

Integrating Reflections on Scriptural Text in Language Classes: The Southern Philippines and Bangkok Experience

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Abstract

Scriptural Text Integration employed in some Catholic educational institutions throughout the world has become the core pedagogy that promises relevant and meaningful education for today's learner. This study investigated the experiences of the teachers and students in integrating Scriptural texts in English language classes. It utilized a transcendental phenomenological research design. The study involved ten students and ten teachers in both Catholic schools in Southern Philippines and in Bangkok, Thailand. Focus Group Discussion and interviews were employed. Findings reveal that teachers used strategies such as careful choice of Scriptural texts; using Scriptural texts to broaden the topic; connecting Scriptures to life experiences; and use of Scriptural text as a platform for values formation. In terms of challenges, they expressed difficulty in having ample time for meaningful integration; Lack of skill in integrating Scriptural text; passivity of some students; and difficulty in word choice considering Thai students' spiritual background. In terms of effects on teachers, they have improved teaching effectiveness; empowered in shaping students' values; In-depth understanding of the lesson; self-fulfillment; and improved devotion to God. For students, this enabled them to gain deeper understanding of the lesson; evaluate their actions; make them more reflective; build closer relationship to God; and learn to share. From the findings, it can be inferred that such integration enabled teachers to experience a deep sense of fulfilment. Students too, developed the skill of discernment in their actions. Thus, it is recommended that teachers be trained and encouraged to continually integrate scriptures in their instructional processes.

Keywords: Scriptural text, reflections, integration, approaches, impact, experiences

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Introduction

Pedagogical innovations in teaching English language expand pathways for developing the next generation of learners and creative thinkers. The goal of the educational curriculum is to equip students with the critical competencies essential for the global competitiveness. A myriad of skills and competencies need to be addressed to develop holistic 21st century learners. One of these important competencies is the affective domain of the learners. In the desire of producing globally competent graduates, combining the cognitive and affective domains of the students is a demand in the curriculum.

Bator (2014) stressed that Catholic education exists to deliver a holistic development of students as living witnesses of faith. You Jung Jang (2012) emphasized that integration of scripture and learning must be vibrant and evident in the teaching and learning process. Thus, most educators agree that scriptures play a central role in Catholic education. The scripture is significant not only to the student's personal life and struggles, but also significant to the subject being studied. This teaching pedagogy does not only deal in evangelization but also in the development of the students' values and godly character. In other words, Scriptural teachings embedded in the lesson facilitate authentic learning and instil into the students a Catholic perspective on all aspect of life.

Catholic schools in South East Asia are committed to provide their graduates the Catholic orientation through this teaching pedagogy. They envisioned in providing integral development of the students as human persons in a dynamic process of growth in the spiritual, intellectual, psychological and social aspects. A Catholic school in Southern Philippines mandated its curriculum to integrate the Four-Pronged Ignacian pedagogy in the students' learning experience . This Ignacian Pedagogy paradigm focuses on the inclusion of Scriptural text, Ignacian Values, Social Orientation and Other Disciplines in the lesson as proposed by S Ma. Rufina Guillano, RVM.

This Ignacian Pedagogy provides the development of the spiritual and intellectual domain of the learners. This teaching pedagogy helps the students not only to understand and remember details, facts, examples and reasons but it guides them in the evaluation of their actions. It provides enough space for learners to comment, justify and mirror themselves. It also revives the consciousness of the students on the significance of scripture in every classroom. By using Scriptural text, the class can turn out to be meditative and motivating. It can also make the class more reflective which will obviously improve the affective competence of the learners.

Some Catholic teachers understand the essence of this teaching pedagogy that makes Catholic education unique and their teaching meaningful. Teachers view the scriptural integration as the lifeblood of their teaching, an essential aspect of their mission. However, despite the emphasis on the integration of the Ignacian Pedagogy in the classroom, a number of teachers are still confronted with problems on how to integrate the bible passages especially in the language classes. Such difficulty manifested in the result of the Student Assessment of the Teachers Performance wherein the lowest rating of the students went to the scriptural text integration.

