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The Efficacy of Religious and Moral Education Textbooks to Promote Morality and Ethics among Students: An Evidence from the Secondary level of Education in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The study found that Religious and Moral Education (RME) textbooks are necessary for instilling ethics and morals among secondary-level students in Bangladesh. The RME textbooks of major religions like Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism advocate similar social and ethical principles, such as empathy, sympathy, thankfulness, honesty, compassion, communal harmony, and forbearance. Despite of containing a substantial amount of religious and ethical materials, the books may not always achieve the expected learning outcomes due to problems with pedagogy and assessmentthat prioritize memorization of exam-centric content rather than practical application. Additionally, the books may seem monotonous because of their unappealing illustrations, inadequate content, outdated stereotypes in story presentation, insufficient practical examples, linguistic ambiguity and publication issues. Therefore, the research advocates for the comprehensive inclusion of morals not only in textbooks but also in pedagogy and learning environments to produce a values-oriented generation with strong national and social commitments at the secondary school level.

Keywords: Values, Religiousity, Spirituality,Schoolbooks

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Introduction

The expansion of social and moral values is considered the most effective way to develop society by influencing individual. It plays a role as one of the criteria for social, state, economic and political excellence. The value of life lies in making students aware of their duties and responsibilities. If we can sow the seeds of values in them, they will be meticulous*(The Holy Bible, 198*4, Galatians 6:6-7, Genesis 8:22).

Value education accelerates the mental development of the citizen, which paves the way for good governance and puts an end to social degradation. Home is the first place while schools and teachers are the second place to influence the morality of the children (Kotaiah mentioned in Gui et. el. 2020). The students, teachers play their role mainly in the Textbook-centric education system. So, the significance of the textbooks in gearing up the students' knowledge, motivating and reorienting their mode of thinking is immense. Again, Harvard study reveals that children who had a religious upbringing are likely to be healthier and have a higher degree of well-being in early adulthood than those who did not (Chen, 2018).

Religious education should help students acquire and develop knowledge and an understanding of religion, as well as the ability to form reasoned opinions that lead to informed judgements about religious and moral issues (Sajjadi, 2008). This study mainly targeted the major religious textbooks of secondary level, how much efficacy does it have in integrating ethics and morals among students.

Statement of the problem

In Bangladesh, the society is experiencing with the growing number of chaos, obscenity and various criminal tendencies. The situation of school going children is getting worse. Sources in the social welfare directorate said that, in the first six months of 2020, for 821 cases 1,191 teenagers were arrested and convicted for drug, murder, and rape (Dewan, 2021). Morality and immorality are getting ambiguous and right or wrong became unclear to them. Parents are not able to combine constructive social and cultural activities. In addition to this, social networking sites act as platforms for adolescents to commit various illegal acts (Gupta, 2021). Another important thing is to fantasize about crime, to take crime to the level of heroism (Yar, 2014).

In order to prevent this sure decline, it is necessary to give equal importance to the moral education of the children as well as the religious education. Archbishop Vincent Nichols warned that treating students as "consumers" and neglecting their "innate spirituality" would damage society and school play a key role in developing virtues and responsibilities (Nichols, 2009). Bangladesh government has a national integrity strategy, wherea special section is added with fostering integrity in all levels of education (National Integrity Strategy, 2012). National Education Policy 2010 has also prioritized the issue mentioning that,"Morality is rooted in religion."

With the aim of developing positive behavioral change, religion books have been renamed as "Religion and Moral Education". The TBs have been prepared with the consideration that

the learners will be sympathetic to family, society and nation irrespective of cast and creed of all religions (Saha, 2020). Despite of those advocacies and efforts, the RME texbook could not have significant role in upbringing the moral values. Hence a critical review of the current RME textbooks are required. In order to get the real picture of textbooks' contribution over the students, this study is indispensable.

Rationale of the study

The education must be based on strong moral and ethical values. It contributes to the individual improving its character, mode of life and way of thinking. The secondary level of education is that stage, where students are assigned to get prepare for higher education and they are in their teenage or adolescence time of life. It is considered to be the best time to learn moral education. In response to the Bangladesh National Integrity strategy, national Education policy and national education curriculum, which have placed moral education at utmost priority, NCTB textbooks were formulated for preparing a generation featuring strong moral and ethical stands.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to explore the efficacy of Religious and Moral Education (RME) Text Books (TB) in developing morals and values among students.

