Research Article

Rebranding Ethics: The Perspectives of Central Luzon State University (CLSU) Learners

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ABSTRACT

Course on ethics has been included in the academic curriculum in some universities. However, the transition of Philippine education to the K – 12 Basic Education Curriculum in 2019, paved the way for the integration of the subject ethics in General Education (G.E.) courses. The course aims to promote critical ethical thinking in students in responding to moral issues that require cogent and inclusive moral deliberation. The paper seeks to present students' feedback on the subject. Qualitative study approach, particularly semi–structured survey among 345 CLSU students enrolled in the subject during the online mode of learning was done. The survey questionnaire focuses on the four major themes as regards the overall assessment of the students on the delivery of the course. These include students' satisfaction with the course that should be retained, students' dissatisfaction with the course which needs to be revised, students' satisfying experiences on the course, and student's preferred mode of learning on the course. Results show that the satisfaction of the students on the course is primarily a teacher factor, nonetheless, a need to revisit the content of the course is necessary hence, the reading articles were highly philosophical. Thus, a rebranding of ethics is essential to effectively deliver and transmit the learning pedagogy.

Keywords: ethics, education, pedagogy, humane education, tertiary education, learning, worldview

INTRODUCTION

The paradigm shift of Philippine education to the K–12 Program has integrated General Education (GE) courses into the senior high school curriculum. This inclusion of the core courses in secondary education created a revised GE curriculum in tertiary education which aims to improve the civic awareness and learning competencies of college students (CHED Memorandum Order No.2 series of 2013). Thus, the transition to the K – 12 Basic Education Curriculum in 2019, paved the way for the integration of ethics as a mandated course in General Education (G.E.). The curriculum aims to promote critical thinking in students in responding to moral issues that require cogent and inclusive moral deliberation.

It is the primary aim of all educational institutions to promote the moral and civic capacities of students. This resonates with the works of Plato and Aristotle on social philosophy who believe that proper education is the key to good governance. John Stuart Mill added that the happiness of the person as well as the community can be best achieved through education (Elliott et al., (2018). This was reiterated by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2011) in a statement "Because the aim of teaching philosophy is to develop critical judgment and the rational analysis of human experience, it can offer valid intellectual tools, additional to and complementing technical and scientific subjects." Teaching the course specifically develops the student's familiarity with ethical theories as well as reasoning skills. Thus, teaching the subject specifically ethics course provides the students with an ethical foundation in responding to moral issues and at the same time equips them with a tool for moral reasoning in contextualizing the diverse ethical perspectives to achieve a rational and reasonable moral judgment (Elliott et al., (2018).

The Hastings Center (1980) enumerates some of the goals of an ethics course in the academe. These goals are as follows "stimulating the moral imagination, developing skills in the recognition and analysis of moral issues, eliciting a sense of moral obligation and personal responsibility, and learning both to tolerate — and resist — moral disagreement and ambiguity". The Hasting Center categorically states that, "courses in ethics ought not explicitly to seek behavioral change in students. They should seek to assist students in the development of those insights, skills, and perspectives that set the stage for a life of personal moral responsibility, manifesting careful and serious moral reflection"

The disruption of mobility because of the pandemic changes the academic institution from the traditional classroom setting to an online/virtual class. The paradigm shift in the educational system as argued by scholars Comeaux and McKenna-Byington (2003) Garrison, (2006), McShane (2006); Palloff and Pratt

(2000) Torrisi and Davis (2000) Wiesenberg (1999, 2002) challenges the readiness of both students and teachers to adopt this mode of learning.

