Subtle Influences Shaping Students' Beliefs, Thoughts, Attitudes and Behavior

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Abstract

Background and purpose: This research investigated impact of subtle influences shaping students' thoughts, attitudes, values and ultimately their behavior. The article first answers what the subtle influences in universities are-the hidden messages students pick unconsciously besides the official curriculum and how such messages affects their learning experiences and life in general.

Methods: The research population included over a thousand regular undergraduate students in Christian universities in 2015-2018 academic years. Using Yamennes' sample size selection formula, 486 undergraduate students participated in the quantitative phase of the research. Out of the 486 students 417 filled and returned the questionnaire with 64 items. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was obtained through Cronbach alpha as 0.834. Experts in the education department in the University of Nairobi confirmed the content validity of the questionnaire. SPSS statistical software version 20 was used in data analysis.

Results: The study results showed that various learning resources in universities, the instructive nature of the education environment, interrelationships, universities' instructional models and cultural orientation subtlety shape students' experiences, thoughts, attitudes, values and behavior, besides the formal curriculum. Strongest relationship was between rules and physical space with more than 90% of the respondents. This researcher recommends that the subtle messages needs attention to produce holistic transformation in undergraduate students' worldview.

Conclusion: Since subtle messages in learning institutions can have both positive and negative influences on students' values, beliefs, attitudes and behavior, cautious attention should be paid to set rules, teacher-students interrelationships, physical space, teaching methods used and evaluation methods so as to positively influence students' worldview.

Keywords: hidden curriculum, students, students' worldview, learning institution

Introduction

Even though theorists like Mo Tzu, Confucius, Aristotle, Plato, John Locke and Rousseau, each had his or her own unique perspectives on the role of education within a given culture and civilization, they also shared several common ideas about what it is that learning institutions must exist to do (Noddings, 1995). Over the years the goal of true education-intelligence plus character has persisted. Counts (1978) believed the role of schooling is to

equip individuals with the skills necessary to participate in the social life and to change the social order as desired. As noted by Nick Gibb (2015) education is the engine of economy, the foundation of culture and an essential preparation for adult life. I concur with John Dewey (1938) that the primary purpose of education and schooling is to teach learners how to live pragmatically-being practical in the real world. Expanding on the pragmatic purpose of schooling, deMarrais and LeCompte (1995) outlined four major purposes of schooling including intellectual purposes such as the development of reading skills; political purposes such as the assimilation of immigrants; economic purposes such as job preparation as well as social purposes such as the development of social and moral responsibility. On this basis many educators call for conducting analytical studies on effects of schooling but rarely, do we find research emphasizing on the influences of the humanistic climate in learning institutions on students' beliefs, values and attitudes.

This article throws light on the influences of the humanistic climate in learning institutions on students' beliefs, attitudes, moral values and behavior. Virtuous living is directed to a supreme life, which is needed in every society to stir its consciousness to behave thoughtfully and connect with one another which in turn would shape the younger generations' behavior in the midst of 21st Century ensnares of behaviors or actions that are not considered good or honest. This is because young people tend to learn more from the humanistic climate in their learning institutions. Unfortunately, most research focuses on the effects of the declarative curriculum on achieving the objectives of the educational process, forgetting the strong impact of the hidden curriculum (Cubukcu, 2012).

The definitional strand that runs through most hidden curriculum perspectives points to the view that a good education is of value in and of itself regardless of future career options-in other words good education ensures that young people in the society are healthy, efficient, in harmony and morally beneficial to themselves and their society. According to Alsubaie, (2015), the unplanned (hidden) curriculum is more penetrative than the formal curriculum and its impact is felt by all and it significantly influences students' thought, intentions and behavior. Kern (2007) suggests that the factors involved in shaping the hidden curriculum include the: architecture and building quality of the learning institution–educational environment such as color, light, sound, learning equipments, narrow and long corridors of the learning institution. The relationship between faculty members and students-attitude and behavior of faculty members also play an important role in the formation of student's attitude-relations between individual students and staff together have their own educational work. One of these relationships is relationship of staff with students (Fyock (2008). The hidden curriculum is a far more influential 'teacher' in shaping students' beliefs, values, attitudes and ultimately their behavior (Massialas and Joseph, 2009). Philip Jackson (1968) believed the hidden curriculum convey aspects like learning to wait quietly, exercising self-discipline, finishing work, collaborating, showing loyalty to both teachers and peers, being neat and punctual and conducting oneself courteously. Yazdeli *et al.,* (2014) describes the concept as the emotional atmosphere and unwritten conditions of educational environment that have the greatest effect on the emotions and values of students. Yuksel (2006) sees the hidden curriculum as conveying implicit messages through everyday vocabulary, practices and habits, all of which have powerful effects on students' beliefs, values attitudes (worldview) and practices. Hafferty (2014) says the hidden curriculum refers to commonly held understandings, customs, rituals and taken-for-granted aspects of what goes on in the life-space called education. Regardless of the definition researchers give to the hidden curriculum, researchers like Massialas and Joseph (2009); Çubukçu (2012), Yousefzadeh (2014) and Azimpour and Khalilzad (2015), perceive its impact as more

