

Moral development and its relevance to contemporary education: A comparative perspective of Ibn Miskawayh and Kohlberg

Muslikhul Ibad^{✉1}, Nunung Dwi Setiyorini²

^{1,2}Universitas Selamat Sri, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of moral development theories proposed by Ibn Miskawayh, a classical Islamic ethical philosopher, and Lawrence Kohlberg, a moral development psychologist. It also seeks to identify points of convergence and divergence between their moral concepts that have practical relevance for moral education in the contemporary era.

Design/methods/approach – This research employs a qualitative approach, drawing on a literature review and comparative conceptual analysis. Data were collected through an in-depth examination of the primary works of Ibn Miskawayh and Kohlberg, as well as of previous scholarly works discussing their ideas. The analysis compared essential aspects, including educational objectives, curriculum content, educational methods, moral foundations, and moral characteristics.

Findings – The study finds a fundamental paradigmatic difference between the two theories. Ibn Miskawayh's theory is grounded in the Islamic-Aristotelian ethical tradition, with the ultimate goal of moral education being the attainment of true happiness (*al-sa'ādah al-ḥaqīqīyyah*). In contrast, Kohlberg's theory is rooted in cognitive constructivism, focusing on the development of moral reasoning through a series of universal stages culminating in the Universal Ethical Principle of justice. Nevertheless, both thinkers agree that moral development is a hierarchical process that involves the function of reason (*'aql*) as the primary determinant in the transition toward mature, internally grounded moral principles.

Research implications/limitations – The findings indicate the need for a comprehensive approach to moral education. Ibn Miskawayh's model is highly relevant for emphasizing character formation and the affective and spiritual dimensions of morality through habituation, which serve as the foundation of moral behavior. Meanwhile, Kohlberg's model is particularly relevant for developing students' cognitive abilities and critical moral reasoning. The integration of these two perspectives offers a more holistic framework that balances character formation with the development of moral reasoning capacities.

Originality/value – This study contributes to building a theoretical bridge and fostering interdisciplinary dialogue between Islamic ethical philosophy and developmental psychology, offering new insights for addressing the challenges of contemporary moral education.

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CONTACT: ✉ muslikhulibad@gmail.com

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Introduction

Moral education and character formation have become urgent and interconnected topics of discussion in contemporary educational discourse. This discussion is essential as a direct response to the increasing prevalence of immoral behavior in schools and broader society. Educational experts have observed a serious moral decline, making the study and implementation of character education an increasingly urgent necessity (Faiz & Purwati, 2022).

In responding to the moral crisis affecting contemporary education, character education has been established as a crucial discourse. Although policy interventions, such as the Character Education Strengthening Program (Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter/PPK), have been introduced to instill ethical values in school environments, the effectiveness of their implementation remains questionable. In practice, such programs tend to be limited to ceremonial activities and fail to address the substantive aspects of students' moral formation. Empirical realities in the field, including the prevalence of behavioral deviations—such as bullying, intolerance, and sexual misconduct—among students, underscore the limited success of character education in fostering noble and integrated personalities (Nisa, 2025).

The essence of moral education lies in efforts to develop human potential toward ethical perfection. Its objective is to shape individuals who are consistently open to goodness while rejecting various forms of wrongdoing, thereby attaining the status of morally responsible human beings. Beyond mere information transmission, authentic moral education is a process of deeply internalizing values, making them the primary foundation that guides individuals in decision-making and action (Miswar, 2020).

Two influential figures who have made significant contributions to the concept of moral development in both Islamic and Western traditions are Abū 'Alī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb Ibn Miskawayh and Lawrence Kohlberg. Ibn Miskawayh was a classical Muslim philosopher renowned for his profound attention to ethics and moral education. His thought plays a pivotal role as a bridge between rational ethical concepts inherited from Greek civilization and moral teachings rooted in Islam. His monumental contribution is recorded in his major work, *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq wa Taḥīr al-A'rāq* (Salamah, 2025). Meanwhile, Lawrence Kohlberg, a contemporary psychologist, expanded Jean Piaget's theory of moral development by introducing a six-stage model organized into three levels. This model maps the entire spectrum of moral development, ranging from simple rule compliance to the highest stage, in which individuals act based on universal ethical principles they personally endorse (Safitri & Dewantoro, 2025).

