

Domain Approach: An Alternative Approach in Moral Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the use of the domain approach in moral education in an upper secondary school in Malaysia. Moral Education needs a creative and an innovative approach. Therefore, a few forms of approaches are used in the teaching-learning of Moral Education. This research describes the use of domain approach which comprises the moral domain and social convention domain. Both these domains are used through various suitable activities based on the curriculum content. The Domain Theory is used to determine the moral domain of thinking and the level of social convention domain of the students.

Keywords: *Domain Theory, Moral Domain, Social Convention Domain, Curriculum Content*

INTRODUCTION

Vision 2020 became one of the main agendas of education in Malaysia, generally and expressively for Moral education. As a national political plan undertaken by Malaysian Government, Vision 2020 attempts Malaysia to have a strong society morally, spiritually and ethically. According to the plan Malaysians will live together in a democratic society that is liberal and progressively tolerant, and be a developed country within the year 2020. Among the nine major challenges stated the fourth one emphasizes on building the moral and ethical values of the people of the country. It undertakes the challenge to generate "a fully moral and ethical society" (Mahathir, 1991). In order to succeed in the challenge of generating, "a fully moral and ethical society", teaching Morality and Ethics needs to be experimented by applying various theoretical approaches.

Moral development process and formation of an individual's personality are related to education approach for moral education which depends on learning theories. Through this approach, we could observe the methods of learning theories that have been used in learning and teaching instruction. By mastering this approach, a teacher may develop suitable techniques in teaching. While choosing a suitable technique, the teacher needs to consider the moral maturity level of a student, value suitability, situation and also the moral issues to be focused in a particular lesson (Wainryb, 2006).

The approaches used in the teaching method of moral education emphasize the dominant values; caring and appreciation. These major values should be given serious attention so that the community shall build up strong personality values. These values are appreciation of knowledge, occupation, friendship, love and caring, aesthetic and etiquette, and also consolidation of moral values (Jarret, 1991). Fraenkel (1977) stated some moral education approaches used in various moral education programs. Among them are value inculcation, moral cognitive development (Kohlberg, 1972), value clarification (Raths, Harmin, & Simon,

1966), value analysis (Coombs, 1977), rational development, considerate, social action (Higgins, 1991), Farmington Trust project (Wilson, Williams, & Sugarman, 1967) and humanity curriculum project (McPhail, 1980). These approaches have been applied in preparing lessons and learning moral education in many countries. Noddings' (1995) approach based on skill and affection and Nucci's (2001) Domain Approach are among some of the approaches in practice and relied upon most now days. The current research is particularly interested in the Domain Approach of Nucci (2001).

Domain Approach

Domain approach in moral education facilitates students to understand the social world by investigating critical social issues in the social convention domain and moral domain. As these domains are different, students necessarily should develop both of the domains so that they could develop themselves as constructive citizens with high moral values generally and individuals specifically. The Domain Approach exactly focuses on developing reflexive behavior assessment in relationship with the moral and social convention domains (Nucci, 2001).

Studies and theories have proved that Moral education displays a significant difference in terms of moral development concept and social convention (Nucci, 2008). These past researches not only show the conceptual difference between moral domain and social convention, it also underlines the interaction of individual environment. From the pedagogical viewpoint it is also found that the interaction of individual environment affects the moral interaction which is correlated with the domain aspect provided in the lesson. These findings can be used for student development based on moral education (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). The findings call attention to the level of student's moral development, and suggest using the reflective approach in education such as discussion (Berkowitz & Gibbs, 1983) usually in accordance with the Moral education development approach to produce a "domain appropriate" lesson (Nucci, 1982).

Moral Domain and Social Convention Domain are also introduced in the Malaysian KBSR / KBSM Moral education syllabus. For example, values related to honesty, justice and freedom of expression are included in the Moral Domain. While values related to prudishness, maintaining the family tradition and mutual cooperation among each other are categorized as values into the social convention domain. Hence, this approach may be experimented for its suitability in our schools as it encourages academic usage of contents of values in discussion. Furthermore, the students can be trained by this approach in order for them to understand and cultivate responsibility in managing their life with righteousness in the social world that they inherit, through achieving the KBSR / KBSM Moral education objectives (Chang, 2000).