The specific objectives of this study are-

- To explore the state of students and teachers' understanding of religious and moral values;
- To analyze the content and identify the strengths and weaknesses of text books in promoting morality and values;
- To explore the necessity of having RME Textbooks to promote morals.

Limitations of the Study

In considering the demographic proportion of four major religions, the study primarily set its target of sampling. However, it was not an easy task to maintain an equal proportion. Teachers from Christians and Buddhists were so rare, particularly of teaching religious education at his school. On the other hand, due to Covid-pandemic, most of the schools were not fully opened. In such situation, interview was taken over by audio and video call. Following that, the key benefits of the phenomenological approach: considering facial expression and observation, were not achieved completely.

Literature Review

Studies on Religious and Moral Values among Bangladeshi People

Affinity to religion has been evident among Bangladeshi people for a long time. Prothom Alo, a leading Bangla daily, conducted a study on religiosity of youth in 2019. The survey found that about 94% of respondents admitted to have a strong belief in religion. The similar survey conducted by Prothom Alo (2016) found the opinion 84%. It indicates that the religiosity among youths have been increased by 10% between 2016 to 2019. Another survey published by The Daily Star (2019) found that those educated in modern education were more likely to become militants than those educated in madrassas. The study further reveals that limited knowledge of religion creates opportunities to encourage and persuade youth towards militancy.

According to the survey conducted by the World Faith Development Dialogue (WFDD) in collaboration with the Berkeley Center for Religion (2020), the people of Bangladesh are more sensitive and closer to religious leaders and religious organizations. The survey also shows that religion is considered always a priority for those people.

Mahajatoq (মহাজাতক) in his book 'শুদ্ধাচার' opined that ধর্মের ফলিত রূপ হচ্ছে শুদ্ধাচার আর অধর্মের ফলিত রূপ হচ্ছে দুরাচার। আপনার আচারই বলে দেবে আপনি ধার্মিক, না অধার্মিক। আসলে ধার্মিক যেমন দুরাচারী হতে পারে না, তেমনি দুরাচারীও কখনো ধার্মিক বলে গণ্য হতে পারে না (মহাজাতক, ২০২১)।

According to the survey conducted by International Institute of Islamic Thought (2018), about 86% of interviewees maintain a relationship with religion (Religiosity). 63% of the students have empathy and 61% have the ability to do moral reasoning. But from the lowest level it is forgiveness (3.3) and self-efficacy (3.5). This also indicates that Religiosity should be one of the strongest predictors for forgiveness. But the result shows that religiosity has comparatively less correlation with forgiveness and self-efficacy. It specifies that Morality has to be incorporated through religion and efforts should be given on how to develop true religiosity/ spirituality among students.

Morals according to the four (4) Major Religions

All major religions' moral values lead us to build a peaceful society. Ignorance misguides human from religion and turns away toward a chaotic society.As Buddha identified Ignorance and Delusion as one of the cause of sufferings or Tanha. So, Buddhist are advocated to gain knowledge. Again, Knowledge in the Bible is always emphasized as a high priority (New International Version Bible, 1984, Psalm 92:6). Hindus believe that knowledge is a blessing bestowed by the Divine. As Swami Vivekananda remarked: "Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man" (Vivekvani, 2020). According to Islam's moral teaching Muslims requires researching and learning to develop themselves and be useful to their communities (Al–Quran, 2022, 35:28, 20:114, 58:11, 96:1).

Review on Religious and Moral Education Textbooks by WFDD

World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) based in USA and Center for Peace and Justice (CPJ), BRAC University, Dhaka (2020) have conducted a study on the NCTB's Religious and Moral Education textbooks(Rob et. al. 2020). Importance of moral education TBs is identified by the study as mentioned below-

> 'Studies have shown that children are usually aware of the social ills around them, which they pick up from non-formal learning cues. Textbooks could provide a more nuanced and systematic approach to addressing these social justice issues, offering opportunities to engage children in critical thinking and problem-solving activities' (p.22).

Methodology

A qualitative research approach based on interpretive paradigm was applied in this study. Following the phenomenological approach, researchers seek to understand meaning in events and in human interactions. The data collected in a qualitative study includes more than words; attitudes, feelings, vocal and facial expressions, and other behaviors are also involved. This research is not adhered only to statistical data but also observed the participants expressions. Selected 3 research questions involved with respondents' feelings. Students and teachers have expressed themselves spontaneously and with an urge to communicate their feelings and demand.