Although emerging from different epistemological traditions—classical Islamic ethical philosophy and Western developmental psychology—the thoughts of Ibn Miskawayh and Lawrence Kohlberg both place reason at the center of moral development. Nevertheless, they differ fundamentally in their understanding of the nature of morality, the goals of moral education, and the strategies for moral cultivation. Ibn Miskawayh prioritizes morality as a stable inner character formed through habituation, whereas Kohlberg emphasizes morality as a progressive and reflective cognitive process (Wahidah & Maemonah, 2020).

Several previous studies have examined Ibn Miskawayh's thought within the context of Islamic moral education. Abdullah (2020) asserts that Ibn Miskawayh's concept of morality is oriented toward the formation of inner character through habituation and self-

discipline as the foundation of Islamic education. Similar findings are reported by Huda (2021) and Hanifah and Bakar (2024), who demonstrate that Ibn Miskawayh's ideas remain relevant to modern education because they emphasize balance among cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions. However, these studies are generally descriptive–normative in nature and focus on a single figure, without engaging in theoretical dialogue with modern moral development theories.

On the other hand, studies on Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development theory in education have been widely conducted from the perspectives of modern psychology and pedagogy. Hasanah (2019) and Ibda (2023) explain that Kohlberg's theory provides a systematic framework for understanding students' moral reasoning development through hierarchical cognitive stages. Other studies highlight the application of Kohlberg's theory in character education and Islamic religious education, particularly through the use of moral dilemma discussion methods (Nida, 2013; Budiman & Mubarak, 2025). Nevertheless, these studies tend to position Kohlberg's theory as a standalone framework, without critically contextualizing it within Islamic ethical traditions.

Several studies have also begun to adopt comparative approaches in examining the moral thought of Islamic and Western figures, such as comparative studies of Ibn Miskawayh and Ibn Sahnūn (Luthfiyani et al., 2024) or conceptual analyses of Kohlberg's moral development theory from an Islamic perspective (Asfiyah, 2023). However, such comparative efforts remain limited to general conceptual aspects and have not systematically linked epistemological differences, educational objectives, curricula, and moral cultivation methods within an applicable educational framework. Moreover, the integrative dimension between character formation (*akhlāq*) and the development of cognitive moral reasoning has not yet been explicitly formulated as a comprehensive model of moral education.

Based on this review, a significant research gap exists in the field of moral education, particularly in comparative studies that bridge classical Islamic ethical traditions and Western moral development psychology in an applied manner. There remains a lack of in-depth research systematically comparing and integrating Ibn Miskawayh's concept of morality with Kohlberg's moral development theory as a conceptual foundation for moral education relevant to contemporary educational contexts.

In light of this background, this study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of moral development concepts proposed by Ibn Miskawayh and Lawrence Kohlberg and to examine their relevance and implications within contemporary education. Specifically, this study seeks to: (1) identify the philosophical and psychological foundations of moral development according to both figures; (2) analyze similarities and differences in moral concepts, educational goals, curricula, and methods of moral cultivation; and (3) formulate the potential integration of both perspectives as a conceptual framework for moral education that balances character formation with the development of moral reasoning.

Accordingly, this study is expected to make a theoretical contribution by bridging the dialogue between Islamic ethical philosophy and modern moral development psychology, while also offering a conceptual foundation for a more comprehensive, contextual, and responsive moral education.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research. The qualitative approach was selected because the research objective focuses on an in-depth

understanding of the concepts, meanings, and structures of the thinkers' ideas, rather than on the quantitative measurement of variables (Sugiyono, 2018). Library research is appropriate, as the object of analysis consists of ideas and theories of moral development derived from philosophical and psychological works, both classical and contemporary.

The approach adopted in this study is a comparative–conceptual approach. This approach was chosen because the study aims to compare two systems of thought originating in different epistemological traditions: classical Islamic ethical philosophy (Ibn Miskawayh) and modern Western moral development psychology (Lawrence Kohlberg). The comparative approach enables the researcher to systematically identify similarities, differences, and conceptual points of convergence, thereby generating a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of moral development and its implications for education. Moreover, this approach responds to the limitations of previous studies, which tend to examine the thoughts of Ibn Miskawayh and Kohlberg separately and partially. By directly comparing the two figures, this study seeks to foster theoretical dialogue across Islamic and Western traditions and to formulate an integrative and applicable conceptual framework for moral education in contemporary educational contexts.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the principal works of Ibn Miskawayh, particularly *Tahdhīb al-Akhālāq wa Taḥhīr al-A'rāq*, as well as significant works and publications by Lawrence Kohlberg addressing cognitive moral development theory. Secondary sources comprise scholarly journal articles, academic books, and previous studies relevant to moral development, character education, and Islamic education, including works that discuss Ibn Miskawayh, Kohlberg, and comparative studies of both figures.

