



Universal Human Values In Educational Curriculum Of 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

The fundamental objective of education has always been the manifestation of an all-round development of an individual. However, this purpose has taken a different shape with time since the present education system focuses more on nurturing only certain skill sets of the students than ensuring a holistic growth of their thought process. As a result, we are witnessing a generation of skilled technicians who are mostly unaware of their true potential. In India, students who are pursuing various academic degrees, demonstrate significant efficiency as far as their competence in core subject domains is concerned. Unfortunately, the basic life skills which are required to sustain and thrive in a social setup are missing in those promising personalities. The importance of such skills, like creative thinking, leadership, teamwork, problem-solving, self-awareness, etc., have been repeatedly highlighted on various platforms by different commissions and expert committees on education, but the effective methodologies and models for inculcating those skills are not yet identified in our education system. To address this concern, the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) introduced a new course on "Universal Human Values" in 2017 with the expectation of fostering the right understanding of the varied dimensions of an individual's personality. This chapter attempts to understand the exact intention behind the introduction of such a course, its relevance in the context of contemporary information-driven academia, and most importantly, the possible outcome of such theoretical deliberation on value judgment. The chapter also tries to identify the areas where such an innovative course can further improvise to elicit the maximum benefit and appeal to the greatest number of young minds.

Keywords: Curriculum, Ethics, Professional Courses, Moral Education, Skills, Values

Introduction

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, a path-breaking education policy that has supplanted the more than three-decade-old National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986, intends to usher in a new education system in India that is at once comprehensive and innovative. This policy stands on the pillars of quality, equity, access, affordability, and accountability. Intending to achieve these goals, along with the successful accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, the policy promises to cultivate a competency-based, holistically-developed brand of learners from the public and private forums of education. By holistic development, NEP 2020 proposes to nurture the cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor well-being of the learners, whereas, by fostering competence, the policy implies shaping their fundamental knowledge, skills, attitudes as well as behavior: "Pedagogy must evolve to make education more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centered, discussion-based, flexible, enjoyable" (Govt. of India, 2020).

Value education has been made a necessary part of the vocational sensitivities in the Middle Stage (11-14 years) of school curricular and pedagogical restructuring. The intention here is to teach students at a young

age “what is right” and scaffold the mainstream pedagogy with a logical framework for making ethical decisions. Inspiring tales and fables from Indian tradition such as *Jataka*, *Hitopdesha* and *Panchatantra* and excerpts from the Indian Constitution have been made an essential part of the curriculum. Even health and social sensitivity are to be nurtured by embedding them in the curriculum. The detrimental effects of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs are scientifically explained to the students. The Secondary Stage (14-18 years) which follows the Middle Stage, is marked by four years of multidisciplinary study. Pedagogy must go interactive and experiential at this stage where they become a part of the project-based communities on various domains. They are provided experiences to develop the ability to engage, handle conflicts with their peers/co-learners, communicate effectively, work collaboratively, work cooperatively, extend philanthropy, etc. Thus, we are marching towards attaining a supportive, sensitive, and nurturing learning environment.

In correspondence with the school curriculum, AICTE has undertaken an initiative to incorporate a course on Universal Human Values (UHV) for students of technical education after school. To fulfill the purpose of education, as articulated in NEP 2020, i.e., to “develop full human potential and a just and equitable society” (AICTE NCC-IP Sub-committee 2020, p.3), it is imperative to understand the difference between “What really is” and “What ought to be”. That is why, in addition to CGPAs and placements in multi-national companies, the graduates passing out every year from various technical institutions of the country are expected to acquire a broader understanding of the society and the relationship that they are supposed to maintain with it. With this intention in mind, starting in 2017, AICTE is providing a three-week introduction program for all first-year students, with one faculty member assigned to every 20–25 students.

In India, technical institutes were primarily established to produce proficient manpower in different domains along with a sense of obligation towards the self, family, and society. However, the undergraduate students setting foot in them are mostly driven by the over-arching expectations of their families as well the society at large. Most of the learners join such programs without actually realizing their interests and orientations. Therefore, quite inevitably, they fail to connect with the larger goals of their institution as well as the program that they are undertaking. Today it is an impassioned discussion in the entire academia where we want our potential learners to be able to establish harmonious relationships with themselves, the people around them, society, and nature at large. The bottom line that cannot be missed is that each of these learners is putting tremendous effort in some form or the other to achieve the primary objective of their program.

In such a scenario, certain pertinent questions come to the fore, the most important of them being- why are such efforts important? Are the efforts being made merely to fulfill the primary aspirations, resolve conflicts, and satisfy the need for basic physical facilities or something else? Which aspirations should we consider as final? The teachers, as torchbearers in the two-by-four classroom- two pages of a book and the four walls set up (Shapiro, 1989), should be churning the young minds into speculating these concerns. Some of the basic responses that the learners of the present generation provide, express their yearning to earn financial stability and secure a reputation in their respective fields of expertise. Some of them also demonstrate their interest in facilitating further research and innovation as one of the expected outcomes of their technical education, while some consider that the end goal of their teaching-learning process is to make their family and the nation proud. Despite all these varied responses, one of the primary questions remains intact, i.e., can we expect young minds to have a fulfilling life after achieving their primary goals?

