

## *Investigating Preparatory Year Students' Recognition of Universal Values at University of Tabuk*

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### **Abstract**

*In a turbulent world, higher educational institutions are requested to better humanize the courses offered to students in order to enhance cross-cultural understanding and to maintain diversity tolerance among world nations. For achieving such goals, imparting universal human values in higher education programs could be one of the effective measures. Responding to such crucial question, the current study attempted to investigate Saudi preparatory year students' recognition of universal values at University of Tabuk and the extent to which preparatory year courses target such values. For collecting data required, a list of universal value was prepared and two questionnaires were developed, validated, and implemented. The surveyed sample was (106) preparatory year students at University of Tabuk. Data analysis revealed three main results. Firstly, the (15) suggested universal value were approved by (10) university professors. Secondly, preparatory year students highly recognized the 15 universal values. There were no statistically significant differences in students' value estimation due to their academic majors. Thirdly, the participants admitted that the current preparatory year offered courses highlight the target universal values. However, more explicit orientation courses on universal values should be offered. Advanced courses should be evaluated in the light of universal value principles.*

**Key words:** *Universal values, University majors, Higher education.*

### **Introduction:**

In a turbulent world, higher education institutions are requested to better humanize the courses offered to students in

order to enhance cross-cultural understanding and to maintain diversity tolerance among world nations. In this age of globalization, universal values are needed than ever before. Nations need to be bound together by common values, so that their members know what to expect of each other, and have some shared principles to manage their differences without resorting to violence. Tolerance and dialogue are essential for peaceful coexistence among nations. Overcoming the clashes of civilizations requires educationalists to reexamine and reemphasize the positive values that all humans share. People must act in an ethical way because what they do affect others.

However, industrialized countries have forced educational institutions to focus on some limited skills that the future labor force need to succeed in economic environment and respond to market pressures. Successful businesses should look for workers who have values such as coming to work on time, being honest, reliable, and able to work well with others. Unfortunately, in many cases, such values and humanistic senses are not part of the standard academic curriculum. Accordingly, education should insert values in curriculum to equip learners with the precious universal values and ideals. Education should foster universal and eternal values in order to maintain the unity and integration of people all over the world. Education aims, curriculum, and methods are inseparably linked with values (Seshadri, 2005). For example, Singapore considers value education as a main part of the Pre University Civics syllabus (Singh, 2011). Hence, education for values and peace is inseparable from a type of teaching that conveys to young as well as to adult learners positive attitudes to nonviolence, tolerance, and openness to others. Among many scholars, Ajala (2003) defined peace and tolerance education as the type of education that impacts in learners all norms, values and attitudes that can bring about a healthy environment for human living. Burns and White (2011) viewed value and peace education as a type of study that reduces violence in people and social ills.

While a large body of research kept one eye on identifying and classifying values, the other has to find out how values could be better taught and learned. The essence of value education is to

enable children to think, reflect, question, criticize, care, feel concern, and act in ways that go in line with the welfare of the human kind.

For Burns (2005), Afidal (2006), and Peterson (2012), peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance are central topics in value education. According to Yusuf (2013): “No country can hope to establish lasting conditions for peace unless it finds ways of building mutual trust between its citizens through its educational system by promoting mutual understanding, respect, tolerance and dialogue” (229).

Yusuf (2013) highlighted the tenets of peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance and suggested how peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance can be included in titles of supplementary reading materials and reading comprehension passages of the reading component of the English Language Curriculum for Basic Education. He concluded that “value and peace skills can promote academic excellence” (232). Character education emphasizes self-discipline, effort, perseverance, and other characteristics related to the self (Benninga et al., 2006).

Authentic character education should emphasize a culture of caring, an important building block to character (Benninga et al., 2006). Marshall, Caldwell, and Foster (2011) also reported significantly positive findings in two multiyear experimental investigations with students in kindergarten through fifth grade, showing that integrated character education resulted in an improved school environment, increased student pro-social and moral behavior. In a study of 120 elementary schools, Benninga et al. (2006) found that greater reliance on character education translated to higher state academic test scores. Awasthi (2014) stated: “In simple term value based Education means part of the education which imparts certain essential moral, ethical, cultural, social, spiritual values in child necessary for their all round development and prepares them as a complete man. It built the character and is necessary for development of personality of an individual” (4). Higher education institutions are devoting energy and resources to a wide range of educational programs

and initiatives explicitly designed to promote character values and behaviors in their students. Value education forms a part of the curriculum in different educational settings across the globe. Countries like India, Australia and Singapore lay a strong emphasis on imparting value education through well defined curricula and syllabi (Singh 2011). That is to say, the discipline of peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance must shape our way of life. Education is vital for peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance.