important than the formal curriculum. This article building on Ozolin *et al.,* (2008) study of students' experiences with the hidden curriculum and its relationship with students' thoughts, attitudes, values and ultimately their behavior, discusses influences of subtle messages on students' worldview. The research is fueled by the fact that most studies have been conducted in the official curriculum in public education and less research is done on the effects of the hidden curriculum in on students' actual learning in Christian learning institutions.

Literature review/Learning Institutions' Culture

In every environment, whether the household, a place of worship or the classroom, there is a hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum, as noted by Philip Jackson comprises different elements such as the expected behaviors, actions and skills unique to a specific environment, degree of responsibility and even conventional mode of dressing. Over the past five decades different perspectives on the hidden curriculum have been articulated. Robert Dreeben (1967) examined the norms of learning institutions culture and concluded that more often than not they teach students to form temporary social relationships, submerge much of their personal identity and accept the legitimacy of categorical treatment. According Henry Giroux (2001), learning institutions not only provides instruction but also values, norms and principles experienced by students throughout their education life. Michael Apple (2004) saw the hidden curriculum as conveying attitudes, values and beliefs to students as part of the overall school culture but such learning is not explicitly stated in the curriculum document. Dickerson (2007) believed the hidden curriculum consists of things students learn through the experience of attending school rather than the stated educational objectives of the learning institutions they attend.

While researchers like Philip Jackson (1968) focused on the social aspects of the hidden curriculum, others like Margolis (2000) focused on the cognitive side of the hidden curriculum-the content and illustrations of the subject matter because they believe the subject matter has hidden messages as well which are sometimes against the aims of the formal curriculum, such as stereotype encounters and sexual discrimination. Other researchers like Kern (2007) focused on the physical aspects of the hidden curriculum and posted that beautiful, well decorated classroom, with good lightening and enough physical teaching equipment are key factors of academic achievement. However, Christian education aims of producing good teachers, doctors, entrepreneurs, who are capable of self-reflective discernment of the many values at play in their professional encounters as well having resilience to re-affirm student's human dignity, show care and compassion as the end-product, remains elusive. The apparent failure of Christian education is probably traceable to a systematic de-emphasis of the hidden curriculum-a value-laden education transmissible through socialization and role-modeling in learning institutions' ecosystem including teachers, the learning community as a whole, non-teaching staff as well as the media. Shaw (2006) says the physical structure of classrooms, which can be described in different types of educational centers like rectangle-shaped classroom with students' desks and chairs located in direct and connected rows and the teacher's table in front of them in the middle of classroom inculcates in students the idea that learners are creatures without mind, controlled by teachers as the only source of learning. According to Fyock (2008) the significant function of instructors in learning institutions as individuals to whom everything practically returns to-directly controls topics to be taught and assessment to be given and as such plays a considerable role in forming hidden curriculum. Bayanfar *et al.,* (2014) in their research concluded that students were not only influenced by school's social and physical environment but also by undersigned teacher-student interactions which directly and indirectly exert both

encouraging and discouraging but noteworthy effects on their actual learning. Taghvaei *et al.,* (2014) found a positive and significant correlation between teaching methods employed, assessments given, physical space, rules and students' emotional intelligence. Nami, Yaghoob *et al.,* (2014) in their study on students' experiences of hidden curriculum found that the hidden curriculum leads to stable behavior in students and instructors as individuals play a great role in students' learning as sources of transmitting hidden behavioral massages. Taghipour and Ghaffari (2009) in their study concluded that there is significant relationship between hidden curriculum components like physical structure, encouragement, punishment mechanisms and students' disciplinary behavior.

