Relationship between School Culture and Moral Development of Students at the Secondary Level

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Abstract: This study explores the intricate relationship between student moral growth and school culture within the secondary education landscape of Lahore, Pakistan. The research aimed to investigate how student moral development intertwines with the prevailing school culture, as perceived by students themselves. The study population included students and teachers of both public and private schools in the Lahore district. Employing a quantitative approach, data was collected from 420 respondents through systematic sampling techniques. Data analysis revealed a significant relationship between moral development and classroom culture. The study also indicated satisfactory and insufficient areas of moral development among school students with respect to their teachers' role. It was recommended that the schools should provide a conducive atmosphere which may satisfy the unsatisfactory areas of moral development among their students. School culture and curricula should both be modified and developed to foster moral development among the students. Similarly, ethical leadership culture should be promoted among the teachers and Heads to cultivate responsible citizenship among students.

Introduction

The invading societal ailments are a point of serious concern among all nations and all religions over the world. The development of responsible citizenship in the country lies upon two basic factors, i.e., the school and home culture of the children. Out of these two, the school culture is of foremost importance because the students spend most of their psychologically active time in a restricted atmosphere of schools. Thus, fostering moral development among students, alongside their academic growth, is recognized as a crucial element of schooling.

The overall school discipline -from school uniform to all sort of activities, curricula, which affect students' personality and moral development, are considered as school culture. In more descriptive approach, it consists of school values, norms, and practices that shape up their personality and nurture their 'Self'.

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Thus, the relationship between school culture and moral development holds very much significance for all stakeholders of the educational process, i.e., the educators, policy-makers, and society at large. Educationists and researchers have identified various aspects of positive and negative school culture. Mustafa et al. (2023) worked on religious diversity and social integration in Pakistan, and they asserted that clear expectations and a sense of belongingness in promoting ethical behaviour and social responsibility among students are key factors to the supportive school climate. Wang and Kenny (2014) added that school ethos plays a vital role in students' moral reasoning and prosocial behaviours. They also emphasized that strong moral cultures within schools positively correlate with students' ethical development.

Other similar studies indicated a dire need for schools to nurture socio-emotional skills and ethical values among students along with their academic competencies (Johns-Klein, 2020; Marengke, 2020; Rahiem et al., 2012; Schreiber, 2019; Shapira-lishchinsky, 2022; Story, 2010). Another study made by (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972) demonstrated that students' with higher moral reasoning behaviours were product of moral education in their school.

The developed countries consider ethical nourishment as part and parcel of quality education and have started working for this cause for years. For example, in the USA, an organization for Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) was developed in 1994, named CASEL (Collaborative, Academic, Social and Emotional Learning). This organization is still considered a trade mark for high-quality education. According to them, socio-emotional learning should integrate responsible decision-making and citizenship among students (CASEL, 2020).

Figure 1
CASEL framework of socio-emotional learning (CASEL, 2020)
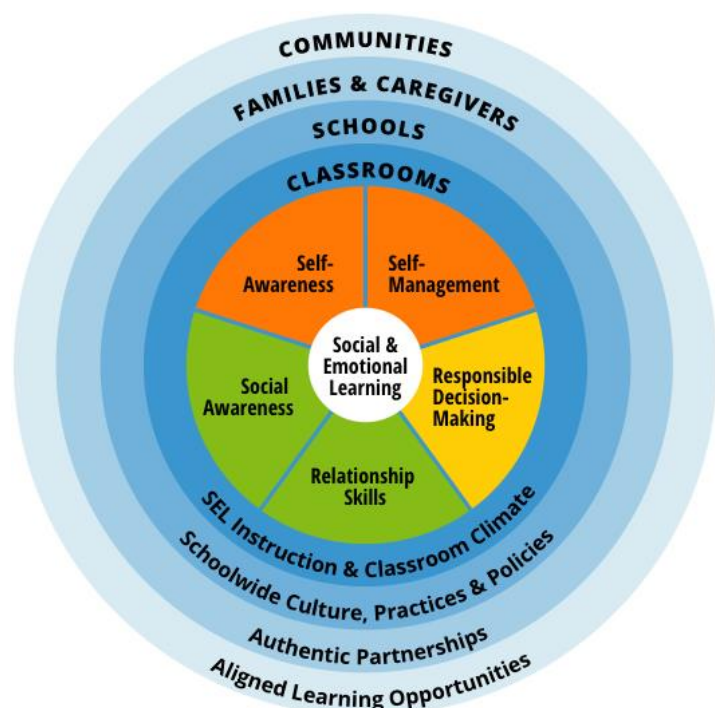
Moreover, the concept of "moral identity" has emerged as a critical factor in this relationship. According to research by Nucci and Gullotta (1997), students who possess a well-developed moral identity are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior and demonstrate higher levels of moral reasoning. This suggests that schools with a culture that encourages the development of moral identity can positively impact students' moral development.