As a result, the researcher was motivated in conducting a phenomenological investigation of the experiences of these teachers on how Scriptures are effectively integrated in the lesson. This work seeks to illuminate and understand the approaches in integrating scriptural text and the challenges of the language teachers in their class. Also, the purpose of the study is not to simply explain the integration of the scripture in the class, but to gain insights from the teachers who are currently experiencing the phenomena in their classrooms.

This study is hinged on the assumption that scriptural integration in language classes does not only promote evangelization and value formation but also promotes meaningful and relevant academic learning experience. This integration increases students' interest and awareness not only on the language lessons being taught but also greater understanding of the world they live. This means that, the teaching of English language does not focus only in learning its structure, syntax, morphology, semantics and pragmatics but focuses on how these ideas applied in the students' life and experiences. This integration will not only give the students the opportunity to acquire the English language but also use language meaningfully.

Teaching English as a second and foreign language has been a challenging endeavour to many teachers in South East Asia like Philippines and Thailand. Anyiendah (2017). validated the notion that teachers are the most relevant contributors in an educational reform, particularly in one that touches on what goes on in the classrooms. However, their training and innovative skills is indispensable but not sufficient for effective transfer of learning. There are more prevalent circumstances which pose a challenge to the teachers hence impeding effective learning. Undeniably, teachers need more pedagogical strategies and innovations in teaching English language. Thus, this study likewise assumes that the language teachers' strategies and experiences play an essential role to the effectiveness of the scriptural integration in the lesson.

This study is basically anchored on the John Dewey's theory of Connected Experience. It is a learning theory which emphasizes the relevance of personal experience in the learning process. Dewey argued that students passively assimilated information that had been designed and pre-digested by teachers and textbooks. Schools do not provide genuine learning experiences but only feed students with an endless amassing of facts where they tend to forget. Combining the classroom concepts with other disciplines or areas will create a positive learning environment. Moreover, examining the language teachers' perceptions of their integration of scriptural components with the lesson is essential. The teachers wishing to integrate scriptural concepts into their class may be able to see the "what" and "how" of implementation. Thus, this theory urged the schools to provide quality experience during the learning process rather than focusing on the information being presented.

This study is also supported by Jerome Bruner's Theory of Constructivism. This theory perceives learning as a dynamic process in which learners construct or create new ideas or concepts based upon their current and past knowledge. Constructivist learning desires the educators to implement the idea that each learner constructs, acquires, and understands his or her own knowledge differently. Thus, in the scriptural integration, learners are encouraged to relate and construct academic ideas into a more meaningful learning experience.

Wilhoit (2007) cited that for many years the strongest philosophical argument on teaching pedagogy is the scriptural integration. It has been the common topic of discussion in many Catholic schools. Many Catholic educators believe that scriptural principles are much more effective employing the methods of scripture and teach the application of its truth to subject content.

Moreover, employing scriptural text is a way of helping students learn to see God's hand at work all around us. It is not just a lesson or objective of including scriptural concepts in the class but connecting these scriptural reflections to the students' day to day experiences.

Burton and Nwosu (2003) emphasized that Integration is also a process of relating faith and the relevant subject matter at hand. This encourages the students not just to reflect and evaluate their actions but also promotes the development of their critical thinking. In the integration, the students' intellectual and spiritual aspects work hand in hand. The integration does not only help the students understand and remember details and details of the lesson but also guide them in the evaluation of their faith and action along the way.

This phenomenological study examined the scriptural text integrated in the language classroom and the strategies used by the language teachers in the scriptural text integration in the language classroom. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions.

1. What are the strategies used by the language teachers in integrating reflections on scriptural text in their classes?
2. What are the challenges of the language teachers in integrating the scriptural text in the language classroom?
3. What are the effects of this integration in the instructional process to the teachers and the students' lives?

The findings of this phenomenological research would provide an effective feedback and substantial information in the following areas or to the following persons: a) the results of the research work may be beneficial to the administrator in the implementation of the Ignacian Pedagogy for the enhancement of the students' social and spiritual aspect; b) the findings of the study may provide input to the Language teachers which may result in the design of activities, teaching techniques and strategies in integrating, promoting and enhancing the scriptural text integration in the classroom; and c) the study may give awareness to the students of the relevance of the scriptural text in their values formation.