This research was conducted through several systematic stages, namely: literature identification, literature selection, literature analysis, and synthesis and comparison. To ensure that the comparison was carried out in a structured and objective manner, the study employed a comparative framework based on several key dimensions: moral ontology, moral epistemology, and pedagogical implications. Data analysis was conducted through concept categorization, the construction of a comparative matrix, and the derivation of educational implications.

Result

The results of this study are presented based on the established research questions, namely: (1) the conceptual foundations of moral development according to Ibn Miskawayh and Lawrence Kohlberg; (2) the similarities and differences in their views on the nature of morality and moral education; and (3) the conceptual implications of both theories within the context of contemporary moral education. The presentation of the results is organized thematically and comparatively, in accordance with the research analysis stages.

1. The Concept of Moral Development from the Perspective of Ibn Miskawayh

A brief overview of Ibn Miskawayh reveals his close association with the study of *akhlāq* (moral ethics). Ethics constituted the central focus of his philosophical inquiry, leading to his recognition as the Father of Islamic Moral Philosophy. This title is attributed to his significant contribution in systematically formulating moral philosophy within the Islamic intellectual tradition (Fathurrahman & Nasaruddin, 2023). Ibn Miskawayh, whose full name was Abū 'Alī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Miskawayh, was born in Rayy, Iran, in 330 AH/932 CE and passed away in Isfahan in 421 AH/1030 CE (Triandana et al., 2024).

Ibn Miskawayh's thoughts on morality represent one of the most influential contributions to the tradition of Islamic moral philosophy. He is widely recognized for his success in integrating classical Greek ethical thought—particularly that of Aristotle and Plato—with Islamic teachings derived from the Qur'an and Hadith (Salamah, 2025). His ideas were shaped by the social, political, and cultural context of his time. Ibn Miskawayh was also known for his intellectual tolerance toward various schools of thought, including Greek philosophy, which fostered a conducive environment for scholars to develop ideas without significant pressure from political authorities (Luthfiyani et al., 2024).

Based on an analysis of Ibn Miskawayh's principal work, *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq wa Taṭhīr al-A'rāq*, as well as supporting literature, it was found that his concept of morality is rooted in Islamic philosophical ethics that emphasize the formation of moral character (akhlāq) as a stable inner disposition (malakah). Morality is understood as a disposition of the soul that motivates individuals to act spontaneously without requiring prolonged rational deliberation. Accordingly, morality is not conceived as a situational response, but rather as a relatively stable internal character trait (Akbar & Alkhadafi, 2025).

Ibn Miskawayh further explains that the formation of moral character is influenced by two main factors: innate disposition (*fiṭrah*) and habits acquired through repeated practice. These findings indicate that, according to Ibn Miskawayh, morality is educative in nature and can be developed through a systematic educational process. Moral education is not merely intended to convey normative knowledge of right and wrong, but more importantly, to cultivate moral habits through habituation, role modeling, and self-discipline (Permadi & Hidayah, 2024).

Furthermore, the analysis shows that Ibn Miskawayh constructs his concept of moral development through the theory of the three faculties of the soul: the rational faculty (*al-quwwah al-nāṭiqah*), the irascible faculty (*al-quwwah al-ghaḍabiyyah*), and the appetitive faculty (*al-quwwah al-shahwiyyah*). These three faculties must remain in balance for human beings to achieve moral perfection. An imbalance in any one of these faculties may lead to extreme behavior and moral deviation. From the harmony of these faculties emerge four principal virtues—wisdom (*hikmah*), courage (*shajā'ah*), temperance (*iffah*), and justice (*ʿadālah*)—which form the foundation of all moral behavior (Luthfiyani et al., 2024).

Thus, the findings indicate that, according to Ibn Miskawayh, moral development is holistic and integrative, encompassing rational, affective, and spiritual dimensions. Morality is evaluated not merely based on outward actions, but on the quality of the inner disposition that underlies those actions. The ultimate goal of moral education in Ibn Miskawayh's perspective is the attainment of true happiness (*al-sa'ādah al-ḥaqīqīyyah*) through the perfection of the soul and moral character.