In addition to the aforementioned studies, other recent references have explored the role of teachers in shaping school culture and, consequently, students' moral development. For example, a study by Lickona and Davidson (2013) highlighted the importance of character education programs led by dedicated and well-trained teachers in fostering moral development in students.

In conclusion, the relationship between school culture and the moral development of students at the secondary level is a complex and multifaceted issue. By examining the latest references and research, it is evident that a positive school culture, coupled with effective character education programs and teacher involvement, can significantly contribute to students' moral growth. As this introduction sets the stage for further exploration of this topic, the subsequent sections will delve deeper into the various aspects of this relationship and provide insights into practical applications for educators and policymakers.

Research Objective
The study's objective was:
To investigate the relationship between student moral development and school culture.

Research Questions
What is the relationship between moral development and educational culture?

Literature Review
The relationship between the aforementioned study variables has been a point of concern and increasing attention in educational research, reflecting the pivotal role of the school atmosphere in shaping students' ethical beliefs, values, and behaviours. This section synthesizes recent advancements towards the theoretical and conceptual perspectives of the study to elucidate the multifaceted dynamics of these relationships and provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

School Culture and Ethical Climate
The research emphasized the significance of school culture in the development of ethics and morality among students. Various types of research visualized school culture as positive and negative with respect to the development of good or bad moral values among the students. Ungar (2010) highlighted that a supportive school atmosphere is always characterized by strong interpersonal bondings, good communication and shared values. He further asserted that these are the elements which foster prosocial behaviour and social responsibility. The other proponents of this concept were Allis (2007), Fadzly (2010), Khanam (2008), and Rahiem et al. (2012). All of them exhibited that a strong ethical climate is directly proportional to the students' moral character development and vice versa.

Lumpe et al. (2012) even asserted moral development as part of the definition of school culture and declared that school culture is a shared set of values, beliefs, and practices within an educational system. The importance of developing an ethical environment and a positive school culture in educational activities has been highlighted by a number of recent research. According to Webb et al. (2012), for example, schools that placed a high priority on moral development and character education had better school climates and good school cultures. The importance of developing a cooperative and encouraging school culture that fosters an ethical atmosphere and eventually benefits students, instructors, and the entire school community was also emphasized in a study conducted by O'Connor and Jensen (2017).

Respect, and Care as part of School Culture and Moral Education

As described in the introduction section, various institutes for fostering moral development and socioemotional learning have been developed in advanced countries, and one such institute, CASEL, was even described as well. The vision and mission of such schools are also notable to mention here, i.e., they asserted respect, and care as the foremost part of Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) that, in turn, results in the development of various social and moral competencies among students, such as the development of 'Self', social awareness and responsible citizenship. This has been part of the very old psychology of emotions, as mentioned by Cornelius (1996).

On the other hand, Allis (2007) and Khan et al. (2021) defined moral education as product of socioemotional learning and defined them as set of values, and responsibilities which are gained after socio emotional learning by formal or religious education. Khanam (2008) further asserted that moral reasoning, moral identity, empathy and prosocial behaviours are key elements of moral development of students.

Hence, social and emotional learning and moral education are considered complementary to each other. For example, both approaches highlight the significance of empathy, self-awareness, and responsible citizenship. Furthermore, both of them are aimed at promoting the overall well-being of students. Thus, both of them should be cared for in developing school curricula. The present study, therefore, focused on respect and care and the predictors of honesty as moral characterization.

Role of Educators as Models of Morality for Students

Education theories assert that teachers, students and the content are three basic pillars of the learning process (Alex Linley et al., 2006; Hogg & Vaughan, 2010; Maxwell, 1954). The teachers, therefore, play a vital role in shaping the climate of schools as well as their role models. Iqbal and Iqbal (2011), in their studies of ethical leadership behaviours in quality education, where described that school policies and practices, such as discipline, characterization initiatives in curricula, as well as the attitudes of heads, play pivotal roles in students' moral development. The ethical attitudes further elaborated by Shapira-lishchinsky (2022) included creating a culture of integrity and ethical conduct within schools.