The implication here is that when analyzing institutional policies and their impact on students' worldview, it is important to consider the humanistic climate in leaning institutions and how it relates to students' beliefs, values, attitudes, their underlying assumptions and ultimately their behavior. This means learning institutions require an authentic and comprehensive enquiry into the nature of the hidden curriculum in their learning contexts and its influences on students' worldview. This is because a plethora of shadow curricula lurks, unseen, behind and beyond the content of daily lessons, limited research if any has addressed how the unspoken factors shapes higher learning institutions' students' beliefs, values, attitudes and ultimately their behavior.

Research Methodology
Considering the topic of research about the impact of subtle influences on students' experiences, thoughts, attitudes, values and ultimately their behavior, the research adopted sequential explanatory design. The statistical population of the research included 486 undergraduate students in Christian universities in Nairobi County. A questionnaire with 64 five-point Likert-type, closed-ended items was used. Items 1-4 gathered respondents' demographic information while items 5-64 rated as "strongly disagree" (1 point), "I disagree" (2 points), "neutral" (3 points), "agree" (4 points), and "strongly agree" (5 points) gathered respondents perceptions' on subtle influences on their worldview. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was found as r .834. The content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed through expert reviewers. All the data collected through the questionnaires were analyzed at descriptive and inferential level using Pearson correlation coefficient and T-test analysis but only the descriptive results are presented in this article.

The Research Results
Item 1 in the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate their gender. Results in figure 2 indicates that majority of the respondents 212 (50.8%) were male while 179 (42.9%) were female. This means 26 (6.2%) of the respondents did not indicate their gender. The findings imply that more male respondents than female respondents participated in the research as illustrated in figure 1.
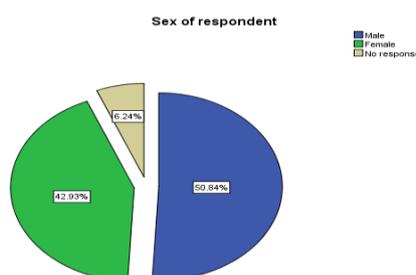

Figure 1. Respondents' gender

Item 2 in the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate their age bracket. Results in figure 2 indicates that 220 (52.8%) respondents were aged 25-35 years, 68 (16.3%) were aged 17 years and below, 60 (14.4%) were aged 36-45 years, 42 (10.1%) were aged 46 years and above while only six (1.4%) were aged 18-24 years. This means 21 (5%) of the respondents did not indicate their age bracket. It also implies that majority of the respondents 220 (52.8%) were aged 25-35 years.
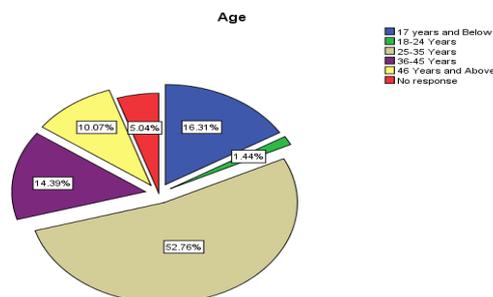

Figure 2. Age of the respondents

Item 3 in the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate the courses they had done online. Results in figure 3 indicates that 189 (45.3%) of the respondents had done very few online courses, 77 (18.5%) had done few, 41 (9.8%) had done an average number while 22 (5.3%) had done a good number. This means 21.1% of the responses did not indicate the number of courses they had done online. It also means that majority of the respondents 189 (45.3%) had done very few courses online as indicated in figure 5.
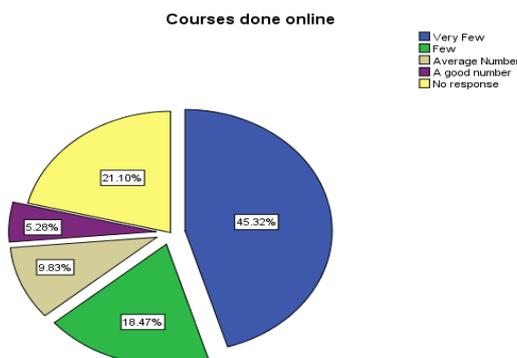

Figure 3. Courses done Online

Table 1. Students' Area of Study

Category	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent
Theological studies	44	10.6	11.3
Business and Economics	165	39.6	42.2
School of education Arts and Sciences	71	17.0	18.2
Counselling Psychology	38	9.1	9.7
Information Technology	46	11.0	11.8
Other	27	6.5	6.9
Total	391	93.8	100.0
No Response	26	6.2	
Total	417	100.0	

Item 4 in the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate their areas of study. Out of the 417 correctly filled questionnaires, 391 questionnaires reflected students' area of study as summarized in table 4. This means 26 respondents did not indicate their areas of study. 44 (10.3%) of the respondents indicated theological studies as their area of study, 165 (42.2%) of the respondents indicated business and economics as their area of study, 71 (18.2%) of the respondents indicated school of education, arts and sciences, 38 (9.7%) of the respondents indicated counseling psychology as their school of study while 46 (11.8%) of the respondents indicated information technology as their area of study. 27 (6.9%) indicated other schools. The results indicated that majority of the respondents 165 (42.2%) who filled the questionnaire were perusing business and economics.

