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School Curriculum and Moral Development: Elementary and Secondary School Textbooks Used in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan Ashar Johnson Khokhar

Associate Professor, Department of Education Forman Christian College University, Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract

Version of Record This research paper examines the role of elementary and secondary school textbooks in fostering moral development within the educational frameworks of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan (BIMP). This study is undertaken to explore the increasing importance of moral education in contemporary curricula, driven by the complexities of the 21st century, shaping pupils' moral perspectives and their cultural interactions. The study employs Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) to analyze the content of textbooks, focusing on how narratives and descriptive texts convey moral values and principles. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze textbooks' content. The findings reveal that textbooks serve as instruments for instilling religious, moral, social, and cultural values, thereby shaping students' moral identities and ethical decision-making. The analysis revealed the alignment of educational policies across BIMP countries, emphasizing the integration of religious (Islamic) values and the promotion of character building a central element to moral education. The study advocates for the incorporation of multireligious and pluralistic perspectives to enhance the relevance of moral education in pupils' lives in the 21st century. This study calls for further research into the impact of language textbooks and teachers' pedagogical practices on moral development of pupils and how these could empower pupils to navigate ethical challenges effectively.

Keywords: moral development, values education, language textbooks, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia



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Introduction:

The contribution of different social sciences and humanities fields has contributed to transforming and expanding the moral development field through a diversity of theoretical perspectives and research topics. The recent works in biology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, political science, and ethics added to the already ongoing discussions and created new discussions. The educational research about intergroup relationships, racism, prejudice, and how educational structures, practices, and materials influence the moral development of pupils. The ever-expanding areas of research are now directly or indirectly connected with education and educational research and topics including civil liberties, culture, intergroup relationships, gender hierarchies, family relationships, parenting, conscience, values, community service, aggression, nature, children's rights, victimization, are all now becoming important elements of an effective educational programmes, and programme materials¹

Literature Review

The pursuit of moral development among elementary and secondary school students has become a paramount concern in all educational systems worldwide. The world has become complex, navigating not just the social, emotional, and political complexities of the 21st century which includes making moral judgments multiple times a day, in school and outside schools, in different settings, and during different interactions. The education policies of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan (BIMP) have recognized it and mentioned it as a core aspect of the educational systems, structures, and materials. The Malaysian government in its Educational Blueprint² (presented the following as a shift in the current education policy, practices, structures, and materials

- (i) Enhance Islamic and Moral Education with a greater focus on unity and fostering stronger bonds among students.
- Develop students holistically by reinforcing the requirement for every student to participate in one Sport, one Club, and one Uniformed Body.
- (iii) Enhance and scale up RIMUP from 2016 to facilitate interaction across school types.

This document suggested that the focus of education should be moved to enable Malaysian pupils to "balance the development of global citizenship with a strong national identity"³; Malaysians who are capable of navigating different moral and ethical issues in a pluralistic Malaysian society and the global world, develop leadership skills possessing a set of skills such as "integrity, compassion, justice, and altruism."⁴ Bangladesh's education policy states the purpose of education is to stimulate pupils' intellectual and practical qualities of the learners helping them to become moral and humane citizens of a productive Bangladeshi society. The document stated the purpose of education as help the students inculcate moral and spiritual values like idea of justice, sense of duty, discipline and etiquettes, non-communalism, human rights, accommodative attitudes toward corporate living, curiosity, friendliness and perseverance, and to encourage them to acquire scientific, cultural and human values and to shun superstitions⁵

Pakistan Government's (GoP) education policy emphasized character building as the core component of GoP's focus on education systems, structures, practices, and curriculum. The policy implicitly wanted to see the pupils rooted in Islamic moral values

- 1. Taleem (Seek, Use and Evaluate Knowledge), Tarbiyya (Social, Technical, Moral and Ethical Training) and Tazkyya (Purification of Soul) are three pillars of the policy.
- 2. Character building on the basis of universal Islamic values integrated with ethical values relevant to all human beings⁶

The Indonesian education policy founded on Pancasila (Five Principles of the State) presents the focus of the education systems, structures, and curriculum to "build and nurture good character and behaviour in relation to moral knowing, moral reasoning, and moral action"⁷ The education policies of BIMP have many similarities such as subject-related knowledge and skills, 21st-century skills, and inculcating moral values, e.g. respecting others with different cultural and religious backgrounds, interethnic tolerance, helping others to become moral agents and to contribute to building value-based society. The other shared aspect of the education and curriculum policies is the Islamic focus of moral, social, cultural, and ethical values.

