Student teachers' and moral dilemmas

The DIT2 (Bebeau, Thoma, 2003) is an internationally validated paper-based test of levels of moral reasoning drawing on the pioneering work of Lawrence Kohlberg. Participants are asked to rank and rate the importance of each of twelve related issue statements when deciding on the appropriate course of action in response to five hypothetical moral dilemmas. Weighted points are allocated to the four most important issues selected in each scenario.

Factor analysis of a mega-sample of over 44,000 subjects (Rest et al., 1997) indicated that DIT items cluster around three general moral schemas: Personal Interest; Maintaining Norms; and Post-Conventional. The Maintaining Norms and Post-Conventional schemata are more advanced in attaining a socio-centric perspective than the egocentric perspective of the Personal Interest schema. The Maintaining Norms schema means that moral decisions are primarily influenced by adhering to the established social order and maintaining the status quo. Those who fit the Post-Conventional schema arrive at moral decisions on the basis of shared ideals that are fully reciprocal and open to scrutiny (Rest et al., 1999a; 1999b) and are prepared to question and suggest changes to the status quo (Narvaez & Bock, 2002).

The points corresponding to stages five and six moral reasoning are used to construct a single measure known as the individual **'P' score** (standing for 'principled moral thinking') (Rest, 1994). It is regarded as a direct indicator of the development of moral reasoning from adolescence to adulthood (Thoma, 2002). The **N2 score** represents a modified version of the P score adjusted by the degree to which an individual respondent discriminates clearly between lower and higher staged DIT items (Bebeau & Thoma, 2003).

The DIT2 was administered to B.Ed. (Primary) students in a lecture setting and to B.Ed. (Early Childhood/ Primary) students in tutorial groups. Completed DITs were returned by 168 students (not all the same students who returned the survey reported in Section A above). Unfortunately 50% of these responses had to be purged at the analysis stage because they failed internal reliability checks. This may be due to a) random responding b) missing data c) choice of meaningless or nonsense items d) failure to discriminate e.g. giving same score to all items.

The results for the 84 ACU first year respondents with meaningful respondents are presented in Table 70.

Table 70: DIT results (N=84)

statistics	Personal Interest	Maintaining Norms	Post-Conventional (P)	N2 Score
Mean	36.2	31.59	25.08	20.8
Standard Deviation	13.25	12.06	12.88	12.58
N	84	84	84	84

Mean P and N2 scores by **gender** are presented in Table 71.

Table 71: Mean scores by Gender (N=84)

Gender	**Post-Conventional (P)**	**N2 Score**
Male	21.46 (11.14)	15.01 (10.14)
Female	26.47 (12.97)	23.0116.26)

While females' mean P scores were 5 points higher these differences are not statistically significant. However the gender difference in N2 scores are statistically significant (p=.020).

Table 72 presents the Mean P and N2 scores by **age**.

Table 72: Mean P and N2 scores by age (N=84)

Age	**P score**	**N2 score**
<18 years (24)	27.89 (13.58)	24.21 (13.61)
18-21 years (44)	23.47 (12.15)	19.59 (16.4)
22+ years (11)	29.45 (12.71)	24.3 (19.91)

While there are no significant differences by age, respondents aged 18-21 had lower means than those <18 and 22+.

Table 73 presents the Mean P and N2 scores by **academic achievement** (entry to university).

Table 73: Mean P and N2 scores by academic achievement (N=79)

Route/achievement	**P score (SDs)**	**N2 score (SDs)**
OP 1-8 (8)	25.87 (11.41)	23.29 (12.69)
OP 9-16 (33)	27.36 (13.33)	24.38 (17.88)
OP 17-25 (6)	25.14 (12.7)	20.23 (11.05)
Non OP (32)	23.92 (12.7)	18.84 (14.66)
Total 79		

Independent ttests found a significant relationships between academic achievement (Rank Entry score) and N2 score (p<.05). This is explained by the higher means achieved by those with OP scores of 1-8, 9-16 as against Non OP entrants.

Table 74 presents the Mean P and N2 scores by **secondary school attended.**

Table 74: Mean P and N2 scores by secondary school attended (N=79)

School type	**P score (SDs)**	**N2 score (SDs)**
Catholic (49)	26.52 (12.59)	21.57 (11.31)
Independent (9)	28 (11.09)	23.84 (14.02)

State (21)	22.6 (13.83)	20.99 (23.66)
Total 79		

Students who had attended independent schools were highest on both scores highest followed by those who attended Catholic schools but no significant differences emerged.

Table 75 presents the mean P and N2 scores by **religion.**

Table 75: Mean P and N2 scores by religion (N=79)

Religion	**Mean P scores (SDs)**	**Mean N2 scores (SDs)**
Catholic (42)	27.97 (13.3)	22.69 (13.43)
Other Christian (18)	22.96 (12.4)	18.7 (12.38)
No religion/atheist (19)	23.08 (11.43)	22.29 (22.12)
79		

While Catholic students had higher P and N2 scores, no significant differences emerged.

Table 76 illustrates **Religiosity** by mean P and N2 scores.

Table 76: Religiosity by P and N2 scores (N=79)

	Mean P scores (SDs)	Mean N2 scores (SDs)
Important (15)	30.68 (16.03)	24.94 (17.62)
Somewhat important (34)	24.77 (11.25)	19.55 (10.51)
Unimportant (20)	24.03 (12.5)	24.06 (21.1)
No response (10)	24.3 (12.8)	19.57 (15.73)

Those who said that religion was important in their lives scored more highly, particularly on P score.

International comparisons

Based on the entire data set held by the Centre for the Study of Ethical Development, University of Alabama, Dong (2009) reports that college freshmen achieve an average P score of 34.11, sophomores an average score of 35.23, Senior College students an average of 35.97, while graduates with a professional degree exhibit an average P score of 41.06.

The mean P score of 25.08 for students in the current study was 9.03 points lower than the international average (out of a possible 95). O'Flaherty and Gleeson (2014) report a mean P score of 25.37 for Freshmen in an Irish university, almost exactly the same as found in the current study.

The mean N2 score for the study cohort was 20.8 as against an international mean for Freshmen of 31.05. The mean N2 score for Irish Freshmen was 20.42 (O'Flaherty and Gleeson, 2014).

Overall conclusions from DIT2 data

- Female students had higher mean scores than males and these differences were statistically significant in the case of N2 score
- Respondents aged 18-21 had lower mean scores than those <18 and 22+.
- Students who entered university with OP scores 1-16 had higher mean N2 scores than those who did not come through the OP route and these differences were significant at the .05 level.
- Students who had attended independent schools had the highest mean P and N2 scores followed by those who attended Catholic schools but no significant differences emerged.
- While Catholic students had higher P and N2 scores than students of other/no religion, no significant differences emerged.
- Those who said that religion was important in their lives scored more highly, particularly on P score, but no statistically significant differences were found.
- While the mean P and N2 scores for students in the current study were considerably lower than the international average, those score was virtually the same as for Freshmen in an Irish university (O'Flaherty and Gleeson, 2014).

References

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