This paper sought to present students' feedback on the subject. It adopted a qualitative study approach, which utilized a semi-structured survey of 345 CLSU students enrolled in the subject during the online mode of learning. The survey questionnaire focused on the four major themes which deemed important in the overall assessment of the students on the delivery of the course. These include students' satisfaction with the course that should be retained, students' dissatisfaction with the course which needs to be revised, students' satisfying experiences on the course, and student's preferred mode of learning on the course. Results revealed that the satisfaction of the students on the course is primarily a teacher factor. Therefore, the need to revisit the content of the course is necessary considering that the reading articles were highly philosophical. Thus, a rebranding of ethics is essential to re-direct the course syllabus to current social issues on gender, politics, and historical development as required in general courses offered by the department.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed empirical phenomenology in trying to evaluate the feedback of students enrolled in an ethics course during the 1st semester (August to December) of 2020. This is the surge of the pandemic and the transition of the learning mode from face-to-face to online/virtual classes. The user of the theory according to Aspers (2009) is grounded on an attempt to understand "that which appears" as the object of phenomenology not in an eidetic nor ontological approach but rather to provide an empirical explanation of the area of inquiry. This suggests that the following criteria: First, the respondents' response plays an important role in the analysis. Second, the assumption is that anything in the social world is socially constructed. Third, it recognizes the role of the theory in research which validates the actor's perspective.

Table 1   Demographic of the respondents

	Business		Education		Engineering		Humanities		Sciences		Tourism		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Gender														
Female	49	70	5	83.33	91	44.61	2	100	2	66.67	50	83.33	199	57.68
Male	21	30	1	16.67	113	55.39	0	0	1	33.33	10	16.67	146	42.32
Total	**70**	**100**	**6**	**100**	**204**	**100**	**2**	**100**	**3**	**100**	**60**	**100**	**345**	**100**
Age														
18	42	60	0	0	44	21.57	1	50	2	66.67	3	5	92	26.67
19	28	40	3	50	86	42.16	0	0	1	33.33	21	35	139	40.29
20	0	0	2	33.33	68	33.33	0	0	0	0	29	48.34	99	28.70
21	0	0	1	16.67	3	1.47	0	0	0	0	5	8.33	9	2.61
22+	0	0	0	0	3	1.47	1	50	0	0	2	3.33	6	1.73
Total	**70**	**100**	**6**	**100**	**204**	**100**	**2**	**100**	**3**	**100**	**60**	**100**	**345**	**100**

Demographics

Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents according to their demographics. There were 345 total respondents in this study of which 199 of them were females and 146 were males. All respondents enrolled in the ethics course during the 1st semester of 2020 online/virtual classes. The courses of the students who participated in the survey were as follows: Business, Education, Engineering, Humanities, Sciences, and Tourism where 59% of the respondents were engineering students and 40.25% of them were aged 19. This research was conducted following the guidelines and policies of the ethics committee and the retrieved information from the respondents was kept with the utmost confidentiality.

Procedure and Instrument

The researchers used open–ended questionnaires to solicit the student's responses in evaluating the ethics subject enrolled during the online mode of learning. The survey questionnaires attempted to answer the following research questions: (1) Identify three (3) satisfactory features of this course, that you think should be retained (2) Identify three (3) unsatisfactory features of this course, that you think need revision (3) What was/were your most satisfying experience in taking this course?

Data Analysis

Using Del Castillo et al., (2021) data analysis of interpreting the student's response, the following steps were followed. The first–order construction was information solicited from the student's response in the course evaluation. To reduce the number of responses for viable qualitative analysis as Creswell (1998) recommends, the researchers carefully analyzed the responses and grouped them according to similarities. This was followed by the second–order constructions where the student's information was analyzed and coded into themes. The themes revealed present the synthesis of students' responses to the given evaluation.

Table 2 Satisfactory features of the course which should be retained.

Research Questions	First order constructs	Second order constructs
1. Identify three (3) satisfactory features of this course, that you think should be retained [Score]	This course helps me realize the importance of ethics in life Relates theories to real-life situations	Practical Application

It is interesting, valuable, and helpful to make better decisions in life.