Textbooks are a tool used by a State to achieve two objectives, to reinforce the existing set of religious, moral, social and cultural values. Studies have shown that textbooks serve as agents of instilling social and cultural norms and values in addition to transmitting knowledge to learners⁸. Language textbooks are a tool not only for language learning but also for learning social, cultural, and religious values and skills. The texts (narrative and descriptive) are written to enculturate pupils and cultivate socializing skills through direct instruction and presenting role models (moral-oriented stories and characters) believing that these stories and characters presented in these stories help cultivate moral values in students⁹. The teachers chose classroom pedagogies and assessments to reinforce moral values and role models and develop students' sensitivity and behaviour.

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The language textbook evaluation studies have found the language textbook portrays not just social, cultural, religious, and political messages but practices. These studies¹⁰ have found language textbooks promoting moral values through religious and fictional stories. The textbooks studies studying the language textbooks of BIMP found the texts infused with moral values and messages informing pupils about the values and preparing pupils to live moral lives and share a moral society. These texts also aimed at preserving moral, social, cultural and religious values considered perennial (Islamic values and values rooted in Islam and Islamic teachings and values) in these cultures, but also presenting values needed to live in multireligious and pluralistic societies.

The cultivation of Indigenous moral values (compassion, honesty, kindness, and friendliness) and global moral values (recycling and substantial living, protecting the earth and the environment) are the focus of not just the educational systems, practices, and procedures but also the curricula and textbooks. The transformative shift in education, began at the beginning of the new millennium, dedicating the focus of all the state-level resources to make educational systems and resources to empower students to actively explore, analyze, and resolve moral issues while anticipating the implications of their decisions.¹¹ The governments of BIMP have been focusing on value education focusing on the moral development of elementary and secondary school pupils as they believe that this group should be supported to learn, experience, and develop moral values and dispositions to the set of values promoted by these states.

The pupils at the elementary and secondary school stages represent a critical juncture for nurturing moral judgment, enabling them to grapple with real-world challenges of the 21st century and make morally and ethically sound choices. The cultivation of moral identity is considered a crucial component in fostering balanced moral judgment of elementary and secondary school pupils. These values, cultivated within both the educational environment and home, play a pivotal role in shaping an individual's moral compass and ethical decision-making. The BIMP States believe that religion (Islam) should be the foundation of moral values development because it [Islam], encompassing cognitive, emotional, and identity-based elements, underscores the pivotal role of education in nurturing moral maturity among pupils.¹² By empowering adolescents to navigate ethical dilemmas, reflect on their thought processes, and internalize moral values, the education system equips them with the necessary tools to thrive in the complex realities of the 21st century.

The Gap Between the Curriculum and Students' Practical Understanding

The educational bureaucracy in the BIMP States used various

approaches to design education spaces (structures and practices) and materials (curriculum and textbooks), such as Kohlberg's cognitive development, Raths et al.'s value clarification, and Lickona's character education. Pupils often perceive value and moral education as just another content-based subject, thus missing the connection between their real-life moral dilemmas and the educational spaces and material.¹³ This disconnect between the curriculum and pupils' practical understanding of moral values is a significant concern, as the BIMP education systems aim to nurture pupils' moral judgment and critical thinking abilities to prepare them for the challenges they will face in the real world.

Methodology

Textbooks are a manifestation of state's ideology represented through different social cultural and moral practices depicted in language and literature textbooks, such as narrative and descriptive texts. This study uses Moral Foundation Theory (MFT) as the basis for analyzing the content of the textbooks, the narrative, and descriptive texts. The proponents of MFT proposed that moral judgment is an intuitive, non-rational process is rooted in five moral foundations (1) care/harm, (2) fairness/reciprocity/cheating, (3) authority/respect/subversion, ingroup/loyalty, (4)and (5) purity/sanctity/degradation, considered the building block of morality, irrespective of various social, cultural and religious settings. It is also true that each society has its own social and cultural contexts and MFT works as 'audio equalizer,' enabling different groups and societies adjusting the sliders.¹⁴ The study by Graham, Haidt, and Nosek¹⁵ showed the comprehensiveness of MFT as their study showed that their theory has elements that both liberals (care/harm/ and fairness/reciprocity/cheating) and conservatives rely on while making moral judgements.

The MFT is chosen to analyze the contents of textbooks because this theory propositioned that moral judgments are shaped by both evolutionary and cultural, political, religious, and interpersonal factors. The care/harm element focuses on empathy and compassion and emphasize the importance of preventing harm and caring for individuals; fairness/reciprocity/cheating is related to justice, equality, and fairness and addresses concerns about equitable treatment and the avoidance of cheating or exploitation; loyalty/betrayal revolves around allegiance to one's group or community and values and the avoidance of betrayal, emphasizing the importance of group cohesion and trust; authority/respect/subversion highlights the importance of social order and adherence to traditional roles and structures and is about respecting established hierarchies and authority figures; purity/sanctity/degradation associates the idea of purity and sanctity, linking them to religious or cultural beliefs about what is considered sacred or taboo; Liberty/Oppression is concerned with the rights of individuals to make their own choices and resist coercion and focuses on the value of individual freedom and the avoidance of oppression.

