

Storytelling as Promoting Moral Consciousness: Religious Education Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract. This study aims at investigating the role of storytelling in promoting students' moral consciousness; as an educational activity that combines religion with storyline. To achieve this aim, an opinion questionnaire was managed to religious education teachers in Irbid, Jordan in the academic year 2018-2019. The study inquired on to what extent storytelling help in learners' internalize moral behavior conduct in light of Islamic ethics and values. The achieved results specify teachers' excessive sureness in the effectiveness of storytelling role in forming moral behavior.

Keywords: Storytelling; moral consciousness; religious education teachers.

Introduction

Unfortunately, moral consciousness in education is an under-researched area despite its apparent connection to beliefs, identity and one's code of practice and behavior. Recently, morality has become more acknowledged internationally as cultures mingle together most at this recent world (Nielsen, 2000). The augmented significance of morality has appeared in post-socialist societies (Heintz, 2006; Varga, 1993). Contemporary world wars and political conflicts have capitalized immorality as midpoint cause.

On the theme of morality, everyone is awarded in light of his/her own creed and belief. In Islam, morality refers to the ethics that make us endowed with 'goodness' and 'happiness' not only in our worldly life, but in heaven as well. Thus, morality accounts for the two worlds, rather than one and this explains why Islam offers believers peace as a finale goal.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2006) presented religion as 'belief', 'identity' marker, 'way of life'. In Islam, religion is defined as "a divine law that enables people with intelligence to attain goodness and happiness in this world and the next with their own desire". Rules come from divine revelation; God. If rules come from man, they will be false. This explains

the underlying argument behind "*Superiority lies only in piety*" as every sacred belief is produced by God. The word "law" illustrates that having faith means that moralities, ethics, principles need to be carried out as fixed rules. Therefore, morality is more than an idea, but rather a commitment. Goodness and happiness refer to an end of any moral behavior. It is the feeling of goodness and happiness; rather than tedious responsibilities. These responsibilities can be judged in either ways: informative or constructive.

Of course, informative delineations (imminent from God) stop us from making any error. Secondly, in addition to "informative" judgments giving knowledge, the "constructive" judgments laying down rules with regard to the functioning of a human's life are good for man in many respects. Hence, morality is the broad term for the kind of order, law and conduct of organizing the liaison between God and man.

Of course, international ideological hypotheses by Western scholars are mostly steered towards liberal atheist, secular humanist, socialist and Marxist perspectives (Rumbold, 2002). There is an underlying belief behind the open-minded education at schools where morality is introverted as opposing to civilization. Nowadays, schools have long been regarded as opportunities for an outstanding nonreligious free future. It may be the case that the goal of learning is to make learners ready to shoulder their own responsibility at studying and at work; rather than imparting personality or ethical views.

In Islam, morality refers to the internalization of spiritual values; and thereby leading to an inner change in behavior (Halstead, 2007). Regarding the Jordanian context, it is considered one of the most religious countries; as religion along with morality is on the educational agenda in Jordan. Thus, education and morality are often perceived as incompatible.

Research argues that inspiring moral consciousness has helpful impact upon the learner. Such belief may be more substantial if it is built on storyline. It may be much worthy to have thoughtful empirical research that demonstrates these prejudgments touching the effect of moral consciousness. All too often, such prejudgments are merely identified without evidences (Ableman, 2000).

In the words of Benjamin Franklin 1787, an influential former USA president, morality is of high significance as: "Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom". Therefore, controlling one's moral conduct is the only way to success. Al-Ghazali (cited in Alavi, 2007), a prominent Islamic scholar, called for education that is based on character and virtue. For him, there are two parts of morality: pure and applied. This explains why, in the Holy Qura'n, there are 783 verses relevant to *pure* heartily morality; whereas there are 748 verses for *practical* morality. Such education is driven by students' acceptance of the lesson; to this end they put the lessons into practice. According to Al-Ghazali, moral education is connected with the heart that ends up with good behavior. Similarly, to Hussain (2007), morality lies with the soul of an individual which leads to an ideal character capable of living in a pleasant-sounding society.