The subject correlates to real-life issues

Teaches us to be humane, encourages us to think deeply, makes us curious about the true meaning of life

It allows us to have a better understanding of reality, and makes us understand why we must be ethical in any way.

Helping students to realize the importance of life.

Helps students to be better people by doing ethical things and avoiding doing unethically.

It gives students the chance to experience true-to-life tours.

The real-life applications, essays about the current issue which relates to the topic, and realization of life's true purpose

This subject is good because it has lots of values, I gain lots of realization in my life

Always connect the lessons to real life so that we, the student, can adapt the lesson easily as we apply it within ourselves (experiences).

Applicable to real-life situations, knowledge gained from this course is helpful in work and can help us a better person

	Enhances critical thinking	Critical Thinking
	It's helping me to develop my thinking	
	Develops critical thinking skills, enhances vocabulary, and increases knowledge	
	Enables students to think critically.	
	Helps you think critically. Your opinions are not judged, instead, it's appreciated. The students can control their learning pace.	

	Improves Essay writing skills, and improves critical thinking, Analyzing a theory or principle, creating an essay that intends to critique a book, letting the students work in groups	
	Teacher competence Well-discussed lesson. The teaching techniques are helpful in my learning experience. The professor is understanding the different situations of the students I love the article and the supplemental videos that were suggested. Addressing the problems of students. Even though this course is asynchronous, the professor made sure to check up on us using google meet. The professor provided videos and articles that will probably help us deeply understand the lessons. He gave me more than enough time to complete and turn in the requirements. He is very considerate and pushes us towards the best we can achieve. Fun, exciting, and interesting The teacher was engaging and I had a great time... The teacher was very accommodating in answering the students' questions The teacher is a good example and model for us as in the future we're going to be a teacher too. The best teacher! The professor is available for consultation. This course provides handouts and facilitates teaching techniques Professor has enough knowledge, concepts, and theories related to real life and it is clear.	Teacher Competence

Ethics as philosophy at its core gives focuses on the meaning and defining meaning of life. It presents various moral concepts which aim to influence students to have a touch of how a moral man should be. It was included in the Philippine curriculum for the sovereign holds an adequate conviction for future social engineers. Muega, (2010) mentioned that despite various institutions having diverse understanding and lenses on values or morality, they still share the same common ground that morality/values is significant to individuals. Oftentimes, values organizations turn to the moral aspect of schooling when they strongly feel that society is facing a moral crisis. For instance, in the Philippines, the thinkers believed that we are suffering from social deceases that distort our moral paradigm. The said problem is continuously affecting society through time for people are becoming tolerant to the social problems. In the face of this perceived cultural malaise, a lot of scholars are becoming pessimistic to values/moral education for apparently it doesn't solve the crisis. The tolerance of people to this kind of rotting culture must open the door to strengthening moral education (even if it doesn't feel effective) for it is the only agency that could conquer the problem of injustices and alike. It serves the purpose of producing more moral agents and caring citizens.

Globale (2020) even affirmed that nowadays, ethics has an essential place in all fields of life. Education helps us to understand the basic understanding of human life. Ethics as part of the body of education helps us to appreciate human life through living the life of virtue. It is in living as a good citizen, a productive agent in society that gives life meaning. With this, it is necessary to include ethics or any moral/values subject to any curriculum since education and ethics are intertwined. In the positive outcomes from the respondents, they stated that they saw the importance of ethics in their curriculum. It wakes them up from the cave of slumber where they found meaning in being socially aware and responsive to the call for change in the country. In the interpretation of the commonality of respondents' answers, it has been said that there is a practical application for them. The perception of practicality for students here means that it is useful or they can apply principles that they learned in the subject through rationalizing under moral conduct. It is a victory on the part of the instructors due to the impact that was given to the students. Another thing to look at here in the respondent's feedback is that subject ethics promotes critical thinking. Critical thinking in a way that is reflective and analytic. The table given above shows that numerous students admitted that the subject and the classroom dialogue assisted them to be more reflective and analytic about the moral issues in the state. (Melillo) 2010 claimed that critical thinking plays a large role in ethics because it is the process by which we determine for ourselves whether or not something is right or wrong. In a sense, critical thinking is a form of analysis and determination of fact vs. fiction, identifying the unknown, and coming to an understanding by taking the path of a critical thinker, a person develops a mental process of evaluation which helps to determine their ethical standards. Furthermore, Melillo 2010 surmised that