Sampling

Interview was conducted with 7 secondary Religion school teachers and FGD (4x4= 16) for students. A convenient/purposive random sampling method was used to determine the respondents.

Sources of Data

Types	Source
Primary Sources	Students and teachers of secondary education, curriculum experts, Religious Education experts
Secondary Sources	Existing curriculum, Education Policy, RME Textbooks for class 9 & 10,research articles, documents and other literature

Table 1: Sources of Data Collection

Tools of Data Collection

FGD for students	In-depth interview for teachers	Round Table Discussion	Book Review
• Open-ended Questionnaire	• Open-ended Questionnaire	• Interactions based on book review	• Check List & • Reviewers notes

Table 2:Tools of Data Collection

Tools are developed according to the guideline prescribed by the expertsof NAEM and these have been finalized having atleast 2 (two) sittings with the exparts.

Book Reviews: 4 prominent educationists and religious experts were invited to review the RME Textbooks on their respective religions. A designed checklist was provided focusing on targeted objective of the research.

Focus Group discussions was also organized with the educational and religious experts for further clarification and supplements.

Methods of Data Analysis and Presentation

Book review notes were written in conjunction with the interviews, FGD and in accordance with subjects. The data collection and the ongoing literature review processes were blended throughout the study then thoroughly examining the transcripts to find final codes and themes. Developing the codes and themes "grounded" in the data analysis was completed and then researchers compiled the information by writing a report.

Analysis, Findings and Discussions

The data was presented by classifying the responses into three specific research objectives.

Understanding of Religious and Moral Values

In response to the questions, a Muslim Teacher opined that,

> 'Morals and Religion have no fundamental difference. Both talked about the welfare of the people, truthfulness, and good deeds. In addition, in religion there is rituals for which religion subject is needed to added in school curriculum'.

A teacher from the Hindu religion emphasized the socialization process while a hindu student fell that the rituals brought a sense of morality in their attitude and behaviour.

A teacher from Christian religion indicated about the behavioral development while a Christian student talked about the mixture of conscience and rationality in morals. According to them, values of Jesus is the true path. It is the emotional freedom like free from envy, pride, selfishness etc.

Buddhist teachers explained moral as the conglomeration of good deeds. Students from the Buddhist religion also said almost similar things mentioning that-

> 'If we learn about the life of Buddha then we will be able to maintain morals and ethics in our life.'

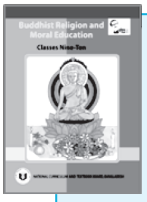
Morals Presented in RME book

Moral values necessary for students are discussed in RME books.



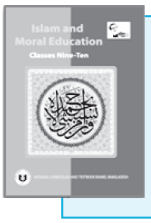
Hindu Religion and Moral Education

- Moral values like, truthfulness, honesty, generosity, respect, being good



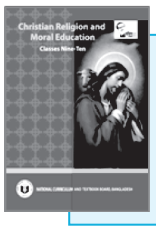
Buddhist Religion and Moral Education

- Right, wrong understanding, gaining morality, leading life with inspiration of Buddha
- পঞ্চনীতি, অষ্টনীতি ও দশনীতি



Islam and Moral Education

- Equality, justice, fairness, brotherhood, mercy, compassion, solidarity, social service, patriotism, tolerance, dutifulness cleanliness, truthfulness, modesty, etc., being free of backbiting, Akhalq Hasana, Haqqul Ibadah, Muamalah



Christian Religion and Moral Education

- Honesty, respectfulness, love, generosity, being gentle etc., believe, patritism, leadership, truthfulness, justice, staying away from sins, prayer, nursing, dignity

Figure 1: Morals presented in RME books

Strengths and Weaknesses of RME textbooks

Islam and Moral Education Book

According to the religious experts' view this book seems to be prepared mostly in line with the guidelines of the national curriculum, but some points or issues need to be explored

more clearly. This book has potentialities to grow a deeper spiritual realization in a reader's mind for being moral if it is read and taught with a spiritual feeling.

Both teachers and students complained that it is tought to memorize the birth and death dates, years of great personalities rather than learning lessons from their life story. As teachers said,

আমাদের বইগুলোতে উদাহরণের মাধ্যমে আদর্শ দেখানোর ঘটনাগুলোর অভাব আছে। মনীষীদের জীবনী থেকে যে শিক্ষা আমরা নিতে পারি সেটা যথাযথভাবে আসে নাই।

Techers have also identified that there is repetition of same discussions in RME textbooks of different classes.

