates that while Kohlberg's theory offers a robust foundation for moral education, its adaptability is crucial for ensuring its relevance across diverse contexts.

In conclusion, Kohlberg's theory of moral development presents a significant framework for understanding the evolution of moral reasoning and its integration into character education. By incorporating

this theory into educational practices, educators can encourage students to develop higher moral reasoning skills, thereby enhancing their character and preparing them for real-world ethical challenges. However, recognizing the limitations of the theory and making thoughtful adjustments to address cultural and gender diversity remains essential. As such, Kohlberg's theory remains a relevant and influential tool in the study of morality and education but requires ongoing evaluation and refinement to provide a more inclusive guide to moral development.

The moral theories proposed by Thomas Lichona and Lawrence Kohlberg offer complementary insights into the understanding of moral development and character education. While both emphasize the importance of moral growth in shaping individuals, their approaches differ significantly. Kohlberg is renowned for his stage-based moral development theory, which focuses on cognitive aspects, whereas Lichona highlights the integration of knowledge, emotions, and actions in character education. These distinct approaches reflect their perspectives on how morality develops and the role of education in fostering strong moral character (Kuswandi, 2020; Hafizi, 2023).

### **Similarities Between Lichona's and Kohlberg's Theories**

A key similarity between Lichona's and Kohlberg's theories lies in their shared belief that moral education is a crucial process in shaping morally upright individuals. Both theories emphasize that morality extends beyond cognitive understanding, encompassing actions and behaviors that reflect moral values (Kuswandi, 2020; Söderhamn et al., 2011). Kohlberg developed a theory centered on stages of moral development, where individuals progress from basic moral reasoning to more complex levels through six stages categorized into three main levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional (Kuswandi, 2020). Meanwhile, Lichona argued that character education should foster good habits and moral values within a social context, emphasizing the integration of moral knowledge, emotions, and actions (Hafizi, 2023; Prasetya, 2020). Despite their differing approaches, both theories agree that moral education must engage all dimensions of an individual's development.

### **Differences Between Lichona's and Kohlberg's Theories**

Although both theories aim to develop moral individuals, Lichona and Kohlberg differ significantly in their approaches and emphases. Kohlberg's theory focuses primarily on the cognitive dimension of morality, proposing that moral reasoning evolves systematically through defined stages. According to Kohlberg, individuals advance from morality based on obedience to rules and external consequences to a more abstract and universal understanding of moral principles (Krebs & Denton, 2005; Magun-Jackson, 2004). In contrast, Lichona advocates for a more holistic approach to moral education that incorporates emotional and social development while stressing the importance of actions that embody moral values (Hafizi, 2023; Prasetya, 2020). Lichona argues that morality is not merely about ethical reasoning but also about consistently acting in alignment with those values in daily life. This approach underscores the importance of character education that goes beyond cognitive aspects, focusing instead on cultivating habits that align with moral principles.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of Each Theory in the Context of Character Education**

Both theories present unique strengths and weaknesses that are essential to consider within the framework of character education. Kohlberg's theory is praised for its clear and systematic structure, which allows educators to identify the stages of students' moral development and design appropriate interventions (Söderhamn et al., 2011; Magun-Jackson, 2004). However, its primary weakness lies in its heavy emphasis on cognitive reasoning, often neglecting the social and emotional contexts that influence moral decision-making (Krebs & Denton, 2005; Lourenço, 2019). This limitation poses challenges when applying Kohlberg's framework to real-world scenarios, where moral reasoning is inherently tied to emotional and situational factors.

Lichona's theory, on the other hand, is lauded for its holistic and practical approach to character education. By focusing on the development of good habits and the internalization of moral values, it equips students to not only understand but also embody these values in everyday life (Hafizi, 2023; Prasetya, 2020). However, a notable limitation is the lack of a clear structure for measuring moral development, which can make it challenging for educators to assess students' progress (Kuswandi, 2020; Prasetya, 2020). In the context of education, combining the strengths of both theories could yield a more balanced approach to character education. The structured insights from Kohlberg's framework can be paired with Lichona's emphasis on emotional and practical dimensions, creating an educational model that fosters both moral reasoning and actionable character development.