people should have a very analytical mind if they are to be truly successful ethically because it is too easy to forget and not care; resorting to self-sufficient forms of thinking and ensuring your survival. I think a lot of people who have had hard lives are forced to make decisions they would not choose to make otherwise had they not been in that situation at the time, but needed to make the choice that would best benefit them personally because of the extreme nature of their lives. Elder (2009) claims are relative to the stand of Melillo about the analytic skills of ethics. They stated that the human mind intrinsically seeks that which it perceives to be in its interests (without necessarily concerning itself with the rights and needs of others). Developing ethical sensitivities requires cultivating the mind to go beyond innate selfishness to consideration of the rights and needs of others. One needs to understand ethical reasoning; cultivate ethical capacities; and integrate ethical understandings with critical thinking skills, abilities, and traits. The findings affirm that ethics and critical thinking go hand in hand. In swift analysis and interpretation from the responses of the respondents, teaching ethics is a win because it helps students to be socially aware and reflective citizens in the country. It also shows that the teaching method through discourse guides them in understanding concepts and moral principles. It is a bacon for both teachers and students.

Table 3 The unsatisfactory features of the course, which need revision.

Research Questions	First – Order Constructs	Second-Order Constructs
Identify three (3) unsatisfactory features of the course, that you think need revision.	Most of the words used in the module are unfamiliar. The reading articles are too philosophical. The reading articles are difficult to grasp. The reading articles are too long and it takes time to read and understand. The words used in the reading articles gave me a hard time comprehending them.	The reading articles are highly philosophical
	Limited time for discussion and interaction with the instructor.	Limited time for discussion and integration

	The explanations of the topic are limited and fast. Limited examples are given on the topic Student class participation is too limited Online class meetings are not enough to explain the reading article	
	Limited class activities and assessment Teaching strategies are limited and monotone.	Limited teaching strategies

Samuelsson and Lindstrom (2017) describe two common practices of teaching ethics in the classroom. The first is the "smorgasbord" approach where the teachers just enumerate the list of different ethical theories giving a little background or description of what the theory is all about. This approach presents the course by randomly picking up a set of theories according to his/her preference without thoroughly examining the criteria for moral evaluation. The second is a "methods-based" approach which focuses on learning the methods of moral reasoning to arrive at moral justification. This is possible when moral reasoning coheres vividly to relevant correct information. In our case, we teach the course by combining the two approaches. This approach as Elliot and June (2018), noted develops the student's familiarity with ethical theories as well as reasoning skills. The former provides the students with an ethical foundation in responding to moral issues. While the latter equips them with a tool for moral reasoning in contextualizing the diverse ethical perspectives and being able to achieve a rational and reasonable moral judgment (Elliott & June 2018).

Topics such as introduction to ethics or morality, virtue ethics, and utilitarianism were presented in the class using a theory–based approach. While topics on the ethical landscape to mention a few include *The Objectivity of Moral Judgments* by Wright (1927), *The Plurality of Moral Judgments* by Horsburgh (1954), *On Moral Dilemmas* by Dahl (1996), *Kantian Ethics* by De Vera (2019). These topics were presented not only to convey the method rather teach the students how to analyze and critique using the methods of moral reasoning. For instance, our discussion on the article of Wright's (1927) *"The Objectivity of Moral Judgments"* clarifies the moral discourse of moral judgments whether they are

