INOCULATING UNIVERSAL VALUES VIA ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Haja Mohideen Bin Mohamed Ali
(Department of English Language and Literature, International Islamic University Malaysia)

The teaching and learning of languages need not necessarily be focused entirely on the acquisition of language skills. While the primary aim of language instruction is enhanced proficiency in a language, we need to inculcate values—moral, spiritual, human, ethical, etc. in our teaching and learning activities. Language education emphasizes the four macroskills, namely reading, speaking, listening and writing. Universal values involving special people, the environment, social issues, health, science and technology may easily be incorporated into the curriculum. The values that go along with the teaching and learning are universal, English being a global lingua franca. For the attainment of world peace, language teaching may be able to contribute in various ways. Values that may be promoted include many themes. Themes such as issues contributing to global warming, terrorism, the refugee crisis, eliminating weapons of mass destruction, the rights of indigenous people, minority communities, corruption, leading a healthy lifestyle, patriotism, freedom of expression, responsible citizenship, etc. These values could be incorporated into the teaching and learning activities of all the major language skills and their components. Although values are subjective, universal values which many can relate to should be identified for instruction purposes. Textbooks from certain countries contain values consistent with their own way of life. Even so, this may be informational to those who are unfamiliar with it. Textbook content and activities may ideally be used to inculcate values which are fairly universal. But we must bear in mind not to adopt the didactic approach, but rather impart the values in our teaching in a neutral, objective way. The paper will demonstrate how this may be done while acquiring various language skills simultaneously. Such value-based education may be a contributing factor towards global peace.

Key words—values, education, humanity, universality, collective responsibility
1. Introduction

What are Values?

According to the Oxford Dictionary, values may generally be defined as “principles or standards of behaviour; one’s judgment of what is important in life (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/value). On the significance of values in an organization, Jimenez (2008) observes competently that values enable us to guide our behavior for self-fulfilment. They are the fundamental beliefs a person possesses to be able to decide what is preferable for him/her to attain inner happiness. He adds that values are related to human needs and represent the aspirations, dreams and ideals of individuals and groups of people with common goals. Values are important for what they stand for and not for what others think of them. He stresses that values lay the foundation for community co-existence and relations with others. They regulate our behavior for collective well being.

Values in Education

Values-based education underpins all its practices on a set of universal human values such as respect, tolerance and peace (www.valuesbasededucation.com/vbe.what.html). It emphasizes morals and values which are commonly acknowledged and appreciated. These values which are almost universally accepted are those such as love for fellow human beings, humane treatment of animals, non-violence, tolerance for one another’s religious beliefs, cooperation between members of the community, dignity of labour, humanism, volunteerism, being truthful and avoiding falsehood, respect for elderly people, empathizing with people with disability, showing compassion for the weak and vulnerable, etc. The Malaysian Education Ministry, for example, has identified many admirable values: intercultural understanding at national and international levels, relationship with parents and friends, caring for the environment, caring for senior citizens and children, consumer rights, combating drug abuse, patriotism and citizenship, love for world peace and harmony and awareness of dangerous diseases (Curriculum Specifications for English Language, 2003).

Values education is not exclusive, but rather it is to be made part of the curriculum and involves, particularly the teachers, learners and policy makers. The teacher, classroom interaction, educational policies, teacher development, their identity, content and testing are very much involved. Value-oriented decisions have to be made to maintain and improve student-teacher relationship (Johnston, 2003).

The question may arise as to why we have to inculcate such values in and through education. Education ought not to be seen as merely as preparation for a career in a competitive world. Modern education cannot be divorced from problems plaguing humanity. Getting educated does not have to be only knowledgeable about the content of the disciplines one pursues. The knowledge has to be useful to the individual and the society. There has to be a kind of marriage between education and values in life. There are many good reasons why it is noteworthy.
Among the many objectives are:

- To practice fundamental values
- To realize one’s inner beauty
- To promote individual and collective well being
- To be an agent for positive change in the society
- To influence the learners to lead a healthy lifestyle
- To groom students for responsible citizenship, and
- To implement a country’s founding principles.

**Values Education in English Language Education**

The educational emphases as outlined in the curriculum specifications of the Form Four English Language Syllabus (2003) by the Malaysian Ministry of Education, for instance, clearly shows the inculcation of values education in English language education: In this respect, the incorporation of moral education, citizenship education, patriotism and thinking skills in the specifications will contribute towards the building of a modern and progressive Malaysian society. Two values based objectives to be achieved by students at the end of Form Four are 1) to be able to interact with people and develop skills in forming and maintaining friendships by expressing care and concern and willingness to help, and creating a sense of togetherness and 2) to be able to show an awareness and appreciation of moral values.

Values education may be integrated and practiced in relation to all the four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. It could also be done in the three areas of language identified in the Form Four syllabus, namely, Language for Interpersonal Use, Language for Informational Use and Language for Aesthetic Use (Lee, A, Roberts, L. and Chew, M. (2003). How could we do that in the instruction and learning of English?

**Grammar instruction**

Grammatical competence is necessary and our learners should be able to produce grammatically acceptable sentences. We may complement this ability by giving them activities and practice which contain values content. This can be done with many grammatical categories. Some examples follow:

1. **Subject Verb Agreement**

   Use the missing subject or verb in the following sentences to show agreement between the subject and verb.

   a) The officer ........ arrested for abuse of power and corruption.

   b) Hawkers.............hard for a living.

