EMPOWERING LANGUAGE LEARNERS: UNVEILING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF VALUE-BASED PEDAGOGY IN ESL EDUCATION

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Abstract

This desk research examines how, in an ESL classroom, when combined with standard academic content, value-based pedagogy becomes a comprehensive and transformative approach to education that strongly emphasises instilling essential values and principles in students. Value-based pedagogy strongly emphasises developing students' critical thinking and moral reasoning skills. Moreover, one could not place a division between language and values as one could not explore either in isolation. In value-based pedagogy, students get the ability to make ethically sound decisions and traverse the intricacies of the real world by participating in classroom discussions and ethical issues. This study's methodology is based on a textual analysis of the existing lesson materials designed for undergraduate students and an in-depth reading of published materials in the above-mentioned research area. The study is based on the theoretical works of scholars such as Arjuna Parakrama, Bill Johnston and Paulo Freire. Finally, the findings and the conclusion of this study emphasise the need for value-based pedagogy in an ESL classroom which empowers students to navigate challenges in life. Similarly, this approach urges educators to act as role models and questions established paradigms. The importance of value-based pedagogy in education is highlighted by its capacity to bring about profound transformation in learners, teachers, and society at large.

Keywords: Education, ESL, Hidden Curriculum, Value-Based Pedagogy

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Introduction

Value-based pedagogy is a holistic and transformative approach to education that strongly emphasises inculcating core values and principles in students' alongside traditional academic content. Value-based pedagogy symbolises a shift from the conventional, content-centric teaching methods and approaches to a more ethical and social development of learners. In the current world, where knowledge and skills are essential, value-based pedagogy equips students with a strong foundation of ethical and moral values, preparing them for academic success and a fulfilling and responsible life.

Our study is premised on how value-based pedagogy can be integrated into a classroom where English is taught as a Second Language (ESL classroom). The L2 students learn the language by following only what is taught by the teacher, which is also known as 'the banking concept of education' (Freire, 1970). Language learning/ teaching explores linguistic intricacies such as syntax, morphology, phonology, and semantics. However, in a university context, one cannot solely depend on teaching grammar and the four skills in isolation, especially in a faculty of humanities and social sciences where most subjects are interdependent and might have minimal nuances.

The target group of the study is undergraduate students of the Faculty of Arts in a public university in Sri Lanka. The majority of the students of this faculty have not received a decent education in relation to the English language from their school days, which results in them having a very low competence level in the language. At the same time, their dislike towards the English language naturally creates an aversion to learning the language. Many students have developed a disinclination towards learning English due to their past experiences (school/ tuition classes).

Parakrama (2010), in his article "Naduth Unge Baduth Unge", analyses the English Language teaching and learning situation in the Sri Lankan context, its politics, and the attitudes of language users towards the teaching/learning processes. He analyses the lessons to justify his argument that the teaching materials are not relevant to the context in which English is being taught and shows how such lessons could further constrain the learners' ability to learn the English language.

Similarly, Parakrama (2012), in his book chapter 'The Malchemy of English in Sri Lanka: Reinforcing Inequality through Imposing Extra-Linguistic Value' examines the sociolinguistic landscape in Sri Lanka and the impact of the English language on social inequality. In this insightful study, Parakrama sheds light on how the imposition of extra-linguistic values on English perpetuates existing inequalities within the country. The author delves into the historical, political, and cultural factors that have shaped the perception of English in Sri Lanka through meticulous research and analysis. It critically examines the complex dynamics between language, power, and social stratification, providing valuable insights into the multifaceted relationship between English and inequality in Sri Lanka.

Johnston (2003), in his book 'Values in English Language Teaching' extensively explores how values, morals, ethics, and ideology are embodied in language learning and teaching. He highlights "the moral side of the politics of language teaching [and] focus in particular on critical pedagogy, on the moral meanings it encodes, and the dilemmas of values to which it gives rise" (Johnston, 2003, p. x). Also, in his book, he talks about how politics and values are incorporated into English language learning and teaching. He quotes Michel Foucault on how he exposes that knowledge is constructed based on society, especially the ideologies that prevail within the people themselves.

