STUDENTS’ RESISTANCE TOWARDS MORALITY-BASED RECURRICULATION

M. M. Mohlake
Centre for Academic Excellence
University of Limpopo, Turfloop Campus
Polokwane, South Africa
e-mail: mosimaneotsile.mohlake@ul.ac.za

ABSTRACT

In the words of Martin Luther King Jnr, because of the type of education offered, now ‘we have learned to fly the air like birds and swim the sea like fish, but we have not learned the simple art of living together as brothers ... We have guided missiles and misguided man’. However, when such skills are treated only as concepts rather than skills, their efficacy cannot translate into progressive development. This article reports on a small-scale study conducted at the University of Limpopo, Polokwane, South Africa, that sought extended curriculum students’ opinions on a morality-based revamped curriculum that factored in a life skills foundational provision. The majority of participants’ responses indicated resistance towards a morality-based module. They regarded the module as being below higher education and only fit for non-academic activities. Intimations shall be made vis-à-vis the inclusion of pro-development morals within higher education curricula.

Keywords: morality-based curriculum, ubuntu, recurrículation, foundation provisions
INTRODUCTION

This article presents a case for the higher education curriculum integration of moral values that will ensure the outcome of well-rounded, balanced and matured graduates. Given the recent blowing winds of re-engineering qualification programmes in South Africa, which inevitably includes recurriculation on a grand scale, it might be an opportune time to focus on the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of moral inclusion in higher education curricula. Generally, a case study showcasing students’ resistance to such recurriculation is presented in the article, followed by proposed innovative forms to both redress the ubiquitous dearth of moral values and ameliorate such resistance. The approach taken in the article towards morality avoids delving into arguments on the actual meaning of the concepts of ethics, morals and values; and the difference between them. However, in the study, these concepts were considered generally closely related as in the approach adopted in the study by Sepota and Mohlake (2009, 26), namely, that ‘[i]n the African context, values [inclusive of ethics and morals] are always clubbed together under the term “Ubuntu”’ …’. Reference to moral-based educations in this study should also be understood to subsume issues related to ubuntu.

MORALITY AND EDUCATION

Generally, people’s everyday behavioural conduct changes from one generation to the next because of the influence of, among other things, the development of science and technology. This reality has serious behavioural modifications among the youth of today. The current status of en masse availability of information at the press of a button obviously dispels myths and secrets previously used to perpetuate fear-based obedience. Although this might definitely be looked at favourably, some of its unpalatable concomitants bring along a tinge of what might be perceived as disobedience to authority. In the eyes of today’s adults and senior citizens, some manifested mannerisms emanating from youngsters are likely to be perceived as immoral, if not down-right amoral. In the African context, for example, the ubiquitous skimpy clothing prevalent among women folk and the public display of affection by youths wearing school uniform, are frowned upon. The moral bank account of today’s youth is mostly perceived as being lacking fundamental human values, such as respect for self and others (authority inclusive), self-discipline and ubuntu humanity. Jansen (2011, 80–81) writes:

What concerns me as a teacher and a citizen is something much more serious, namely, that we are breeding a new generation of youthful South Africans who are learning early to be angry, deadly angry, without adult intervention and without political or pedagogical correction ... We are producing and reproducing (yes, that’s the word) a new generation of cold, callous, clinically dangerous youths who will not be in training or development. They
Students’ resistance towards morality-based recurruculation

may slay a family for a television set, or shoot a pedestrian for a cellphone. They may rape and walk, not run, away.

Jansen (2011, 115) continues by writing:

What we fail to do at South African universities is to educate young minds broadly in ethics, values, reasoning, appreciation, problem solving, argumentation and logic. Locked into single-discipline thinking, our young people fail to learn that the most complex social and human problems cannot be solved except through interdisciplinary thinking that crosses these disciplinary boundaries.

Rwiza (2010, 226), writing from within the Kenyan context, accordingly maintains that:

There is a need to advocate the teaching in universities, and similar institutions, of the ethics of human rights and proposed guidelines for such courses. Human rights cannot just be an object of purely theoretical teaching without any link to the existential conditions in which they may be realized.

