Research Article

Content and Value Integrated Learning: Perspectives, Curriculum and Perceptions in the Private University Contexts of Bangladesh

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How to cite this article: Begum, F., & Kamal, M. A. (2024). Content and value integrated learning: perspectives, curriculum and perceptions in the private university contexts of Bangladesh. *International Journal of Education, Language, and Religion, 6*(1), pp. 58-66. doi: https://doi.org./10.35308/ijelr.v6i1.9100

Abstract

In this consumerist world, the necessity of teaching ethics, values, and humanity seems to secure a marginal space in any curriculum emphasizing only on content teaching of the subjects associated to shape the graduates as sellable candidates in the job market. Since the ultimate vision of teaching and learning is expected to reshape or build ideal human beings with moral, ethical, and humane qualities, the teaching of ethics and values should be integrated along with the content teaching of the subjects in undergraduate programs. Hence, the vision of developing professional ethics, community ethics, self-esteem, personality, and character should be reflected in and taught through the curriculum. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether human values and ethics are emphasized in the objectives of the curriculum and course content of the departments of English in Bangladeshi private universities. This paper also aims to identify the gap created by the absence of humanizing study contents in the undergraduate English program curriculums of private universities in Bangladesh and provide suggestions to fill the vacuum. After the content analysis of collected curriculums, a significant gap in the inclusion of humanizing study contents in these undergraduate English curriculums to develop moral and ethical faculties among the learners was traced. The study came up with suggestions for adjustment in the university curriculum to fill this vacuum by integrating content and value learning together adopting a holistic approach to nurture humane and moral behavior.

Keywords

value and content integration; ethics, humanity; English curriculum; religion

Introduction

The current scenario with tantalizing contexts in higher education in Bangladesh is the right time for both private and public universities to evaluate and rethink the way we teach our students and revise our

curriculum integrating the teaching and learning of values and ethics along with the content teaching from the syllabus. The choice of text in undergraduate English programs and the application of certain approaches in teaching in class appear significantly important in rebuilding the moral character of the learners as human beings. Especially, the English literature classes are fertile grounds for nurturing humanitarian values and sensitivity (Hossain, 2021) by appropriating the issues and themes presented in the Western canon of literature with the local context as well as by selecting the texts written in English by local authors on contextual and contemporary issues concerning, for example, moral decay, abuse of religion, terrorism, and distortion of ethical values. Instead of being too neutral regarding the teaching of values, the present scenario demands a more particular mission of guiding learners to the process of installing humanity in their personality and practically exercising it in social and global contexts.

Since dilemma persisted among policymakers and educators in designing curricula and choosing contents to instill better humanitarian values in students, questions regarding cultural relativism of morality in English literature, suspicion on aesthetic and moral power of literature, and doubts about the transferability of moral awareness acquired through literature to actual moral conduct (Pantić, 2006) encouraged much closer scrutiny on rethinking about compulsory inclusion of all canonical English literature in Bachelor of English programs in South Asian countries like Bangladesh. Moreover, because of the continuous recession of focus on the subjects of liberal arts and humanities and the blooming of market-driven subjects such as business studies, engineering, computer science, and other technical subjects in Bangladesh, learners tend to focus less on the ethical and moral development of their personalities leading to the moral degradation of the new generation. Hence, the integration of moral and ethical contents through literary study courses seems to create a scope for the reinstallation of the moral-ethical values that the new generation seems to lack.

Since relativist theory advocates for equal valuation of all cultures, notions, and ideologies rejecting the notion of superiority/ supremacy of any, a more concentrated focus seems to remain absent here. So, a modified or curtailed version of cultural relativism of morality appears to be more effective in choosing the contents of our syllabus. In fact, the evaluation and revision of the whole of the BA in English program could be classified into three different major aspects: a) Introducing full credit course on morality building b) Revising course contents for contextualizing, and c) Rethinking teaching approach focusing more on the affective goal of Bloom's Taxonomy.