Research Objectives

This research is aimed at studying the application of Domain Approach in the Moral education subject in an upper secondary school in Malaysia which is locally known as Form Four. The following are the specific research objectives:

1. To identify the thinking level of students in terms of moral domain.
2. To identify the thinking level of students in terms of social convention domain.
3. To understand acceptance of the students on domain approach.
4. To understand problems faced by students during implementation of the Domain Approach.

Research Questions

In order to attain the research objectives the following research questions are to be answered:

1. How is the thinking level of the students in terms of moral domain?
2. What is the thinking level of the students in terms of social convention domain?
3. How is the acceptance of the students on domain approach?
4. What are the problems faced by students while engaged in learning through Domain Approach?

Conceptual Framework

Domain theory becomes a reference when discussing the education approach applied in Moral education. Domain theory is one of the moral education theories often used by researchers (Laupa & Turiel, 1995; Nucci, 2001; Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006). Domain theory is used to identify the understanding or thinking levels of the learners and also to forecast someone's way of conceiving an incident or event (Gabennesh, 1990b; Gravestone, 1987; Nucci, 2001; Turiel, 2006).

This theory became famous because, according to Turiel (2002, 2006) and Nucci (2001, 2006), various programs, desk research in education have become issues of discussion in order to deepen understanding on matters in moral education. This study, however, does not focus on Moral education in general but is limited to the teaching approach of Moral education.

Turiel (1998) and Nucci (2001) in their studies describe Domain approach in moral education as being segmented into two components namely moral domain and social convention domain. Modules in moral education, according to Domain Theory provide the opportunity to expand learners' moral domain and social convention domain. Table of contents taught through domain theory will increase moral knowledge and indirectly motivate social reasoning in a person.

Nucci (2001) modified and expanded the study by Turiel (1976); he strongly believed that the domain approach can forecast the understanding, thinking and reasoning level of the students. Smetana (2006) claimed that variations exist in understanding of moral domain and social convention produced through domain theory, by considering someone's way in constructing holistic understanding about value, social regulation, norms and integrating all these together through moral selection. This approach attempts at encouraging people to develop a higher level in moral thinking and social regulation.

This domain theory contrasts with other theories. This theory is segmented into two domains namely moral action domain and social action domain. According to Nucci (2001) students give different opinions with one another. These different opinions and ideas of the students are in terms of moral action domain and social action domain. The current research investigates moral thought development by using the domain approach.