2. The Concept of Moral Development from the Perspective of Lawrence Kohlberg

A brief overview of Lawrence Kohlberg indicates that he was born in Bronxville, New York, on October 25, 1925, and passed away in 1997. He was a prominent American psychologist widely recognized for his studies on moral development. Kohlberg's interest in Jean Piaget's theory—particularly through Piaget's work *The Moral Judgment of the Child*—motivated him to conduct in-depth research on how children develop moral decision-making abilities (Safitri & Dewantoro, 2025). His research culminated in the completion of his doctoral dissertation in 1958, which later became known as Kohlberg's stages of moral development (Suparno, 2020). Formally, Kohlberg's theory of moral development is referred to as the cognitive moral development theory (Hasanah, 2019).

The analysis of Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development theory shows that morality is understood as an individual's capacity to reason and make rational moral decisions. Kohlberg conceptualizes moral development as a cognitive process that unfolds progressively and hierarchically as an individual's cognitive structures develop. Within this framework, morality is not determined merely by obedience to external rules, but rather by the quality of moral reasoning that underlies a particular decision.

Kohlberg classifies moral development into three primary levels—pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional—each consisting of two stages (Hanafiah, 2024), as described below.

2.1. Pre-Conventional Level (Ages 4–10)

This level is commonly found in children, although similar patterns of moral reasoning may also be exhibited by adults in certain situations. At this level, judgments of right and wrong are based on the immediate consequences of an action. Moral reasoning remains egocentric, as individuals view situations primarily from a personal perspective. The pre-conventional level consists of two initial stages of moral development:

(1) Stage One: Obedience and Punishment Orientation

At this stage, individuals evaluate actions based on the punishment associated with them. The more severe the punishment, the stronger the belief that the action is wrong. Moral judgment is more concerned with avoiding punishment than with understanding broader moral principles. In this condition, individuals also tend to obey authority figures because authorities possess the power to impose sanctions.

(2) Stage Two: Individualism and Self-Interest Orientation

At this stage, individuals consider an action to be correct if it brings personal benefit or satisfaction. Concern for the needs of others is limited and typically arises only insofar as it serves one's own interests or personal gain.

2.2. Conventional Level (Ages 10–13)

This level of moral development typically emerges from adolescence into adulthood. At this stage, individuals base their moral judgments on norms and standards that are generally accepted within society. The conventional level is divided into two stages:

(1) Stage Three: Interpersonal Relationships Orientation

Interpersonal relationships strongly influence moral judgment at this stage. Individuals assess actions based on their impact on social relations, such as respect, gratitude, and the principle of reciprocity—“treat others as you would like to be treated.” They strive to conform to rules in order to maintain social harmony and gain recognition as good individuals.

(2) Stage Four: Law and Order Orientation

At this stage, moral orientation shifts toward obedience to laws and the maintenance of social order. Individuals view rules, laws, and conventions as essential elements for sustaining society. Moral principles are no longer based solely on social approval, but on the belief that laws must be upheld to ensure social stability.

2.3. Post-Conventional Level

This level typically develops from the age of 13 onward, when individuals begin to evaluate moral actions based on more abstract and universal principles. The post-conventional level consists of two stages:

(1) Stage Five: Social Contract Orientation

Individuals become aware of and respect diverse perspectives and values without discrimination. Social rules are understood as flexible social contracts rather than rigid regulations.

(2) Stage Six: Universal Ethical Principles Orientation

At this highest stage, individuals judge actions based on universal moral principles such as justice, human dignity, and respect for human rights. Laws are considered legitimate only if they align with principles of justice; conversely, unjust laws may be challenged or rejected (Budiman & Mubarak, 2025).

The findings also indicate that Kohlberg's theory places justice as the core principle of moral development. Each stage reflects an increasingly complex and inclusive understanding of justice. Moreover, moral development within this theory is strongly influenced by cognitive stimulation and social interaction, particularly through discussions of moral dilemmas that challenge individuals' ways of thinking (Muthmainah et al., 2025).

However, the analysis also confirms that Kohlberg's theory places greater emphasis on moral reasoning than on actual moral behavior. This means that an individual may reach a high level of moral reasoning but may not consistently display moral behavior in everyday life. These findings suggest that while Kohlberg's theory is strong in its cognitive dimension, it pays relatively limited attention to the formation of moral habits and the affective–spiritual dimensions of morality.