It could be summarized that the main features of the conception of basic values appears in the writings of many theorists and researchers as follows: Values are beliefs, cognitive structures that are closely linked to affect. When values are activated, they become infused with feeling. People for whom independence is an important value discuss it passionately, become aroused if their independence is threatened, despair when they are helpless to protect it, and are happy when they can express it. Values refer to desirable goals.

For example; social equality, fairness and helpfulness are all values. Values transcend specific actions and situations. Obedience and honesty are values that may be relevant at work or in school, in sports, business and politics, with family, friends or strangers. This aspect of values distinguishes them from narrower concepts like norms and attitudes, concepts that usually refer to specific actions, objects, or situations. Values serve as standards or criteria. That is to say, values guide the selection or evaluation of actions, policies, people, and events. People make a decision whether actions, policies, people or events are good or bad, justified or illegitimate, worth approaching or avoiding, by considering whether they facilitate or undermine the attainment of cherished values. Values are ordered by importance relative to one another. The ordered set of values forms a system of value priorities. Cultures and individuals are affected by their systems of value priorities. The importance of the set of relevant values guides action (Kohn and Schooler, 1983; Hofstede, 1980)

Recent value theory is concerned with the basic values that are recognized by people of all cultures. It identifies some distinct types of values and specifies the dynamic relations among them. This suggests that there is a universal organization of human motivations (Schwartz, 2006). The value theory of Schwartz (2006) considers six main features of values. Firstly, values are beliefs linked inextricably to affect. When values are activated, they become infused with feeling. People for whom independence is an important value become aroused if their independence is threatened, despair when they are helpless to protect it, and are happy when they can enjoy it. Secondly, values refer to desirable goals that motivate action. People for whom social order, justice, and helpfulness are important values are motivated to pursue these goals. Thirdly, values transcend specific actions and situations. Obedience and honesty values, for example, may be relevant in the workplace or school, in business or politics, with friends or strangers. This feature distinguishes values from norms and attitudes that usually refer to specific actions, objects, or situations. Fourthly, values serve as standards or criteria. Values guide the selection or evaluation of actions, policies, people, and events. People decide what is good or bad, justified or illegitimate, worth doing or avoiding, based on possible consequences for their cherished values. But the impact of values in everyday decisions is rarely conscious. Values enter awareness when the actions or judgments one is considering have conflicting implications for different values one cherishes. Fifthly, values are ordered by importance relative to one another. People's values form an ordered system of priorities that characterize them as individuals. Finally, the relative importance of multiple values guides action. Based on these features, Schwartz (2006) identified ten universal values as follows: Universalism, Benevolence, Conformity, Tradition, Security, Self-Direction, Stimulation, Hedonism, Achievement, and Power. In addition to Schwartz's ten universal values, five more values are suggested namely; Peace, Freedom, Social Progress, Equal Rights, and Human Dignity. Universal values in higher education must be deliberated in detail to get recommendations for preparing

foundation courses of universal human values. Educationists have to presented more insights on the human values that could be introduced in universities as a foundation course. Universal human values should be made a part of university curriculum. According to Damon (2002), "If the values on which there is broad consensus within the community and the school are taken seriously, they can become the founding principles for values education" (159).

### **Statement of the problem:**

Universal values should be included in the curricula of higher education institutions, however no study investigated the representation of universal values in the curricula of Saudi universities. Accordingly, the current study attempts to investigate Saudi preparatory year students' recognition of universal values at University of Tabuk.

### **Question of the Study:**

The study tries to find an answer for the following main question:

1. What are the most relevant universal values that should be included in University Curricula?
2. To what extent do students of University of Tabuk recognize such universal values?

### **Study Hypotheses:**

The study attempted to test two hypotheses:

1. There would be statistically significant differences between preparatory year students' recognition of the relevancy of the suggested values in terms of students' majors.
2. There would be statistically significant differences between preparatory year students' ratings of the universal values representations in their courses in light of students' majors.