Of course, morality starts with individuals and proceeds to societies. Putnam quoted, in *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, pieces of research on the effect of moral consciousness in society. Putnam concluded that morality has not only virtuous influence; nevertheless it has countless weight upon learners' attainment. As a result, when equating moral with immoral learners, moral learners achieve better scores and thereby succeed in their careers. Besides, moral learners have greater affiliations with their families or any other additional activity. This can be attributed to their ethical construction as inclined by moral consciousness which offers them with the apt context that enables them to thrive.

On reflection, religion and moral consciousness interact. In this regard, Sinnott (2001) introduced morality as relevant to what is sacred in a way that advises our relations that make meaning to one's own life. In fact, for Sinnott (2001), morality possibly will or will not comprise world opinions and creed shared by any group. Religion, in contrast, is relevant to the conduct of opinions, habits and creed concerned with certain dogma.

In his pleasurable book, Gottschall (2012) introduced the first cohesive approach of storytelling. Gottschall claimed that stories support us to face varied social difficulties; in a way that prepare listeners/readers for challenging conditions to safeguard their existence. Further, Chowdhury (2016) highlighted the significant role of morality in science curriculum. He compared and contrasted moral education in both Western and Islamic cultures. The author articulated a theoretical outline for the improvement of moral education in schools; while at the same time proposing pedagogical activities.

Employing the up-to-date review in neuroscience, biology, and psychology, Gottschall (2012) explained the role of storytelling in modifying human behavior. Gottschall gave details on the extent of engagement and absorbing in a story is strongly reflected in behavior change. Thus, all listeners/readers present equivalent type of responses regardless to their context. To Gottschall, stories are powerful explicit and implicit tools for changing the world for the better; especially if they are moral, principled and noble that instill values; thereby shaping our behavior. Nevertheless, sometimes stories create superficial and dangerous behaviors that are fueled with treason theories, national myths, deceptive adds or news that are fallacious. For example, Hitler's goals were somewhat driven by a story. Here, the task of the teacher is to invent an expression (coin a phrase) as phrases guide consciousness and thereby changing students' behaviors.

During the course of history, people have considered religion as a pathway to morality. For example, Boyatzis (2005) reported that 95% of American youth have faith in God. Boyatzis established that half of American youth state they often pray on their own; while 36% have church groups. Boyatzis highlighted the result of a national survey which indicates that more than half of sixth -to-twelfth grade students describe themselves as 'being religious'. The survey

showed that about 90% of caretakers wanted their kids to have religious education classes. Moral conscience brings up cognitive principles supported by emotional conditions that empower us to distinguish between what's right and what's wrong (Stan, 2001). As such, the development of moral conscience entails three successive domains; namely: cognitive, affective and motor. Specifically, morality is the internalization the three domains altogether. Religious education teachers are expected to shape learners' cognitive, affective and motor skills. Of course, The Holy Qur'an encompasses plentiful proofs of moral consciousness and their apt behaviors

A large body of research propose storytelling driven curricula as stories form moral education effectively (Alkaaf & Al-Bulushi, 2017; Setiawati, 2017; Rossano, 2008; Bunanta, 2003). In light of pieces of research proofs, storytelling has a positive effect on education. As such, teachers should at best acknowledge that it supports the development of their learning. Storytelling entails a story that demonstrates joyful tasks that attract wide addressees. It capitalizes top events, famous people, ethical values, cultural traditions (Ellis, 1997; Alvey, 1974). Walter (2016) stressed the role of storytelling as a platform of breaking up students' consciousness. To Walter, teachers can craft stories. He takes this further and says: "*If you want a well paid stable career today you do one of two things. You learn to work with computers. Or you learn to tell stories*".

From a social reconstructionist perspective, storytelling is associated with educating conscientiously intended formal, cultural, and religious values (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Here the teacher is reflective as being concerned with not only the content of the story, but rather with the 'how' to tell it. Basically, the 'effect' of the story on learner's behavior is what really matters. Questions such as: Where do stories drive them? To what action?. A story that focuses on 'integrity' can change learner's life to the better.