subjective or objective. This article attempts to explore by indicating a *via media* between these two conflicting alternatives. Essential questions such as *"In what sense are moral judgments possible?", "What determines moral standards?", "How do we address the problem of moral judgments?", "Are there intrinsic types of goods?", "It is possible to build ethics upon them?", "How are moral judgments revised?", "How is the content of the good decision?"* are presented to facilitate philosophical discussions with the students. We assume that the difficulty of understanding these articles are as follows: First, the students are non – philosophy major, and they were not introduced to such depth readings on philosophy. Second, there is a false impression that minor subjects offered in the university are not prioritized by the students. Lastly, the students do not have much interest in philosophy courses according to Hein (1972) for two reasons. First, the course is offered at an early stage in college (1st and 2nd year) and second, students enrolled in the course because of academic coercion rather than a personal pursuit.

Another unsatisfactory feature delivered on the course according to the results is the limited time for discussion. The disruption of mobility because of the pandemic changes the academic institution from the traditional classroom setting to online/virtual classes. This paradigm shift in the educational system as argued by scholars (Comeaux & McKenna-Byington (2003) Garrison (2006) McShane (2006) Palloff and Pratt (2000) Torrisi and Davis (2000) Wiesenberg (1999, 2002) challenges the readiness of the teachers in terms of technology preparedness and the delivery of instructions. While all sectors of society look for a solution to mitigate the spread of infection, schools continue to mobilize using the online/virtual mode of learning. Developing countries like the Philippines have no choice but to migrate to this new platform of online learning. The arrangement of classes to the asynchronous and synchronous mode of learning and the use of technological devices affects both the performance of the teachers and the students. In our case, the lack of technological literacy, and the poor internet connectivity hinder us to deliver quality instructions. On the part of students, although learning is virtually possible, it may perhaps be optimal as compared to classes before the pandemic where there is enough time spent in the discussion and participation of the students (Franchi, 2020). In our case, classes were held asynchronously and synchronously using the google classroom platform. Reading articles were uploaded for a week and synchronously followed by an online class meeting for at least twenty to thirty minutes. This meeting does not require the attendance of the students for reasons such as the availability of gadgets and internet connectivity in the area. Having these reasons, a poor learning outcome has to be expected based on the student survey results which compliments the studies of various scholars (Adarkwah, 2021; Copeland et al. (2021), Day et al., (2021), Fawaz et al., (2021), Kapasia et al., (2020), Khalil et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2020), where the quality of learning experiences, students interaction and mobility was aggravated by the pandemic (Barrot, et al., (2021). Thus, the overall results of the study showed that student's dissatisfaction with

the online mode of learning is primarily grounded on the reading articles, limited time and space for class interaction, and monotonous synchronous and asynchronous learning strategies. These findings agree with the study conducted by Tang et al. (2020) on engineering students whose dissatisfaction with the present mode of learning is limited communication and assessment.

Table 4   The most satisfying experience in taking the course

Research Questions	First–Order Constructs	Second-Order Constructs
What was/were your most satisfying experience in taking this course	Doing an ethics essay was my most satisfying experience because I was able to give my opinion and apply the knowledge I have learned from this course. The most satisfying experience in this course was the lessons that changes my perspective on life There were videos (links) sent to us so we could understand the lessons more. I think it is the most satisfying experience because not all profs provide materials to help students understand the lesson. Visual aids are a must! It is applicable in real life and can be used for future references The interaction that we experienced with our teacher. We were able to express ourselves, understand the subject matter clearly, and his consideration to all circumstances that we had encountered. When our prof is always updating us, motivating us, and checking if we are okay Being able to explain the relevance of ethics to life It was fun and rewarding and taught me lessons in life Creating a term paper, that sharpens my critical thinking on different aspects inclined with the course.	The students' appreciation of the course is primarily grounded on the competence of the teacher teaching the course and the supplemental materials provided by the teachers to guide the students in exploring the articles