Further research indicated that effective teaching practices can significantly improve students' academic performance. Additionally, teachers with high levels of emotional intelligence, empathy, and cultural sensitivity can create an inclusive and supportive learning atmosphere (Oliveira, 2007). It was also explored that the effectiveness of school policies is also contingent on the educators' personality and

commitment (Marengke, 2020), i.e., the positive attitude of educators can foster school culture towards positivity and vice versa (Fadzly, 2010; Mkhize, 2003; Rafiq, 2020; Shapira-lishchinsky, 2022).

Teachers hold a significant responsibility in promoting moral education by incorporating both academic content and guiding concepts in their classroom activities. They help students understand the relevance of moral concepts in their daily lives, such as keeping promises, telling the truth, and recognizing injustice or prejudice. Through their actions and communication, teachers serve as role models for students, establishing an ethical framework for their interactions (Weissbourd, 2012).

The primary objective of education is to enhance students' understanding of societal principles and values while nurturing their abilities and attitudes, such as leadership, self-discipline, empathy, and the courage to act according to their core beliefs and thoughts. This growth is reflected in various outcomes, ensuring a well-rounded and responsible citizenry.

Discipline as Basic Milestone of Positive Culture in Schools
The literature study revealed discipline as a basic milestone of positive school culture (Wang & Kenny, 2014). Some of the research indicated socio-economic factors and community dynamics can be influential on the moral atmosphere of schools (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Juraqulova et al., 2015).

Identifying the significance of culture, researchers assert that culture is a prerequisite of morality among students irrespective of their backgrounds and perspectives (Shehzad, 2011). Research also identified that cultural pedagogy is very necessary in creating mutual respect and understanding as sign marks of morality (Pressman et al., 2015; Torney-purta et al., 2015).

Basic Pillars of Religious and Social Moral Development
Traits of morality, as described in the literature, vary in different communities as well as beliefs (Azam, 2010; Karin, 2015; Mustafa et al., 2023). Psychologists envisaged rules, priorities, functions and interactions as signs of morality (Alex Linley et al., 2006; Gilovich et al., 2006). While in the case of religiosity, moral ethics include spirituality, modesty, and honesty as well (Albelaikhi, 1997; Czyżowska & Mikołajewska, 2014; Hernandez, 2011; M. J. Khan, 2014. Including both social and religious moral development parameters, it can be summarised that awareness, faith, honesty, spirituality, and tolerance are the basics of morality.

Significance of the Study
Practically, the study can be an important piece of research for all stakeholders of educational process i.e., teachers, parents, students, policymakers, and society at large. Educators and policy-makers can prioritise the creation of a positive school culture that may foster moral development, i.e., by identifying the significantly affecting factors of school culture and adopting them in the curriculum development.

The selected variables of moral development criteria are taken from both religious and social moral development studies. Thus, finding good correlates of the school culture will help to develop an ideal society ultimately.

Moreover, path analysis has been adopted as a research methodology, which can further be an asset for future research as well.

Conceptual Framework

This was a correlational study that adopted correlation, regression, and path analysis to find out the relationship between variables. The school culture was viewed as the independent variable and studied under four sub-variables, i.e., discipline, care, respect, and teachers' influence. At the same time, moral development was taken as the dependent variable and studied as a composite of five sub-variables, i.e., awareness, faith, spirituality, tolerance, and honesty. The demographic variables, i.e., age, gender, institution (religious/ government), and sector (public/private), were taken as moderator variables. The complete conceptual framework of the study is given as follows.

