

Roles, Responsibilities and Ethical Principles of University Teachers

Muhammad Foysal Mubarak¹ and Kh. Atikur Rahman²

¹Lecturer, BRAC University, 66 Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh

²Assistant Professor of English, Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT: The focus of the paper is to explore the roles, responsibilities and ethical principles of the university teachers; as researchers, educationalists and human beings in the context of a world in which the rapid erosion of societal values is manifested both in Bangladesh and across much of the globe. The paper has tried to develop a better sense of key, pertinent ethical issues within the teaching-learning community of university and contribute to the national discourse on promotion of moral values among students and the community. Data have been collected from 70 faculty members of a university through discussion. Focus group discussion guidelines were used to generate data. Thematic analysis have been used for understanding teacher responsibilities and ethical principles. Some of the major findings are: student teacher body should exist at each university, there should be a complaint box to tackle potential and relevant ethical violations that the faculty can come across, an ethical framework should be developed for the universities, and quality of human interaction should be measured and promoted.

KEYWORDS: ethical framework, moral values, responsibilities, university teacher.

1 INTRODUCTION

University teachers have some defined roles and responsibilities as well as ethical guidelines to create and sustain a community of scholars devoted to producing, sharing, extending, and critically examining knowledge and values. Teachers are free within their respective fields of competence to pursue and teach knowledge in accord with appropriate standards of scholarly inquiry. Ethical guidelines are meant to enhance, not to restrict the creative freedom that teachers must enjoy in our community of knowledge. The guidelines are premised on the assumption that an ethically informed and responsible community is a precondition for a healthy environment of academic freedom. The rapid erosion of societal values is manifest both in the context of Bangladesh and across much of the globe. Thus, it is imperative to explore the roles, responsibilities and ethical principles of the university teacher; as researchers, educationalists and human beings. The university faculty members collectively embody the ethical values that will in large measure define the institution. Therefore, this paper intended to foster a systematic understanding and clarity of ethical issues at university teaching.

2 OBJECTIVES

- Explore the roles, responsibilities and ethical practices of university teachers.
- Understand key ethical principles that are reflected in their professional activities as university teachers.
- Develop a better sense of key, pertinent ethical issues within the teaching-learning community of university and more broadly.
- Contribute to the national discourse on ethical issues and the promotion of moral values among students and the community.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Roles, responsibilities and ethical principles for academic staff are a set of basic principles that outline the professional responsibilities of university faculty members in their role as teachers. These principles are drawn as general rules, standards, or expectations which are needed to be considered, besides other pertinent conditions and circumstances, in the design and analysis of university teaching. A formal document namely "*Ethical Principles in University Teaching*" developed by the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education includes 9 principles. These are Content Competence, Pedagogical Competence, Dealing with Sensitive Topics, Student Development, Dual Relationships with Students, Confidentiality, Respect for Colleagues, Valid Assessment of Students, and Respect for Institution (Murray, et al, 1996).

A university lecturer should preserve a high level of subject matter knowledge and keep abreast of the developments. He should confirm that content of the course is up-to-date, correct, representative, and suitable to the student's program of studies. In addition, a teacher has sufficient academic knowledge and skills, including communication of objectives, selection of appropriate instructional methods, creating space for practice and feedback, and handling with student diversity (Shahid et al, 2014; Stefani, 2009).

If a teacher has to teach any particular subject matter that is sensitive, he should admit it at the beginning of the lesson and should explain why he has to insert it in the course content (Crosby, 2012; Lowe & Jones, 2010). He should design lesson in such a way that eases learning and inspires autonomy and autonomous thinking in students (Wachob, 2006).

He should deal with students with respect, dignity and self-esteem, and to keep away from activities that detract from student development (McMillan, 2014). But he should not enter into dual-role relationships with students which may lead to favoritism on the part of the teacher (Margaret, 1999). On the other hand, he should consider marks and grades of student, records of his attendance, and any private communications as confidential, and can be published only if student gives consent, or for justifiable academic purposes (Brown, 2004). Since assessment of student performance has immense impact on his live and career, appropriate assessment techniques should be selected by the teachers which are congruent with the objectives of course and the same time are open, fair, valid and reliable (Boud, & Falchikov, 2006). Students' examination scripts should be graded fairly and equitably (Brown, & Hirschfeld, 2008).

He needs to be acquainted and sensitive to and respects the educational vision, mission, guiding principles, and standards of the university, and comply with these. He should always work for the betterment of the institution. In addition, with a view to nurturing student development, he should respect the dignity of his fellow teachers and works closely with them (Wen, et al, 2014).