3. Comparative Analysis of the Moral Concepts of Ibn Miskawayh and Lawrence Kohlberg

The comparative analysis reveals significant paradigmatic differences between the moral concepts of Ibn Miskawayh and Lawrence Kohlberg. From an ontological perspective, Ibn Miskawayh views morality as an inner disposition rooted in the soul and grounded in religious–philosophical values. In contrast, Kohlberg conceptualizes morality as a cognitive construct that develops through social interaction and reflective thinking experiences.

From an epistemological perspective, Ibn Miskawayh positions reason (*'aql*) as the primary regulator of the soul, operating in harmony with revelation and Islamic ethical values. Moral knowledge is acquired through training, habituation, and the internalization of values. Conversely, Kohlberg understands moral knowledge as the result of rational construction developed through cognitive conflict and reflective discussion of moral dilemmas.

Despite these fundamental differences, the findings also indicate a point of convergence between the two thinkers, namely their shared recognition of the central role of reason in moral development. Both Ibn Miskawayh and Kohlberg agree that moral development is not instantaneous, but rather progresses gradually toward higher levels of moral maturity.

Table 1

Comparison of Moral Concepts According to Ibn Miskawayh and Kohlberg in Education

No	Aspect	Ibn Miskawayh	Kohlberg
1	Educational Goals	According to Ibn Miskawayh, the primary objective of moral education is to train the soul through habituation in goodness, resulting in an inner disposition that naturally motivates individuals to perform virtuous	Kohlberg defines the goal of moral education as the attainment of Universal Ethical Orientation, in which individuals fully understand, accept, and internalize moral norms. At this stage,

No	Aspect	Ibn Miskawayh	Kohlberg
		actions. This process serves as the path toward moral perfection and the attainment of true happiness (<i>al-sa'adah al-haqiqiyyah</i>).	individuals can also question or criticize rules that conflict with principles of justice, democratic honesty, and other fundamental ethical values.
2	Curriculum / Content	The curriculum proposed by Ibn Miskawayh does not focus solely on cognitive (knowledge) aspects; it also encompasses affective (attitudes) and psychomotor (skills) dimensions. Education is directed toward the formation of an integrated personality reflected in daily behavior. In practice, moral values can be integrated across subjects, remain adaptable to changing times, and preserve Islamic identity by combining traditional values with modern approaches.	According to Kohlberg, moral education should not be treated as a hidden curriculum. Instead, moral education occurs through relationships, communication, and interactions established between teachers and students. Kohlberg strongly emphasizes the importance of teachers' moral exemplarity, through which students can analyze and understand moral values aligned with socially and nationally accepted behavior.
3	Educational Methods	Ibn Miskawayh proposes methods that emphasize practical experience and self-reflection. He believes that experience is the best teacher in character formation. Therefore, learning should not be limited to theoretical instruction, but must actively involve students in activities that facilitate learning through direct practical experience.	Kohlberg employs the moral dilemma method, presenting students with complex moral situations and asking them to make decisions and justify their choices. In addition, he uses Socratic-style discussion methods, in which teachers facilitate discussions of moral issues to help students analyze moral conflicts by considering interests, rules, and social values from students' perspectives.
4	Moral Foundations	Ibn Miskawayh's moral foundation is grounded in religious law (<i>Sharī'ah</i>) and ethical philosophy, particularly Aristotelian ethics. Morality is objective and originates from God/revelation, achieved through the cultivation of reason and the soul.	Kohlberg's moral foundation lies in cognitive development and individual reasoning. Morality is evolutionary in nature and is constructed through social interaction and the resolution of moral dilemmas.

No	Aspect	Ibn Miskawayh	Kohlberg
5	Moral Characteristics	Morality is understood as an inner state of the soul that spontaneously motivates virtuous actions, with a strong emphasis on character and virtues such as wisdom, courage, and moderation.	Morality is defined as moral reasoning—why individuals judge an action as right or wrong—focusing on the cognitive processes underlying moral decision-making.