Hindu Religionand Moral Education Book

The teacher from Hindu Religion emphasized the particular religious' scriptures and the stories in the textbook, which promote social values and morals among students. Therefore, he criticized the explanation and examples of the religious scriptures are not that much deliberate. They also indicated that examples here are not sufficient.

As he said that,

'Even better examples could be given in explaining different morals. But even though, I think students can learn a lot from here. It is mentionable that there is a lot of opportunities to incorporate moral short stories from Gita, Beddant, Mahabharata'.

Christian Religion and Moral Education Book

Christian teacher necessitated as-

'It would be nice if it is possible to make the stories of the Bible inserted in an interesting approach to the learners'.

Christian students urge to include references from the Bible. As they commented:

> "বাইবেল থেকে কিছুই নাই, থাকলে আমাদের পড়তে, বুঝতে সুবিধা হত। যদি আমরা ইসলামে বইটা দেখি, এখানে কোরআনের কথা আসছে, কিন্তু খ্রিস্টান ধর্মের বইতে বাইবেলের কথা আসেনি।"
>
> It is found that according to expert's review;students' and teachers' response, language of Christian and Moral Education textbook is not suitable for the secondary students.

Buddhist Religion and Moral Education Book

Moral has been described properly for uplifting students' morality.

According to the Buddhist students the language of TB ishard for them. Like, they have to memorize *Shutra* without understanding. On the other hand, they love to read *Jatok*, which was meaningful and inspirational story for them. They had a mind to apply the learned lessons

in their daily life, like helping others.

Teaching Methods/Strategies are followed

Most studies on teaching strategies for moral education recommend a problem-based approach. This approach gives room for dialogue and interaction between students, which is considered to be crucial for their moral development. On the contrary, traditional methods are used in teaching RME subjects in Bangladesh.

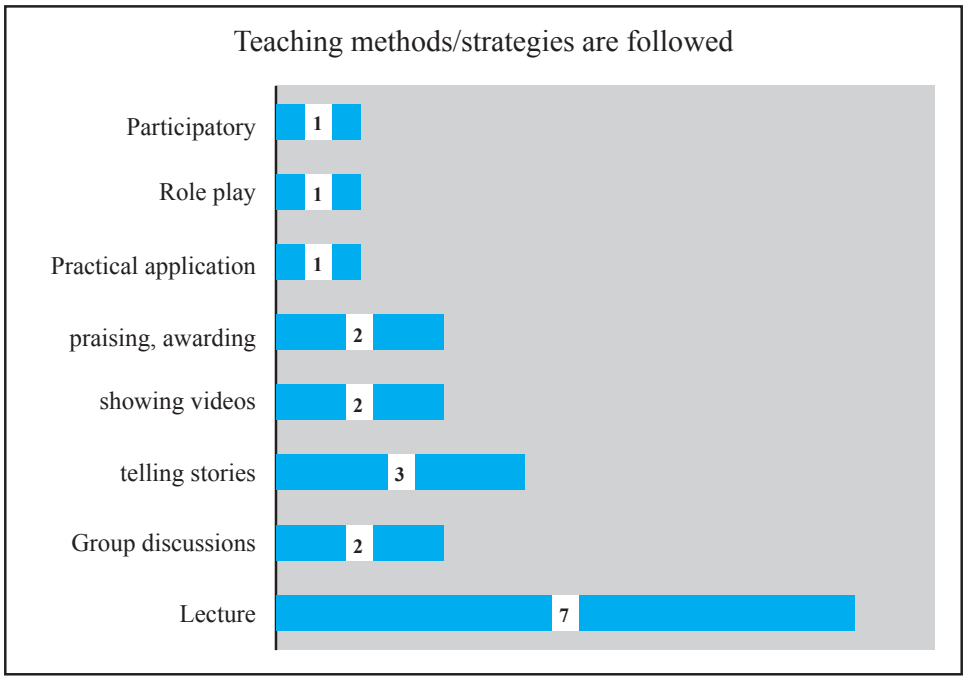


Figure 2: Teaching method used in RME classroom

Teaching methods for morals are Analysing Values, Brainstorming, Clarifying, Consequence charts, Drama, Debate, Discussion, Decision Meeting, Moral Dilemmas, Problem Solving and so on (Tajin, 2008; Schuitema, 2008). Some teachers expressed that using some other methods would be fruitful like, Role playing. But teachers don't get enough time to apply other methods as they remain busy to complete the syllabus.