Null hypothesis 1: Christian universities' organizational structure has no significant influence on students' worldview, results indicated that more than half of the respondents agreed with 10/16 statements. 82% of the respondents agreed that every campus rule imparts in their heart a sense of honor to a supernatural creator, to whom all people are answerable to. 93.4% of the respondents agreed that campus physical space instills in them the idea that the world is characterized by scarcity and one's struggle to acquire as much as one can, of the limited resources is justified. 85.2% of the respondents agreed that campus time distribution infuses in their hearts a desire to fulfill their duty as the highest value of life. 67.5% of the respondents agreed that campus time control inclines their hearts to think that time is a limited resource and wise utilization of the precious commodity (time) supersedes social interrelationships. 79.4% of the respondents agreed that campus disciplinary policies inclines their hearts to think that it is possible for two people to define what it means to live uprightly in conflicting ways and both be right. 68.8% of the respondents agreed that campus physical space instills in their hearts the idea that the world is characterized by scarcity and one's struggle to acquire as much as one can of the limited resources is justified. 65.7% of the respondents indicated that campus knowledge transmission styles inspire them to think that no meaningful learning can take place outside the classroom. 92.3% of the respondents agreed that campus instruction strategies instills in their hearts a strong believe that hard work increases one's ability to succeed in life. 83.9% of the respondents agreed that campus control inspires a strong believe in them that there exits absolute moral values that must be cherished by everybody. 55.9% of the respondents agreed that lecturers' positioning in front of the class inspires a strong desire to embrace time as precious commodity controlled by those in authority.

More than half of the respondents 61.3%, 59.5 and 57.6% disagreed with three items but the items were negatively stated which means respondents were in fact agreeing with the opposite. Respondents' views on the other three items were shared almost equally among the three ratings: agree, never and disagree. The implication here is that aspects like rules, physical space, instruction strategies, campus leadership and time allocation, among other aspects significantly affect students' worldview positively so they should be improved for better results. However, there is a significant number of students who are negatively affected by aspects like correctness in exams (45.8%), physical space (48.3%) among other hidden curriculum aspects which should be changed to positively affect students' worldview. There is also a significant number of respondents, in some cases more than 15% who indicated that they were not influenced in any way by some of the learning institutions' organizational structure elements which cannot be ignored.

Null hypothesis 2: Christian universities' interrelationships have no significant influence on students' worldview, results indicated that more than half of the respondents agreed with 7/12

statements. 69.4% of the respondents agreed that campus way of dealing with those caught in the wrong inspire in them a desire to freely forgive those who hurt them. 84.4% of the respondents agreed that their colleagues' ways of live their lives instill in them a craving to stand up for what is right even if their friends do not support their stand. 80.3% of the respondents agreed that lecturer-student interrelationships inspire in them a craving to help the needy in the society. 79.8% of the respondents agreed that lecturers' behavior inspires them to see free-thought as a fruitful practice in the teaching-learning processes. 65.7% of the respondents agreed that emphasis of content coverage suggest student-lecturer interrelationships are one-way—lecturers have higher knowledge which students must gain to succeed in education. 69.6% of the respondents agreed that universities' reward system inspire them to prioritize competition over cooperation. 68.7% of the respondents agreed that campus rules that require every student to handle his or her academic tasks inculcates in them a strong desire to safely guard any good learning material they discover.

More than half of the respondents 58.1% and 57.3% disagreed with only two items but the two items were negatively stated which means respondents were agreeing with the opposite. Respondents' views on the other three items were shared almost equally among the three ratings: agree, never and disagree. The implication here is that university interrelationships' aspects like student-student (84.4%), lecturer-student interrelationships (80.3%) and lecturer's behavior (79.8%), to mention but a few have momentous positive influence on students' worldview and should be improved to maintain the positive impact on students' worldview. However, there were also many students, as many 18.3% who indicated that they were not influenced in any way by some of their university's interrelationship aspects, which cannot be ignored.