TEACHING MORALITY

In the light of the above, some interest groups in higher education are of the belief that some form of pedagogical intervention is in order with regard to the institutionalisation of moral values in the learning environment (Basara and Sifuna 2013; Jansen 2011; Lilemba 2013; Shoorai and Chirobe 2013). However, the unavoidable question becomes: whose morals are we to teach? Perhaps as a form of addressing this concern, the approach to adopt might be that of considering the Golden Rule that Maxwell (2003, 22–23) postulates to exist universally:

Christianity: Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them.

Islam: No one of you is a believer until he loves for his neighbour what he loves for himself.

Judaism: What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man. This is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary.

Buddhism: Hurt not others with that which pains yourself.

Hinduism: This is the sum of duty; do naught unto others what you would not have them do unto you.

Zoroastrianism: Whatever is disagreeable to yourself, do not do unto others.
Confucianism: What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.

Bahai: And if thine eyes be turned towards justice, choose for thy neighbour that which thou choosest for thyself.

Jainism: A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated.

Yoruba proverb (Nigeria): One going to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts.

Maybe the school curriculum should help to promote such behaviour as espoused by the Golden Rule among its learners. However, caution might need to be exercised in this regard given the possible contradiction between African morals and those of Western origin – some of which stand in contrast vis-à-vis the former. According to Opong (2005, 91–92):

In African traditional moral conduct every individual is ‘his brother’s keeper’ in the maintenance of the total moral order for the total well-being of the community as a whole. By this I mean that every individual is a watchdog of his/her neighbour’s conduct so that social norms are maintained in order to avert disaster affecting the whole community through an individual’s misconduct.

The foregoing might obviously be at loggerheads with some non-African moral values influencing the African school curriculum. Accordingly, Ramose (1999, 120) argues that:

In African morality the inescapable point of departure is the maxim that motho ke motho ka batho. In order to attain and enjoy the status of being-a-human being, one must comply with the rules of behaviour prescribed by botho. For example, to refrain from sharing whatever we have with those in greater need than ourselves is contrary to botho. Sharing and caring for one another are basic tenets of African morality. Because of this most Africans who are employed continue to share their wages and salaries by way of caring for their unemployed kith and kin. This practice is evidently contrary to the philosophical outlook that provides their wages and salaries. According to this philosophical outlook, the wages and salaries are measured to suit the requirements of the employee and, if they are lucky, the members of their nuclear family as well. The wages and salaries are provided without due regard for the extended traditional African family. To stretch one’s salary or wage beyond the boundaries of the nuclear family in the name of African morality is not only a severe strain but it is also a clear indication of a fundamental contradiction between African moral philosophy and Western moral philosophy.
PRECEDECE OF MORALITY-BASED RECURRICULATION

The foregoing advocacy for teaching morality is despite the ubiquitous presence of foiled attempts by other African states to bring morality-based education into the school curriculum. The case in point is the present school curriculum status quo in Zimbabwe, which reflects poor maintenance of the school subject Religious and Moral Education (RME). Apparently, RME was established and initially implemented with good intentions. However, the subsequent implementation showed lack of commitment on the part of stakeholders. According to Shoorai and Chirobe (2013), this school subject does not enjoy respect from the government, despite the fact that it was designed and introduced with lofty ideals of impacting the ethical behaviour of the Zimbabwean citizenry. In 1980, the Zimbabwean government aimed ‘to design a curriculum that would provide and promote firm moral principles on which to build the nation while reflecting the heterogeneous nature of the Zimbabwean society’ (Shoorai and Chirobe 2013, 476). Shoorai and Chirobe (2013, 479) continue to make a case for the resuscitation of REM by indicating its importance thus:

We do not want doctors, nurses, politicians, policemen who are immoral and whose practices are unethical. In relation to this point is the fact that R.M.E. is not always considered for employment or as a qualifying subject to enter tertiary institutions, unless one is training as an R.M.E. teacher or to enrol at a theological college. The Zimbabwean Republic Police (Z.R.P.) is one government department that is well known for excluding R.M.E. in their ‘O’ level qualifying subjects. This Z.R.P. attitude towards R.M.E. in its recruitment policy is difficult to understand for a profession that expects high moral standards and integrity among its members.