4. Conceptual Implications for Moral Education

Based on the comparative findings, this study reveals that each theory offers complementary educational implications. Ibn Miskawayh's moral concept is particularly relevant in educational contexts that emphasize character formation, moral habituation (*akhlāq*), and the strengthening of students' spiritual dimensions. Although Ibn Miskawayh's thought emerged in a classical context, his moral philosophy remains relevant for addressing the challenges of contemporary Islamic education. His ethical approach is holistic, providing not only practical guidance for character formation but also a theoretical framework that can serve as a foundation for developing a moral education adaptable to changing times.

First, from the perspective of educational objectives, Ibn Miskawayh asserts that moral education aims to form character through the habituation of goodness until it becomes a stable inner disposition (*malakah*). Human perfection, according to him, consists of both cognitive perfection and practical perfection, culminating in the attainment of true happiness (*al-sa'ādah al-ḥaqīqīyyah*). Education, therefore, does not stop at the acquisition of knowledge, but is directed toward shaping character that naturally motivates individuals to act morally in real-life situations (Abdullah, 2020).

Second, in the context of moral education curricula, Ibn Miskawayh's thought inspires the development of curricula that balance cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Moral values are not taught as separate subjects, but are integrated across all subjects and educational activities. Such a curriculum enables Islamic education to remain responsive to the challenges of globalization without losing its Islamic identity by combining traditional values with modern pedagogical approaches (Huda, 2021; Hanifah & Bakar, 2024).

Third, regarding moral education methods, Ibn Miskawayh emphasizes the importance of direct experience and self-reflection in character formation. Moral education is not conveyed solely through theory; it must involve learners in concrete practices, such as habituation in good behavior, social simulations, reflective discussions, and religious practices. This approach is effective in fostering deep moral awareness and encouraging the internalization of ethical values in everyday life (Janah, 2025).

Fourth, in responding to the challenges of globalization and technological advancement, Ibn Miskawayh's thought offers solutions through the cultivation of universal values such as justice, honesty, responsibility, and social solidarity. Moral education is not directed solely toward individual development, but also toward the formation of collective moral awareness in addressing global issues such as injustice, poverty, and environmental crises. This orientation demonstrates that Ibn Miskawayh's moral philosophy is social and collective in nature, and remains relevant in supporting sustainable social transformation (Akbar & Alkhadafi, 2025).

In addition, according to Ibn Miskawayh, moral education requires a balance between the material and spiritual dimensions. He rejects extreme attitudes, whether in the form of materialism or excessive asceticism (*zuhd*), and emphasizes the integration of worldly and spiritual life under ethical guidance. This principle remains relevant in the modern era, characterized by rapid scientific and technological progress, enabling moral education to preserve human values in the use of technology (Abdullah, 2020; Hikmah et al., 2025).

The relevance of Ibn Miskawayh's thought is also reflected in its alignment with national educational objectives as articulated in Indonesia's National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, which emphasizes the holistic development of learners, both intellectually and morally. Accordingly, in Ibn Miskawayh's perspective, moral education affirms that intelligence must always be oriented toward the values of faith, moral excellence, and personal integrity (Huda, 2021).

Finally, Ibn Miskawayh views the spiritual dimension, including values derived from *taṣawwuf* (Islamic spirituality), as an integral part of moral education. The integration of moral cultivation and spiritual reinforcement enables moral education not only to shape good behavior but also to provide meaning in life and ethical direction for individuals as they navigate the complexities of modern life (Faidzal & Nurjanah, 2023).

Meanwhile, Kohlberg's theory makes a significant contribution to the development of students' critical thinking skills and moral reasoning, particularly through the use of moral dilemma discussions. Lawrence Kohlberg positions education as the primary domain for the application of moral development psychology. From the outset of his theoretical development, Kohlberg viewed moral education as a process that requires a clear philosophical ethical foundation, unfolds through qualitative developmental stages, and emphasizes cognitive stimulation through idea development and problem-solving skills. Thus, education functions as a strategic arena for facilitating the progressive development of students' moral reasoning (Wahidah & Maemonah, 2020).

Within the framework of moral education, Kohlberg places justice as the central ethical principle. Justice is understood as a fundamental value that guarantees equality and moral freedom for individuals. Moral development occurs through hierarchical integration, a process in which higher-level cognitive structures absorb and reorganize earlier modes of thinking, resulting in increasingly complex and inclusive moral understanding (Nida, 2013).