Recent global phenomenon traces our juvenile generation losing their moral direction (Bhakta, 2017; Desai, 2015) and indulging themselves in violence and anti-social entanglements like never before. This study is inspired by the recent terrorist incidents taken place in Bangladesh as well as around the world. It was marked that the terrorists taken in custody by the police in one of these incidents come from very educated backgrounds as students from some reputed private universities as well as some English Medium schools of Dhaka which follow either EDEXCEL or Cambridge curriculum. The involvement in anti-social activities of educated students from a particular stream of education points its finger toward some invisible lack in the overall education system. The study evolves from the question: what is lacking in the curriculum the presence of which could have demotivated the students from extremism and anti-social living?

According to Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom et al., 1994; Gronlund, 1991; Krathwohl et al., 1956.), there are three taxonomies incorporating knowledge-based goals, skills-based goals, and affective goals (affecting values, attitudes, and interests). While applying Bloom's taxonomy to the objective of BA in English courses, for example in *Modern English Drama* course, a) a knowledge-based goal can be achieved by asking whether a student understands the structure and story of a particular drama; b) a skills-based goal for this course might be the expectation that student will be able to independently interpret the theme(s) properly. Lastly, c) an affective goal for this course might be the expectation to see students caring about real-life social issues reflected in any drama. The affective goal appears to be the most important and the most difficult part to assess (Setiawan et al, 2019; Pandra

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& Mardapi, 2017). This is an affective goal because it requires that the student's values, attitudes, or interests be affected by the course. The following table gives us a clear idea of Bloom's Taxonomy of educational objectives for affective goals.

Table 1. Bloom's Taxonomy of educational objectives for affective goals

Level of Expertise	Description of Level	Example of Measurable Student Outcome
Receiving	Demonstrates a willingness to participate in the activity	When I'm in class I am attentive to the instructor, take notes, etc. I do not read the newspaper instead.
Responding	Shows interest in the objects, phenomena, or activity by seeking it out or pursuing it for pleasure	I complete my homework and participate in class discussions.
Valuing	Internalizes an appreciation for (values) the objectives, phenomena, or activity	I seek out information in popular media related to my class.
Organization	Begins to compare different values, and resolve conflicts between them to form an internally consistent system of values	Some of the ideas I've learned in my class differ from my previous beliefs. How do I resolve this?
Characterization by A Value or Value Complex	Adopts a long-term value system that is "pervasive, consistent, and predictable"	I've decided to take my family on a vacation to visit some of the places I learned about in my class.

(Bloom et al., 1994; Gronlund, 1991; Krathwohl et al., 1956.)

Since Bloom's Taxonomy can be very conveniently used to ascertain the level to which students demonstrate their aptitude in understanding and using concepts, in demonstrating particular skills, and in having their values, attitudes, and interests affected, it should very carefully be adopted in developing BA in English curriculum and syllabus. Most of the BA in English program curriculum aims more at cognitive and skill-based aptitude-building goals whereas the affective goal of the whole program is less prioritized. The understanding of today's degrading-value-vacant context demands more emphasis on the effective goal of teaching and learning which will positively affect the learners' values, attitudes, and interests.

Moreover, the syllabus should be designed more carefully keeping it contextual, relevant, and need-based. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said's (1994) review of the English departments' syllabi at Arab universities suggests that they do not reflect the "relationship between English and the colonial processes that brought the language and its literature" to the region. So, there should be a socio-cultural relationship reflected in the syllabus of the BA in English program in Bangladesh.

Culture, religion, society, and politics play a vital role in designing an effective BA in English syllabus. In this case, religion is one of the important binding factors that unite society though there are some minor loopholes subject to careful handling. Scholars through their research (Hasan, 2012; Mohd Ramli, 2013; Nirwana & Darmadali, 2021, Syed, 1994) have already emphasized the importance of integrating religious values, such as Islamic values with the Muslim majority in Bangladesh, in English language and literary studies which can be adopted in Bangladesh.

Method

This research is basically qualitative in nature. The methodology for this research includes collecting data from existing syllabuses of BA in English curriculum taught in six different private universities situated in the metropolitan capital city, Dhaka in Bangladesh, and analyzing them thematically to reach a better understanding of the gap in the existing curriculum to accomplish the objective of moral and ethical development of the learners. The research design incorporated a step-by-step content analysis of the undergraduate English curriculum of the six universities in context (See appendices). The curriculum of these universities out of the total 112 (as of 2024) was chosen based on random sampling and ease of availability. Once the curriculums were collected from these university websites, a thematic and

diagnostic analysis of the curriculums was made to find the lack and provide a proposal to bridge the gap.