Table 4 summarizes the overall response of the students taking the course. Results show that the student's appreciation of the course is primarily grounded on the competence of the teacher teaching the course, and the supplemental materials provided by the teachers to guide them in exploring the topics or articles. This complements the study of Self and Ellison (1998) of engineering students who were evaluated on the impact of ethics courses on their moral reasoning. The study shows that there was a significant increase in the student's moral reasoning after taking the course. The same results were found in the study of Drake et al. (2005) of 164 students whose findings resulted in substantial growth in students' moral capabilities after studying the course. Although both studies find out a positive response to the increase in student's moral and critical reasoning nevertheless, a gap still exists on whether this ethical knowledge can be translated into moral practice Bowden et al. (2008) remark that even though the course increases one's moral sense of what is right from what is wrong, but its relationship to moral or ethical practices still needs further verification.

CONCLUSION

This paper tracks the inquiry of Ethics as a subject in the academic curriculum in tertiary education. These feedbacks, however, have also shown the remarkable impact of the transition to digital platforms when it comes to the issue of student satisfaction. The idea of the practical application of highly philosophical reading materials, limited time for discussion, and issues about teacher competencies have a huge implication with regard to the nature and character of the digital working environment.

The study emphasizes the importance of understanding the effects of integrating Ethics as a mandated subject as a result of students' evaluation. The university should be open to feedback, appraisals as well as disapproval; hence, it should cease to be an educational system that controls both teachers and students. The findings show that Ethics as a subject must be re-branded, i.e., a change into a mode of the teaching method. Accepting the responses of students must be respected since it is by such measures that a healthy and improved learning and teaching environment can be created in the academe. The results from the student's responses aid the gap between the fusion of the teacher's and student's horizons. As this paper re-brand ethics, it encourages the said new brand to be more focused on practical application by relating topics on social issues like in the field of gender, politics, and human relation so that it could be more helpful to the student's awareness and interests. The substance theory must remain but it should always connect to the said issues to be relevant to the curriculum and at the same time to student's well-being. Deconstructing the syllabus of ethics in a brand that does not only step on theories but practicality, makes the course vital and living. The logic behind rebranding is to incorporate

the subject to other course offerings of the university by integrating it into their Program Educational Objectives (PO's). For example, the Bachelor of Science in Agriculture has this PO's "The BSA program aims to educate students in the scientific habit of thought and entrepreneurial skills and prepare them to become globally competitive professionals with entry-level competencies in technical agriculture. It emphasizes the processes and techniques of identifying, diagnosing and analyzing problems and in designing, packaging and applying technologies needed in the development and conservation of the agriculture and food system resources". Diagnosing and analyzing the issues and problems in agriculture involves understanding the ontological relation of the human person to the environment. There is a need for a deeper understanding of this relationship towards integral development that enhances both the person and the environment.

The readings of Martin Heidegger's Philosophy of Technology specifically *"The Questions Concerning Technology and Other Essays"* (1997), and Pope Francis's *"Laudato Si"* (2015) can be a helpful guide in reflecting the said relationship. The same readings can be applied to the courses of BS Environmental Science and BS of Science in Food Technology whose PO's stipulated the following: (1) Disseminate effectively knowledge pertaining to sound environmental protection, conservation, utilization, and management, (2) demonstrate the ability to contribute to the protection and management of the environment, (3) analyze local environmental issues and problems in the regional and global context, and (4) assist in waste management for sustainable environmental safety (BSFT). Other courses such as Development Communication and Accountancy whose PO's adhere to ethical standards and practices and the sense of responsibility and the performance of duty can be deepened using Immanuel Kant's reading on the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (2005). Such readings aim to understand the notion of duty and responsibility grounded upon Kant's notions of autonomy and humanity (De Vera, 2019). The insight gained through this reading of Kant helps the students realize what it is to perform one's duty and responsibility even in the absence of any incentives.

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