

Call for inputs: Curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment at the service of the right to education

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A. Introduction to the Right to Education

The right to education is a universal entitlement recognized as a human right under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). It includes the right to free and compulsory primary education for all, the obligation to develop secondary education that is accessible to everyone—particularly through the progressive introduction of free secondary education—and the obligation to ensure equitable access to higher education, ideally through the progressive implementation of free higher education policies (Badruzzaman & Mian, 2015).

‘Education’ is recognized as a human right in various international instruments for its essential role in enabling individuals to acquire knowledge and develop skills necessary for personal growth and societal advancement. Human development cannot be meaningfully achieved without education, as it has consistently served as the backbone of society and a fundamental precondition for the emergence and sustainability of thriving civilizations.

As such, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) articulate the core values of what it means to be human and provide a foundation through which schools can become peace-building learning communities. A review of United Nations scholarly publications makes it possible to identify a set of knowledge, values, and skills that underpin the realization of human rights through peace education.

In addition, UNESCO argues that human rights education involves both the learning and practice of human rights and emphasizes that these rights should be taught through a

combination of content transmission and lived experience (UNESCO, 2023). Similarly, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights asserts that teaching about human rights alone is insufficient; rather, educators must engage continuously in teaching for human rights, fostering attitudes and actions that uphold these principles.

Beyond the classroom, knowledge transmission remains essential, particularly in ensuring that human rights knowledge, values, and skills are embedded as a central focus of teachers' curriculum planning and pedagogical practice. This approach enables both teachers and learners to engage in socially actions grounded in human rights principles within and beyond the school setting (McLeod, 2014). Building on this foundation, a model of a human rights curriculum derived from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), in which the transmission of content reflects the epistemologies of human rights—constituting learning about human rights, values, and skills that foster Cultural Rights for holistic empowerment. Furthermore, learning through Cultural Rights based pedagogy can be understood as experiential learning rooted in human rights principles within the cultural setting.

B. Curriculum Modernisation and Redefining Educational Goals: Integration of Cultural Rights

The current trend in curriculum design places a strong emphasis on measurable and tangible outcomes, often at the expense of creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. However, education should not be reduced to a mere instrument for employment. Rather, it must seek to cultivate thoughtful, responsible, and empathetic citizens by emphasizing value-based and culturally grounded education based on Cultural Rights that promotes sustainable empowerment.

Academic (Demmert,2011), further call for a clearer articulation of Cultural Rights as a concept aligned with human rights to develop modern curricula that reflect contemporary realities. Such curricula should incorporate critical themes, including environmental issues (climate change and natural heritage), gender concerns (gender equality and domestic violence), cultural dimensions (Cultural Rights, freedom of expression, and cultural empowerment), and social issues (political rights, digital literacy, social inclusion, and health awareness).

From a holistic cultural and human rights perspective, a “Whole-Person Education” model is proposed to nurture students' social, emotional, physical, and ethical development while encouraging creativity, supporting psychological well-being, inspiring deep inner reflection, and opening pathways to new opportunities. Such an approach is essential for fostering both intellectual and emotional growth to encompass Cultural Rights for empowerment (The Daily Star, 2025).

Recent scholarly inquiry by the United Nations has argued that the core content of human rights education in schools should be grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). These documents provide foundational principles and ideas through which students can assess lived experiences and contribute to building a school culture that values and upholds human rights. However, the United Nations also acknowledges that documents alone cannot bring human rights to life in the classroom unless students engage with them through their own real-life experiences and critically examine concepts such as justice, Cultural Rights, freedom of expression, and equity in ways that resonate with their personal understanding in line with global citizenship.

With regard to Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) was developed as a guiding document for States Parties in ensuring the care and protection of children. It emphasizes the primary responsibility of the family in providing care and protection, the necessity of legal safeguards for children, respect for the Cultural Rights of the child's community, and the importance of international cooperation in securing children's empowerment. For example, many organizations have produced "child-friendly" versions of the Convention; however, it is important for all audiences to recognize that such interpretations are situated within specific Cultural Right to be empowered.

In the context of Cultural Rights, Harvard professor Jerome Bruner notes, "Culture shapes the mind...it provides us with the toolkit by which we construct not only our worlds but our very conceptions of ourselves and our powers." He further emphasizes that "you cannot understand mental activity unless you take into account the cultural setting and its resources, the very things that give mind its shape and scope."