Results and Discussion

Though some of the private university curriculums incorporate the teaching of humanity in courses like Ethics and Culture, Introduction to Ethics, and Art of Living under different programs, the rest of them tend to seldom bother about the necessity of institutionally teaching and learning humanism. The analysis of the curriculum and course objective of some core and general education courses such as *Ethics and Culture, Introduction to Ethics, Art of Living, Value, and Ethics,* etc. in some major Higher Educational Institutions (See Appendix) gives us an idea to identify the vacuum and fill up the gap between the objective of teaching and outcome of learning.

Before designing and after implementing the curriculum and syllabus the assessment and judgment of the learning outcome is obvious. If we have a look at the course objective (given below) of *Introduction to Ethics* course under BA in English program taught in one of the private universities in Bangladesh, it will be clearer that subjective focus of the students' affective outcome is present there in the course description but focus is more on Western values and ethics and is limited to within a single course of 3 (three) credit which may not create any immediate effective impact on building students' ethical character suitable for Bangladeshi culture and context. The following course description will make it clearer:

> This course introduces students to the prominent ethical theories (virtue ethics, utilitarianism, deontology, etc.) in the Western philosophical tradition, examines the debate between moral universalism and moral relativism, and demonstrates various methods of analysis as applied to contemporary moral problems, e.g., abortion, assisted reproductive technologies, organ transplantation, affirmative action, capital punishment, euthanasia, war and violence, gender roles, human rights, environmental degradation. As appropriate, a multicultural perspective on ethical theory and moral problems will be examined.

In this course description the focus could be shifted from Western to more contextual South Asian philosophical tradition. Moreover, current moral and ethical issues that may have a more immediate impact such as responsibilities towards parents and family members, attachment with society, and betterment of deprived and financially needy people could be dealt with. On the other hand, another private university is offering **HUM 103 Ethics and Culture, a 3 credits** course with the following course description:

> This course introduces the students to principles and concepts of ethics and their application to our personal life. It establishes a basic understanding of social responsibility, and its relationship with social and cultural aspects, and eventually requires each student to develop a framework for making ethical decisions in his work. Students learn a systematic approach to moral reasoning. It focuses on problems associated with moral conflicts, justice, the relationship between rightness and goodness, objective vs. subjective, moral judgment, moral truth, and relativism. It also examines personal ethical perspectives as well as social-cultural norms and values in relation to their use in our society. Topics include truth-telling and fairness, objectivity vs. subjectivity, privacy, confidentiality, bias, economic pressures, social responsibility, controversial and morally offensive content, exploitation, manipulation, special considerations (i.e. juveniles, courts), and professional and ethical work issues and decisions. At the conclusion of the course, the students will be able to identify and discuss professional and ethical concerns, use moral reasoning skills to examine, analyze, and resolve ethical dilemmas, and distinguish differences and similarities among legal, ethical, and moral perspectives.

The second one seems to be more contextual and effective to instill humanitarian values in students if there is a real reflection in classroom teaching of the concepts and issues mentioned in this course outline.

Art of Living is another course taught by another private university in Dhaka with a target to understand parenting and their empathetic bondage by extracting from the past, bearing the present, and exploring the future by involving them directly. This course also caters to upholding self-esteem, confidence, and self-driven quality for evolving leadership quality which also seems to have an immediate affective goal. However, only classroom teaching of the values is not enough; it must have practical sessions involving projects and reports which will include students' practical application in society and family of their learning in the classroom. Social campaigns, demonstrations, and volunteering in social events and calamities might be some effective ways how students can learn practically and academically through the Institutions. Another course titled *Values and Ethics* describes its objective as:

> The whole course is aimed at the practical application of moral values to the burning problems of the troubled world today. The course has been so designed to prepare the students to face moral issues properly and lead a noble life. The objective of the course is to introduce the students to the basics of ethics so as to make them aware of the nature and importance of morality and human values in human life, especially in a pluralistic society and multi-dimensional environmental variables in which individuals have to operate today.

