

How to use the Buddhist education concepts in making a university level curriculum

Polgaswatte Paramananda (*)

Introduction

The Buddha is indeed the light of the world's kingdom of morality and the greatest moral teacher that has ever lived on earth. He is the greatest master of social justice. He boldly declared that a man never becomes an outcast or a Brahmin by birth, but by his own deeds. He was the unique teacher to preach universal love and compassion and he practiced what he preached, and preached what he practiced (yata vadi tatha kari yatha kari tatha vadi). This is the criteria of developing a university level curriculum in the light of the Buddhist perspective. According to the Webster's dictionary, curriculum is defined as a set of courses constituting an area of specialization and a curriculum is a course offered by an educational institute. Buddhism always recommends an ethical base curriculum endowed with wisdom. In this respect, university level curriculum needs to be based on the

(*) B. A. Hons, M.A. , M.Ed. , Sri Lanka, PhD, China

Buddhist practices such as Four Divine Abodes (catu brahmavihara)
:- Loving kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic joy and Equanimity.

Objectives of a university level curriculum on the basis of Buddhist education concept in the global arena

It is a more difficult task to build a university level curriculum in the dimension of higher education system than primary or secondary education system. Students who are at university level are obviously liberal minded, democratic and well motivated characters and the goals and objectives of a curriculum for university students should be eligible to fulfill their aspirations effectively. In this context, consideration of including ethical aspects into curriculum is very critical but it would be a sensible approach to curb the violence, disagreement and crisis emerging in university crowds. In this relation, Buddhist education concept regarding morality is playing an enormously important role. The Buddhist education concept constantly suggests developing any subject wise curriculum on the basis of morality firstly and on knowledge secondly. The objectives of a Buddhist concept based curriculum may therefore be:

1. To add moral values to the current knowledge based curriculum
2. To minimize the crisis and violence among the student community
3. To create knowledgeable as well as emotional society
4. To provide moral criterion in building up a curriculum for any kind of subject or discipline
5. To make path for the students to develop wholesome skills effectively

Developing Curriculum

The curriculum should provide all students with essential life-long learning experiences for whole-person development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physical development, social skills and aesthetics according to the individual potential, so that all students can become active, responsible and contributing members of society, the nation and the world” (2002). This broad concept of developing curriculum is introduced by the modern educationists but the ethical phase of modern educational curriculum is not successful in practice.

The Buddhist way of education totally depends on morality and emphasizes that the wisdom without morality is worthless. Basically, cultivating positive values is the path of constructing knowledge and the Buddhism advises the positive values are the basement of knowledge. Therefore, employing Four Divine Abodes into curriculum provides a flexible framework which can be applied to any kind of subject practically. It is found that the modern education system is job oriented practice and possibly neglects acquiring human qualities. "Our civilization-and our educational institutions-grew more secular as material wealth and happiness in this world became the goals of life, rather than salvation in a world to come. By the end of the nineteenth century, the purposes of schooling had become in large part economic-to nurture the practical knowledge that would enable individuals and the country to compete and thrive economically" (Nord, 1997). Therefore, either material wealth oriented or job oriented education causes unrest among the students and such a curriculum of any educational institute is obviously targeted to develop human capital that can generate new ideas and innovations except emotions. Thus analyzing the content of modern curriculum seems to engage in entrepreneurial and innovative objectives directly related to economic growth and development rather than morality. Buddhism advises on constructing university level curriculum, demands not only innovative objectives but also loving kindness, compassion and equanimity (upekka).

Fiala (2006) represents three factors to consider in forming a curriculum policy document.

1. Full development of individual
2. Development of the nation and the economy
3. Recognition of the importance of the values of equality, democracy and the broad rights of human beings for education.

According to Buddhist concept of education, full development of individual is interpreted as spiritually developed person and further, to become a spiritually developed person one needs to follow the Noble Eightfold path, otherwise named as the middle path. As mentioned above, to acquire life-long learning experiences for whole-person development is a model of ethics, it includes the

20 THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTING BUDDHIST EDUCATION

Noble Eightfold path and within this framework we can develop a university level curriculum. The Noble Eightfold path is illustrated in terms of three aggregates.

1. Morality (Sila)
2. Concentration (Samadhi)
3. Wisdom (Panna)

Buddha mentioned that the Noble Eightfold Path is consisted of three aggregates of morality, concentration and wisdom. Full development of individual begins with morality and it is the foundation of the wisdom. Three factors of the Noble Eightfold path; Right speech, Right action and Right livelihood are included in the aggregate of morality. Buddhism insists morality based curriculum is the path to wisdom. Curriculum is prepared on the request of social needs and it is altered from time to time based on purposes or political involvements. From the point of education reforms, there was debate to build up knowledge based society and therefore educational policy makers are interested in planning curriculum on the basis of a just society and a good life. But the definition of a good life is very simple, it might be a luxurious life and curriculum objectives also focus on students' capability to contribute to future economic growth. This aspect is too worldly and not recommended by the Buddhism. And considering Right speech, Right action and Right livelihood, these three factors directly contribute to the benefit of individual and society. Therefore, developing of a curriculum at university level needs to be based on morality and on the base of morality constructing knowledge is the way to make a full developed person.