### **Instruments:**

For collecting the data required, firstly, a list of universal value was prepared and validated by ten university professors

who approved both values relevancy and validity. Secondly, two questionnaires for student were developed, validated, and implemented. Whereas one of the questionnaires was to evaluate values' relevancy to Saudi culture, the other was to assess preparatory year courses in terms of supporting the suggested values.

### Study sample:

Ten university professors participated in judging values list. The surveyed sample was (106) preparatory year students at University of Tabuk. All the students were Saudi. The average age of the students was ranging from 18-20 years old. All the students who were present on the day of the questionnaire application were voluntarily asked to participate.

*Table 1 Study sample*

Students' Major	Participants	Percentage
Arts Majors	46	43.4%
Scientific Majors	60	56.6%
Total	106	100%

### Results and Discussion:

For testing the first hypothesis that there would be statistically significant differences between preparatory year students' recognition of the relevancy of suggested universal values in terms of students' majors, students' ratings were calculated and analyzed via t-test procedure as shown in table 2.

*Table 2 Comparing the ratings of arts majors and scientific majors (t-test)*

Students' Major	N.	Overall Rating Scores	Means	%	P.
Arts Majors	46	1670 out of 2070	36.30	80.7%	0.97258*
Scientific Majors	60	2219 out of 2700	36.98	82.2%	
Total	106	*Difference not significant at 5%			

As shown in table 2, Arts preparatory year students positively recognized the relevancy of suggested universal values where relevancy percentage was (80.7%). Scientific preparatory year students positively recognized the relevancy of suggested

universal values where relevancy percentage was (82.2%). This means that the suggested universal values are relevant to Saudi culture as they gained a rate above (81.45%). Differences in the ratings of Arts majors and Scientific majors seem statistically insignificant since ( $P = 0.97258$ ). Accordingly, the first hypothesis that there would be statistically significant differences between preparatory year students' recognition of the relevancy of suggested universal values in terms of students' majors is to be rejected and to be restated as follows: There would be no statistically significant differences between preparatory year students' recognition of the relevancy of the suggested universal values in terms of their majors.

For testing the second hypothesis that there would be statistically significant differences between preparatory year students' ratings of the universal values representations in their courses in light of students' majors, students' ratings were calculated and analyzed via t-test procedure as shown in table 3.

**Table 3** Value representations according to Arts majors' and Scientific majors' ratings (t-test)

Students' Major	N.	Overall Rating Scores	Means	%	P.
Arts Majors	46	1263 out of 2070	27.45	61%	0.88849*
Scientific Majors	60	1720 out of 2700	28.66	63.7%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>*Difference not significant at 5%</b>			

As shown in table 3, Arts preparatory year students positively recognized the relevancy of suggested universal values where relevancy percentage was (61%). Similarly, scientific preparatory year students positively recognized the relevancy of suggested universal values where relevancy percentage was (63.7%). This means that the suggested universal values are somewhat represented in the preparatory year taught courses as they gained a rate above (62.35%). More importantly, differences in the ratings of Arts majors and Scientific majors seem statistically insignificant since ( $P = 0.88849$ ). Consequently, the second hypothesis that there would be statistically significant differences between preparatory year students' ratings of the

universal values representations in their courses in light of students' majors is to be rejected and to be restated as follows: There would be no statistically significant differences between preparatory year students' ratings of the universal values representations in their courses in light of students' majors.

To conclude, preparatory year students' positive ratings of the universal values may be due to many preparatory year teachers are non-natives who represent divers of cultures. Likewise, the textbooks assigned to preparatory year students represent a wide range of worldwide publishers. The selected values were adopted from well-known theories which rest on a solid common ground among different nations. Finally, students' manipulations of some Internet applications might expose them to other culture which in turn encouraged them to accept universal value. Accordingly, more topics are required to be inserted into the curricula of higher education institutions to maintain cross-cultural communications as well as mutual understanding. Such insertion could be spate chapters in the caught courses or a single course. In addition, more research is required to investigate the same values in other majors at university level. In other words, more explicit orientation courses on universal values should be offered. Advanced courses should be evaluated in the light of universal value principles.

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