Therefore, it can be deduced from the above course descriptions that some of the BA in English curriculum incorporates some courses with an objective of nurturing human values whereas the majority of the BA in English curriculum under study do not incorporate, or even though they incorporate, their focus remains impractical and ineffective, hence, devoid of any affective goal of the course or syllabus which remains vague (Birbeck & Andre, 2009).

Ways to emphasize humanitarian values through higher education in Bangladesh

Teaching values might be integrated into the BA in English curriculum in Bangladesh since this is a uniquely fertile ground suitable for nurturing humanity because of the subject's nature of immediate reflection of learning on social beings. The ways can be categorized in the following subfields:

a. **By including compulsory courses exclusively for teaching values/ building good characters**: The inclusion of courses related to ethical values e.g. art of living, changes the values and practices of our students from the Greco-Roman world to the modern world. Things do not always remain universal since there is an evolution of values in different cultures.

b. **By developing or selecting course materials with ethical content**: "Clearer understanding of others, sharpened knowledge of the groups to which we belong, should be one of the explicit goals of the literature program." (Hawisher & Soter, 1990). So, contextualizing the context of the texts used in most of the courses could be an important tool for engaging students to more an immediate cause of studying European or American (foreign) texts. Moreover, texts, such as Don Juan, which are very intriguing and inspiring to live a more irrational, erratic, and unprescribed moral life should be under restriction of large-scale use in classes.

c. **Through religious interpretation of texts:** Bangladesh, comprising 90.0% Muslim, 7.9% Hindu, 0.6% Buddhist, 0.3 Christian, and 0.1% others estimated in 2022 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, is observed to have a similarly heterogeneous religious group of students in higher education institutions. Therefore, instead of interpreting Western texts from Christian perspectives which is integrated by default, Eastern religious contexts might be incorporated to

make the themes more contextualized with a goal of more immediate impact on students connecting to Bloom's affective goal of learning.

d. **Integrating the ethics in course objectives**: Course objectives should guide the pedagogical role expected (relating the content to the relevant cultures of the students).

For example, in the late Victorian age, the disillusionment of European people towards religion and in the early twentieth century the disillusionment towards science and technology left human beings in a hopeless dilemma, which is reflected viciously in literature. What ethical aspects evaded human behavior at that time must be focused on while teaching? Huxley's *A Brave New World* or Eliot's *The Wasteland* must be read as a forewarning of what might happen if …

e. **By integrating values in pedagogy**: A certain literary approach to interpretation could be adopted with a focused mission. Instead of keeping the approach of interpretation open-ended, it could be controlled, and value guided. How much of Bangladeshi culture is related, exposed, or compared should be an important issue while teaching English literature. Differences in family structure (living together, homosexual marital status) in Western and Eastern countries, celebrating Halloween and Christmas, Guyfaulkner night in England, and comparing local culture with these and finding out resembles and significance of local culture should be emphasized.

Ways to Incorporate Religious Values

Manshur and Husni (2020) identified that literary-based learning is useful in promoting and developing religious moderation. The inclusion of some texts advocating religio-cultural values, written by Muslim writers, in contemporary English literature courses of the BA English program studied by the Muslim majority students is necessary for the better understanding of Islamic culture and 'proportional representation of writers belonging to various religious and ideological background'. Ziauddin Sardar (b. 1951), Qaisra Shahraz (b. 1958), Leila Aboulela (b. 1964), Mohsin Hamid (b. 1971), Rabina Khan (b. 1972), Shelina Zahra Janmohamed (b. 1974), Rekha Waheed (b. 1975), Na'ima B. Robert (b. 1977), Ralegh Ommar (b. 1967), Robin Yassin-Kassab (b.1969), Zahid Hussain (b. 1972), and all of whom somewhat use their literary career and creative works to exemplify various aspects of Islamic teachings. Excluding such writers from contemporary English literature courses is a deplorable and inexplicable anomaly (Hasan, 2012).