Framework Of Concept Study

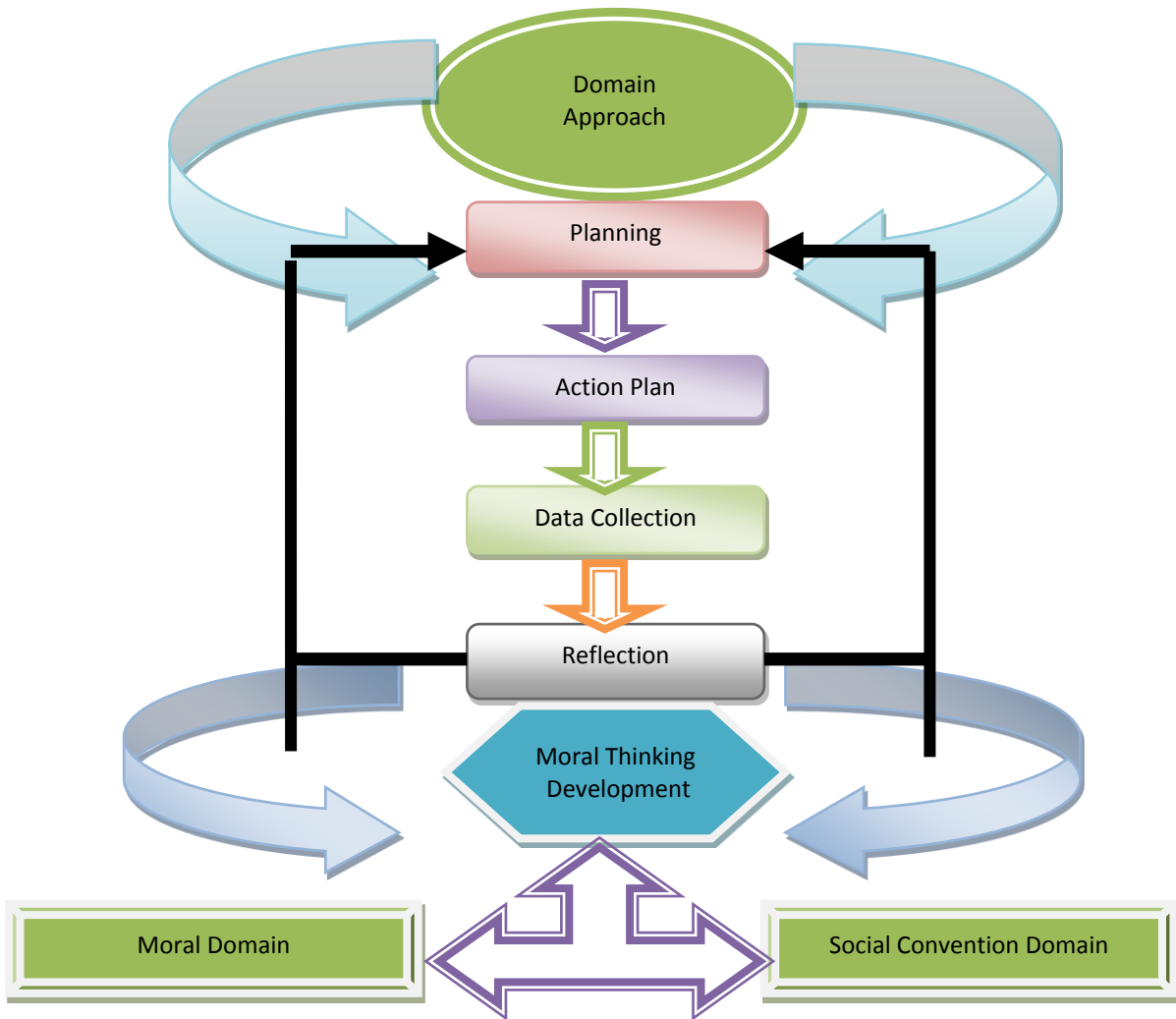


Diagram 1: Framework of Concept Study Based On Domain Theory

This is a qualitative action research. The Action Research concept was pioneered by Dewey in the United States in the 1920s. After the Second World War, a social psychologist, Lewin (1946), started using this action research approach as an effort in resolving local community problems. Two important features of action research are: making decisions collectively and giving attention to enhancing work quality (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). The main purpose of this method is to bring theory into practical development. The original idea to practice this method started at the time of Aristotle and continues to be effective till today. It enables individuals or groups of individuals to play an active role in improving their environmental circumstance (Clark, 1972). Action research has been carried out on individuals or group of individuals in some organization that is facing a problem or handling an issue that needs to be resolved. In action research, the researcher uses methods such as story- telling, elaboration, observation in data collecting and to understand what and how some event occurs followed by taking action or planning a specific plan to resolve the problems faced. Following Bradbury & Reason (2001), the current research is qualitative, participatory, cyclic and reflective. McNiff (2002) stated that action research is an approach to improve the quality of education through changes by encouraging teachers to be aware of their own practice by becoming critics on practices and set up for transformation. This requires

involvement of the other teachers collectively. In the context of this study, Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1988) module was used to reflect on teaching and learning activities. Since this study involved teaching and learning practices, action research has been “sensitively attuned to the world of practice and the concerns of practitioners and capable of building systematic understandings about practice through the critical reflection of practitioners” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). As the program objective is to understand the students’ moral thought development through usage of domain approach, so by itself the researcher implemented the lesson in the classroom in order to get reflective feedback from various perspectives by using the Kemmis and McTaggart Module (1988). This pictures action research to be a “systematic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self- reflective, critical and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). In this study the researcher participated as a teacher looking back into the practice and positions to development of teaching and learning theory in the future.

Kemmis & McTaggart’s Action Research Model (1988)