4 METHODOLOGY

Data have been collected from 70 faculty members of a university through discussion. Sample was selected randomly irrespective of discipline and experience. Focus group discussion guidelines was used for collecting data. For data collecting and processing, ICT toolkits such as Laptop, voice recorder and video camera were used. In addition, notes were taken to supplement and record data. To analyze the data, the process suggested by Marshall & Rossman (1999), where they recommend following the sequence of organizing the data, developing the themes and then interpreting the data was adopted. For this qualitative study, thematic analysis was followed and the results were grouped together to understand teacher responsibilities and ethical principles.

5 LIMITATION

Data was collected from one private university in Bangladesh and does not necessarily generalize situation across the country. The sample size of the study was 70 only and it was not enough to carry out any statistical analysis for generalization.

6 DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

6.1 RELEVANCE OF ETHICS TO UNIVERSITY TEACHING

The participants discussed in generic terms about the meaning and relevance of ethics in the post-colonial developing world and the role of institutions of higher learning in that context.

They put emphasis on the erosion of ethical values worldwide which has resulted in a world in which an obscene concentration of wealth and power is in the hands of miniscule coteries of unelected billionaires who constitute the 1%; those

for whom the notion of morality, ethics and the general good is non-existent. Universities can and do have a profound impact on the mindsets of their students and through that are able to influence the development of a morally and politically progressive approach to Higher Education which espouses ideas of equality, inclusion and enlightenment. The most important aspect of ethics has to do with the quality of interaction between stakeholders. According to them,

- *“Ethics is an amalgam of mentalities of individual stakeholders.”*
- *“The practice of ethical behavior amongst certain quarters is non-existent and wholly contradictory to the beliefs and ideals espoused by the universities.”*
- *“A truly ethical organization is one in which equality and inclusiveness is practiced and all stakeholders are appreciated and respected.”*

The discussants drew links between money and education giving reference to historic perspectives. Charging money for education had been considered unethical a century ago, but now it is established that education increases productivity, and therefore students can be asked to pay for their education with some rationalization. They discussed new institutional imposition of ethics that can cause conflict to certain institutes like some of the religion based universities which impose certain ethical practices at the institutional level which may create conflict within the diverse student body. Different sections of society hold different ethical beliefs, and this may give rise to conflict when societies interact with each other. There is also a major issue with fundamentalism and question of academic freedom.

6.2 PERCEPTION OF ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND ETHICAL PRINCIPLES IN UNIVERSITY TEACHING

This discussion summarizes six ethical principles in university teaching e.g. content knowledge, content delivery, assessment of students' performance, student development, relation with student and maintaining confidentiality.

According to the findings of the discussion, a university teacher maintains a high level of subject matter knowledge and ensures that course content is current, accurate, representative, and appropriate to the position of the course within the student's program of studies. A pedagogically competent teacher communicates the objectives of the course to students, is aware of alternative instructional methods or strategies, and selects methods of instruction that, according to research evidence including personal or self-reflective research, are effective in helping students to achieve the course objectives. The prime responsibility of the teacher is to contribute to the intellectual development of the student, at least in the context of the teacher's own area of expertise, and to avoid actions such as exploitation and discrimination that detract student development. To avoid conflict of interest, a teacher does not enter dual-role relationships with students that are likely to detract from student development or lead to actual or perceived favoritism on the part of the teacher. Student grades, attendance records, and private communications are treated as confidential materials, and are released only with student consent, or for legitimate academic purposes, or if there are reasonable grounds for believing that releasing such information will be beneficial to the student or will prevent harm to others.

6.3 ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OF UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

The discussants shared their ideas about a few ethical aspects that they depicted as “must haves” if faculty are to be practicing and promoting ethical conduct because these practices are meant to have an immediate impact on the ‘growth’ of students. They emphasized on the individual ethical practices of the faculty as they develop themselves as ethical educationalists. They also shared key ideas of rational and ethical conduct with the students.

They suggested that a good teacher should have trust, ethics, honesty, appreciation, engagement, empathy and compassion. In addition, it is important to maintain confidentiality, but transparency is also essential. Teachers should know themselves and the topic they teach as it is utterly unethical for them as a teacher to preach what they do not know properly.

One of the participants highlighted the fact that teaching should be a vocation and instead of a profession. The teachers should be knowledgeable because being a teacher is based on knowledge and the ability to convey that knowledge and setting a path that can be followed by students. Another participant commented that ethics is only valid when we deliver something of quality.

Another discussant explored the collegial aspects and tried to link it with ethics. Teachers respect their colleagues and any conflicts that may arise because of the day to day dealings should be addressed with professionalism. A teacher should be punctual, empathetic and take teaching as vocation and to do this they should constantly engage themselves in intense scholarship.