Kohlberg views moral orientation as the outcome of gradual cognitive development. Learners do not merely internalize social norms passively, but actively construct moral reasoning through social interaction and personal reflection. This perspective aligns with Jean Piaget's theory, which emphasizes that moral development is influenced by social interaction and individuals' active engagement in interpreting rules and values they encounter (Wahidah & Maemonah, 2020). The primary goal of moral education, from Kohlberg's perspective, is the attainment of a universal ethical orientation—that is, the capacity to evaluate and critique norms, laws, and policies based on principles of justice and honesty. Therefore, moral education is not realized through a hidden curriculum, but through dialogical interaction between teachers and students. Teachers' moral exemplarity plays a crucial role as a reference that enables students to analyze and internalize ethical values relevant to social and civic life.

Methodologically, Kohlberg developed the Socratic-style moral dilemma discussion method, in which teachers act as facilitators who encourage learners to analyze moral conflicts from multiple perspectives. This method is designed to stimulate moral reasoning development and identify individuals' levels of moral maturity. Through complex dilemma discussions, learners are trained to articulate moral arguments rationally and reflectively.

The relationship between educators and learners in Kohlberg's conception of moral education is dynamic and transformative. Teachers do not merely transmit values, but actively facilitate students' cognitive and moral transitions toward higher developmental stages. By refining Piaget's approach, Kohlberg expanded the use of morally charged narratives with greater levels of complexity, thereby challenging learners' modes of thinking and accelerating the development of their moral reasoning (Wahidah & Maemonah, 2020).

Thus, the findings of this study indicate that integrating these two perspectives has the potential to produce a more comprehensive framework for moral education—one that not only forms character and moral habits, but also develops learners' capacities for ethical reasoning critically and responsibly. When comparing the moral concepts of Ibn Miskawayh and Lawrence Kohlberg in the context of moral education, both similarities and differences can be identified, as detailed in Table 1.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the concepts of moral development proposed by Ibn Miskawayh and Lawrence Kohlberg represent two distinct yet complementary paradigmatic approaches within the context of moral education. These findings reinforce the argument that the moral crisis in contemporary education cannot be addressed through a single approach; rather, it requires a synthesis between value-based character formation and the development of cognitive moral reasoning.

1. Moral Development as Character versus Moral Reasoning

The findings confirm that Ibn Miskawayh conceptualizes morality as *akhlāq* rooted in a stable inner disposition (*malakah*). Morality is not measured solely by an individual's ability to judge right and wrong, but by inner habits that spontaneously motivate moral action. This finding is consistent with the studies of Abdullah (2020) and Huda (2021), which conclude that moral education from Ibn Miskawayh's perspective emphasizes habituation and moral exemplarity as the core of character formation.

In contrast, Kohlberg's theory views morality as the capacity to reason ethically when confronting moral dilemmas. Morality is progressive in nature and develops alongside the increasing complexity of an individual's cognitive structures. The findings of this study corroborate the results of Hasanah (2019) and Ibda (2023), who emphasize that moral development according to Kohlberg is highly dependent on cognitive stimulation and social interaction rather than merely on the internalization of norms.

This fundamental difference indicates that Ibn Miskawayh's approach is more effective in fostering consistency in moral behavior, whereas Kohlberg's approach is stronger in developing ethical reflection and moral justification. In other words, Ibn Miskawayh addresses the question of *why* a person becomes morally good, while Kohlberg addresses *how* a person reasons about moral goodness.

2. Epistemological Implications for Moral Education

From an epistemological perspective, the findings reveal that Ibn Miskawayh integrates reason, revelation, and moral practice as sources of ethical knowledge. Morality

is acquired through a sustained process of value internalization rather than through rational discourse alone. This reinforces the view that moral education in Islam is normative–transformative in nature, guiding individuals toward the perfection of the soul and the attainment of true happiness (*al-sa’ādah al-ḥaqīqiyyah*).

Conversely, Kohlberg views moral knowledge as the outcome of individual rational construction through cognitive conflict. Moral values are not transmitted dogmatically, but are developed through critical thinking and dialogical processes. This finding aligns with the study by Nida (2013), which demonstrates that moral dilemma discussions are effective in enhancing students’ levels of moral reasoning.

Nevertheless, the findings also reveal limitations inherent in each approach. Ibn Miskawayh’s approach may encounter implementation challenges within modern formal education systems that tend to prioritize cognitive achievement and evaluative outcomes. Conversely, Kohlberg’s approach is prone to neglecting affective and spiritual dimensions, which may result in inconsistencies between high levels of moral reasoning and actual moral behavior in everyday life.