Considering the aforementioned literature, we could understand the importance of values, morals and ethics in an ESL classroom. Moreover, it proves language cannot be learned or taught in isolation, focusing only on syntax and semantics. Language is but essentially part and parcel of our day-to-day

realities. A textual analysis of the materials used in the ESL classroom of undergraduates is employed to understand how value-based pedagogy could empower students in academia and their lives.

The teachers and material designers should ensure that the lessons and discussions do not infantilise the students as the target group, consisting of adult learners and users of language. Classroom discussions and material should be challenging and, at the same time, intriguing to the learners, which is one way of ensuring their usage and active participation. Therefore, an amalgamation of value-based pedagogy with language is apt for empowering undergraduate students.

Furthermore, value-based pedagogy places a strong emphasis on role modelling. Educators themselves must embody the values they wish to impart to their students. Teachers play a pivotal role in this approach, as they serve as living examples of the values they seek to instil in their students. In practice, value-based pedagogy can manifest in various ways, including incorporating moral and ethical themes in the curriculum, establishing a code of conduct, and encouraging community service among students. It also encourages open dialogue and debate, allowing students to express their thoughts and beliefs and fostering inclusivity and respect for diverse perspectives. So, it is crucial that the students realise the purpose of value-based pedagogy and learn that what they have been taught was to be subjects of oppression instead of valuing their authenticity as students. Therefore, the educator's role in the ESL classroom contradicts drastically with the so-called 'traditional' educator embedded in the system and functions as an oppressed individual themselves.

In this introduction, we have briefly explored the essence of value-based pedagogy, highlighting its commitment to fostering values, morals, and ethics in education. The subsequent sections will delve deeper into the principles and practices that underpin this transformative educational approach, demonstrating its profound impact on students, teachers, and the broader society.

Methodology

This desk research is qualitative and takes the approach of textual analysis. The research is conducted by an in-depth study and analysis of the existing lesson materials. These lessons are designed for university undergraduates in a public university in Sri Lanka. The material we have chosen for this study addresses the needs of the language learner categorised under the basic competence level. Moreover, students are tested on the four skills: reading, writing, listening and speech. The course is a non-credit compulsory for undergraduates representing diverse contexts, such as different educational levels, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and multiethnic and language proficiency levels. These cases will serve as the basis for our study.

The material designers for this course in discussion are the ESL teachers of the Department of English Language Teaching of this university. The teachers design the lessons by considering the competence levels and the needs of the students. Moreover, the lessons are tested and piloted with the students, and then the lessons are subjected to revisions, updates, and editions for a second time. The material goes through numerous editions with time; each semester and year, they are used in classrooms. The lesson materials used for this study are the latest versions of the lessons taught in the current academic year (2022/2023). These lessons are designed based on themes like 'equality versus equity', 'gender and identity', 'justice and discrimination' etc.

Furthermore, the teacher journals are also analysed to understand and observe the students' reactions and how the students respond to such mundane yet complex concepts and ideas. The teachers are expected to maintain a journal for each class in which they note down how well/bad the students respond to the class and the lessons, where the teachers note down the challenges and difficulties they faced in

the class etc. These journals were beneficial and corresponded well to understanding what values, attitudes, opinions, and ideologies were addressed in the ESL classroom and how.

The data/lesson materials and journals were analysed using the critical discourse analysis approach. This approach to the critical theory of language sees language as a form of social practice. This technique helps to understand how social and linguistic practices represent one another and investigates how societal power relations are established and reinforced through language use. Hence, this technique facilitated an understanding how values and norms are passed on to students and teachers and how they are reproduced in the ESL classroom through language. Furthermore, the technique of colour coding was also used to analyse data/ material. This technique helped identify similar themes, ideas, concepts, and keywords from the lesson materials and teacher journals. The emergent themes through the technique of colour coding made it easier to compare and identify any patterns which came up in relation to the themes and concepts used in the lesson materials.

This desk research acknowledges one's own diverse backgrounds while engaging them with alternatives of knowledge, values, beliefs, attitudes, ethics, and ideologies. Moreover, the study was manoeuvred with the belief that the university is a space where one could learn and unlearn the subtle nuances and values of society, ensuring student empowerment in the long run.