It is our view that instead of reinforcing on the passing of any 5 ‘O’ level subjects including English and Mathematics, R.M.E. should be included here so that every person who wants to be employed shows that they have enough moral qualifications and not [just] academic qualifications only. This way, the subject’s utilitarian value would have been enhanced and at the same time school products would have gained moral values that help them to shun corruption.

Of late in South Africa, the University of South Africa (Unisa) celebrated the 37th National Commemoration of the 16 June 1976 student uprising by introducing its new institutional approach to youth development, namely, through

... promoting an ethical learning environment ... to assist students in achieving ethical behaviour and standards ... to ensure that their [i.e., students’] decisions and choices would be guided by respect, disciple [sic], honesty, commitment and humanity, with integrity being the overarching principle traits of their behaviour (emphasis mine).

On the same note, a proposal by the Task Team on Undergraduate Curriculum Structure, commissioned by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), to the
Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), on the introduction of a flexible undergraduate curriculum recommends, among other things, that:

[Curriculum enhancement should include] [t]he development of graduate attributes that are not linked to core disciplinary learning but are believed to be important as life skills, a foundation for critical citizenship, or an element of the general quality of ‘graduateness’. The international ‘Graduates for the Twenty-First Century’ movement attests to an increasing global focus on such attributes. In South Africa, there is a strong interest in the concept of social responsiveness and how experience with it can be included in educational programmes, to foster cultural sensitivity and civic engagement (CHE 2013, 96).

In a way, the foregoing both acknowledges the dearth of acceptable morals among students, graduates, community and global society; and announces the need for active academic intervention to redress the problem before it escalates into a pandemic. Reiterating this point, Holloway (1999, 151–156) advises that:

It would be difficult to exaggerate the moral confusions of our day and the urgency and importance of finding an agreed basis for our conduct towards one another as sharers of life on this planet ... Just as obedience to the commands of authority, whether God, state or any other centre of power, was the dominant characteristic of ancient traditions, so today, is the consent of our reason and emotion. Today, we expect to be persuaded by coherent argument and the consequential results of particular policies.

Although Holloway postulated this 15 years ago, this is indeed a reflection of today’s reality, and as such, any pedagogical intervention needs huge amounts on innovation to harness the effectiveness of a learning environment’s setup to ‘persuade by coherent argument’. It is because of this that the schooling environment becomes an ideal arena in which character building morals can be inculcated in learners. Accordingly, talking on ‘Value Education’, Barasa and Sifuna (2013, 15) write that the basic aim of education is simply two-fold, namely: ‘To help young people become intellectually smart [and] to help them become good character people’.

However, Barasa and Sifuna (2013, 15) are cognisant of the precarious dynamics surrounding this stance when stating that: ‘Some people may ask whether the school should teach values and if the answer is yes, then whose values’. It is a fact that generic morals are paradoxically relative. As such, given the status quo heterogeneous nature of South African society, the reality of potential volatile disagreement as to whose moral values are to be enshrined in the curriculum is inevitable. In a way of helping to resolve the predicament, Barasa and Sifuna (2013, 16) argue that:

There are moral values that ought to be done because they are based on universally accepted grounds. An example of the source for universally accepted values is the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. This declaration has been customised into almost all constitutions of countries around the world. Another important source of universal moral values is religion. Some people have become quite itchy about the role of religion in public forum. They are afraid that religion may bring tensions and polarize pupils, teachers and parents. However, this need not be the case if religion is looked upon from a different angle.
The moral code of most religions including the African Traditional Religions is based on *Natural Law* which is universally acceptable. Values such as respect for human dignity and honesty are examples of this.