Storytelling is a joint formation process. In this regard, Baker and Greene (1977) stated that storytelling does not refer to the demonstration of learn the text by heart but rather to the interface between the teacher and learners. As a matter of fact, stories are role models in the sense that learners learn by example by the act of imitating and simulating of esteemed conduct (Smith, 1989). Stories are informative and loaded with moral lessons in the sense they inspires learners with precious wisdoms on values such as; friendship, thoughtfulness, tolerance and sharing. To this end, stories are crucial in improving the merits education. Such stories are effective when they are meaningful and relevant to learners' lives in a nondirective manner (Yoo, 1997). In this concern, Kelley (2008) capitalized the significant role of storytelling in identifying learners' attitudes, ethics and views. Further, Molenda and Bhavnagri (2009) established the effectiveness of storytelling in supporting cooperation morals such as; assisting others, sharing, taking and giving turns, allocating duties, discussing, directing, transaction, and presenting views.

As an instructional technique, partaking real-life stories shapes and outlines the learning process intentionally. To this end, learners can learn more from

reflecting upon what they listen to. Generally, people think chronically as they opt to recall facts in a story manner. Here, Archibald (2008) maintained how stories echo people's where events, facts, characters are better recalled in small blocks of a grander story. Listeners construct and organize meaning in light of what they see or hear.

Problem

Morality has been manipulated and distorted by some immoral actions. Immorality stimulates ethical crises in our region in particular and world at large. Unfortunately, it has become the reason behind intimidating, oppressing and bullying the weaker ones. Religious education teachers have improved the meaning of moral consciousness in order to form their students' moral behavior. In Jordan, parents as well as teachers rely heavily on stories mentioned in our creed; Islam. It is very much expected that Islam feeds these stories. The rhetoric raised by this study examines the role of storytelling as a means to such end.

Aim

This study aims at investigating the role of storytelling in raising moral consciousness as a means of embodying religious morality segments throughout students' conduct of suitable moral conduct.

Questions

The present study attempted to answer one major question: *what is the effect of storytelling in promoting moral consciousness as perceived by religious education teachers?* Then, three sub-questions stemmed out from the major question in order to consider all tentative factors that may affect teachers' perceptions. These questions are as follows:

1. Are there any statistically significant differences on teachers' responses that are associated with their gender?
2. Are there any statistically significant differences on teachers' responses that are associated with their teaching experience?
3. Are there any statistically significant differences on teachers' responses that are associated with their academic qualification?

Method

The descriptive survey research was selected as the research design of the present study. Here, the study used descriptions and classification, measurement in order to compare and describe responses. Details of the specific aspects of the participants and the instrument are as follows:

The participants

The settings of this study involved religious education teachers who were selected randomly. Specifically, fifty religious education teachers responded to the opinion questionnaire developed by the researcher. They were randomly selected from twenty-five schools in Irbid district in the academic year 2018-2019. The sample represented 50% + 1 of the targeted school population as it was 49 schools. A symmetrical distribution of gender, academic qualification, and teaching experience was considered. The following Tables demonstrate such symmetrical distribution:

Table 1. The symmetrical distribution of gender variable

Gender	Number of religious education teachers
Male teachers	23
Female teachers	27
Overall	50

Table 2. The symmetrical distribution of academic qualification variable

Academic Qualification	Number of religious education teachers
Diploma degree	2
Bachelorettes degree	39
Master degree	9
Overall	50

Table 3. The symmetrical distribution of teaching experience variable

Years of Experience	Number of religious education teachers
1-5 years	3
More than 5 years	47
Overall	50

Instrument:

To meet the aim of this study, the researcher developed a thirty-item opinion questionnaire that was validated by a jury of university instructors at Al alBayt University. For reliability, Alpha formula (Cronbach Alpha) was applied to decide the reliability of the questionnaire. The results showed that the score of reliability was 0.91; which was considered suitable for the purpose of the study. The researcher himself distributed the copies of the questionnaire.

Procedures

In the present study, the aim was investigating the role of storytelling in promoting moral consciousness. First, the researcher selected 50 teachers. He got the number of the teachers from the supervisors in Irbid Directorate of Education. The researcher selected the participants of the study randomly, which characterized 70% from the population. The researcher himself circulated the opinion questionnaire. In order to have reliability and validity of the responses, the targeted teachers were invited to fill in the questionnaire either at once or later at their convenience. Fortunately, the researcher was able to collect all the distributed copies. Then the data were statistically treated.