Figure 2

The conceptual framework of the study shows the relationship between all variables.
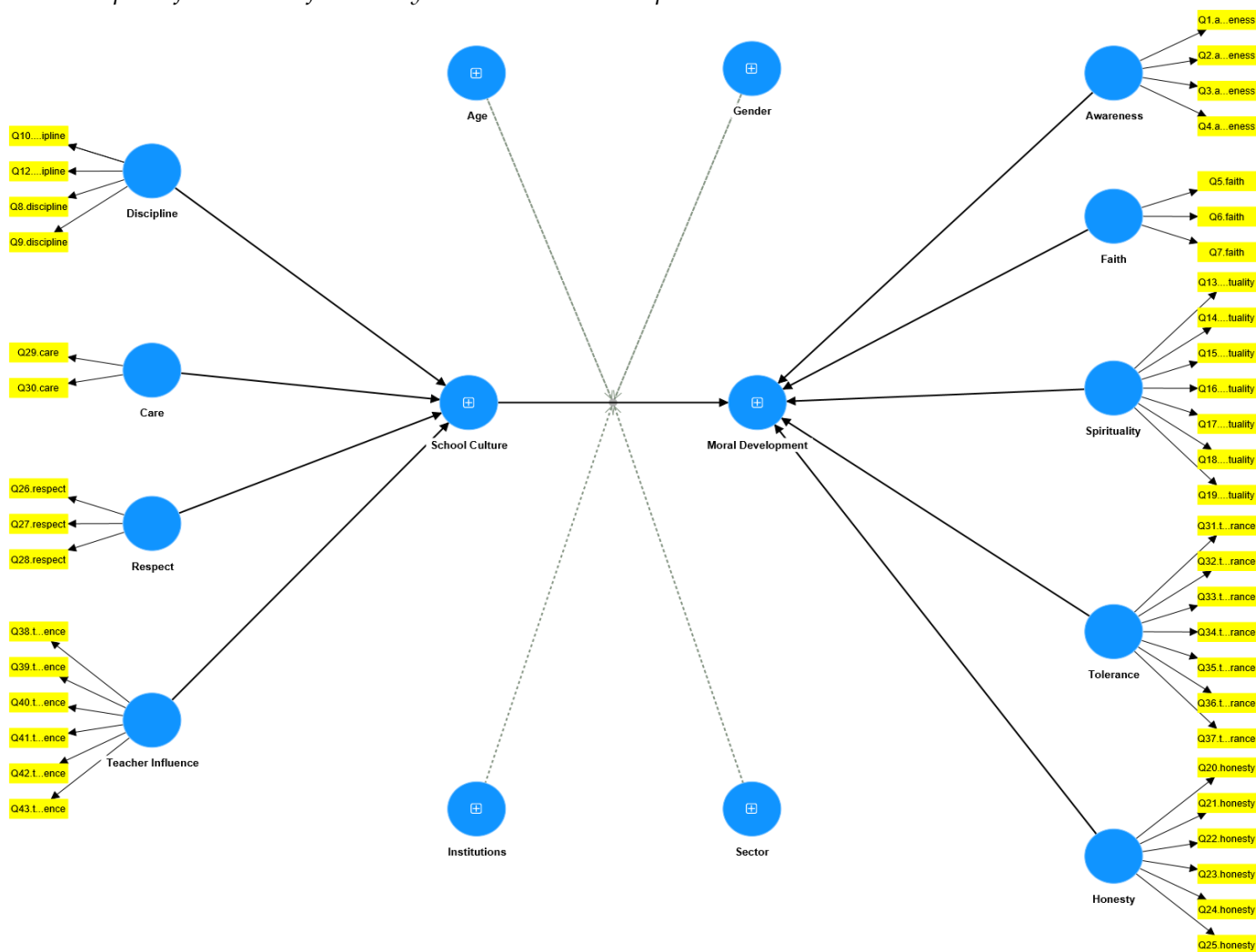
Research Methodology

The study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between school culture and moral development among secondary school students. School culture was treated as the independent variable, while moral development served as the dependent variable. The research design followed a descriptive approach, which involved the sequential collection and analysis of quantitative data.

Population of the Study
The study population comprised all secondary school students and teachers from both public and private schools in the district of Lahore, Pakistan.

Sample of the Study
The participants of the study included 420 students selected from 03 public and 02 private schools. Purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study.

Research Instruments
The research instrument was designed to measure students' perception of the relationship between school culture and moral development. Self-developed questionnaire was as research instrument for the study. The questionnaire was planned on 5-point Likert Scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

Validity of the Research Instrument
The instrument was validated in three different ways, i.e., it was content validated by ten experts and acceptance criteria for each item were considered as accepted by 80% of the experts. Secondly, the instrument was validated by a pilot study, and confirmatory factor analysis was made for further validation. Here, the acceptance criteria for each item loading was taken as 0.56. The items that were less than the given criteria were eliminated from further data analysis. The AVE was also found to determine construct validity.

Reliability Analysis
This was made by Cronbach's alpha. Overall reliability of moral development was found to .718, while that of school culture was found to be .705.