In addition to textbook contents, teachers have talked about limitaions of resources, and facilities in delivering the quality teaching to the students. Follwoing figure described some limitions, mentioned by the teachers during their interviews.

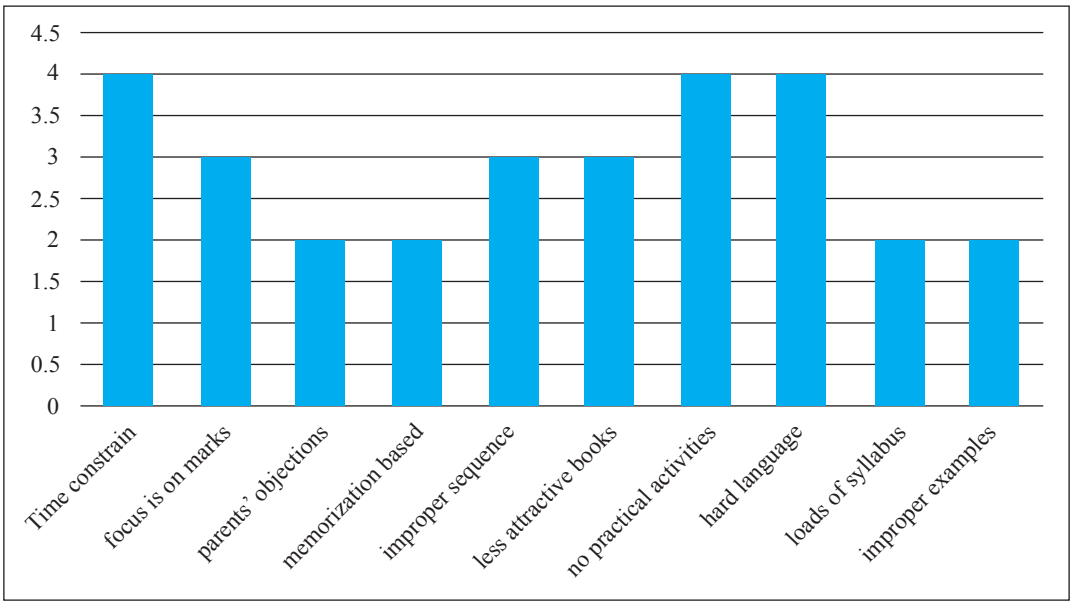


Figure 3: Problems faced by teachers while teaching RME

Problems faced by the RME teachers in their class, almost half of them (4) said about not having sufficient time for classes. However, more or less teachers have said about the lack of illustration, proper sequence, sufficient examples and etc.

Necessities of Religion and Moral Education Book as Text

All the 7 (seven) teachers and 4 (four) experts have suggested to keep the RME as a subject of Moral Education. Only 2 teachers added that Moral Education may be added separately as co- curricular classes once in a week or quarterly.

Muslim students supported for RME books. According to their views,

'If there is no religious education then there will be no modesty in society. Human being will have nothing to follow or afraid off. Then it will create an anarchy. We can learn moral and religion lessons from many sources also but it's better to learn from school. Otherwise, it can be a wrong learning. Anyone can misguide us.'

Hindu teachers opined that, 'Religion is like to be under laws and rules. And being loyal to these laws, one can become the worthy citizen of the country.'

According to Christian teacher, 'More importance should be given while implementing RME TBs. Teachers should assess theoretical, practical and attitude of the students then students will practice moral at least for grading and they will be habituated with practicing moral.'

Buddhist students responded that 'Religion book portrays a picture of life of Buddha in front of us so that we can understand why so many people follow Buddha, Buddha was kind, he could understand the truth, he could understand the world.'

According to Buddhist teachers, 'Now a days students are not getting moral education from family as both parents are busy. So, responsibilities go to teachers.'