In line with the foregoing, the extant literature indicates that scientific discoveries have been made to the effect that there is evidence suggesting a high probability of moral codification in human genes, thus espousing the existence of basic universal moral values (Potgieter 2011, 4). This means that, at some subconscious level, because of this wiring, people know unconsciously what is acceptable and/or unacceptable behaviour in the eyes of their communities.

**SUBVERTING IMMORALITY**

The ultimate objective of inculcating morals is hopefully to subvert immorality. Perhaps one way of introducing such redress mechanisms in a learning environment will be intentionally to inject various curricula, regardless of the Classification of Educational Subject Matter (CESM), with traces of *ubuntu*-based values with the hope that such a move will inadvertently influence the recipients’ behavioural conduct for the better. Admittedly, this call might inevitably demand great effort in initial politicking, subsequent policy-related endeavours and impeccable constant implementation. In addition, proponents advocating such a move will almost certainly come across resistance spurred chiefly by: (a) the demand on curricula innovation (e.g., subsuming morality in astronomical-physics when talking Newton’s law of motions or the Big Bang theory); and (b) the moral legitimacy question of lacing curricula with morality.

The inevitable groups of resistance can be witnessed in the case of the Zimbabwean efforts in introducing a value-based school subject referred to above. The Zimbabwean post-independence regime introduced a school subject known as REM to ensure the inculcation of morals in its citizens. However, the extant literature shows that the articulation of the REM curriculum was never completed; the REM curriculum has never been reviewed over the past 30 years; teachers treat the REM subject and its classes with utter contempt; and even the police force excludes it from recruits’ requirements (Shoorai and Chirobe 2013, 472–477).

In the move to introduce morality-based education, another force of resistance might also come from the side of students due to misconception, fear of compromised autonomy, lack of sufficiently proper consultation, and so on. In the chapter titled ‘What they don’t teach you at high school’, Jansen (2007, 10–13) identifies the following six moral values as indispensable to an educational system, namely: commitment, creativity, compassion, confidence, connectivity and caring, of which he concludes:
If all our schools spent more time teaching young people these deeper human values, we would no longer have matriculants with distinctions who drink themselves into a stupor, disrespect women, are uncomfortable with those whose skin colour happens to be different from theirs, and whose sole ambition in life is to make money, rather than to make a difference.

It is with this in mind, among many other variables at a macro level, such as overall low throughput and graduation rates, that the newly-introduced extended curriculum programmes in South African higher education institutions (HEIs) may be taken advantage of for the inclusion of values that will ensure the consequent production of responsible citizens.

**STUDENT RESISTANCE**

The case of a life skills course

This article presents a small-scale research project on the subject in question at the University of Limpopo, Polokwane, South Africa, with particular focus on a life skills course designed for the promotion of moral values among students. The dawn of democracy in South Africa in the early 1990s ushered in the opening of doors of learning to the masses of South African citizens. What compounded the inadequate infrastructural accommodation capacity was the provision of alternative access modes that granted university access to learners who did not fare well in matric. Unfortunately, with the passage of time, this massification of access to higher education did not translate into epistemological access (CHE 2013; Scott, Yeld and Hendry 2007; Sepota and Mohlake 2009). This led to high failure rates plus low retention and graduation rates nation-wide regardless of historical institutional privileges or otherwise. The country’s education system has since been relooked and policies churned out with the hope of correcting what might have gone wrong.

One of the things since introduced on the higher education curriculum, was the extension of the normal curriculum accompanied by the inclusion of foundational provisions in the form of support systems and non-credit bearing foundation courses. As such, in addition to mainstream curricula, a new mode of qualification was introduced. These were extended curriculum programmes (ECPs) whereby a 3-year degree had a year added to it. The idea was to channel learners whose post-matric test (i.e., National Benchmark Tests) results indicated possible potential academic struggle. To help provide a solid foundation for such learners at entry-level of university education, much innovation had to take place.

At the University of Limpopo, in an effort to be innovative, the case of recurriculation through effecting life skills transpired. The life skills course, officially dubbed Foundation in Life Skills (FLSK), included ethical issues pertaining to self and others in its syllabus. ECP students had to register for this course, which was non-credit bearing but a qualification requirement.
One of the modules within the syllabus contained a section on Stephen Covey’s *Seven habits of effective people*, whose relevance to the course is reflected in Table 1.