Discussion

Studying the sample activities and tasks given to the students in the ESL classroom helps one to understand how value-based pedagogy is adapted to the language learning/ teaching space/s. One could understand how value-based education influences students' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours in ESL classes. This pedagogical method emphasises incorporating values and ethical concepts into language learning. In 'The Malchemy of English in Sri Lanka: Reinforcing Inequality through Imposing Extra-Linguistic Value', Arjuna Parakrama states,

> "Extra-linguistic value can be defined as that value placed on aspects of language and language use which go beyond the legitimate purview of linguistics. (...) judgments about a person's intelligence or honesty are made based on his/her competence in English (as measured by pronunciation or adherence to grammatical rules), then this is an example of extra-linguistic value afforded to English use. (...) Since English competence (as a proxy for class and privilege) confers power, it possesses qualities and characteristics that transcend language, moving into the realm of ethics and personality." (Parakrama, 2012, p.121).

Hence, language and extra-linguistic features are indispensable. Thus, the educator's role in the ESL classroom is to discuss with the learner how English is much more than grammar and 'fancy' vocabulary. Thus, value-based pedagogy paves the way to carry discussions instead of merely transmitting knowledge (Freire, 1970), exploring these extra-linguistic values and the realities we encounter in this hierarchised societal base. Therefore, instead of focusing solely on the grammar components, the ESL classroom transforms into a vibrant platform in which the learning and teaching experience is enhanced through dialogues based on worldly matters that affect everyone.

The first lesson for the first-year undergraduates is based on 'Describing People'. This lesson's Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) teach students to describe a person based on their appearance, qualities, and habits. This is taught with the help of contextualised passages while talking or discussing people in their realities. The image (figure 1) below includes some comprehension questions provided to the students after reading a passage describing a person.

3. What kind of clothes does she like to wear?

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4. Do you think her choice of clothes reveals/ reflects her character? Give reasons for your answer.

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5. Does the speaker like her aunt? Provide at least two reasons for your answer.

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6. Do you think this is a realistic (convincing/ truthful) description of the aunt? Why/ Why not? Give reasons for your answer.

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Figure: 1

The next image (Figure 2) also describes a person and discusses the qualities and habits of a person. The students are then asked to write their own description and or adapt the given information to another scenario or a task/ activity.

Tilak Ranaraja was an unusually quiet young man. He had few friends, avoided social functions and spent a great deal of his time in the seclusion of his room. He was by no means unfriendly. He was decisively an introvert. He had been very studious during his school days in Kandy. After he left school and joined the Irrigation Department as an apprentice, he kept on studying for his professional engineering examinations and passed each stage in the minimum of time. Now he is a senior engineer with full professional qualifications.

His bosses liked him as he could be relied upon to complete his work with thoroughness and integrity. As it often happens to someone who is hardworking and reliable, his workload increased regularly and with it came greater responsibility. His bosses had also been very fair by him, and given him accelerated promotions. Even his colleagues admitted that Tilak deserved his promotions.

1. **Do you want to be a person like Tilak in future? Write 125-150 words describing the qualities that you would like to adopt from his character and the qualities you would like to avoid.**

OR

2. **Tilak is your colleague and your mother thinks that he is a good match for your sister. Write 125-150 words describing to your mother whether Tilak is a good match for your sister based on his qualities and habits.**

Figure:2

Finally, the lesson ends with the capstone activity in which the students read a passage about Nelson Mandela and the Apartheid system. In this context, we describe the background of South Africa's legalised system of racial segregation and discrimination and also how apartheid led to systematic injustice by creating a hierarchical society where people were categorised based on their race. Furthermore, classroom discussions are based on how they lead to social separation and mistrust,

limited healthcare and education access, and economic inequities. Also, by using this passage, Mandela's efforts are highlighted in the text to show how important education is in the fight against discrimination. Above all, the lesson inspires students to consider the moral precepts reflected in Mandela's life and contributions, which could also be used to discuss their personal views and experiences.

Read the following passage about Nelson Mandela and respond to the questions below

Nelson Mandela was born in South Africa in 1918. Unit about 1992, South Africa had a political system called apartheid. This meant that black people had to live apart from white people. For example, they could not go to the same schools as white people or eat in the same restaurants. Most black people had no jobs, were very poor, and could not vote in elections.

Mandela grew up in a village. When he was a young man, he left his village to study law. He wanted to help free black people from apartheid. He became a lawyer in 1952 and worked in Johannesburg, a large city in South Africa.

Figure: 3

1. Write 125-150 words describing what you consider to be the main lesson(s) to be learnt from Nelson Mandela's life story.

