

Significance of Human Rights Education in Developing Nations

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Abstract

The world has become a global village and values such as the upholding of human rights are shared globally. Human rights education promotes values, beliefs and attitudes that encourage all individuals to uphold their own rights and those of others. It develops an understanding of everyone's common responsibility to make human rights a reality in each community. One way of ensuring awareness of human rights is the introduction of human rights education in schools. In this paper the researcher explores the issue of human rights education and its importance in modern society. The researchers discuss ways in which human rights could be incorporated in the school curriculum. Reasons why governments in developing countries do not seem to embrace the introduction of human rights education are discussed. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations are given.

Keywords: United Nations, Human Rights, Curriculum, Universal Declaration, Education.

Introduction

Since the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations sixty-five years ago, ordinary people in most developing countries are still suffering from denial and abuse of the rights. Ignorance of many peoples' rights results in its denial and abuse. Human Rights were first articulated in 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). According to Flowers et al. (2000), human rights are those rights that belong to every individual man, woman, boy, girl, infant or elder simply because he or she is a human being. The principles of human rights are that they are universal and inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. Human rights are universal, meaning that no one has to earn or deserve human rights. The universality comes about from the realization that everyone is born with and possesses the same rights regardless of race, country, color, gender, religious, cultural or ethnic background.

Human rights are inalienable in the sense that they can never be taken away from an individual, that is, by virtue of being a human being one cannot lose these rights. Thus, no person may be divested of his or her human rights under clearly defined legal situations. Indivisibility means, one cannot be denied a right because one decides that it is less important or non-essential.

The interdependence of human rights is because all rights whether political, civil, social, cultural and economic are of equal importance and none can be fully enjoyed without others. Human rights are interdependent in that, all human rights are part of a complementary framework because each human right entails and depends on other human rights (Flowers et al., 2000). Violating one such right affects the exercise of other rights. For example, the right to life presupposes respect for the right to food and good standards of living.

Amnesty International (2009) reports that there is gross violation of human rights in most parts of the world. It reports that there is torture and abuse in at least 81 countries, unfair trials in at least 54 countries and restrictions in freedom of expression in at least 77 countries. This paints a gloomy picture of the upholding of human rights; as such violations are inconsistent with contents of the UDHR, which many countries have ratified. Vulnerable groups such as women and children are also marginalized in many ways, further showing violation of their rights. A sure way of ensuring that people are aware of their rights so that they can stand for them is to teach them about their rights. Teaching of human rights also ensures the nurturing of appropriate values consistent with the promotion of human rights.

History of human rights

Eckmann et al. (2009), declare that human rights are historical in nature. The notion that human beings have a set of inviolable rights simply on the grounds of being human beings began during the era of the renaissance (Eckmann et al., 2009).

The idea of human rights as we know them today emerged stronger after the second world war. Contemporary international human rights were marked with the UDHR, which led to the codification, at international level, of human rights (Flowers, 2003). The United Nations has played a leading role in defining and advocating human rights. Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations declares “promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedom for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion” (United Nations Charter, 1945; article 1 paragraph 3). The UDHR was the first document listing 30 rights which are entitled to everyone. The first preamble of UDHR reflects the “recognition of the inherent and inalienable rights of all member of the human family”. The UDHR emphasized a set of standard rights for all people, everywhere, whether male or female, black or white, communist or capitalist, victorious or vanquished, rich or poor, for members of the minority or majority community. According to Ishay (2004), the UDHR can be regarded as the most important document created in the 20th century and as the accepted world standards for human rights. As a result, the human rights have been codified in various international and regional treaties and instruments that have been ratified by most countries and represent today the only universally recognized value system. Article 1 of the UDHR proclaims that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood”.

Universal declaration of human rights

THE Universal Declaration of Human Rights was one of the first major achievements of the United Nations. The declaration of the instrument was aimed at exerting a massive impact on people’s lives all over the world. Adoptions of the UDHR were done on the 10th of December in 1948 (Horn, 2004). The UDHR was adopted on the belief that human rights are common to every being. According to Vieira de Mello (2004), the declaration recognizes that the “inherent dignity of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”, and is connected to the recognition of the fundamental rights to which every human being aspires, namely the right to life, liberty and security of persons, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries, asylum from persecution, the right to own property, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the right to education, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to freedom from torture and degrading treatment.

The rights outlined in the declaration are meant to be enjoyed by all inhabitants of the global village that encompass women, men, children and all groups of people in the society. Following the UDHR a number of human rights instruments were produced and these constitute the international law of human rights. Vieira de Mello (2004), reveals that these instruments are the International Covenant on economic, social and cultural rights of 1966, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966. A combination of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two Covenants constitutes the International Bill of Human Rights are the pillars of human rights enforcement.