**Table 1:** FLSK module and intended moral outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Covey’s habits</th>
<th>Principle base</th>
<th>Moral value outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Be proactive</td>
<td>Responsibility/Initiative</td>
<td>Honesty, obedience, kindness, friendliness, loyalty, self-reliance, cooperation, respect for elders, hard work, responsibility, self-discipline, concern for others, justice, fairness (Ogula 2009,62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Begin with the end in mind</td>
<td>Vision/Values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Put first things first</td>
<td>Integrity/Execution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Think win/win or no deal</td>
<td>Mutual respect/Benefit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Seek first to understand, then to be understood</td>
<td>Mutual understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Synergise</td>
<td>Creative cooperation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sharpen the saw</td>
<td>Renewal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher conducted an evaluation of the ECP foundation courses among students, with particular focus on the students general towards the ethics-based course.

**METHODOLOGY AND DATA PRESENTATION**

A questionnaire with closed-ended questions, purported to evaluate ECP courses, was distributed among 351 foundation students for completion, and 273 students’ responses were found usable for the research purposes. The questionnaire reflected all seven foundation courses, namely: Foundation in Computer Literacy (FCOL), Foundation in Multilingualism (FMAL), Foundation in Life Skills (FLSK), Foundation in English for Academic Purposes (FENG), Foundation in Social Sciences Concepts (FSSC), Foundation in Research Skills (FRSK), and Foundation in Basic Numeracy (FBNU). However, with the exception of FENG and FCOL, not every ECP learner enrolled for all these courses, but rather registered only for the ones relevant to their degrees. For instance, FBNU (which had 70 respondents) was only meant for those whose degrees required competency in dealing with numbers, for example, BComm (29 students) and Law (41 students) making a total of 70 students.

Of the 273 respondents, 124 were female and 118 were male, with 11 per cent \( n = 31 \) of the respondents failing to indicate their gender. The majority were in the age range 20–24 year olds (at 44%), followed by the 17–19 year olds (26%). Given that the normal university-entrance age is 19 years, this statistic seems to suggest that most of the first-years at this university might be over-aged for the level.
With the morality-based curriculum in mind, when asked which ECP course they considered important for their studies/degrees, only five (one of whom was in the non-humanities) chose FLSK, and the majority (at 59%) chose FENG. On the least important course for their studies, 94 (34%) respondents chose FLSK, followed closely by 87 (32%) respondents who said none was unimportant. When asked which ECP course they would recommend for opening to people outside the university community, FLSK was the highest at 35 per cent, followed by FENG at 25 per cent.

DISCUSSION
The data clearly show that the majority of the respondents consider FLSK to be a course that predominantly belongs outside their academic scope. On the one hand, there was a high recommendation (at 35%) that the FLSK course be offered to people outside the university, which might actually mean that, according to the respondents, either the nature of FLSK makes it irrelevant to matters academia has to focus on, or that it is ‘them’ (i.e., the outside world) not ‘us’ (i.e., the students) who need to have their ethical house in order. Unfortunately, the design of the data gathering tool (i.e., the questionnaire) left no room for the substantiation of responses given. As such, speculative assumptions can be the only safe option.

On the other hand, the negative responses to the value-based course might be a reaction reflecting the reality of both the existence and impact of a ubiquitous prevailing stigmatisation towards ECPs by non-informed and ill-informed faculty, administration staff and mainstream students. Although it has neither been officially reported nor researched, there are nonetheless anecdotal reports by ECP students who claim that being associated with ECP courses is considered by non-ECP faculty and students as equivalent to imbecility. This is in spite of the fact that ECP national research indicates the viability of such programmes vis-à-vis their mainstream counterparts. Along these lines, in 2013 the CHE handed in a report to the DHET recommending the refurbishment of the traditional Europe-inherited 3-year bachelor’s degrees to become normal mainstream 4-year degrees augmented with the provision of diverse support interventions.