Table 1
Construct reliability and validity.

|	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Awareness	0.781	0.859	0.604
Care	0.683	0.862	0.758
Discipline	0.495	0.705	0.383
Faith	0.365	0.683	0.468
Honesty	0.305	0.598	0.230
Moral Development	0.718	0.761	0.164
Respect	0.716	0.844	0.648
School Culture	0.705	0.780	0.229
Spirituality	0.222	0.415	0.185
Teacher Influence	0.435	0.662	0.376
Tolerance	0.351	0.501	0.251

Data Analysis and Findings

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25, was used for data entry, data mining and data cleaning. While, smart PLS (Version 4.1.1.) was used for data analysis. The descriptive statistics included frequencies, mean, percentages, mean and standard deviation, while the inferential statistics included correlation, regression and path analysis. The findings of the study are discussed in the following tables and figures.

Table 2

Correlations among the variables

	School Culture	Moral Development
School Culture	1.0 (.000)	.67 (.000)
Moral Development	.67 (.000)	1.0 (.000)

The table indicates the value of the correlation between the two variables. The value of correlation was found acceptable as criteria set by various researchers (Cohen et al., 2018; Fraenkel et al., 2012). The detailed value of correlation for all constructs under each variable is described in the following figure.

Figure 3

Correlation between constructs and their all sub-variables.
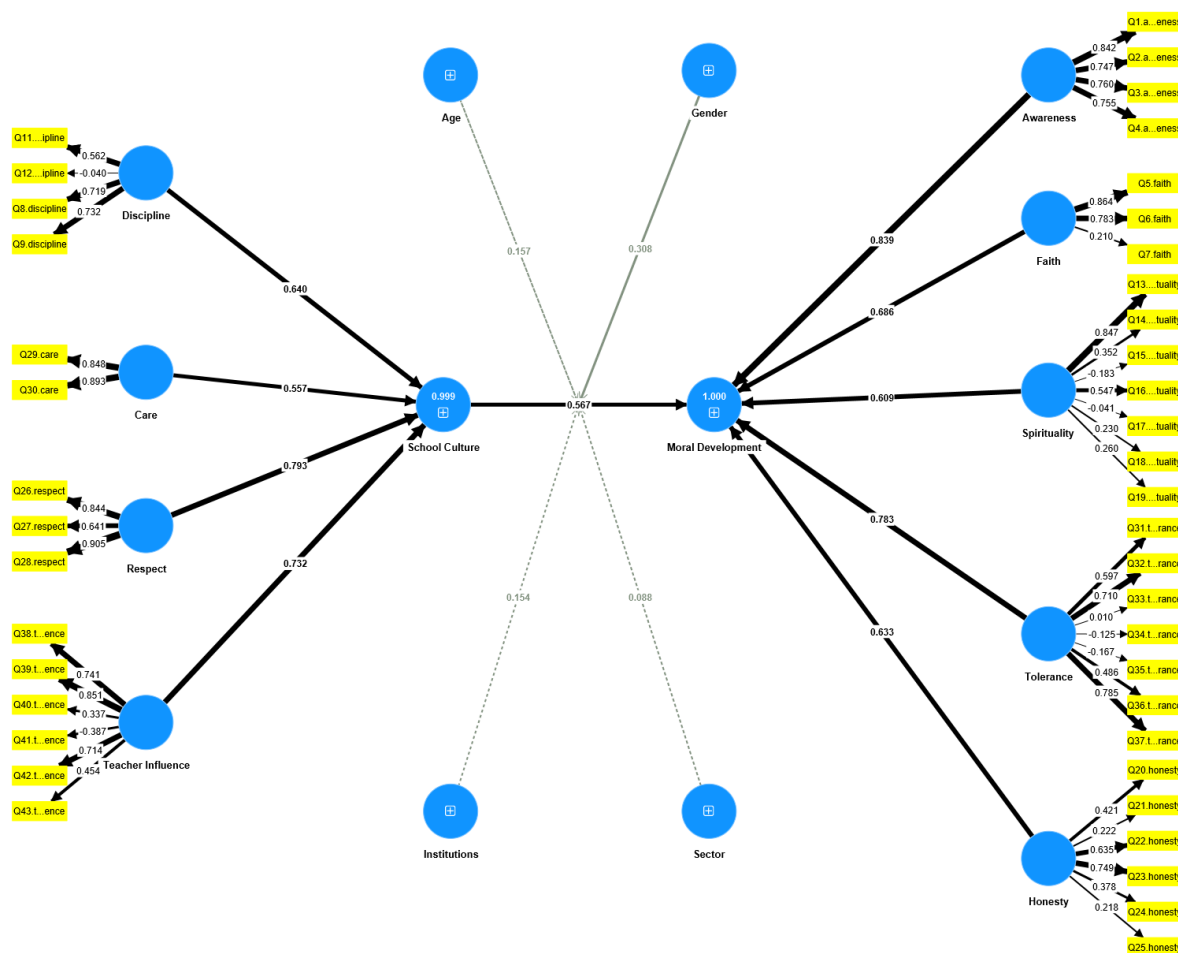
The bold lines in the figure indicate the values of good correlations, while the others show acceptable or weak correlations.