The scope of the study is focused on the experiences of the language teachers in integrating the Scriptural text in their classes. This phenomenological study is limited to the transcendental approach used in the study which attempts to provide a description of the experiences of the participants.

Research Method

This study utilized the transcendental phenomenological research design developed by Husserl, which is a philosophical approach to qualitative research methodology in

the pursue of understanding human experience (Moustakas, 1994). This qualitative approach was used to completely explore into the variations and complexity of integrating scriptural text into the language classroom. Chambers (2013) defined phenomenology as a qualitative approach of research which focuses on the similarity of the existing experience within a particular group. He further said that usually in this approach, an interview is conducted with a group of participants who have first-hand knowledge of an event, situation or experience. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

The transcendental approach investigated the phenomenon of scriptural text integrated into the language classes and the teachers' approaches by delving into the nuances of their experiences. It will also provide a description of the experiences of the participants with emphasis on discovery and meaning, thus, the approach is deemed suitable to be used in this study.

This study was conducted in one of the schools in Southern Philippines and Bangkok Thailand. Both are catholic schools in South East Asia. Ten junior high school students and ten teachers from both schools were involved in the study.

In order to gather data of this study, the researcher sought the approval of the principal to conduct an in-depth conversation and interview with the students and teachers. Parents' consent was then requested and gathered. After the focus group discussion and interview, the data were collected, read, reread and culled for like ideas and themes. Relevant statements were highlighted to determine the similarities among the response of the participants. Clusters of meaning were established from the significant statements into themes.

Through this process the researcher created the common meaning of the event, situation or experience and attain at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher described the different elements and gain further insights into the meaning and essence of scriptural integration into the language classroom.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the analyses and interpretation of data obtained from the participants of the study. The researcher presented the information in themes with interpretation and implication. The presentation is organized based on the order of the stated problems in the introduction.

1. Approaches in Integrating Reflections of Scriptural Text

Themes

Careful choice of Scriptural texts
Using Scriptural texts to broaden the topic
Connecting Scriptures to life experiences;
Use of Scriptural text as a platform for values formation

From the data, the approaches in integrating reflections of scriptural text mentioned by the teachers were categorized into four themes namely: careful choice of Scriptural texts; using Scriptural texts to broaden the topic; connecting Scriptures to life experiences; and use of Scriptural text as a platform for values formation.

1.1 Careful Choice of Scriptural texts

Majority of participants' responses were categorized as *Careful Choice of Scriptural texts* as the main approach in the integrating Scriptural text during the interview. The following are the samples of the transcription showing the participants' approach in integrating scriptural text in the class.

P2(Phil): I carefully choose relevant scriptural texts in integrating into my lessons to help the students understand and see connection of the scriptural text to the lesson and their life experiences

P5 (Thai): I choose scriptural texts for me to formulate higher order thinking questions that would really able the students to think.

P2: Scriptural text needs thorough analysis beforehand so it needs ample time in preparing. Besides, the relevance of the text and the lesson or topic should always dwell together.

P6:(Phil) I made sure that the scriptural text I use is related to the topic I discuss in the class.

P2(Phil): I look for appropriate scriptural text that can be connected to one of my lesson objectives.

Most of the teachers carefully choose the scriptural text to be integrated in the lesson for the students' reflection. Scriptural texts that are relevant to the lesson and the students must be carefully reflected and integrated. Daniel and Wade (2007) emphasized that teachers should make careful choices on what Scriptural text that is most meaningful to the class. Burns and Drake (2019) reiterated that integration is something that is planned and can and should be carried out throughout the academic day. Thus, teachers should make careful choices on what Scriptural text that is most meaningful to the class. (Daniel and Wade, 2007)

1.2 Using Scriptural texts to broaden the topic

Another relevant strategy emerged in the response of the teachers in the integration is using scriptural texts to broaden the topic. The following are the samples of transcription:

T3: (Thai): Students can openly express their thoughts, feelings and ideas allowing them to master English language proficiency.