CIRCUMVENTING RESISTANCE: BEING INNOVATIVE
The reality of moral degeneration is beyond question (Barasa and Sifuna 2013; Holloway 1999; Jansen 2011), although voices of dissent can be heard from some scholars (Wright 2011), who look at that stance as romanticising the past and the youth themselves, who argue that if ‘everybody else does it, then why cry foul’ (Bayaga and Jaysvere 2011). However, if the former’s observations, supported by Martin Luther King’s words, are anything to go by, it would be wise to factor morality into curricula. It, therefore, behoves both educators and education policy-makers to
be innovative so as to alleviate the possibility of resistance against morality-based re-curriculation. Barasa and Sifuna (2013, 53) suggest the following by way of innovation:

Utilising the hidden curriculum [which] refers to all the other aspects of school life that are not directly academic or co-curricular but add up to produce a free flow of the main curriculum. Such aspects include things such as:

- Use of prefects and other students to pass on school values (peer influence)
- Punctuality for all in school
- Interactions of students and their parents or guardians
- Cleanliness, hygiene and dress code
- Behaviour in and outside school
- Involvement of students in planning school activities.

Some of the foregoing can be achieved at pre-tertiary level and may prove a daunting task at tertiary level given the nature of academia. Much more relevant innovative approaches at tertiary level might include those proposed by Ogula (2009, 62−63), namely: ‘… [1] teach children [explicitly] what is right and acceptable in society… [2] use biographies of famous people in the child’s location … [3] deploy value-clarification approach… [and, lastly, form] group discussions on moral issues’.

Other innovative measures might be taken as follows:

a. overtly involving students in demonstrating the application of subject theories and principles in relation to their ethical conduct, that is, using biology as an example, equating the concept of ‘homeostasis’ with how human relations react to treatment received from others (thus demonstrating the moral value of respect and interdependence); showing parallels between the function of white blood cells and caring for others and helping one another, or using ‘symbiosis’ to amplify the value of cooperative relationship;

b. showing the implications of morality in examples when elucidating on the subject matter. For example, when explaining his complex Theory of Relativism (\(E = mc^2\)) to his secretary, Albert Einstein is purported to have said: ‘A man sits with a pretty girl for an hour, it seems like a minute. He sits on a hot stove for a minute; it’s longer than any hour. That’s relativity’ (Shapiro 2006). Although not directly related to morality, the foregoing example shows that, with innovation, it can be illustrated every day.

The other obvious way to ensure the inculcation of morals through education is to take advantage of the traditional implementation of strict measures in terms of exercising control over students. However, studies such as Ndamani’s (2008), have
found that exercising control might actually work against that which is supposed to be learnt in the first place. According to Ndamani (2008, 187), an overwhelmingly high percentage of participating parents agreed that ‘the failure of parents to exercise control over their children leads to indiscipline [sic] in secondary school’. Hence, the implementation of this would mean educational institutions working closely with parents, who would themselves have begun the practice much earlier in the child’s life.

The above would not only help to inculcate values that would ensure responsible citizenry, but would also aid in concretising concepts, processes and phenomena that would otherwise remain dry data, meaningless to the students’ lives, and thus ultimately useless to both the possessor and the community. In addition, relating subject matter to people’s everyday lives would positively enhance memory given that the overall interconnectedness of various universal variables would become clearer. This would in turn promote the students’ productive edge in terms of their being innovative and creative vis-à-vis finding solutions to existing human problems.

**CONCLUSION**

Students seem to resist anything that is not obviously the core curriculum. Therefore, if it is agreed that (a) something needs to be done about moral regeneration, and (b) that formal education is a vehicle with the potential to help with such a task, then educators need to be innovative. Maybe the resistance on the students’ part is not against morality-based education but rather educators’ lack of innovation in terms of incorporating agreed-upon ideal moral values into the curriculum when recurruculating. In order to realise this, a lot of curriculum re-engineering has to take place, accompanied by a shift from silo-form operation to inter-departmental and across-discipline collaborations.

**REFERENCES**


CHE see Council on Higher Education.