Second, means, standard deviations, T- test and one way ANOVA statistics were used for analyzing the obtained data. Based on coding on a scale categories as developed by the researcher, the following was considered in interpreting the results, 80% and more was considered as 'very good'; 79.9%-70% was seen as

'good'; 69.9%-60% was viewed as 'medium'; 59.9%-50% was considered as 'poor'; and less than 50% was seen as 'very poor'.

Findings

The major research question reads as: *what is the effect of storytelling in promoting moral consciousness as perceived by religious education teachers?* Means, standard deviations, percentages, numbers and rank order were used to find out such effect. This is shown in Table 4:

Table 4. The role of storytelling in promoting moral consciousness

Rank order	No.	The role of storytelling in promoting moral consciousness by:	Mean	St. Dv.	%	Impact degree
1	30	Stimulating Islamic moral standards	4.50	0.54	90	Very good
2	4	Instilling 'Holy Qur'an' and 'Prophetic tradition' as sources of Islamic standards	4.38	0.57	87.60	Very good
3	1	Distinguishing between 'standard' and 'opinion'	4.34	0.56	86.80	Very good
4	5	Capitalizing the need for considering morality	4.26	0.60	85.20	Very good
5	9	Realizing that dishonest deeds are irrelevant to mortality	4.20	0.76	84.00	Very good
6	2	Encouraging students to intermingle as moral.	4.16	0.71	83.20	Very good
7	24	Considering freedom of standard norms as immoral	4.06	0.77	81.20	Very good
8	27	Considering illegal deeds as immoral	4.06	0.65	81.20	Very good
9	12	Encouraging students to take part in voluntary acts as being moral	4.06	0.77	81.20	Very good
10	14	Encourages students to earn money effortlessly as immoral	4.04	0.83	80.80	Very good
11	15	Instilling that hurting oneself as immoral	4.04	0.70	80.80	Very good
12	10	Realizing that not doing bad things as moral	4.02	0.68	80.40	Very good
13	6	Considering helping each other as moral	4.02	0.80	80.40	Very good
14	19	Considering parents' rearing and advice as moral	3.96	0.75	79.20	Good
15	8	Considering societal ethos as moral	3.96	0.97	79.20	good
16	3	Considering friend's opinion as moral	3.88	0.92	77.60	good
17	11	Contravening law is immoral	3.88	0.85	77.60	good
18	7	Avoiding lies as moral	3.86	0.76	77.20	good

19	28	instilling responsibility for societal progress as moral	3.86	0.76	77.20	good
20	25	Encouraging cooperation as a basis for progress as moral	3.82	0.87	76.40	good
21	26	Encouraging sacrificing own interest as moral	3.82	0.87	76.40	good
22	17	Encouraging students to become great thinkers as moral	3.80	0.90	76.00	good
23	16	Pocketing others' things as immoral	3.78	0.79	75.60	good
24	23	Keeping promise as moral	3.78	0.91	75.60	good
25	29	Treating all people in the same way as moral	3.74	0.90	74.80	good
26	18	Highlighting that moral standards do not vary	3.72	0.76	74.40	good
27	20	Sustaining social order as moral.	3.68	0.71	73.60	good
28	13	Infusing the responsibility for serving society as moral.	3.68	1.06	73.60	good
29	22	Considering conscience as moral	3.64	0.96	72.80	good
30	21	Considering the rules of law as moral.	3.54	0.76	70.80	good
Total impact degree			3.95	0.36	79.00	good

Table 4 displays the impact degree of storytelling in promoting moral consciousness as 'very good' in thirteen items as the percentage of teachers' responses have touched 80% and more. On top, 'Stimulating Islamic moral standards' came first; thereby entailing significant role of storytelling in this regard. The impact degree was 'good' for seventeen items with 'Instilling 'Holy Qur'an' and 'Prophetic tradition' as sources of Islamic standards' in the lead ranking as second. All in all, the impact degree for the role of storytelling in promoting moral consciousness was perceived by religious education teacher as 'good' students' oral proficiency.