Next, analysis revealed path coefficients which represent the anticipated connections between constructs within the model or between constructs in the structural model. They are analogous to standardized betas in regression analysis.

Table 3

Regression Analysis Showing Path Coefficients for Variable Relationships

	Sample (O)	Mean (M)	SD	T statistics	P value
Age -> Moral Dev	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.828	0.204
Awareness -> Moral Dev	0.420	0.404	0.023	17.956	0.000
Care -> School Culture	0.247	0.245	0.024	10.469	0.000
Discipline -> School Culture	0.332	0.330	0.027	12.284	0.000
Faith -> Moral Development	0.222	0.214	0.016	13.856	0.000
Honesty -> Moral Development	0.206	0.223	0.029	7.197	0.000
Institutions -> Moral Development	0.001	0.001	0.003	0.471	0.319
Respect -> School Culture	0.420	0.415	0.021	19.745	0.000
School Culture->Moral Development	0.009	0.010	0.003	3.291	0.001
Sector -> Moral Development	-0.001	0.000	0.003	0.374	0.354
Spirituality -> Moral Development	0.185	0.188	0.018	10.004	0.000
Teacher Influence -> School Culture	0.433	0.432	0.031	14.148	0.000
Tolerance -> Moral Development	0.315	0.307	0.020	16.009	0.000
Gender -> Moral Development	-0.008	-0.009	0.004	1.757	0.039

The highlighted values in the table indicate the weak or insignificant regression between the variables. Thus, it is obvious from the table the demographic variables such as age, institutions, and sector had insignificant effect over the moral development of the students.