Positive psychology defines holistic well-being as the fundamental goal of the life of an individual (Swarbrick, 2006). However, since we are living at a time when progress is quantified in terms of money and power in the society in which we inhabit, the concept of basic human aspirations needs to be re-evaluated. The course on Universal Human Values paves the way for such deliberation. The introduction of this course for students of technical programs aims to imbibe the idea of success and progression and the path to achieve them in an individual during the most crucial time of their formative years, i.e., teenage and early adulthood. The teachers in schools, colleges, and universities also have the primary responsibility to internalize, and thereafter, impart that pecuniary progress is an essential appliance for our society to function, but that should be sustainable and egalitarian.

While talking about the fundamental objective of education, critics have rightly pointed out that the well-being of a person is directly proportional to fitness, ingenuity, fecundity, kinship, and the Avante-Garde (Howell, Kem, & Lyubomirsky, 2007; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Pressman & Cohen, 2005). Adler (2017) continues by saying that an educational system that encourages students and their community's overall health while still encouraging traditional financial gain will provide them with the skills that are needed to lead fulfilling and uncompromised lives. This after all is the foundation of constructive education. A thorough review of the existing literature further reflects that people enjoy good health, high professional achievement, good societal kinship, and greater financial contributions to society if they have greater life satisfaction (Howell, Kern & Lyubomirsky, 2007; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Pressman & Cohen, 2005). Fry and Debats (2009) have reflected that a positive person has better physical health, which covers faster recovery post-surgical procedures, infrequent illness, lower mortality rate, and lower prevalence of substance abuse. Shen, McCreary, & Myers (2004) have also confirmed the same. Salovey, et. al. (2000) contends that the more positive emotions one nurtures, the better relationships he/she maintains in society with healthier behavior towards everybody. Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan (2009) stated that people who feel grateful for everything around them experience less somatic symptom disorder. Johnson & Fredrickson

(2005) also reaffirm that with all these positive effects, we are less biased and discriminatory towards our fellow folks who are racially, ethnically, culturally, and religious-wise different from us.

These studies and their discussions lead us to have a clear picture of what exactly the current academic structure of India needs. The ideologies propagated by these educationists and philosophical thinkers can be seen, to a large extent, being promoted through the modules of the Universal Human Values course which has been made compulsory for students in all cross-sections of the country to bring a significant change in the belief system of the modern learners.

The rationale behind Introducing the Course

In the busy pulse of work, we need to project the hum of energy and the purpose of having the UHV course in the curriculum. The Universal Human Values is a course included in both schools and institutes of higher education under the umbrella of Value Education. Value education addresses the most significant concern of human existence- 'what is of value', or 'what is valuable to a human being'. Based on what we value, our actions are determined. The skills that have been acquired by the youth in the education system thus need to be complemented with the values with which they use them in real life. To talk about the proposed course, in the following segment of the chapter, we shall discuss the rationale behind AICTE's decision to introduce Universal Human Values for students of technical institutions.

The current syllabus of Universal Human Values prescribed by AICTE augments an initial discussion on the idea of basic aspirations and the right understanding of harmony in varied aspects of life. The main goal of the course has been identified as helping students build a holistic viewpoint through examination of themselves, their families, society at large, and nature in general. The course propagates the central idea that to make our education meaningful as well as valuable, we need to understand the various ways in which we can establish a harmonious relationship with every unit present in our environment.

The course also facilitates detailed discussion on topics such as friendship, assertiveness, cheating, ambition, growth, contentment, competition, indifference, etc. These characteristics which are basic to any individual, are not usually effectively dealt with, in the skill-driven curriculum that the students are made to undertake. Such discussions under the guidance of faculty mentors are expected to motivate the students to reflect, explore and verify these emotional attributes on their own. The course on Universal Human Values is expected to generate more self-awareness among the students- awareness of their selves as well as the environment that surrounds them. The rationale behind this course is to enable young minds to identify their real aspirations, and in handling problems with sustainable solutions while keeping human relationships and human nature intact. This would, in the long run, help them in lateral thinking which is a pre-requisite for a sustainable life and professional career. Additionally, they would develop sensitivity to their commitment to what they have learned about human values, relationships, and society. Hopes are also pinned on the fact that the lessons of the universal values learned would make them real-life ready in situations that come out of the blue.

Relevance of the Course in the Present Curriculum Structure

This goes without saying that despite our expedition from the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century to Industrial Revolution 4.0, we have been prone to a large number of human-made disasters in the name of COVID-19, arsons, wars, civil disorder, terrorism, biological/chemical threats, and cyber-attacks more than ever, with tumultuous after-effects. The genesis of all lies in what we believe, our aspirations to be that bring us happiness, and the means to achieve them. The best instances that we get from, are those social-network memes which quote, "Happiness is destination wedding", "happiness is late-night ice-cream", "happiness is wearing a sweater that reminds you of mom", "happiness is money, mansion, and Mercedes", etc. What if we could germinate in them ideas like "happiness is being at peace with you in this crazy world", "happiness is to be able to say no", "happiness is saying sorry", "happiness is feeding a hungry", etc?