Certainly, Cultural Rights enhance to create cultural identity through the exploration of cultural value is a key strategy for developing global understanding. Arguably, Cultural Rights play a vital role in shaping cultural identity through the exploration of human values and represent a key strategy for fostering value based cultural empowerment. This understanding is grounded in four core values that underpin Cultural Rights : freedom, social recognition, equality within social contexts, and integrity. Accordingly, educators are encouraged to address these values in order to establish the wholeness of Cultural Rights as fundamental to being human (UNESCO, 2025).

Arguably, value creation, identity progression, and collective involvement belong to the Cultural Rights. UNESCO defined Cultural Rights as both individual and collective, spanning all areas of culture—from cultural heritage to the cultural and creative sectors, including the digital environment. Cultural Rights are essential for dignity, personal fulfillment, and social cohesion for empowerment. Exercising these rights fosters diversity and equity, while reducing inequalities. This is why guaranteeing the right to culture is an ethical, social, and economic imperative for holistic education to empower community (UNESCO, 2025).

C. Knowledge Transfer and Teacher Professional Development: A Pedagogical Perspective on Cultural Rights

Pedagogy refers to the art and science of teaching, encompassing the methods and strategies educators use to facilitate learning. It involves an understanding of how students learn, the design and organization of instructional materials, and the assessment of educational outcomes (UNESCO, n.d. Pedagogy). However, knowledge transfer remains a significant pedagogical challenge in facilitating leaders' learning through leadership development programs, which are often expected to equip leaders with the ability to lead, manage, and communicate learning and knowledge processes (Atwood et al., 2010). The effectiveness of such programs, however, remains contested (Soderhjelm et al., 2021).

Previous research has also highlighted persistent transfer challenges, referred to using related terms such as training transfer (Gilpin-Jackson & Bushe, 2007), learning transfer (Johnstal, 2013), and transfer of knowledge (Soderhjelm et al., 2021). Given leaders' responsibility to manage and communicate learning and knowledge processes—and the emphasis placed on these competencies within leadership development programs—the pedagogical challenge of knowledge transfer has become more critical than ever.

Regarding pedagogical leadership, political corruption in the recruitment of higher education faculty remains a significant challenge for developing countries such as Bangladesh. Currently classified as a lower-middle-income country, Bangladesh aims to attain upper-middle-income status by 2031 under its broader Vision 2041 plan, which also includes graduating from Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2026. In Bangladesh, the proposed education budget allocation for FY2025 is 1.69% of GDP, amounting to BDT 94,711 crore, according to the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). Although this reflects a nominal increase in education spending, it remains well below UNESCO's recommended allocation of 4–6% of GDP.

In forecasting Bangladesh's transition to middle-income status by 2031 in the context of Higher Education, Dr. Shahida Khanom, Founder and CEO of Women Cultural Empowerment International (<https://wceia.org/>), described her practical experiences with *Political Corruption* in faculty recruitment:

“While Bangladesh is pursuing to be a middle-income country by 2031, an insightful revision of the teaching recruitment and student enrollment procedure is in urgent need to be equipped with Global Standard. After independent in 1971, the education sector especially the university remains politically controlled and biased based on ruling party interest. First and foremost, the selection criteria of primary Lecture level is only a graduate degree where in Australia it is PhD and Post Doctorate with notable publications. The selection process is not transparent where student can participate in the candidature process.

Arguably, most of the time, there is a prescription from the Political High Command for politically favoured candidate through all over the government universities. Frequently, the selection criteria often make flexible to count the political teacher and this is a very normal practice. These selections are often ended up with poor candidate with lower GPA and without any reputable publications.

As there is no transparent monitoring and evaluation system in the university, the selected teacher thrives poor class and research skill to navigate the student. Further, they are often abusive for any query for academic mentoring as they are not legally justified. Eventually, students cannot take any action against the faculty as the legal provisions are visualized for the Academic NOT the Mentee. The faculties soul support is the political party which lessen their mentoring responsibility to develop good research and publication. Often, promotions are ambiguous with poor quality publications and mentoring experience”.

D. Reforming Assessment and Evaluation Systems: Promoting Freedom of Expression and Upholding Cultural Rights

At the system level, learning assessment serves as a key mechanism for understanding, measuring, and improving the quality and equity of education. It involves the large-scale collection, research, analysis, dissemination, and use of information from multiple sources to determine what learners know and can do with what they have learned, how various factors influence their learning, and how competencies are distributed across different groups of learners. As such, learning assessment forms an integral part of monitoring and evaluation processes used to assess how effectively the education system delivers expected learning outcomes (UNESCO, n.d. Assessment).