Null hypothesis 3: Christian universities' instructional models' (on-ground and on-line) influence on students' worldview is not significantly different, results indicated that more than half of the respondents agreed with 10/16 statements. 73.4% of the respondents agreed that communication through e-learning bulletin boards inspires in their hearts an honest respect for an ever present creator who is concerned about all people. 80.1 % of the respondents agreed that e-learning inspires then to be careful because nameless actions can affect many people. 70.1% of the respondents agreed that on-line classroom engagements, interactions, emotional and psychological support provide them with an holistic picture of people who need their care and compassion. 502% of the respondents agreed that limited sense of instructor control in on-line learning context makes them believe people are born free and nobody should monitor what one does with his/her life. 50.9% of the respondents agreed that limited face-to-face student-student interactions suggests pursuing one's self-interests is all what is needed to succeed in academics. 55.2% of the respondents agreed that limited accountability in on-line classroom inspires them to see time as within his/her control to spend it as one pleases. 54.9% of the respondents agreed that values and attitude promoted in on-line classes suggest life is a pin-ball game-whose rules, though few, are a means to the player's enjoyment. 51.5% of the respondents agreed that individualized on-line assessments negatively affect ones moral values and group work. 72.7% of the respondents agreed that multi-sensory appeal in on-ground classrooms where students listen to an instructor, participate in face-to-face discussions and ask questions makes one see other learner's opinion as valuable. 53.2% of the respondents agreed that lack of higher-order learning (evaluation and synthesis) or internalization and practice of knowledge in on-line classes usually encourage rote memory among students to pass exams. More than half of the respondents (51.5%) of the respondents disagreed with one item: limited lecturer-student interrelationships make them believe absentee lecturers are more admired. The implication

here is that compared to universities organizational structure and interrelationships, more students are affected negatively by on-line aspects. For example, 43.5% of respondents indicated that lack of face-to-face interactions makes them feel inferior to their colleagues, which means there is a lot of groundwork to be covered to reduce the negative influence in on-line learning.

Null hypothesis 4: Christian universities' cultural orientation has no significant influence on students' worldview, results indicated that more than half of the respondents supported 10/16 statements. 50.5% of the respondents disagreed that campus orientation that students must always follow what their lecturers teach if they want to succeed in exams, makes one think lecturers do not respect the God who sees all people as equal. 52.8% of the respondents disagreed those campus inclinations in handling grievances incline their hearts to think that when they are wronged, the only reasonable way is to get even with the offender. 64.5% of the respondents agreed that the manner in which their campus handles problems incline their hearts to think that they can still find a way out where others normally give up. 50.1% disagreed that campus usual way of addressing social ills incline their hearts to believe other people—not the individual are liable for one's difficulties. 52.5% disagreed that emphasis on grades as the only thing that determines students' success inline their hearts to believe that cheating to succeed in exams is wise. 53.4% of the respondents disagreed that lecturers' positioning in front of the classroom influences them to think that there can never be several answers to one problem except the one given by the lecturer. 68, 4% of the respondents agreed that campus obsession with assessment standardization make them look for fact-oriented information when learning.

Compared to other university hidden curriculum related aspects, cultural orientation seems to affect students less. For example the highest percentage of students who disagreed with the negatively stated items like: campus obsession with assessment standardization make them look for fact-oriented information when learning, was 68.4% while those who agreed with the positively stated items like the way the university handles problems incline my heart to think that I can still find a way out where others have given up was only 64.5%. This could imply that universities need to make their cultural orientations more positive so as to positively impact students more or it could mean that respondents were less careful when responding to the last set of items because they were already tired which means the instrument needs to be revised by reducing the number of items.

Research Result Discussions
The hidden curriculum as one outcome of educational organizations is a concept, if considered seriously by education policy makers, education planners and university professors could create a context that raises teaching-learning efficiency. The results in the present research revealed that universities' organizational structure significantly influences students' worldview and it should be taken seriously in addressing social challenges in the society. In this respect factors like responsive rules, appropriate assessment techniques, adequate physical space, proper educators' behaviors and provision of free thought discussions would greatly positively impact students' worldview.