### **Integrating Lichona and Kohlberg's Theories in Character Education**

Achieving a holistic and effective approach to character education requires integrating elements from both Lichona's and Kohlberg's theories. Kohlberg's framework provides a systematic way to understand students' stages of moral development, while Lichona's principles emphasize building strong character through daily practices (Kuswandi, 2020; Hafizi, 2023). For instance, educators can leverage Kohlberg's stages to assess students' moral reasoning and then apply Lichona's strategies to foster habits aligned with moral values. This dual approach encourages students not only to think ethically but also to act in accordance with these values in their everyday lives.

Furthermore, this integration reinforces the idea that morality extends beyond rule compliance or abstract reasoning; it also encompasses interactions with others and decision-making within complex social contexts (Prasetya, 2020). In this regard, character education serves not merely as a tool for teaching moral values but as a means to develop individuals capable of critical thinking and acting with integrity. By combining Kohlberg's cognitive perspective and Lichona's holistic approach, educators can create a learning environment that supports comprehensive moral development.

### **The Importance of a Multidimensional Approach in Moral Education**

A multidimensional approach in moral education is crucial to ensure that students not only develop moral reasoning but also internalize these values in their everyday lives. This approach involves active student engagement in various activities that support character development, such as classroom discussions on moral dilemmas, participation in social projects, and personal reflections on moral values (Hafizi, 2023; Kuswandi, 2020). Moreover, it is essential to create a supportive school environment where moral values are applied in every aspect of school life, from teacher-student interactions to school policies and practices as a whole.

Thus, this multidimensional approach not only helps students understand and internalize moral values but also enables them to apply these values in their daily lives. This is the essence of effective character education, where students not only learn to think ethically but also act in ways that reflect the moral values they have learned (Prasetya, 2020). In this context, Lichona's and Kohlberg's theories can be seen as two sides of the same coin, together forming a strong foundation for holistic and effective moral education.

Overall, the moral theories developed by Thomas Lichona and Lawrence Kohlberg make significant contributions to our understanding of moral development and character education. Although they take different approaches, both emphasize the importance of moral development in shaping individuals who are morally sound. By integrating elements from both theories, educators can create a more balanced and effective character education approach, which not only develops students' moral reasoning but also shapes their character comprehensively (Kuswandi, 2020; Hafizi, 2023). This is a crucial step in creating a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also morally strong, prepared to face ethical challenges in their lives.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored the depth of moral concepts from the perspectives of Lichona and Kohlberg, along with their applications in character education. Through a comparative and integrative analysis, it was revealed

that both theories made significant contributions to the understanding and teaching of morality within the context of education.

Although Lichona and Kohlberg have different approaches to understanding moral development, both acknowledged the significant role that social and cultural environments play in shaping individual moral values. Integration in Character Education: The integration of Lichona's and Kohlberg's moral concepts into character education can be achieved through a curriculum design that aligns the moral development stages from both theories, alongside the use of teaching strategies that reinforce students' identities and moral values. The integration of these moral concepts had significant practical implications for shaping students' character. Through comprehensive moral education, it is expected to enhance students' moral awareness and contribute to the development of a more morally responsible society. Relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: In light of the increasing moral and ethical complexities within modern society, character education based on the integration of Lichona's and Kohlberg's moral concepts becomes increasingly relevant and essential in fostering a morally resilient generation.

Thus, this study reaffirmed that the combined approach of Lichona's and Kohlberg's moral theories can provide a more comprehensive and effective framework for shaping students' character and fostering strong moral values in the context of character education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### RECOMMENDATION

This study provides in-depth insights into the synergy between Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development theory and Thomas Lichona's character education approach in the context of school character education. However, several areas can be further improved and developed. First, it is recommended to conduct further study involving empirical tests of the application of these theories at various educational levels to quantitatively measure their effectiveness. Second, the integration of character values within the curriculum needs to be tailored to the local cultural context and the needs of the learners, ensuring it has a more relevant impact. Lastly, the collaborative role between schools, families, and communities in supporting character education needs to be strengthened, which can be enhanced through more structured and sustainable intervention programs. Future study that combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches is also recommended to generate more comprehensive data.

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