   The values being indirectly exposed are that 1) the law will catch up with corrupt officers who abuse their position and 2) we need to show care and concern for those who work very hard to earn a livelihood/
2. Tenses

Fill in the blanks with the correct tense of the verb in brackets.

a) Pupils in some remote areas still walk a long distance to reach their school.
b) The snatch thief try to escape fast in his motorbike, but he was quickly apprehended by members of the public.

The values instilled here are 1) to empathize with residents in some rural areas for whom life is hard, and 2) to realize crime does not pay and to instill awareness among the citizens that combating crime is also our responsibility.

3. Gerunds and infinitives

In the teaching of gerunds and infinitives, the teacher may provide value laden examples, for example:

a) He gave up smoking (gerund) after being advised by the doctor.
b) He used to mingle (infinitive) with bad company and that is how he picked up smoking.

It is possible to use both gerunds and infinitives in the same sentence as in (b). Avoiding bad company and giving up bad habits are the values inherent in the examples.


The four types of connectives - additive, causative, contrastive and sequential (Jones, J.H.,2012) may be taught by using positive examples

1. The employees were sincere in their work. Moreover they were loyal to their company (additive).
2. She drove the car recklessly. Consequently she met with a nasty accident (causative).
3. Despite her injury, the player wanted to win for the country (contrastive).
4. He finally secured a scholarship after many attempts (sequential).

Vocabulary acquisition

Base words which are provided in the word list may be exploited in various ways to blend values with their usage. Some words from the word list in the curriculum specifications for Form Four English, set by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia are exemplified here according to their guidelines, including using the target words as various parts of speech, plural forms and use of affixes in context.

Average- 1. He was just an average pupil in school, but he now owns a company with 120 employees. 2. Most children only do averagely well before their public exams.

Bless- 1. The mother gave her blessings to Jack to succeed in life. 2. Our country is blessed with natural resources, for which we should be grateful.

Confident- 1. Never lose confidence in yourself. 2. They represented their school in the competition confidently.

Disease- 1. The refugees are suffering from diseases and are helpless. 2. The gardener removed the diseased plants to give the garden a fresh new look.

Essential- 1. The homemaker stopped buying unessential items to save on expenses. 2. Essentially, Trump’s triumph has seen the rise of racism.

Glory- 1. The team brought glory to the nation. 2. The glorious victory was accomplished through tough training and hard work.

Human- 1. The hunting of whales in abundance is inhuman. 2. Mother Theresa was made a saint for her service to humanity.

Request- 1. Did you request to be transferred to your wife’s school? 2. No, the department rejected my request.

**Reading comprehension**

Passages selected for reading comprehension ought to include those which are related to some issues of concern which have been published in print or online. These may include topics associated with global warming, climate change, racism, honour killing, child labour, animal cruelty, child brides, pollution, globalization, free trade, free education, literature, music, statesmanship, feminism, good governance, etc.

Students should be required to think sensitively to topics which affect most of us globally. They need to come up with practical suggestions to eradicate poverty, famine and hunger, preserving the environment, treating the minority indigenous people with due regard for their rights, for example. Such an approach may help our learners to acquire admirable human values by becoming aware of the problem and to ponder over them. These topics may be included together with other human interest topics. The various reading skills such as skimming and scanning, identifying topic and supporting sentences, understanding context clues, drawing conclusions, predicting outcomes, interpreting non-linear texts, summarizing, etc. can be practiced with the values focused topics.

**Listening comprehension**

For listening comprehension practice, audio materials which deal with universal human values may be used together with other materials of interest concentrating on specific listening skills. Students may be asked to listen to a talk on recycling, evils of war, arranged marriage, domestic abuse, etc. in addition to the many topics suggested earlier. The skills which normally follow a listening comprehension activity such as noting the gist of a talk, summarizing, presenting the information in tabular form, identifying important details of the discussion heard, taking notes, etc.

**Writing skills**

Writing activities are usually based on the main reading passages. Since it is suggested that values based reading passages are also included, the writing activities may be geared towards the realization of inculcating and imparting human values. These may include writing letters to the editor of newspapers in print or online, expressing personal opinions, writing an article for a
magazine, writing the transcript of an interview with a social activist, for instance, presenting a chart on common illnesses, writing a short story which contains a moral, writing a persuasive speech to highlight certain issues, writing about a problem and suggesting solutions using the problem-solution pattern, preparing a poster for world peace, etc.

**Speaking skills**

Speaking skills are integrated with the other macroskills of reading, listening and writing. The speaking component is based on the main reading passage. Students should be able to talk about issues affecting humanity, social customs, cultural differences and tolerance, persuade people to protect the environment, conserve water, express care and concern for social issues such as drug abuse and homelessness, share stories about those who have gone on to become achievers despite their disabilities, exchange opinions on human rights and agree or disagree politely, initiate a discussion on controversial topics, etc.

**Conclusion**

Values in education include many aspects: classroom content, management, methodology and assessment. For our discussion in this paper, we have focused mostly on classroom content. Value education and English language acquisition can go hand in hand. Values may sometimes be seen as subjective, but largely they are not. In a class of students from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, the values we integrate into our instruction have to be appreciated as being universally acceptable. Where there are learners from a single identifiable group, we may include values associated with the target group. In a classroom of an Islamic institution, for instance, we could introduce Islamic values through various materials and language tasks (Shamimah, 2013). The inclusion of values through teaching of the English language and other languages is seen as akin to holistic education which emphasizes cultivating the emotional, moral and spiritual dimensions of the learners (infed.org/mobi/a-brief-introduction-to-holistic-education/).
References