Book review done by Educational Experts

Four renowned educationists and religious experts were invited to review the textbooks. Their review findings are presented below here:

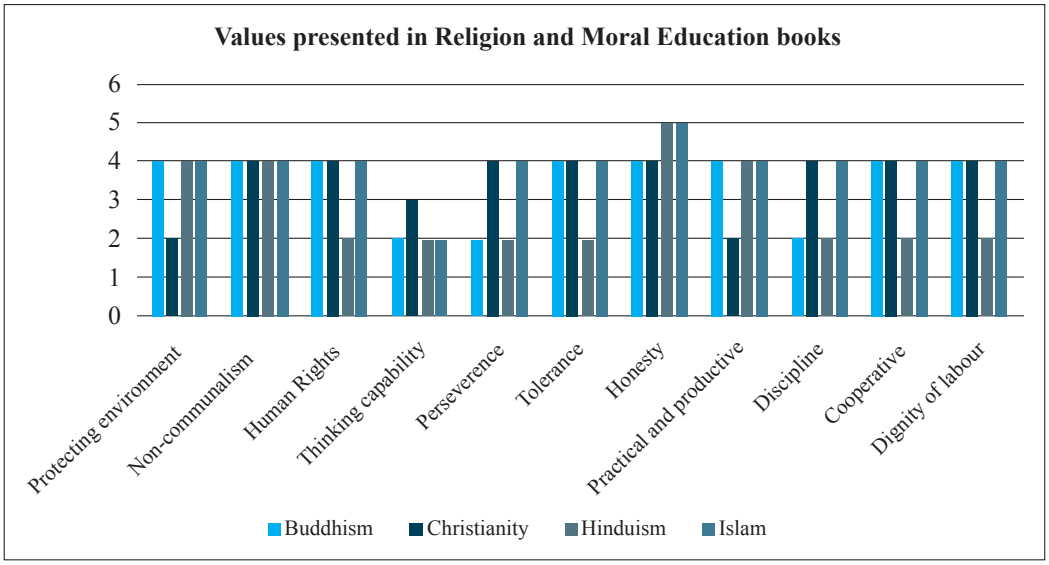


Figure 4: Book Review (Values)

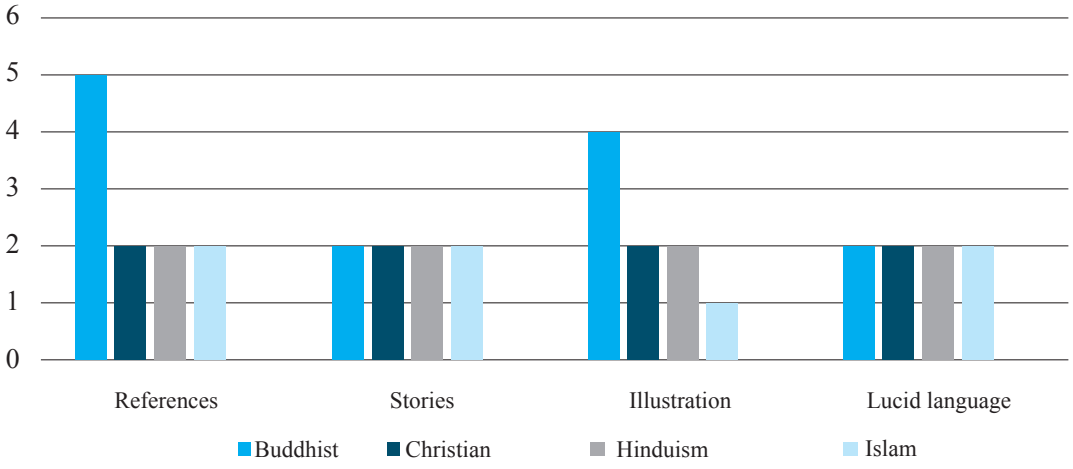


Figure 5: Book Review (Content Presentation)

The above graph depicts that some necessary morals are missed in RME books. In some cases, morals are discussed without any story. Which need to be incorporate. Teachers and

students' interview also expressed in the same line that there are opportunities to incorporate morals through stories and religious instructions.

Through the graph it is clear that "Thinking" is not promoted in RME books. It is however indispensable to have a high level of thinking skills and it can be learned and can be taught (Zannat, 2013).

Expected RME books

This is suggested that, if morals are presented with stories of prophets (peace be upon them), and other religious persons, that influences children to be morally uplifted.