Arguably, learning assessment employs a wide range of methods and tools to measure students’ mastery of knowledge and/or skills, typically through their performance, while also seeking to understand the processes and contexts that enable or hinder their progress and achievement. Accordingly, assessment approaches, methods, and tools vary considerably and may be formal or informal, high- or low-stakes, anonymous or public, individual or collective, and are often constrained by the technical and financial capacities of those responsible for assessment (UNESCO, n.d. Assessment).

Globally, education systems tend to rely heavily on teacher-based assessments, leaving students with limited opportunities to engage in counter-assessment of curriculum and teacher evaluation. Furthermore, in low-income countries such as Bangladesh, curriculum development is often driven by experts appointed by the Ministry of Education based on selection rather than competence. In a recent interview, hosted by Professor Emiliano in the Global Citizen Education Series, Dr. Shahida Khanom further stated that teaching agendas—particularly in heritage education—are frequently biased in favor of the ruling party in developing countries

Additionally, Dr. Khanom (<https://youtu.be/5RH9TJjvr5k?si=j8l8NA96JI8IL0ZT>) explained that heritage-based education in Bangladesh is highly politicized and lacks practical implementation. Sensitive heritage, such as the Liberation War and related historical sites, is inadequately conserved, with insufficient documentation, museums, educational initiatives, tourism, and community engagement. Her observation is that with each change in the ruling party, heritage names and historical narratives are altered, hindering the nation's ability to build a collective identity.

Drawing from her 30 years of travel in Bangladesh and among overseas diaspora communities, it is evident that there is a struggle to establish a unified customary identity. Moreover, the commodification of political identity continues to fragment communities, weakening their capacity to unite around a common national goal. While numerous scientific and development narratives exist for community empowerment, the lack of articulation regarding identity construction remains a significant impediment to cultural empowerment.

From assessment perspective, UNESCO's commitment to ensuring effective and relevant learning for all underscores the importance of adopting inclusive and holistic approaches to learning assessment. Projections further emphasize the need for all countries—particularly low-income nations—to establish at least one quality measure of learning by 2025, in line with broader efforts to close persistent data gaps that hinder effective monitoring and acceleration of progress toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education).

Concerning reforming assessment, especially in developing countries, I propose incorporating freedom of expression from primary school through university to ensure the direct participation of students and families in the education process, thereby promoting holistic cultural empowerment. To expedite the participation, students should not be communicated with individually, except in exceptional cases, as this may isolate parents from understanding their children's experiences, including potential teacher misconduct or academic difficulties. Within extended family systems, the family is nurtured as an integral cultural heritage in child development across all levels of education, as children are future leaders who will assume ownership and family responsibilities that contribute to cultural empowerment.

Apart from modern science, storytelling can serve as an accessible cultural method through which students can develop a model of mutual respect (UNESCO, 2014) aligned with cultural

rights and freedom of expression, enabling their active participation with educators in curriculum design and assessment. Such evaluative approaches affirm that all participants are treated with dignity and respect at all times, in accordance with human rights, Cultural Rights, and principles of empowerment. Consequently, evidence and insights derived from learning assessments conducted by both teachers and students provide a strong foundation for developing more effective policies and strategies to enhance curriculum, pedagogy, educational resources, and related conditions for improved learning outcomes, in harmony with each country's vision and cultural needs (UNESCO, 2023).

E. Global Education and Culture: The Missing Nexus of SDG

The Global Heritage Education system is still behind in developing curricula on “Cultural Rights” that promote cultural empowerment of students or learners to tie the local to the global. Cultural empowerment recognises and values the cultural heritage of a place and the people which make up the tourism destination. This acknowledges the position taken by Indigenous communities, who understand “. . . cultural diversity as the root of a more moral, spiritual, ethical and sustainable way of life (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021).

In conclusion, this study proposes *Advancing Scientific Research* as a framework that connects the pressing issue of Cultural Rights with Global Education Strategies, aiming to foster cultural empowerment in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals: Quality Education (SDG 4), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Life on Land (SDG 15), and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17).

Future analysis will focus on examining how Cultural Rights can be used as a tool to inform and advance a dedicated Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) framework for Culture, addressing its current underrepresentation within Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11).

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Annex

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