T1 (Thai)Z: I use scriptural text in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of the students. They learn not only to comprehend the story but also values through their reflection essay.

T2 (Phil): the pedagogy delivers what is being communicated rather than the grammar itself.

T5 (Thai): Deepen the students' understanding of poetry through psalms and proverbs.

Most of the time academic subjects are taught as separate entities, outside of the scriptural or spiritual understanding or framework. However, in this integration, the lesson and scriptural is taught as connected entities. Teachers use scripture to broaden the topic discussed in the class so students are able to explore learning not limited in the four walls of the classroom. Subjects are not taught in mere isolation, but taught in such a way as to reveal the character, nature, or handiwork of God.

Harville (2019) acknowledged the relevance of bible as great authentic resource to use along with other authentic resources in a language class. He further illustrated that learning English with the scripture is a great way to improve one's knowledge on reading and vocabulary skills. Cooney (2007) cited that English grammar instruction integrated with the scriptural text provides instruction with meaningful examples for lifelong learning. Thus, scriptural integration provides parallels and opportunities for broader associations of the topics discussed.

1.3 Connecting Scriptures to life experiences

Connecting Scriptures to life experiences was also used by the teachers as a strategy in scriptural text integration. These are some examples of transcription:

T10: (Phil): I allow the students to see the connection of the scriptural text context not just in the lesson but also to their day-to-day activities.

T8(Phil) During integration, I see to it that students somehow relate the scripture as basis of their way of living

T5 (Phil): What makes our learning plan unique from other school's pedagogy is the integration of scriptural text. During the teaching, learning process, I see to it that students would see connection of our lesson to their real experiences

T9 (Thai). This provides the students an opportunity to reflect scriptural text relating to their everyday life.

The most challenging strategy employed by the teachers in this integration is relating the scripture to the life experiences of the students. Teachers carefully prepared questions that lead to the connection of scripture to the life experiences of the students. With this, student openly expressed their feelings, emotions, thoughts and life experiences. The reflections of the scripture may also serves as guide and light to the students in dealing their daily life experiences. Emlet (2009) mentioned that students think of a contemporary life situation to which they could apply the given passage.

Moreover, Evangelisti (2001) recognized the relevance of scripture as true help and guidance into the lives of students. In God's Word, students may find comfort in times of sorrow, encouragement when they want to give up, and correction and instruction when finding my way through thoughts and situations to God's will. The verses of the scripture bring peace and comfort in the midst of confusing thoughts and uncertain situations. This integration bridge the gap between an ancient scriptural text and a present-day life situation.

1.4 Use of Scriptural text as a platform for values formation

One relevant strategy employed by the teachers is the *Use of Scriptural text as a platform for values formation*. The following are samples of the teachers responses:

T2: (Phil): I did not teach only the students with the academic learnings. But also I was able to touch the spiritual being of the students.

T5 (Phil): Through the use of scriptural text, the students are now have more refined behavior inside the classroom as they have more realization during the discussion.

T9 (Thai): Every time I introduce scriptural texts my students would switch behavior. They become more attentive and cooperative. Their interest arises.

Today, Christian values have been taken for granted. Schools are often expected to function in lieu of the family, and it leads to the sad reality that the teaching of fundamental values is often lacking. This integration can be an aid in teaching values and Christian beliefs. Groenendyk (2007) emphasized that texts in the scripture leaves a meaningful learning to the students in a brief amount of time and space and often with lasting effect. He further said that this integration reinforces and develops an appreciation for the values the teachers want to convey and instil in the hearts and

minds of the learners. He strongly recommended the use and worth of proverbs, psalms and other scriptural text in teaching moral values in the classroom.

In general, the different themes showed the different approaches of the participants in integrating scriptural texts in their language classes. Their responses were corroborated with some research findings as mentioned in the discussion.