The analysis started by reading the text and analyzing the actions and behaviors of different characters in different situations and determining which of the moral values (care, fairness, loyalty, authority, purity, equality, proportionality, liberty, honor and ownership) envisaged under different foundations, were most relevant to the character's actions and decisions and how different characters behave and connected their moral behaviors with the moral values or principles. This process was guided by the following factors (a) the context in which the character's actions take place, (b) moral values or principles driving the character's behavior. The analysis tried to analyze how the character's actions align with or deviate from these moral foundations and compare the character with others in the same story or scenario to deepen understanding.

Findings

The Indonesian English Textbook entitled Contextual English for Grade XI of Senior High Schools has 33 texts, 18 characters, which are integrated into stories in both explicit and implicit ways. The stories represent the values of honesty, tolerance, religiousness, love of peace, environmental awareness, cooperation, patience, respect, gratitude, respect, optimism, gratitude, fairness, and politeness. A text in this book explains while informing students about a moral character "In the first place, it is against the teachings of major religions, especially Islam. It is a form of idolatry and the biggest sin of all. In Islam, this is an unpardonable sin."¹⁶ The text while explaining the importance of a noble living and respecting people irrespective of their profession and socio-economic the textbook asks pupils "Whatever the case is, dealing with cartmen and helping them to improve their life is a noble commitment. We can always learn from our religious teachings that helping the orphans and the poor is a noble deed blessed by God."¹⁷

The values of charity, compassion, tolerance, and care are found in the stories presented to pupils in this textbook. A story explaining the journey of a tourist visiting Indonesia presents the exemplary behavior of the driver: "On one fine afternoon, a taxi was passing at moderate speed along the road leading to the lake. Inside was a foreign tourist who didn't seem to be as happy as he should be. The driver, who was able to speak English, not very well though, was trying to do his best to make his guest enjoy his trip."¹⁸ The character (Mr. Budhi) explains to pupils the importance of the value of caring for the underprivileged groups says "Orphans are the children of God, says God in the Holy Book, and whoever helps orphans God will provide an abundance of rewards. So, for us, the children represent the possession of

God. Neglect them, and we neglect God."19

The English textbook for class 6 taught in Bangladeshi schools portrayed different values through narrative and descriptive texts in this book. The Bangladesh's diversity is portrayed informing pupils of the rich cultural and religious diversity of Bangladesh, its people and how this diversity has contributed to make Bangladesh a peaceful society. The values of diversity and accepting differences in the national, regional and global settings is presented in the stories to broaden pupils' understanding of Bengali culture and its connection with regional and global cultures. Intercultural understanding is also aimed at by including content promoting content related to interactions between actors from different religious and ethnic groups. The textbooks informed pupils about the cultural context, making them aware of differences to help them understand their and others' cultures. The nationalistic and historical narrative is presented to pupils to cultivate the unique cultural, religious and political identity of pupils.²⁰

The cultural stories and folklore are included in language textbooks to illustrate the rich tapestry of cultural diversity and shared human experiences through sharing stories about local and global cultural heritage, promoting the values of loyalty, authority and sanctity of different public and private spaces. The values of respect, empathy, ethical considerations, interpersonal respect, and empathetic understanding are conveyed and emphasized in stories included in textbooks. The stories highlighted the social, personal and professional values of individuals, communities and the world. Ethical living is an important part of the textbook content, and topics about environment, communal living and sharing public spaces are included in the textbooks. The value of caring, sharing, and fairness communicated through these stories.²¹

The language textbooks taught in Pakistan schools has many stories about religious teachings and rituals and rites to pupils communicating the values of authority of Allah/God, sanctity of worship places and loyalty to state and Islam. The texts about Muslim religious festivals (Eid), their history and how to celebrate, its societal and communal importance focusses on communicating knowledge and loyalty to Islam, its values and teachings. The stories of Muslim rulers and Islamic kingdoms are narrated in the textbooks underlining the values of authority of Muslim rulers, and loyalty to Muslim state, Islam, Islamic kingdom and Muslim rulers. The textbooks have texts about families, communities demonstrating the value of care, loyalty and fairness to family and family members, and the larger family (Muslim community across the world). The texts (descriptive and narrative) in the language textbooks narrating nationalistic stories, stories of war heroes with India presented to pupils accentuating the values of the sanctity of the land (geographical) and its war heroes.²² The language textbooks directly (in case of Pakistan) and indirectly (in cases of Bangladesh, Indonesia and Malaysia) have shown the influence of religion (Islam) and Islam-infused values in the texts found in language textbooks. The values of care, compassion and charity, acceptance, tolerance are presented in family and community settings where different characters, father, mother, brother, sister, cousins, uncles and aunts exhibiting these values through these actions and validating these values. The values of obedience to authority (state and religious) are communicated to pupils through nationalistic stories and in texts describing different nationalistic, political events. The analysis also showed that textbooks did not present minorities and their stories in the textbooks and their stories were presented under the umbrella of nationalistic stories, ignoring their everyday lives and stories in these countries.