Since educator were regarded as key in the teaching-learning process as developer of cognitive, affective and behavioral characteristics of students, it is paramount for them to choose relevant teaching strategies for nurturing positive social outcomes in students' worldview. Collaborative educational strategies as well as provision of conducive learning context as well as reducing students' seclusion and passivity would enhance students' holistic

worldview. This is because the character students' picture in their mind of their lecturers play a significant role in their interrelationships with the world including people which also influences their academic performance fundamentally improvement as well as work performance now and in the future. On the basis of this observation, a successful educator would be the one who regulates his or her behavior and teaching strategies based on their students' thought levels, emotions, social and cultural growth. It is, therefore, necessary for educators to seamlessly integrate the hidden curriculum with official curriculum to holistically nurture students. These findings are consistent with Amini and Rahimi (2014) findings which confirm the significant role played by teachers' teaching strategies and educators' behavior in shaping hidden curriculum. For example, if the educator rebukes weak students, in a sense he or she can reinforce negative attitudes in them leading to low confidence in the particular student's competencies and lack of hope to compensate for failures. Silver and Alexander (2007) observed that assessment strategies like tests and scoring methods for measuring students' academic performance should be put into focus of attention as elements entailing hidden educational values. The implication here is that inappropriate teaching and assessment strategies more often than not imposes punitive stress on students so that incorrect views to learning are shaped which could enhances mental stress and anxiety which in turn may disturb the process of learning and makes students not to enjoy their learning. This means assessment tasks should not in any way lower students' self-confidence or increase lack of hope to success so as to lower the potential of stress and anxiety in students.

In relation to educator-student interrelationships, it should be noted that learners implicitly learn values, norms and particular thinking patterns (worldviews) from their lecturers. After recording their lecturers' behavior in their minds, students try to interpret and internalize them and because the educator-student interaction is a key factor in students' learning, educators must create an open atmosphere with more independence and freedom for students. They should also provide adequate opportunities for students' active contribution through which students' self-confidence and learning would flourish. Active educational strategies like problem-solving, discussion and classroom debates are believed to enhance students' self-esteem and positively transform their worldview. Fallah's research in 2013 found that learning institutions' rules and regulations, interpersonal relationships, teacher and student's interactions are among influential factors on students' learning.

In relation to physical space, it can be said that appropriate physical space creates positive feelings among students. This means dull educational settings without liveliness, inspiration and vision attractions more often than not inculcates in students the idea that students are passive empty-mind vessels to be filled by educators. This means it is important to provide necessary environmental contexts for students to emerge and to nourish their values, beliefs, emotions and character. This research finding corresponds with similar study findings of researchers like Taghipour and Ghaffari (2009) who found a significant relationship between hidden curriculum components like physical structure, encouragement and punishment mechanisms and disciplinary behavior of students. This means revising learning institutions rules and regulations, student-lecturer interrelationships, teaching strategies and cultural orientation, it is possible to replace negative thoughts in students with positive attitudes and reinforce students' self-confidence thus developing positive character.

It is also important to mention that classroom physical environment contributes significantly in nourishing critical thinking among students. For example, in a classroom that chairs are usually located in a direct row and behind each other, the students are likely to see the teacher

as the only source of all significant knowledge and see themselves and their classmates as recipients which leaves no space for critical thinking. This calls for teachers to amend the classroom situation and provide an atmosphere in which students can interact with their thoughts and other students' thoughts easily. This means thoughtful seating arrangement as well as conducive classroom atmosphere are likely to positively orientate students' worldview which in turn would avert passivity, hopelessness, superficiality, rote memorization and even exam cheating in students as well as enhance enthusiasm and excitement in learning and life in general among students.

In relation to present research findings it can be suggested that with respect to efficiency of hidden curriculum in various aspects of educational settings, it seems necessary that more precise attentions be given to the hidden curriculum by policy makers and higher education planners as well as professors so that the positive influences of the curriculum would be maximized while minimizing its negative effects in a way to help students enhance their holistic development, efficacy and efficiency. It is essential that necessary measures in creating appealing aesthetic and artistic aspects of classrooms and also the overall atmosphere of learning institutions to intensify positive impact of teaching-learning experiences while reducing negative impacts. This means amending dominant educational and administrative rules and regulations like reducing pervasive bureaucracy in many learning institutions may be a starting point in making it possible for students to soften and consequently revise their attitudes towards life in general and education programs in universities.

Conclusion
The concept of hidden curriculum suggests that although what happens in hidden curriculum is unpredictable and cannot be controlled by instructors and educators, its positive impact can be improved by taking the right steps. Therefore, considering factors like applying active teaching method, formative and summative assessment methods, appropriate physical space, rule and regulations proportional to students' needs, noting the positive impact of university instructors' behaviors and holding seats of free-thought can be fruitful in this regard.

Acknowledgement

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