   OR

2. Describe an incident in your life where you faced injustice due to your gender, skin colour, ethnicity, or religion and explain what you felt and what you did in response to that incident

Figure: 4

The second lesson we have chosen is named 'Responding to Basic Academic Lectures and Speeches' and focuses on two significant themes: Universal Human Rights and Education. The students are required to engage in discussion with their teachers and peers about Universal Human Rights, and the pre-discussion is mainly based on the Right to Protest (as they engage in numerous student protests).

PRE-LISTENING DISCUSSION: WHAT ARE UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS

Time allocation: 02 hours

NB: This activity should lead to a discussion on rights and duties/ responsibilities. PLEASE MODIFY THIS ACTIVITY TO SUIT THE REQUIREMENTS AND THE COMPETENCE LEVEL OF YOUR CLASS.

The pre-listening discuss is based on the US Capitol Hill Siege Protest. It is not necessary to go into detail about the reasons for the protest (students can do it as homework if necessary). Instead, focus on the following:
1. The idea of a protest, why people protest, why people should have a right to protest, how should people protest, whether people have a right to be disruptive, be violent, loot, use bigotry, etc. when they protest etc.
2. What are rights, why rights are necessary, how rights and responsibilities/ duties are interdependent etc.

Figure: 5

The second half of the lesson deals with Education and the Right to Education. Students are expected to listen to a speech on education by Amartya Sen, answer the questions provided, and carry out a class discussion. The following image (Figure: *6*) gives a brief overview of the themes/ topics of discussions carried out in class.

TOPIC 01: Lack of teachers and/or unfair distribution of teachers is a serious problem in Sri Lanka. In your view, what are the reasons for this issue and what can be done to address this problem?

TOPIC 02: What do you think the current state (condition) of Sri Lanka would be if the Free Education Policy had not been introduced?

TOPIC 03: According to you, what are the barriers that parents face when sending their children to school in the present COVID-19 situation in Sri Lanka? What do you think can be done to minimize these barriers?

Figure: 6

Thus, by conducting the aforementioned lessons, positive discussions were carried out with the students to make the ESL classroom thought-provoking. In the lesson 'Describing People', discussions were carried out on how people should not be 'labelled' solely on their appearance but their values and qualities. While the students were taught adjectives and adverbs, classroom discussions were carried out on different realities that individuals encounter daily. This fueled how experiences shaped one's thinking and character when the students answered the questions in Figure1 The majority of students responded to the questions in a rather critical manner, where they often disagreed with the questions they were asked. For example, many students responded to the 4th question of
, stating that one's character does not reflect the attire one wears.

Furthermore, the students carefully measured the qualities they would consider/adopt in Tilak's character and vice versa. Likewise, for the activity based on Nelson Mandela and the apartheid system (Figure 3), student responses to the first question pointed out the importance of fighting against discrimination and inequality and how education gives a voice to the voiceless in confronting social injustice. In addition, the responses to the second question (Figure 4) revealed how students could relate more to the discussion based on the reading by referring to their own contexts.

The second lesson, 'Responding to Basic Academic Lectures and Speeches', which focuses on Universal Human Rights and Education, paved the way for refreshing discussions in the ESL classroom. Activity in Figure 5 and encouraged insightful classroom discussions on protest. Instead, lengthy conversations were carried out on how protests are often misconstrued as 'overreactions' due to the mainstream, dangerous, and generalised societal norms such as, 'protests are harmful because they are violent' or 'university students do not understand the depth of protest'. The importance of being aware of one's rights and responsibilities as a citizen in a country where rights are often found under threat and how fundamental human rights must be protected and fought for (under any circumstance given) were discussed in the classroom. The second part of the lesson, which focuses on Education and the Right to Education, created the space to discuss inequality in resource distribution in Sri Lanka, which, rather unsurprisingly (yet dishearteningly) unravelled the reason for students' common hatred towards English, lack of 'competent' English teachers in rural/suburban schools. The dire importance of free education was also discussed while exploring how the right to free education should always be defended, contrary to whatever the argument presented. Moreover, the impact of COVID-19 on education and how it has created a visible drift between the students and education was a topic that gained attention. Students discussed how the barriers created by the pandemic affected their lives as

undergraduates and how schooling children and their parents were met with innumerable challenges and barriers as they have witnessed these situations by themselves in relation to their realities.

