

CONTENTS

Instilling Values and Ethics in Higher Education Institutions

Helmi & Henmaidi
pp. 1-3

Strengthening Cultural Connectivity through Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems into Undergraduate Coursework: A Perspective from Sabah

Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan
pp. 4-9

Opportunities for English Language Learning of International Students in Malaysia

*Noor Saazai Mat Saad, Melor Md
Yunus & Mohamed Amin Embi*
pp. 10-14

Strategi Penerbitan atas Talian dalam Meningkatkan Penarafan Universiti: Kes USM

*Mohamed Nor Azhari
Azman, Taksiah A. Majid &
Mohd Sanusi S. Ahamad*
pp. 15-19

Instilling Values and Ethics in Higher Education Institutions

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Introduction

Values and ethics are two concepts that are inter-related. Halstead and Taylor (in Zegward & Campbell, 2011, p. 3), define values as “principles, fundamental convictions, ideals, standard of life stances which act as general guide to behaviour, or as a reference point in decision making, or evaluation of beliefs, or actions”. In contrast, ethics are righteous conducts which adhere to a values-based judgment system (Garg, 2013). Buckeridge (2002, in Zegward & Paul, 2011, p. 4) defines ethics as the “application or outcomes of adherence to such value systems”.

The primary reason for the need to instil values and ethics is due to the fact that failure to address these two aspects in the learning process at higher education institutions (HEIs) will affect different aspects of public life as graduates from these institutions will eventually constitute the various actors in different arenas of that public sphere (Revell & Arthur, 2007; Lickona, 1991). Such failure has serious ramifications as students fail to develop a viable and sustainable value-based judgment system to guide their actions (called wisdom or character) thus contributing to the proliferation of self-centered and irresponsible behaviours amongst graduates (Marshall et. al, 2011 and White & Warfa, 2011). Cognisant of these negative implications, the need to cultivate and nurture wisdom has been highlighted on numerous occasions in the recent past. For instance, Bertrand Russel in *Impact of Science on Society* (1968: p. 97-98) foregrounds the role of wisdom in developing civil society and being the bedrock of civilisation by noting that: “Knowledge is power but it is power for evil just as much as it is for good. Unless man increases in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase in sorrow is certain.”

Basically, education, as the process of “bringing out the hidden goodness and capabilities in human beings” (Pandit, 2011, p. 2), has three major aspects: information, knowledge and wisdom. Analysed information forms the knowledge component. In turn, knowledge functions as the basis for intelligence in human beings and is essentially developed into skills and capabilities to deal with or perform various tasks in life. Wisdom, on the other hand, is the outcome derived when knowledge is combined with value-based judgments. It is wisdom that guides human behaviour to be responsible to both one’s self and to society. Given wisdom’s crucial role in forming and nurturing social harmony and well-being, it is incumbent that we instil values and ethics in HEIs and in so doing assist graduates, lecturers and support staff to become responsible and ethical citizens.

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A framework for Instilling Values and Ethics – The On-Going Initiative at Andalas University

Andalas University has designed a comprehensive framework in instilling values and ethics (called character education) and has established a potentially viable system to attain this goal. Essentially, the system comprises a four phase framework that encompasses laying a foundation, systems development, embedding of processes, and benchmarking.

The foundation phase commenced with the determination of a set of values formalised as the Andalas University’s Values and Ethics Framework. This framework, called the Andalusian Characters involves an iterative process of proposing, analysing evaluating, formulating and compiling a set of values derived from brainstorming sessions, focus group discussions and seminars. During this intensively intellectual process students, lecturers, support staff as well as external stakeholders were invited to provide inputs, verify and validate the proposed values. The values themselves were sourced from the various spiritual traditions as well as from the rich heritage of universal and local wisdom. Basically, the Andalusian Character consists of values which fall into three categories: knowledge, good deeds and social relations which are all inspired by spirituality. If we put them into circles formation, this spirituality constitutes the core stratum/inner circle and, serves as the source idea for all values in other three categories in the second circle. This implies that the basis for all values must not be inimical to the tenets of any faith. There are four values in each category in the second circle (knowledge, good deeds, and social relations): values in the category of knowledge include life-long learning, being visionary, being intelligent and willing to share, being creative and innovative. Values under good deeds are self-reliance (independence), self-control, diligence, and effective/efficient. In contrast, values under the social relations category include teamwork, excellent communication, courtesy and humility, and respect.

At the system development stage, a series of awareness seminars, trainings and workshops were conducted to train change agents who will play important roles in the embedding process. The change agents were

the core group consisting of lecturers, students and administrative staff who play the role to promote and instil values and ethics in the university community. Over the years the number will increase as necessary to cater the need to facilitate the values and ethics instilling processes.

The embedding process is a vital phase that is nevertheless both complex and longitudinal in scope. This phase includes activities that are both intra-curricular as well as extra-curricular in context. During this period, the students are to be provided with a conducive environment that supports character development. This phase will witness the involvement of all internal stakeholders who will be assigned to play different roles that are imperative towards the realisation of the programme’s specific goals. Activities that will commence once new students enrol will include introduction to the university’s values and ethics, dormitory-based character development programmes, participation in student activity units, mentoring activities and values internalisation programmes. All these activities are designed to be conducted throughout the students’ period of study. The embedding of values and ethics will also be effected via the teaching-learning process in classrooms, laboratories as well through structured assignments and other forms of learning activities. Values intended for embedding through various activities include honesty, discipline, responsibility, empathy, fairness, patient/enduring for change and sincerity.

“...the approach involves the consensual adoption of a set of agreed values, followed by an integrated approach in character development that is infused through intra-curricular and extra-curricular activities.”

Another important aspect of the embedding process is role modelling. In this regard, lecturers, instructors, and senior students have a vital role to play as exemplary role models. In addition to this, a conducive campus environment augmented by the relevant rules, regulations and activities has been nurtured with the aim of fostering value acceptance and adoption by the campus community. As noted above, activities designed to facilitate the adoption and practice of the requisite values are basically either intra-curricular or extra-curricular in orientation. In this regard, monitoring and evaluation are utilised as the preferred modalities to assess the efficacy of these activities in serving as catalysts for value embedding. In the case of intra-curricular activities, the monitoring and evaluation protocols are integrated into the formal assessment component of each subject, while the impact of extra-

curricular activities is monitored and evaluated by the Students Activities Performance System (SAPS). Finally, future character assessment of graduates regarding their adherence and practice of the values so gained are to be conducted via the university's alumnae association.

Conclusion

Character education has received due attention from HEIs over the last decade. This is due to the alarming decline in moral standards in the public sphere. As a consequence, the Ministry of Education and Culture has encouraged HEIs to integrate values and ethics into their education programmes.

In light of these developments, Andalas University has initiated a programme designed to develop and strengthen the character of its graduates. This paper provides a brief summary as to how this initiative was conceptualised as well as the frameworks and approaches adopted for the implementation of the character development programme in the university. Essentially, the approach involves the consensual adoption of a set of agreed values, followed by an integrated approach in character development that is infused through intra-curricular and extra-curricular activities. It is envisaged that this programme will expose students to a conducive environment for character building and eventually enable them to graduate with noble values and ethics, ready to be agents for social change.

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