Scholars also suggest that a proposed Islamic study of English literature would also have to include a response to literary pieces that are embedded with Christian teachings, such as Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Here, lecturers could use a comparative religion framework, which has been developed amongst others by Ismail Raji al-Faruqi in works such as *Islam and Other Faiths* (1998), to highlight differences between Islam and Christianity in matters dealing with the soul and society. It could show that, for the most part, Christianity emphasizes good deeds as a guarantee of salvation without any reference to God as the ultimate source to which the objectives of these deeds are directed. Islam, however, views the gaining of Allah's (s.w.t.) *redha* or satisfactory acceptance as the objective of all virtuous acts and that the road to salvation must not only be filled with good deeds but also the perfection of man's *iman* or belief as well as manifestations of these in his formal acts of worship toward Allah (s.w.t.). If a work like John Milton's *Paradise Lost* describes in detail Christian views on man's creation and so forth, the many interpretations by Muslims to *Paradise Lost* which sees it as glorifying Satan could be discussed in class. Milton's work could also be compared with the Quran's rendition of the Prophet Adam's (a.s.) fall from Heaven. (*Oasis International Conference on Islamic Education (OICIE2014) on 5 November 2014 at PWTC, Kuala Lumpur Positioning and Repositioning Islamic Education*)

Code-switching is a very effective way a teacher can guide students towards accepting and practicing one's moral behavior. In terms of naming religious persons, prophets, and beliefs adding extra words of reverence e.g. while uttering the name of prophet Mahommet, adding traditionally used extra words e.g. *pbuh* (peace be upon him) is expected to influence the students psychologically to show respect and honor. Here, misnaming or misrepresenting of Islamic or any other religious values must be checked carefully. The BA in English syllabus may follow the model where texts are chosen selectively emphasizing on English literature which focuses more on religious culture, values, and historical background. In that case *Literature of the Islamic Culture* course taught at Aligarh University may be cited here as an example:

Literature with the Religious Culture and Insight (50 marks) course includes the following texts in different categories or genres such as,
- Poetry (any two)
  - Scott Fitzgerald: The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam
  - Mirza Ghalib: Selections
  - Dr. Allama Iqbal: Selections
  - Faiz Ahmed Faiz: Selections
  - Kishwar Naheed: Selections
- Novel (anyone):
  - Kahlil Gibran: The Prophet
  - Attia Hossain: Sunlight on a Broken Column
  - Khaled Hosseini: The Kite Runner
- Prose: Selections from Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain

Conclusion

One of the aims of this paper was to identify the gap in the inclusion of humanizing study contents in the undergraduate English curriculums of private universities in Bangladesh to develop moral and ethical faculties among the learners. Another purpose of the study was to suggest the ways how university curriculum might be adjusted to fill this vacuum by integrating content and value learning together adopting a holistic approach to nurture humane and moral behavior. Very few of the private university curriculums incorporate the teaching of humanity in courses such as Ethics and Culture, Introduction to Ethics, and Art of Living under different programs, the rest of them tend to seldom bother about the necessity of institutionally teaching and learning humanism. It is evident from the above study that a more careful attempt is needed in designing the curriculum, and syllabus and choosing course contents of undergraduate English programs focusing more on Bloom's affective goal of teaching over cognitive and skill-based goal. In this regard, it could be suggested that the syllabus designer of this country needs to be slightly restrictive while choosing some of the canonical texts such as Don Juan or Doctor Faustus, etc. as the course contents in BA in English syllabus because of the provocative messages conveyed through the characters of them. Though it may raise the allegation of conservatism, sometimes it should be ignored for the bigger benefits of the moral-ethical development of the young learners belonging to Generation Z and Alpha. Rather, the curriculum should be enriched with texts with religious and moral messages and connotations prone to render an affective impact on the young learners which will ultimately help foster ethics and values among them which the world is now in dire need of. The gap in the curriculum to provide moral and ethical input to the learners will be minimized.

However, this study has some limitations. In this study, the syllabus of the public university undergraduate curriculum of the English program was not included which is one of the limitations of this study. Another limitation of the study is the omission of the learners as research participants to assess and evaluate their moral and ethical status and compare the impact of the curriculum on them. These limitations may lead to scope for further research on these fields focusing on the learners' perceptions

and perspectives about moral and ethical content inclusion in the undergraduate English program curriculum.

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