2. Challenges on the Integration

Themes

Difficulty in having ample time for meaningful integration
Lack of skill in integrating Scriptural text
Passivity of some students
Difficulty in word choice considering Thai students' spiritual background

Catholic colleges and universities are faced with numerous challenges as they strive to prepare students to pursue scriptural truth in integrating reflections of scriptural text. The data revealed the following challenge categorized into four themes namely: *difficulty in having ample time for meaningful integration; Lack of skill in integrating Scriptural text; passivity of some students; and difficulty in word choice considering Thai students' spiritual background.* The following are the sample responses of the teachers.

P1 (Phil): Scriptural text needs thorough analysis beforehand so it needs ample of time in preparing

P5 (Thai) : Students' individual background is a challenge for me since I don't have an idea on how religiously trained the students are at their house. So I have to make sure that the way I integrate scriptural text would meet the needs of the students who are familiar with biblical texts and those who are not.

P8 (Phil): Scriptural text needs thorough analysis beforehand so it needs ample of time in preparing

P4(Phil) : The lack of time in deepening the connection to my lesson especially that I am teaching English. It needs more time to deepen the connection.

The findings are in consonance with the findings revealed in the study of Peshkin (2009). Teachers had the difficulty in the integration due to lack of skill. Teachers struggle in showing students the relevance of the scripture to the subjects taught. They failed to find significant connections of learning the scripture and connecting it to their educational experience. Thus, teachers need ample time and relevant skills in the integration.

The findings implied that Catholic schools and universities should help teachers by providing classes, training, or seminars on scriptural text integration. (You Jung Jang, 2012)

3. Effects of the Integration to the teachers and students

3.1. Effects to the teachers

Themes

Improved teaching effectiveness
Empowered in shaping students' values
In-depth understanding of the lesson
Self-fulfillment
Improved devotion to God

As to the effect of the integration to the teachers, this study revealed the following themes: *improved teaching effectiveness; empowered in shaping students' values; In-depth understanding of the lesson; self-fulfillment; and improved devotion to God.* The transcriptions below are the responses of the teachers:

P1 (Phil): It has empowered me as a teacher by being reflective to my students. It gave me more grace to teach the knowledge and wisdom to my students. I am now an evangelizer with in my capability as an English teacher.

P5 (Phil) : Integrating scriptural texts and concepts in my classroom makes my teaching become more meaningful. I perceive it as an essential tool to allow my students closer to God as they journey their life in the academe,

P9 (Phil) : Students' priceless reaction made me feel the fulfilment and satisfaction in this noble task

3.2. Effects to the Students

Themes

Gain deeper understanding of the lesson
Evaluate their actions
Make them more reflective
Build closer relationship to God
Learn to share

For the students, scriptural text integration had greatly contributed to their total human development. Five themes emerged from the responses such as *gain deeper understanding of the lesson; evaluate their actions; make them more reflective; build closer relationship to God; and learn to share*. Responses of the participants related to these findings include the following:

P3: (Thai): When study the bible it helps us to be more good at English even in listening, speaking and even writing because it develops us in using English in the sentence when we share.

P1 (Thai): yes, this integration helps me in my personal relationship with God because through these verses I will be closer to God.

P9 (Thai): This help me know what is good and bad and help me think if my action is wrong

P6 (Phil): For me, this integration helps me personally in my relationship with God

Findings revealed that integrating reflections of the scripture promote positive effects not only to the students but also the teachers. This study also showed how this integration encourages students to be reflective of their actions and build a closer relationship with God. Teachers too are becoming empowered as an agent of change in the lives of the students. The study of Theron (2013) has similar findings that scriptural text integration brings transformation to the lives of the students and teachers.

Conclusion

The central emphasis of a Catholic education is the integration of scripture with learning and living in its teaching and scholarship. Faith, heart, soul, and intellect must function harmoniously to achieve student and teacher empowerment. Scriptural teachings embedded in the lesson especially in Language class facilitate authentic learning and instil into the students a Catholic perspective on all aspect of life. From the findings, it can be inferred that such integration has empowered and enlightened teachers in becoming more worthy of emulation and enable them to experience a deep sense of fulfilment. Students too, developed the skill of discernment in their actions. Thus, it is recommended that teachers be trained and encouraged to continually integrate scriptures in their instructional processes.

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