The first research sub-question reads as: *Are there any statistically significant differences on teachers' responses that are associated with their gender?* A *t*-test was used to find if gender is a tentative factor that may affect teachers' perceptions. This is shown in Table 5 as follows:

Table 5. T-test results of gender as a tentative factor

Male teachers (N. 23)		Female teachers (N. 27)		T	significance
Mean	Standard	Mean	Standard		
3.91	0.42	3.99	.31	.75	.46

The results in Table 5 indicate that there are no significant statistical differences between the means of the two groups due to the effect of gender as an intervening factor. Specifically, the Table shows *t* value as .75 which means that

there were no significant differences at $\alpha=0.05$ from the teachers' perspectives due to gender.

Regarding the second research sub-question, it reads as: *Are there any statistically significant differences on teachers' responses that are associated with their academic qualification?* A *t*-test was used to find if teaching experience is a tentative factor that may affect teachers' perceptions. This is shown in Table 6 as follows:

Table 6. T-test results of teaching experience as a tentative factor

Experience ranging From 1 to 5 years (N. 3)		Experience ranging From 5 to 10 years and more (N.47)		T	significance
M.	S. D	M.	S. D		
4.71	.19	3.94	0.37	1.07	.29

The findings, in Table 6, indicate that there are no significant statistical differences between the means of the two groups due to the effect of teaching experience as an overruling factor. Specifically, the Table shows *t* value as 1.07 and the significance level as 0.29 which means that there were no significant differences at $\alpha=0.05$ from the teachers' perspectives due to teaching experience. Concerning the third research sub-question, it reads as: *Are there any statistically significant differences on teachers' responses that are associated with their academic qualification?* Firstly, Table 7 details the number of teachers in light of their academic qualifications as follows:

Table 7. Details of teachers' academic qualifications

Teachers' academic qualification	Master degree	Bachelor degree	Diploma degree
Number of teachers	9	39	2

In order to find the effect An ANCOVA test was used to find if teacher's academic qualification is a tentative factor that may affect teachers' perceptions. This is shown in Table 8:

Table 8. ANCOVA results of academic qualifications as a tentative factor

Source of variance	DF	Sum of squares	Mean square	F	significance
Between groups	2	.155	.077		
Within groups	48	6.250	.133	.58	.56

The findings, in Table 8, indicate that there are no significant statistical differences between the means of the two groups due to the effect of teaching experience as an overruling factor. Specifically, the Table shows *F* value as .58 and the significance value as 0.56 which means that there were no significant

differences at $\alpha=0.05$ from the teachers' perspectives due to academic qualification.

Discussion

The key point in this study was exploring the role of storytelling in promoting moral consciousness among religious education teachers by the means of mapping their opinions by a survey questionnaire. The study reported a 'good' impact of the effectiveness of storytelling.

Generally speaking and considering the world around us, we can see how stories guide the biblical, social, economic, and even the political behaviors. Fortunately, cultures are now grasping the values of stories. Empirically and credibility speaking, the findings of the current study are in congruence with Gottschall (2012) who theorized that stories place individuals with each other round joint values. In consequence, teachers can shape their students' behaviors in a way that meet moral ends. In Gottschall's own words: *"a story is, to coin a phrase, the operating system of human consciousness"*.

An explanation of top scored response (viz. 'Stimulating Islamic moral standards') or of the second ranked response (viz. 'Instilling 'Holy Qur'an' and 'Prophetic tradition' as sources of Islamic standards') is in congruence with The Movement of End Violence statements by Richie (2015) highlighted the significant role of storytelling, most startlingly, by the statement that reads: *"there's a story behind we started doing this work, a story that connects us, and a story that will bring others along"*. Here in the present study, the obtained responses reflected how students were able to get along with their religion. To this end, stories were perceived by the participant teachers as powerful tools that raised their students' consciousness.

The findings of the present study are in line with the findings obtained in artificial Intelligence science which takes human consciousness further by testing it on machines by creating simulation programs that have the rhetoric of the story; either by films, TV, games, etc. Stories have the power to inspire and change the behavior of people (O'Neill & Riedl, 2014).