Teachers frequently incorporate tolerance, respect for variety, and cultural knowledge into their lessons. For instance, the two lessons we have chosen for the study are apt examples where discussions based on themes like people and their realities, discrimination, human rights, and education are embedded into language teaching/learning lessons/ materials. Value-based pedagogy fosters students' moral and social growth in addition to teaching language skills. However, to maximise the efficacy of their instruction, educators must be cognizant of the potential difficulties that may arise, such as managing cultural differences and ensuring that their own values are not imposed on the students.

The hidden curriculum operates in the ESL classroom concurrently. To be specific and more elaborative as to what is hidden in the curriculum, it is what the students learn from it that is not addressed directly in their learning environment.

> "The hidden curriculum indicates that some intentional outcomes from schooling are not formally recognised; these are unofficial instructional influences, which may either support or weaken the attainment of manifest of goals" (McNeil, 1981, p.236).

The above statement refers to the hidden curriculum; though it is not viewed as a crucial part of learning or teaching, it plays a significant role in curriculum planning. It has the ability to improve learning as well as decrease the level of learning in students. The hidden curriculum is the ideologies, views, perspectives and stands the students learn and understand from the curriculum used in the classroom or their learning environment. Even though these aspects are not discussed in the classroom openly, students are able to gauge and understand the insinuations and hints that are used in the curriculum.

Thus, with the use of the second lesson mentioned in the 'Methodology', students are taught about their rights and responsibilities as the general opinion about university students among the public is that they misuse and waste the money of the government by engaging in protests and strikes rather than focusing on their studies. Even though the Intended Learning Outcomes of the lesson 'Responding to Basic Academic Lectures and Speeches' is to teach students to listen, understand and respond to academic lectures and speeches, students are able to understand and learn their rights and responsibilities with regard to protesting and education which is presented through the aspect of 'hidden curriculum' of the lesson.

Similarly, the use of politically correct terms, being more humane towards everyday realities, empathy, critical thinking, etc., also inculcates positive attitudes in students and focuses on not only grammar, structures, and their functions but also values. Understanding the nuances of hidden curriculum helps underscore the complexity of this concept and its multifaceted impact on students. The hidden curriculum can include messages about discipline, obedience, competition, gender roles, race, and societal norms, influencing students' attitudes and beliefs in subtle, often unintended ways. By recognising the existence and impact of the hidden curriculum, educators and institutions can work towards creating more intentional and inclusive learning environments that empower students with critical thinking skills and a sense of social responsibility.

Conclusion
In conclusion, value-based pedagogy is an innovative approach to education that goes beyond traditional classroom settings. It emphasises the importance of teaching students' fundamental values and concepts in addition to traditional information, realising that education is more than memorising

facts; it is also about developing students' moral character, empathy, and sense of social responsibility. Moreover, value-based education helps with moral reasoning and critical thinking, empowering students to make morally sound judgments. Additionally, much emphasis is placed on educators serving as role models by exhibiting the values they want to instil. A well-rounded education is achieved through the approach's many manifestations, which include encouraging community service, integrating moral and ethical themes into the curriculum, and promoting open discussions.

The curriculum or materials should be designed in a way to keep the students interested while challenging them, which would, by extension, motivate students to learn and use the language. Therefore, we believe adopting value-based pedagogy in language classrooms is apt for empowering students. Franklin Bobbitt also emphasises that the content of the curriculum should address the fact that the students should only be taught or learn skills essential to fulfilling their personal tasks.

> "Educate the individual according to his capabilities. This requires that the material of the curriculum be sufficient to meet the various needs of every class of individuals in the community and that the course of training and study be sufficiently flexible that the individual can be given just the things that he needs" (Bobbitt, 1912, p. 269).

According to (Caswell and Campbell, 1935), a "curriculum is composed of all the experiences children [students] have under the guidance of the teacher", which resonates with the idea of value-based teaching. This gives students a proper base and a moral compass to help them negotiate the difficulties of education and life in a world where contradicting values and facts abound. The ultimate goal of this strategy is to produce morally upright citizens. After a brief overview of value-based pedagogy, it is clear that this creative teaching method can profoundly affect students, educators, and society at large. It challenges us to examine its values and methods in greater detail, showing the significant impact it can have on education.

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