“According to Buddhism for a man to be perfect there are two qualities that he should develop equally: compassion (*karuna*) and wisdom (panna). Here compassion represents love, charity, kindness, tolerance and such noble qualities on the emotional side, or qualities of the heart, while wisdom would stand for the intellectual side or the qualities of the mind. If one develops only the emotional neglecting the intellectual, one may become a good-hearted fool; while to develop only the intellectual side neglecting the emotional may turn one into a ruthless, hard-hearted intellect without feeling for others. Therefore, to be perfect one has to develop both equally. That is the

aim of the Buddhist way of life: in it wisdom and compassion are inseparably linked together” Rahula, 1996).

The elements of a curriculum depend on educational policies of a country though it is worth to review any kind of curriculum with the help of human values. Kennedy (2005) points out broad dimensions of curriculum.

1. Curriculum as a prescribed plan for learning
2. Curriculum as all the learning experiences encountered at school, planned and unplanned
3. Curriculum as a reflection of the expectations that society has for young people
4. Curriculum as statement of values

Within this context, describing statement of values in curriculum is very significant but it should be social values rather than economic values. According to the Buddhist education concepts, social values are defined as the sense of wholesome and unwholesome acts. For this purpose, it is worth to prescribe three principal references ‘Adhipattaya Damma’ in *Anguttara nikaya* in developing university level curriculum. As the curriculum is a plan of learning or practical document, these three principal references can be used as criteria to discuss the ethical paradigm of a curriculum and therefore, they are significant in this connection.

1. Reference to one’s own conscience (Attadhipateyya)
2. It is mentioned that one should evaluate the action before performing with one’s own conscience.
3. Reference to conventions in the world (Lokadhipateyya)
4. The conventions in the world need to be taken as a criterion for judging an action before performing.
5. Reference to the Doctrine (Dhammadhipateyya)
6. Before performing an action one should evaluate the moral value of it according to the Doctrine.

The curriculum is an action plan prescribed for the purpose of learning and the evaluation is the main component in learning any subject. In this context, the above criteria can be applied to every

22 THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTING BUDDHIST EDUCATION

subject stream in developing university level curriculum. There is an argument how to apply ethical aspects to the science curriculum but it is assumed that either science or mathematic stream is for the benefits of human kind and therefore, involvement of ethical aspects in developing any kind of curriculum is essential part in modern higher education system. It is true that the intellect without emotions is worthless, and modern education system mainly focuses on knowledge based society. Designing and implementing the above three references in a curriculum will help to evaluate the behavior of a person in the social setting effectively. Sometimes, there may be gaps between the ideal and the reality in utilizing ethical based curriculum at the university level but isolating the ethical aspects in developing a curriculum would be an utter failure in the education system universally.

Buddhism advices to consider the intellectual level of students in developing a curriculum, and to plan successful curriculum needs to comprise four factors that are stipulated in *Anguttara nikaya* playing a significant role in connection with Buddhist education concept.

1. Uggatitannu
2. (Intelligent students)
3. Vipacitanna
4. (Students who understand with short introduction)
5. Neyya
6. (Students who understand with commentaries)
7. Padaparama
8. (Students who understand with great effort)

Generally, curriculum drives the students to act in that particular subject but student should also have potential to follow the curriculum. In this respect the above factors play an important role in employing the process of a curriculum. Moreover, those four factors answer several questions in developing a curriculum regarding intellectual level of students. However, first and foremost factor is morality in Buddhist education concept and it is the foundation of the wisdom.

“Buddhism is ethical and moral from beginning to the end... Since, Buddhism is specific with regard to moral value of an action, motive

and intention of an action are evaluated with reference to righteous or unrighteous means adopted in performing an action" (Gnanarama, 2000).

Furthermore, to encourage development and innovation of university based curriculum in the light of Buddhist education concept is a pre-requisite and it is a responsibility of Buddhist educationists to make this concept successful in the world. Besides, including ethics into the curriculum, the psychological factors are essential to be considered in developing the university level curriculum.

Conclusion

Buddhism is considered to have emerged for the sake of compassion in the human kind and therefore, Buddhist education concept is based on morality and wisdom. Buddhism suggests that the modern curriculum guidelines be endowed with morality and as a result of that students will possess knowledge and skills on the basis of morality. This is the way to create humane citizens of the world.

REFERENCES

- Anguttara Nikaya, I,II, (2005), Buddhist cultural centre, Dehiwala.
- Basic Education curriculum Guide, (2002) Curriculum Development Council Secretariat, Hon Kong,
- Fiala,F, (2006) "Educational ideology and the school curriculum", In Benavot, A. and Braslavsky, C.,(eds), School knowledge in comparative and historical perspective, Hong Kong.
- Gnanarama,Pategama, (2000) ,Essentials of Buddhism, Singapore,.
- Kennedy, K. (2005). Changing schools for changing times – New directions for the school curriculum in Hong Kong. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- Nord, A. Warren, (1997) " Multiculturalism and Religion", In Ovando,J. Carlos, McLaren,(eds), The politics of Multiculturalism and Bilingual Education, Students and teachers caught in the cross fire, Boston,.
- Rahula, Walpola (1996), What the Buddha taught, Buddhist Cultural Centre, Dehiwala, z