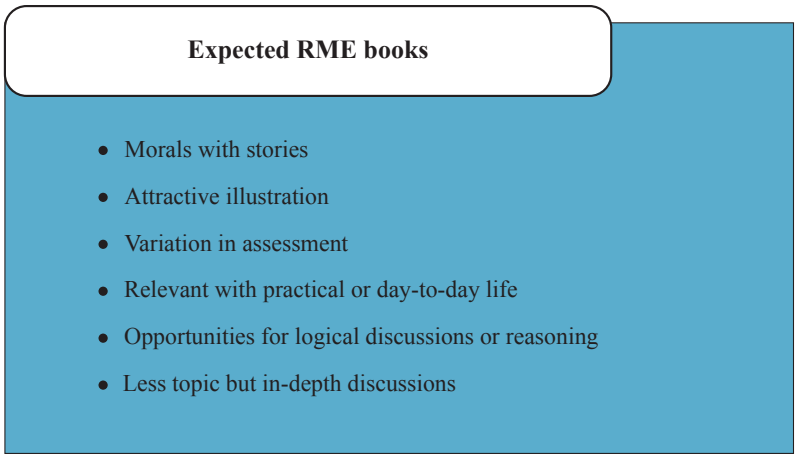


Figure 6: Expected Religious and Moral Education Text Book

Recommendations in general

Policy Level

i. Appointing more dedicated, committed and sincere teachers in order to convince the students for accepting moral. In this regard implementing effective Teachers' Training is essential focusing on 'Critical Pedagogy'.

ii. It is recommended to have diversified teaching methodologies instead of depending on lecture method only. Teachers should follow National Curriculum and Teachers' guide. In this regard, monitoring is necessary.

iii. Recruiting teachers for all the 4 major religions is necessary. If it is not possible, in the meantime, at least have to train teachers for specific religions. Like, if any school has Christian students, a Christian teacher of other subject may be trained to take the Christian religion classes for time being. Again, a specific religion teacher might be recruited for a catchment area for respective religious students.

iv. Compulsory RME is necessary for school children otherwise they might be destructed by outsiders' wrong influence and adopt the RME in an erroneous and dangerous way.

v. Special training and guiding support are suggested for the RME teachers to use ICT in their teaching methods as well as in mentoring students for ethical and safe uses of online Media and sites. Engaging students actively in RME can play a significant role in control use of media which will also develop an accountability among students.

NCTB Level

i. It is recommended to plan curriculum in a sequence or step by step process from class one to Secondary classes. So, there will be neither repetition nor gap of information.

ii. Christian students have urged to include lessons from the Holy Bible. Religious expert also mentioned that it is needed to include lessons about Jesus.

iii. Secondary students are going to learn second language in an age when it is difficult for them to learn new language, like Arabic, Shankskrit or Pali. Learning language should not be left for teenage years. It has to be started before 10. This is when the language sound is established through the brain neurons and interconnections(Altalib, 2013).

iv. Curriculum should be planned to promote thinking. So that students can understand the religion with logic, thinking and reasoning.

v. Language of RME book must be simple, lucid and coherent.

vi. RME books should be made more interesting. Like introducing inspiring, interesting moral stories of religious scholars, leaders, personals. i.e., teaching morals through stories with adequate and accurate references.

vii. Related illustrations should be clear and unambiguous.

viii. Unnecessary memorization should be avoided. Rather presentation should be like that way which grows the inner feelings of students.

ix. Emphasis should be given in understanding or internalization of RME rather giving priority on exams or grading. So, some practical activities should be incorporated in RME.

x. In addition to quality writing, quality publication is necessary, most specifically in presentation, bindings, and cover designing.

xi. In response to the growing scenario of cyber-crimes: spreading hatred, bullying, addiction to pornography, destructive griming, and involvement in hacking, circulating fake and disinformation, it has been a burning necessity to include a special section for ethical and safe use of cyber tools, and social media in the RME Textbooks.

School Management Level

Teachers or administrators must talk to the students as a second guardian. There must be at least a teacher or administrator with whom students can express themselves easily.

The classroom environment must provide children with a sense of emotional security. There should be respect among students and between the teachers and students. Students must feel free to express themselves without fear of ridicule or discouragement (Moslimany, 2018).

Lack of family awareness, lack of pure entertainment, mechanical urban life, deterioration of relationship between children and parents plays major role behind juvenile delinquency. Adolescents are more likely to become criminals if they constantly observe conflicts and abnormalities in the family environment (Mannan, 2021). Considering all these school managements must arrange regular "Parents' counselling Session" or "Parents-Teachers Communications".

Arranging Study tour. Visiting orphanage, graveyard, masjid/pagoda/mandir/Church with students. Giving opportunities to students for voluntary or social work.