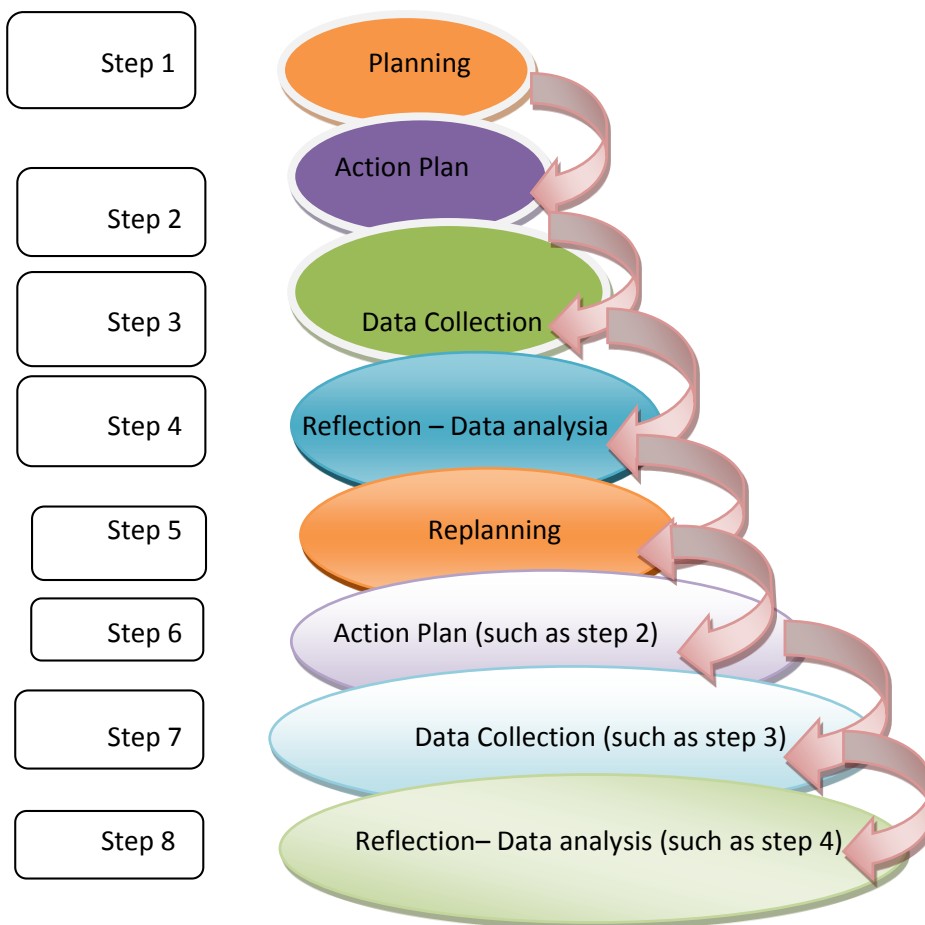


Diagram 2 : Kemmis & McTaggart’s Action Research Model

FINDING

Students thinking level in terms of Moral Action domain

The findings of the study consist of elements such as by focusing on three themes. The first theme is justice, second is altruism and the third one is autonomy. The current study systematically followed the steps of Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1988) model of action research. The steps were planning, action plan, data collection, reflection, re-planning and discussion on moral domain action. The findings of the study are thematically categorized into three: Justice, Altruism and Autonomy.

Justice

Justice is an important standard in moral assessment and it is related to the principle that allows procedures to distribute profit between individuals and society. Certainly the value of justice also ensures individuals do not show favoritism and nor greed of personal interest. On the other hand, it also means fair, square, balanced and equal in all terms. This meaning could be explicable with more detail through study findings as follows:

Study participants opined that the value of fairness and impartiality are important things in a morally decisive situation. In the teaching and learning process on fair justice and balanced aspects, it becomes focal in emphasis before focusing on other aspects and this is known as moral component treatment.

In detail study participants gave opinion on the importance of fair and balanced aspects in a particular situation. An excerpt from one of the interviews of the participants follows:

“Although Raju is a prefect, arriving late to school is still invariable as a delinquency and he should stand in front of the assembly site as other students who do it. Discipline teacher should not forgive Raju. If the teacher forgives, other students also should be forgiven. The rule is a rule and it should be stands sic, all must be entertained fair and equally” (Yalu).

The above mentioned interview transcript showed that study participant gives priority to fairness in justice claimed that in all affairs or state, fair value should be given priority. If it is not maintained, justice will not be practiced in all matters in the future. Another participant of the study gives opinion by saying as follows:

“If the school gives flexibility to the prefects who did disciplinary offence, this will affect other students. It will encourage students doing wrong and breaking school rules with slovenly. Students also will not respect the prefects in school because they are also breaking the school rules by doing disciplinary offence” (Mugilan).