Besides focusing on individual ethical development, numerous ways were suggested to uphold ethical culture with students and within the teaching community. They said that students should have full access to their grades and faculty is also advised to command respect as opposed to be demanding. However, politeness should not be interpreted as weakness. They stressed on the need for being compassionate to the students as private university students are not as privileged as they are thought to be. They focused on knowledge acquisition on the teacher's part and tied it with the ethical mean of dissipating knowledge. Knowledge dissemination at any level of the education system is very important and it must be a process. Regarding ethics in behavioral attitudes between teachers and students, they suggested honesty in cases where a teacher has no significant answer to a question that may have been raised by the students. Moreover, a teacher should not use students' research as his own. Students look at their teacher as mentors and scholars and it is the duty of a teacher to motivate, respect and guide them wisely. They insisted on the mentorship factor as key in guiding the relation between among the teacher and students and as a practice in this regard they suggested the engagement of elements like guest speakers and to promote, inspired field trips.

6.4 TEACHERS' VALUES AND ETHICS ON RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

The participants discussed the ethical standards and norms that need to be concurred with doing research. By connoting ethics as an important human conduct, they mentioned some of the unethical proceedings in academic research. 'Publish or perish' trend is sweeping the academic world and this trend is calling for the adaptation of numerous unethical measures. Moreover, they mentioned the feuds of happiness data and how those data are produced just to be at par with the requirement of the donor agency. Some of the international journals that will just print anything for money and publications in those journals are a complete disgrace. The faculty members should not publish in those journals.

6.5 ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AS A UNIVERSITY TEACHER: RESPECT TOWARDS COLLEAGUES, INSTITUTION & COMMUNITY

In terms of teachers' respect towards colleagues, institution and community, the participants said that a university teacher respects the dignity of her or his colleagues and works cooperatively with colleagues in the interest of fostering student development. This principle means that in interactions among colleagues with respect to teaching, the overriding concern is the development of students. In the interests of student development, a university teacher is aware of and respects the educational goals, policies, and standards of the institution in which he or she teaches. When they enter into a special relationship with some sector of the community at large, as when they are engaged as consultants or when they conduct research under contract, they have a responsibility to ensure that these duties are consistent with their primary obligation to the university and in no way deleteriously affect their duties within the university.

6.6 THE ROLE OF CLASSROOM TEACHERS IN PROMOTING ETHICAL VALUES OF STUDENTS

The participants discussed about how to make 'Responsive Classrooms' and discussed the role of teachers in promoting ethical values of students. They suggested the teachers should use various techniques (e.g. modeling, role playing, teacher reinforcement, reminders, and redirection) to foster students' social skills—cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. Classroom approaches should emphasize both social and academic learning. It is essential to include a classroom that provides interest areas, and displays of student work; a mix of whole-class, small-group, and individual instruction; student participation in the development and enforcement of classroom rules; choice time, during which students can direct their own learning in both individual and cooperative group activities; guided discovery in which students have the opportunity to explore various learning experiences; and frequent assessment and reporting to parents.

Teachers' 'modelling' of moral values (integrity, honesty, fairness etc.) and continuously reinforcing what is right and good (e.g. teacher admitting mistakes, correcting them, and taking responsibility of the consequences) can be a strategy of promoting values: helping students know their values, making morally principled decisions, not to rationalize unprincipled behavior. Students' positive connections with teachers and their perceptions that teachers are 'fair' and they care about them are what stimulate their effort and engagement. Stressing the importance of a predictable set of expectations and the consistent and fair use of rewards and punishments; encouraging students' participation in classroom decision making and planning; providing opportunities for students to interact with one another in cooperative activities or in other ways, to have experiences of success, to be self-directing, and to explore areas of interest. Building in-school community is a means of fostering academic success. Students who experience their school as a caring community consistently become more motivated, ambitious, and engaged in their learning.

They suggested that followings to be maintained properly:

- Level of punctuality and diligence must be maintained.
- No public humiliation of students should be there.
- Students should be informed about assessment scheme and rules.
- Equitable and nondiscriminatory practice must be ensured.
- Instructors must be engaged with the students.
- Listening is important for faculty members.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

- The universities should recruit enlightened faculty and staff who value and nurture students, parents and together they will make a great institution.
- Teachers should maintain easy interaction and communication: mutual respect, relationship with other staff and students.
- Individual rights and respects should be entertained.
- Incentives and rewards should be offered for teachers' contribution by the university.
- Institutional values should be augmented.
- Commitment towards profession should be maintained by the teachers.
- Teaching community/ Teachers' union/ Student teacher body should be established.
- Segregation of high and low achievers and teach them separately may be an option.
- Students from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds should be provided training so that they may go back to the job market equipped for specific tasks
- Workshop on ethics should be organized for students.
- More example of international ethical standard can be included in different professional development training modules.
- Management personnel can be invited to discuss about ethical issues.
- Conversation between management and faculty members should take place regularly.
- There should be a complaint box to tackle potential and relevant ethical violations that the university faculty and students can come across.
- An ethical framework for the university involving senior faculty members should be created
- Quality of human interaction should be measured and promoted.

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