As it was said, none of the variables of gender, teaching experience or even academic qualification intervene in the effectiveness of delivering storytelling. The study demonstrated a remarkable degree existing in teachers' responses. One effective means of promoting moral consciousness might be the utilization of storytelling; one may conclude. This in congruence with Herman's (1997) who put forth conclusions regarding the nature of storytelling; as it entails guiding, mentoring, counseling, and standing with others. In a way or another, storytelling is about giving advice in an indirect manner. This is in line with Polletta's (2006) definition of a story as *"a sequence of events in the order in which they occurred so as to make a normative point"*. To this end, 'to make a normative point' is what really matters in telling a story rather than the characteristics of the teller.

The outcomes exposed a significant relationship between the storytelling and morality regardless to the variables of the teachers. Congruently, Bruner (1991) highlighted storytelling as crucial in raising individual's consciousness to morals. Similarly, in old times, Fisher (1984) elaborated on the association between storytelling and reasoning and thinking.

Conclusion

The present study considered the effects of storytelling in religious education classes in the promotion of moral consciousness. From the investigation of teachers' reactions to the opinion questionnaire, it may be stated that storytelling aids students to raise their consciousness and thereby behaving morally. To this end, desirable code of practice can be introduced in light of real morals of Islam. Hence, the findings of this study inspire the consideration of morality which stem from 'Holy Qur'an' and 'Prophetic tradition' as sources of Islamic standards.

- The conclusion from this study indicated the powerfulness of storytelling in promoting moral consciousness among students.
- The results of study invited the participant teachers to appreciate the prerequisite for students to have all-embracing prospects to hear stories in religious education classes.
- On the theme of consciousness, it is prerequisite and vital for the apt behavior. Between competence (consciousness) and performance (behavior) facets is a balancing and corresponding affiliation. Competence directs performance. Religious competence, of course, and morality are no exception; thereby, individual's behavior can be shaped accordingly.
- Considering the significance of developing moral behavior in societies, effective methods such as 'storytelling' are of great help. Curriculum designers can include storytelling in all subjects' textbooks in a way that directs well-organized moral education in schools.

Researchers are invited to think of 'code of practice' activities with clear guidelines that capitalize the role of storytelling in creating and maintaining morality in schools. Specifically, activities considering the moral values in a sequenced manner are also strongly recommended. The more religious education teachers are acquainted with religion per se, the better they drive and exemplify moral values for students. It is strongly recommended that religious education teachers deliver a written list of suggested stories that correspond to students' age and interest.

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Appendix:

Tool

The role of storytelling in promoting moral consciousness by:
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1. Stimulating Religious moral standards
 2. Instilling 'Holy Book' and 'Prophetic tradition' as sources of Religious standards
 3. Distinguishing between 'standard' and 'opinion'
 4. Capitalizing the need for considering morality
 5. Realizing that dishonest deeds are irrelevant to mortality
 6. Encouraging students to intermingle as moral.
 7. Considering freedom of standard norms as immoral
 8. Considering illegal deeds as immoral
 9. Encouraging students to take part in voluntary acts as being moral
 10. Encourages students to earn money effortlessly as immoral
 11. Instilling that hurting oneself as immoral
 12. Realizing that not doing bad things as moral
 13. Considering helping each other as moral
 14. Considering parents' rearing and advice as moral
 15. Considering societal ethos as moral
 16. Considering friend's opinion as moral
 17. Contravening law is immoral
 18. Avoiding lies as moral
 19. instilling responsibility for societal progress as moral
 20. Encouraging cooperation as a basis for progress as moral
 21. Encouraging sacrificing own interest as moral
 22. Encouraging students to become great thinkers as moral
 23. Pocketing others' things as immoral
 24. Keeping promise as moral
 25. Treating all people in the same way as moral
 26. Highlighting that moral standards do not vary
 27. Sustaining social order as moral.
 28. Infusing the responsibility for serving society as moral.
 29. Considering conscience as moral
 30. Considering the rules of law as moral.
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