This interview shows the participants demand the practice of justice to be executed for all in a proper manner. The learners also expect fairness of treatment to be equally accorded to all, be it prefect or general student. This study participant also feels and hopes that school captains should help teachers in maintaining school disciplinary problems and not perform any anti-disciplinary activities. Regarding fulfilling the study agreement, the study participant gives opinion in the interview transcript as follows:

“As a father, he should hold in his words, he could not cheat the children. Pity to the children, they are been cheated. If can't do, don't promise. Pity those because they certainly wait for the school holiday to go for a picnic, furthermore they already told their friends in school” (Mong).

According to this participant, maintaining agreement or keeping what is promised are principles that should be adopted by every human being to avoid any disappointment or cheated feeling from anyone. This point of view has been supported by a participant in the same group who stated:

“People will respect us if we always fulfill promises that we make. But people will be angry and will not respect us if we not fulfill our promises that we do frequently. A father should become an example to the children, otherwise the same matter will happen to him in the future” (Darshen).

This view of the study participant clearly explains that this study participant has powerful hold in words or promise and always paid tribute and gives respect to elder generation, and he hopes the elder generation should become an example to the young generation. This will help in bringing up a righteous community in society. Result of the written documents exactly shows us that a few study participants think an individual should not be biased in implementing a given task. This mindset is also supported by another participant in the following interview:

“Teacher Lim should be taking the same action to Ravi although Ravi is the teacher's friend's child and stays in the same housing area. Chin will feel not fair in this situation because he was sent to the discipline teacher even though both of them were doing the same offence” (Kavina).

Altruism

Based on the result of written documents, it was found that study participants are compassionate seeing people in difficulty. God created humans to live peacefully in a conciliatory situation. But, because of human greed disasters and catastrophes befall the human self. The matter was realized by this study participant. However the study participant should give information on moral action and moral principle that should be consolidated to proffer and submit facts or explanations.

Moral action taken by the study participant is in accordance with moral principle namely humane or merciful. Moral actions without intentions based on welfare, humane, mercy, sympathy, and empathy are not acceptable. At the same time a few study participants give the same views on altruism principle namely humane feeling will lose sense in hatred and greed.

“I am willing to suffer in hunger in order to help those ... in famine” (Thurga).

In this modern world of materialistic gain, the words of this participant stood apart with humane urge of feeling the difficulty and sufferings of the needy and poor people.

Result of observation made through this field record shows that many study participants made judgments by involving others. Considerations such as this were carried out based on welfare of others. Vested self-interests are not prioritized; instead, others' needs are more important and given preference. In order to consider someone's case, the participants engage in a discussion to decide mutually in order to give comfortable protection of the person involved in the crisis. The participants also become caring and sympathetic in this practice of thinking about others' welfare.

Autonomy

To observe the autonomy principle, the retrieval interview shows that study participants are sensitive on righteousness issues. The autonomy principle explains the free consideration concept. Consideration and behavior made by result of coercion from outside actually could not be categorized as moral. Here is an example of transcript to express the learners' sense of autonomy:

“Corruption is the main enemy of a country so it should be controlled immediately. There are a few government officers willing to be implicated in corruption when conducting design task given to them.”

Teacher : Is there wrong if giving bribe to police officer to avoid getting summons?

Mei : Yes, wrong.

Teacher : Why wrong, otherwise we will get summons?

Swetha : Teacher, police must to take care.

Teacher : Take care what?

Swetha : Take care of us so that we are not doing evil.

Teacher : If the police not take care, are you going to do evil?

Kavin : Not like that teacher. Our law says that we can't give bribe. Just now only we read that corruption is the main enemy of the country.

The group discussion indicates that the participants think and share ideas on appropriation. Moreover, they also try to provide credible reasons with the help of the small dictation article. This matter could be proved from one of the participant's clarifications:

“Police must catch the people who give bribe. Corruption is the main enemy of the country. If all people could give bribe to the police, for what purpose they getting their salary? Police should play a major role in order to look after the country, not to get link or build a network with the bad people who make offence to the country. Police must conduct their duty according to the instructions given by their main leaders. Our country will be safe and peaceful with the assistance of police force that functioned as clean, efficient and trustworthy” (Joseph).

The observation shows that the students are able to apply logic in their reasoning. This moral consideration is more essential in order uplift the learners’ thinking capacity. The issues and situations mentioned in this research could easily guide the students in order to understand the matter immediately. Even though consideration and behavior of an individual are based on the result of interaction with the superior in power. For example, a police officer takes action on an individual due to bribe issue and due to the instruction given by the superior officer. The action taken by force or order would not bring any positive effects for a long term period. Individuals must have the assurance to realize that all the actions are carried out voluntarily and independently. This matter could be identified through the collection of research findings in the following transcription observation:

Jaya : Yallini should inform the complex manager about Mala who steal the clothes. This is because Mala should not

steal the clothes.