The question is, are our students who have completed the UHV course a changed person after the value education taken in the classes? Have they impacted themselves from CGPAs to CGAs already? Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) is a tool to evaluate the academic performance of students, whereas CGA is a new nomenclature for Common Graduate Attributes as delineated in NEP 2020. Some indicators that speak about CGA are a "Holistic vision of life, Socially responsible behavior, Environmentally responsible work, Ethical human conduct, Having Competence and Capabilities for Maintaining Health and Hygiene and Appreciation and aspiration for excellence (merit) and gratitude for all" (Marg, 2020).

The holistic vision of life brainstorms the pupils' motivation for excellence, clarity in aspiration, self-confidence, and self-fulfillment. Socially responsible behavior enables students as a team, ensures mutually prosperous behavior at the level of- self, family, workplace, and society, restores civil responsibility & engagement, and instills a sense of justice for all human beings. Environmentally responsible work enables prosperity in human beings by being coexistent with nature, having the right skills and standpoint for entrepreneurship, having expertise for ensuring balance and replenishment in Nature, attitude of right usage of physical resources, and getting rid of anthropogenic tendencies. Ethical human conduct includes work ethics and good disposition. Having Competence and Capabilities for Maintaining Health and Hygiene through an appropriate lifestyle includes good food habits, following routine, and interaction with the

environment. Acknowledgment and endeavor for excellence and gratefulness for everything is the nugget of ancient Indian wisdom which reiterates the significance of gratitude to all living and non-living entities in addition to the divine.

But if the student is oriented to score more than what he internalizes in the lessons, are our learning outcomes met? We need to stop and stare at how far we have walked off from being sensitive to others. The non-existent utopia which looks reachable at the cost of relationships we ought to enliven is driving us nowhere. Can we make ourselves non-threatening wilfully, in the market of potential underachievers thus assuring a compassionate space for them to be empowered? The race of encroachment, to be the powerful is a draconian cause of all conflicts. Can we break off all of that aggressive rapacity? Can the rate of divorces in households be retracted? The questions go on and on.

Limitations of the Universal Human Values Course

Although the foundation course in Universal Human Values and Professional Ethics has been introduced by AICTE so that the students of various professional degrees across the country learn to "appreciate the essential complementarity between values and skills to ensure sustained happiness and prosperity, which are the core aspirations of all human beings", there are still few areas which can be deliberated upon to make the course more effective. The present curriculum of UHV initiates a discussion on topics that are fundamental to human existence yet are barely touched upon by mainstream technical pedagogy. In that way, the course is one of a kind. However, the theoretical method that has been adopted in imparting such discussion, can be interrogated since it subverts the larger goal of the course.

The basic intention behind introducing a course on Universal Human Values for students of technical education is to make the young minds realize that their ultimate reason to pursue a degree is not merely to grow into skilled technicians. Rather, the objective is to shape themselves into a well-rounded individual who is aware of their place in the larger social order- someone who rightly understands the balance between fulfilling the need for physical facilities and yet maintaining healthy relationships. The theoretical framework of the newly introduced course obstructs this goal, since it does not actively promote experiential learning which is one of the primary missions of NEP 2020: "In all stages, experiential learning will be adopted, including hands-on learning, arts-integrated and sports-integrated education, story-telling-based pedagogy, among others, as standard pedagogy within each subject, and with explorations of relations among different subjects. To close the gap in achievement of learning outcomes, classroom transactions will shift, towards competency-based learning and education" (p.12). Mere academic discussion on the notions of right and wrong in the confines of a traditional classroom can be a starting point for generating awareness, but unless the learners are allowed to practice and experiment with those value judgments in their day-to-day life, the definitive purpose of the course cannot be fully achieved.

There are two general sets of questions that a student usually confronts- "What to do?" and "How to do?". The present structure of the UHV course sufficiently addresses the former question, whereas due to its theoretical premise, the latter remains unaddressed. However, it is quite evident that a course like this will not be able to achieve its desired outcome if the learners are not allowed to experience their knowledge in real-life situations. For that, provisions have to be created. For example, instead of merely discussing with the students the right understanding of the natural world, if they are allowed to experience its all-pervasive impact, the impact of the course will be more powerful and sustaining. In short, a course that is expected to raise questions in the minds of the students regarding the larger goals of life might undermine its significance by limiting itself to the boundaries of marks and grades.

Conclusion

If education in the country takes a course to values for content and discourse, we could feed on the emotional and spiritual sustenance of our depleted beings because it seems we have long forgotten that man is a social animal. Man has to understand that he cannot afford to walk alone anywhere. He has to have a symbiotic relationship with entities in the surrounding. The human civilizations that have thrived in the past are a testimony of ineffable kinship in the communities. So, we do have to be readied for the wholesome growth of the community by being thoughtful, compassionate, all-encompassing, and grateful to all associates including nature. It is high time that we realize that to take control over the socio-ethical destruction that we are perpetuating on earth, we need to actively engage in imparting a course like Universal Human Values and its principles thereof.

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