The following figure depicts path coefficients for each relationship among the variables. Here, too, the bold lines indicate the significant path coefficients.
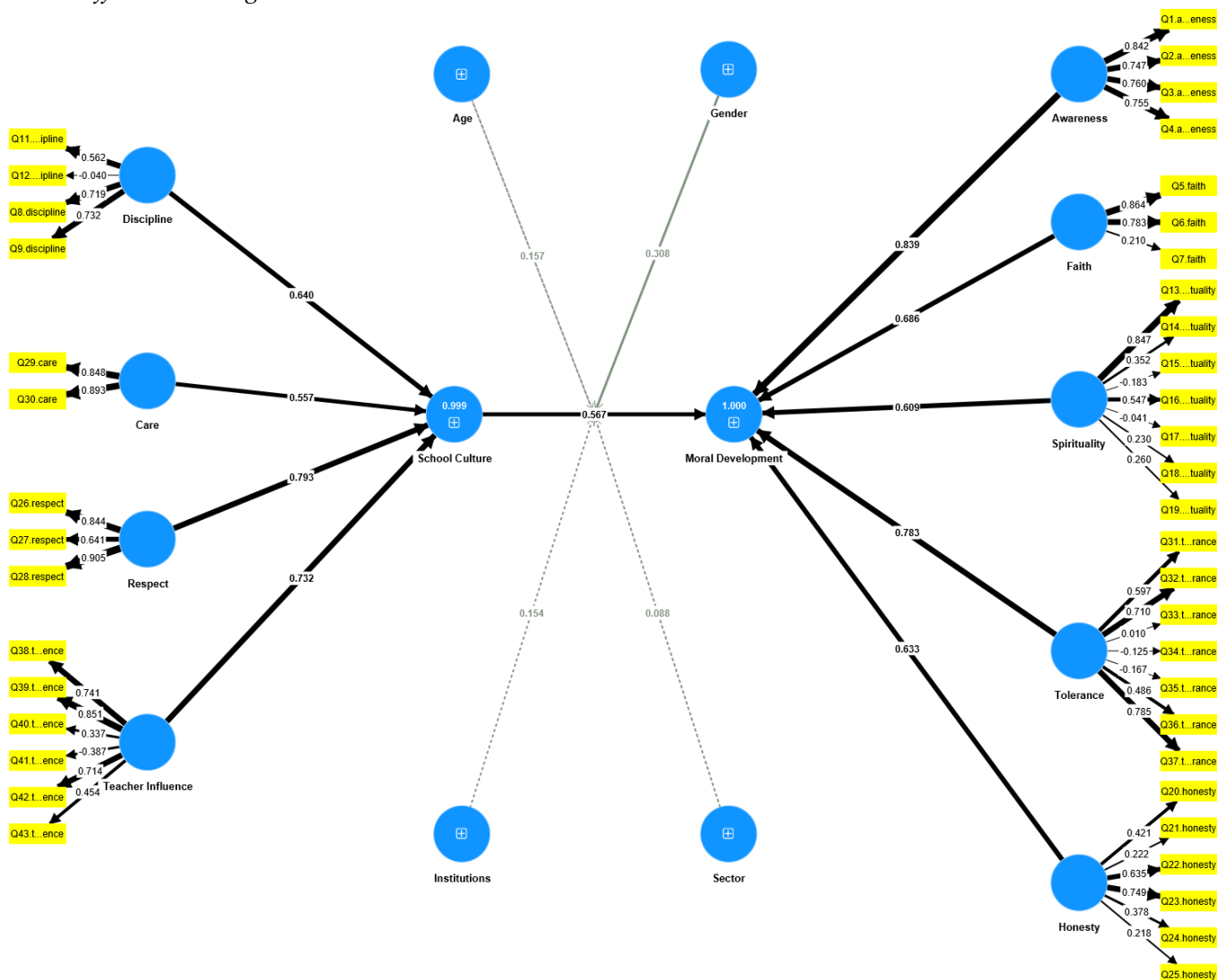
Figure 4

Path coefficients among all variables.

Table 4

Total effect of regression analysis

	R-Square	f-square	VIF
Moral Development	1.000		
School Culture	0.999		
School Culture -> Moral Development		0.100	3.106

The table indicates that the school culture can predict 99.9% of moral development among the students.

Discussion

The findings of the study highlighted the importance of school culture for the moral development of secondary school students. This underscores the importance of supporting a value-driven school culture, which fosters morality and virtuous and ethical behaviour among the students. The research emphasized

the multifaceted impact of cultural dynamics of the schools which participated in moral development (Fadzly, 2010; Khanam, 2008; Rahiem et al., 2012). Moreover, all of the independent variables, i.e., respect, care, honesty, and teachers' influence, were found to be strong and significant predictors of moral development. The studies made by Händel and Fritzsche (2016) indicated that the culture of respect promotes good citizenship and loyalty among students. The research made by Nash (2009) indicated that spirituality is not dependent on school culture; rather, it is more contingent on the informal social placement of children. However, irrespective of this statement, he also asserted the importance of culture for the development of spirituality as a moral character. Studies made by Gulzar et al. (2010) and Mulder (2008) supported the present study findings and found that care, respect and teachers' influence are strong predictors of moral development and vice versa.

Conclusions

The study investigated the relationship between school culture and moral development among secondary school students. Irrespective of age, gender, and the school education system, all elements of school culture were found to have significant predictions towards the moral development of the students. This underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to understanding and promoting moral development in schools, considering the multifaceted influences at play. Future research could further explore these intermediary variables to deepen our understanding of their impact on students' moral development and inform the development of targeted interventions aimed at fostering ethical growth within educational settings.

Recommendations

The study limitations and findings both led to recommendations for future researchers and policymakers such as:

- Enhancing the area of research both in depth and breadth to explore more influencing factors of moral development i.e., in depth expansion may be incorporation of the other factors and adding qualitative design for the future researchers. While, in breadth may take it towards expanding the research area to the province or country wide, so that more cultural influences can be explored clearly.
- For the policy makers, it is imperative to enrich school curricula with good moral aspects that may polish students' personality and ultimately make them good responsible citizen and Muslims.
- Teachers and parents should also take care of the positive non-cognitive factors that may help in their psychosocial growth and development. For that purpose, adding religious education should be given prime importance as no other source can show a more clear or righteous path.

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