Shan: Why he wants to trouble his friend, furthermore the manager threatened Yallini. It is considered as a bad habit also because Yallini did not make any offence. If want to ask, he must ask in a proper manner.

Jaya : Ok let do not talk about the manager, tell whether Mala’s behavior is right or wrong.

Shan : Simply wrong but Yallini’s feeling also should be taken into mind.

Jaya : But the problem is Mala, not Yallini. If the shop is ours how our action could be. We must think.

Shan : Ok in that case, I agree with you.

Through the transcript record, we found that Jaya state ‘should’ while Shan state ‘should not’ to inform the complex manager about the theft. Although the positions taken by Jaya and Shan differ, praise should be accorded to both study participants because they made decisions independently. But more importantly here, pressure is given to Yallini in the situation where Yallini becomes an important factor in this case. However, after a brief discussion conducted in the group and when the issue of righteousness was taken into consideration, Shan agreed with Jaya. This discussion proves that group discussion in obtaining perfect answer is truly needed (Muthu).

For Shanti moral action or moral treatment became the fundamental point in all human action. Without moral action humans do not become perfect. Learning is not just for theory only in fact should be adopted in life. Shanti also emphasized righteousness in written documents such as follows:

“Zaki should not behave such like that, he should respect the ceremony that actually held for celebrating his great success returned back to his own country after complete his tertiary education in overseas. He should respect and return back the merit given by his family members that willing to support him financially while he is [pursuing] his studies in overseas. Giving respect to the elder generation is a good element that should be adopted by our society”. (Shanti).

According to Shanti, righteousness is the main idea under the principle of altruism. A matter can be taken into consideration under the righteousness policy. If carried out, such appearance so common, good things will turn out and be acquired at the end of every action. Devi, another participant, stated: “I should accept promotion while working in the future just like an ordinary man even though I’m a woman”.

The stance taken by Shanti shows that righteousness in action should be maintained regardless of gender. At the same time, all of us deserve to get privileges in case we have qualification and ability which

could bring common good for all. Muni, the other participant, wrote as follows:

“Prefect who is on duty always stomp the school toilet door because of not satisfied with behavior of students who always defile the toilet. The behavior of the prefect who is on duty is correct, because the prefect carry out his/her duty that is given to him/her and comply with the school rules” (Muni).

Based on the written documents, Muni has understood the question suggested in the post-test, while study participant could do moral considerations before giving facts or reasons. Aspect of moral consideration has transpired by Muni and at the same time she started to employ moral reasoning in this situation. She also justified the prefect’s action as being due to order or assignment given by the discipline teacher. Therefore it also can be considered that treatment and the way an individual judges results from the pressure exerted by superiors.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that the students were interested in learning moral education using the domain approach which involves the moral domain and social convention domain (Nucci, 2001). Applying the Domain approach in teaching morality in the classroom is not very easy. There may be some challenges to overcome in the teaching and learning process.

To teachers, the toughest challenge was making clear the difference between the moral and social convention domain. Some of the participants mixed up the domains when discussing the issues given to them. However, finally most of the students managed to understand the difference and increased their moral knowledge.

Domain approach in moral education gives teachers a way or option to associate moral content more creatively. This approach can forecast the understanding, thinking and reasoning level of the students in some situation (Nucci, 2001; Turiel, 1976).

Nucci (2001) affirmed that students’ thinking level in moral domain will be increased by using the domain approach. In this study, Yalu opined that fair value and impartiality are important in moral situations. This shows that the thinking level of this student improved from earlier.

Domain Approach empowers students to engage themselves in discussions on moral issues. They can give ideas and opinion about justice, altruism and autonomy. As discussed earlier, Kavina thinks an individual should not be biased in implementing the task given. Giving opinion using the domain approach can also be used to solve real situation or problems faced in everyday life. At the same time students could think and share ideas on appropriation and gave logical reasons which related to trust.

CONCLUSION

In the world of globalization, it is important to use various types of approaches in teaching moral education. Domain approach in moral education gives opportunity for students to understand the social world by investigating critical social issues in the social convention domain and moral domain.

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