Discussion

The textbook authorities overlooked the importance of students' voices and experiences, and curriculum failed to address the moral dilemmas and situations they might encounter in their future lives. This gap hinders the effective translation of theoretical moral concepts into practical application, leaving pupils unable to navigate the complex ethical landscapes they encounter outside the classroom.²³ This divide enhanced the relevance of moral education in pupils' lives, a more collaborative and student-centered approach is necessary. Participatory Action Research methodologies, actively involve pupils in the communication and discussion of moral issues, are proposed as a promising avenue to better understand pupils' perspectives and incorporate them into curriculum and textbook design. By empowering pupils to share their real-life moral dilemmas and collaboratively explore solutions, the curriculum can be tailored to address the challenges pupils face, fostering a deeper connection between the theoretical content and their practical experiences.²⁴

The evolution nature of moral landscapes ensures that the curriculum remains responsive to the shifting values and priorities of contemporary society. The students' perspectives, experiences, and emerging moral values keep changing with the changes occurring in society due to economic and technological development, and these changes contribute to a shift in understanding the current values and the new values emerging due to globalization and migration.²⁵ The BIMP language textbooks present a conservative society, societal values, and worldview to pupils and leave many moral values such as tolerance and acceptance of LGBTQ+ groups as part of society and their communities. The education spaces and materials contribute to enhance and lessen the relevance and impact of morals that would empower students to navigate the real-world ethical challenges they will face

beyond the classroom, as they might be traveling to other parts of the world (especially Europe and North America) where they would see the values considered negative in their home countries.

The language textbooks (first language and English) present an opportunity to integrate personal moral values and foster character development among students. Though the content chosen for these books lacked the critical thinking focus research has suggested that teachers could leverage critical literacy pedagogy to facilitate discussions around the moral themes and dilemmas presented in literary texts.²⁶ The texts chosen to be taught in classrooms in the language textbooks have positive and negative implications for their personality development (such as interpersonal interaction, conflict resolution, deference to authorities, and social cohesion). The pedagogies chosen should also consider the individual differences in moral identity and behavior of pupils because these differences are reflected in the pupils' interest in classrooms discussing the antecedents and consequences of moral conviction, demonstrating their strong or weak moral beliefs about different moral messages and values demonstrated, presented and reflected in textbook stories and descriptive texts.²⁷

Conclusion & Recommendations

The education and curriculum policies, educational spaces, and materials in BIMP showed a strong commitment to developing moral pupils. There are two subjects' language (national and foreign languages) textbooks and Islamic education and moral education textbooks to cultivate pupils' moral values. Another shared value is the Islamic roots of educational spaces and materials presenting stories reflected in the texts of language textbooks. The analysis revealed that education makers, curriculum, and educational material developers believe that cultivating moral values is a cognitive process learned in socially constructed settings. Moral values (a unified body of knowledge connected to several other factors) should be taught as a unified body of knowledge. The documents also reveal that all government stakeholders considered religion an important element in shaping pupils' thoughts, actions, and behaviors, and all values considered good are presented as religious or Islamic values.

This study has highlighted the value of incorporating moral education into language and literature classrooms because pupils can connect the moral lessons from the narrative and descriptive texts to their own lived experiences This approach allows students to grapple with complex moral issues in a safe and constructive environment, cultivating their critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills.²⁸ Further research is needed to fully understand role of language textbooks and the classroom pedagogies in the process of moral development and its role in character building through the textbooks' content and discussion of moral values in language and literature classrooms. The textbook writers, editors, and approvers should choose textbook content that empowers students to examine their personal moral frameworks in relation to narrative and descriptive texts and teacher. Educators foster a deeper appreciation for ethical decision-making and the application of moral principles in real-world contexts. It is suggested that the teacher education programmes inculcate sensitivity to national, regional, and global diversity through different elective and pedagogical courses. The courses should support the integration of personal moral values into language and literature teaching to support holistic pupils' development in language learning settings.



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