3. Integrating Islamic and Western Approaches in Moral Education

One of the most significant findings of this study is the potential for integrating the ideas of Ibn Miskawayh and Kohlberg to formulate a more comprehensive model of moral education. The results indicate that moral education grounded in habituation and character formation should be complemented by the development of moral reasoning skills, enabling learners not only to be normatively compliant but also to engage critically with complex ethical issues.

Such integration can be achieved through a layered approach to moral education. In the initial stage, moral education may focus on cultivating moral habits, role modeling, and self-discipline, as emphasized by Ibn Miskawayh. In subsequent stages, learners can be guided toward reflective discussions and analysis of moral dilemmas in the Kohlbergian tradition to develop mature ethical reasoning. This gradual approach is consistent with the principle that moral development is progressive and non-instantaneous.

These findings extend previous research that tended to position the two thinkers in a dichotomous manner. Unlike the study by Asfiyah (2023), which emphasizes Islamic critiques of Kohlberg, this study demonstrates that Islamic–West dialogue can instead open pathways for strengthening moral education in an integrative and applicable manner.

4. Theoretical and Practical Contributions of the Study

Theoretically, this study enriches moral education scholarship by offering a comparative framework that bridges distinct epistemological traditions. Rather than merely juxtaposing two moral theories, the study demonstrates how ontological and epistemological differences can be synergized within a unified educational framework.

Practically, the findings provide implications for the development of curricula and pedagogical strategies in moral education, particularly within both Islamic education and general education contexts. Moral education should no longer be understood as a purely normative subject or an incidental activity, but as a systematic process that integrates character formation, value habituation, and the development of ethical reasoning.

Despite its significant conceptual contributions, this study is limited by its nature as a library-based and conceptual analysis. It does not empirically test the effectiveness of integrating Ibn Miskawayh’s and Kohlberg’s concepts in educational practice. Therefore, future research is recommended to develop integrative models of moral education and to

examine their effectiveness through empirical studies in both general educational institutions and Islamic educational settings.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the moral development concepts of Ibn Miskawayh and Lawrence Kohlberg represent two distinct yet complementary approaches to moral education. Ibn Miskawayh conceptualizes morality as *akhlāq*, rooted in a stable inner disposition (*malakah*) formed through habituation and self-discipline, with the ultimate goal of attaining true happiness (*al-sa'ādah al-ḥaqīqiyah*). In contrast, Kohlberg understands morality as a process of moral reasoning that develops progressively through cognitive structures, with justice as the core universal ethical principle.

The comparative analysis reveals that ontological and epistemological differences between the two thinkers lead to different orientations in moral education. Ibn Miskawayh's approach emphasizes character formation and behavioral consistency, whereas Kohlberg's approach focuses on critical thinking and ethical reasoning. Nevertheless, both converge in recognizing reason as the central element in moral development, a process that occurs gradually and continuously.

The main implication of this study is the need for an integrative model of moral education that balances character formation with the development of moral reasoning. Integrating the perspectives of Ibn Miskawayh and Kohlberg offers a more holistic framework that is responsive to the complex and pluralistic challenges of contemporary education. However, as a conceptual study, further empirical research is required to test the effectiveness of this integrative moral education model in educational practice.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

The author takes full responsibility for the entire research process and the writing of this article, including the formulation of the research concept and design, determination of the study focus, identification and selection of relevant literature, comparative–conceptual analysis of the moral development theories of Ibn Miskawayh and Lawrence Kohlberg, as well as the interpretation of findings and preparation of the final manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are derived from classical primary texts and contemporary scholarly literature addressing the moral development theories of Ibn Miskawayh and Lawrence Kohlberg. As this research constitutes a qualitative library study, all data were obtained from publicly accessible published sources.

Declaration of interests statement

The author declares that there are no financial interests, personal relationships, institutional affiliations, or other potential conflicts of interest that could have influenced the research design, data analysis, interpretation of results, or the writing of this article.

Additional information

This study forms part of a broader academic effort to strengthen the theoretical and pedagogical foundations of moral education through dialogue between Islamic ethical philosophy and modern moral development psychology. The author welcomes scholarly discussion, critical feedback, and academic collaboration on moral education, character education, and the development of an integrative educational theory. Further information regarding this research and related publications may be obtained by contacting the author through the correspondence address provided in this article.

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