Special recommendation for effective evaluation system

National Education Policy (2010), and National Education Curriculum (2012 & 2021) (Proposed) clearly mentioned the particular learning objectives of RME textbooks. It focuses on graduates with strong moral and ethical commitment. From other subjects, RME subjects are different, as it requires students to be practical in morality and ethics, not merely knowledge of those. So, the evaluation system of these subjects should have proper accommodation of assessment of knowledge and practice. Most specifically, the evaluation system given below followed by a number of education systems in some developed countries like Sweden, Turkey,Albania (Qattawi, 2014; Nasche, 2011;and OECD, 2019).

A Proposed Framework for Evaluationin RME Subjects

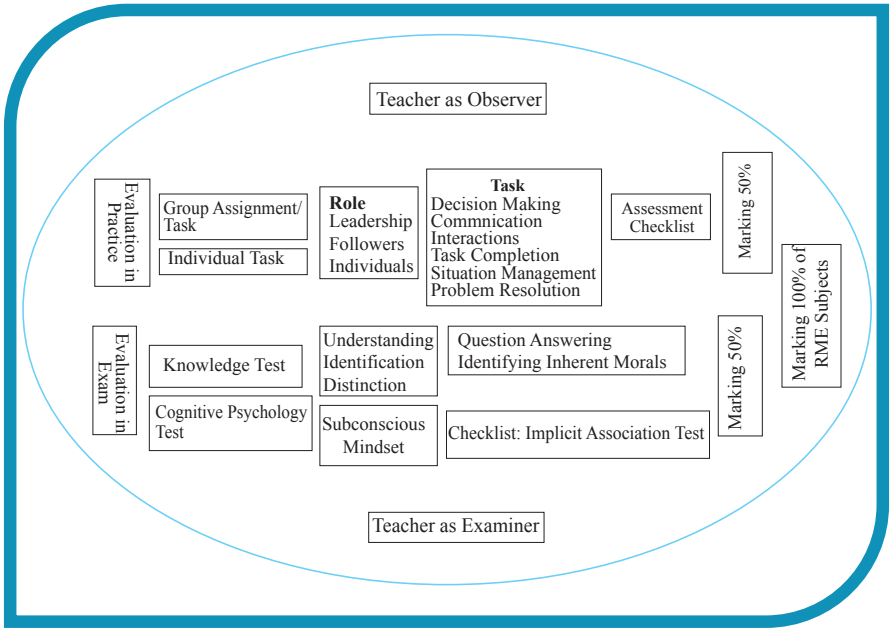


Figure 7: Evaluation Framework in RME Subjects

The figure depicts two evaluation approaches for RME subjects. The main objective of both evaluations is to assess key morals and values stated in the curriculum's learning objectives. The first approach is through examination, which involves prioritizing students' understanding of specific learning objectives from stories, texts, and illustrations. Additionally, a checklist

can be used to assess students' understanding of the inherent morals in particular contents, which can be expressed in their own words. Another experiment can be done to measure students' subconscious mindset by adopting approaches used in cognitive psychology, such as the implicit association test.

The second approach is through practical evaluation, which involves assessing students' roles in various projects and assignments. Teachers will assign students different tasks such as social volunteering and extracurricular activities, as well as group assignments and homework in one hand. These activities facilitate leadership roles where students must make decisions, solve problems, and deal with challenges and difficulties to achieve specific targets. On the other hand, the teacher will silently observe students based on a specific checklist of ethics and morals such as integrity, consistency, patience, sympathy, empathy, cooperativeness, regularity, and transparency. Based on this, the teacher will score the students.

This proposed model is a guideline that will help teachers to design their assessment framework.

Conclusion

According to the National Curriculum (2012), lifeskills-oriented education is essential, but desired benefits will not be achieved if the person with lifeskills does not have morality. So, moral education in the life of a student is very essential, whether it achieved through religion or any other means.

In order to analyze the causes of juvenile delinquency, we need to take a biological, psychological, economic, sociological, geographical and institutional perspective. Excessive addiction to mobile and internet, degradation of social values, lack of playground, the negative impact of social media, lack of family awareness, lack of pure entertainment, mechanical urban life, deterioration of relationship between children and parents plays a major role behind juvenile delinquency (Mannan, 2021). In this consequence if institutional support is not given to the students from religious aspects, they might be misguided and divert to wrong path easily.

Every great religion has its own values which eventually lead human being to believe in oneness of Almighty awing His Supreme Being. It helps them to establish strong religious values in society which ultimately leads to a peaceful society. RME subjects could not contribute to promote morals, it is not the fault of religion but it's wrong implications. We have to revise the syllabus or content, assessment methods and teaching strategies.

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