Important human rights instruments

1. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPCG). The CPCG was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1948, as General Assembly Resolution. All participating countries were advised to prevent and punish actions of genocide in war and in peacetime.
2. The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (CRSR). The CRSR is a United Nations multilateral treaty that defines who is a refugee, and sets out the rights of individuals who are granted asylum and the responsibilities of nations that grant asylum.
3. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Article 1 of CERD defines racial discrimination as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life (International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination 1966). The above definition reiterates the fundamental position of human rights, that all human beings deserve equal treatment by virtue of their humanness. Therefore, there should be discrimination based on race or any other factor.
4. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the CEDAW reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights and the dignity and value of the human being and in the equal rights of men and women. The countries that are signatories to CEDAW undertake to ensure equal rights of men and women and to enjoy all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. The promotion of equality of rights of men and women becomes the main thrust of CEDAW.

The introduction of Human Rights Education in schools ensures the conscientization of students on the need for equality. Children should not just be taught about equality but it should be embedded in the curriculum by making it gender sensitive. This calls for serious consideration of gender equality in curriculum content, instructional materials, assessment, co-curricular activities and all forms of hidden curriculum.

United Nations declaration on human rights education and training

The teaching of Human Rights Education (HRE) is informed by the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011). The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training states that, “human rights education comprises all educational, training, information, awareness, raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for, and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Human rights education contributes to the

prevention of human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills, understanding, and by developing their attitudes and behaviors to empower them to contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights (United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, 2011, paragraph 1).

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training also asserts that human rights education encompasses education about human rights, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection through human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners. In addition, it encompasses human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others (United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education, 2011, Article 2 paragraph 2). This shows a multipronged approach to the teaching of human rights, with the most important objective being to empower learners on human rights.

Importance of human rights education

The aims of a Human Rights Education (HRE) curriculum is to enhance knowledge and understanding of human rights, foster attitudes of tolerance, respect, solidarity and responsibility. In addition, develop awareness of how human rights can be translated into social reality as developing skills for protecting human rights (Panda, 2001). The most important one is the inculcating in students, the values and attitudes of human rights resulting in the promotion and protection of the rights.

According to Eckmann et al. (2009), human rights education does not simply aim to teach students whether children, adolescents, or adults, about human rights norms and laws. It also tries to promote appreciation for human rights as a fundamental ethical and legal basis of society and teach the value of human rights enforcement. Human rights education also fosters the attitude and behavior to uphold human rights for all members of society. Effective human rights education not only provides knowledge about human rights and the mechanism that protects them, but also develops the skills needed to promote, defend and apply human rights in daily life (UN Decade for Human Rights Education 1995-2004).

Eckmann et al. (2009), assert that HRE sheds light on the important protections achieved by human rights, and documents the tragic outcome when the ideal was largely absent or abandoned. Thus, HRE is important in as far as it contributes to the prevention of human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills and understanding, and by developing their attitudes and behaviors to empower them to contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights (United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education, 2011, Article 2 paragraph 1).

In this sense, HRE contributes to the long-term prevention of human rights abuses and violent conflicts, the promotion of equality and sustainable development and enhancement of participating in decision making process within a democratic system (Commission on Human Rights resolution, 2004/71, 21 April 2004). HRE promotes an understanding of the complex global forces that create abuses, as well as the ways in which abuses can be abolished and avoided. Human rights education engages the heart as well as the mind.

Today's societies are socially and culturally diverse. They are confronted with crises and conflicts linked to increasing globalization. As a result of the heterogeneity of contemporary societies, traditional religious, philosophical, and national narratives can no longer guarantee a normative consensus. Within

this context, human rights education also aims to create a baseline consensus that enables students and citizens to engage with controversial social and political issues. It provides multicultural and historical perspectives on the universal struggle for justice and dignity. Human rights education aims at developing an understanding of our common responsibility to make human rights a reality in every society. Human rights education helps to develop the communication skills and informed critical thinking essential to a democracy. According to Bokova and Pillay (2012), human rights education activities should be practical, relating human rights to learners' real-life experience and enabling them to build on human rights principles found in their own cultural context.

Even though the implementation of human rights education continues to lag behind the goals envisioned by international human rights programs and initiatives, human rights education has assumed an unprecedented importance on both the national and international level (Eckmann et al., 2009). It examines human rights issues without bias and from diverse perspectives through a variety of educational practices promotes democratic principles. Moreover, human rights education itself is now recognized as a fundamental human right (Bokova and Pillay, 2012).

Conclusion

Human rights are very important human entitlements as enshrined in the UDHR. Most countries in the world are signatories to their UDHR and several other treaties that promote and safeguard different forms of rights. All human beings should be aware of their rights in order to defend them and be aware of instances where these are violated. Educating the general populace, particularly the young, on human rights is critical in establishing a human rights culture in the world. Sadly, some governments, despite being signatories to various UN treaties and conventions on human rights deliberately violate people's rights and do not promote the teaching of HRE.

Recommendations

1. Human rights education should be taken seriously in schools from primary to tertiary levels. Deliberate curricula should be in place and human rights must be taught.
2. Teachers should be trained and retrained in human rights education in order to adequately equip them with knowledge, skills and values necessary for the facilitation of its education.
3. School systems and cultures should be consistent with the promotion of human rights.
4. There is need for concerted efforts for community outreach programs on the teaching of human rights in ways clear even to the illiterate people in African as well as other societies.
5. The United Nations should have measures to hold governments accountable for programs meant to ensure the teaching of human rights education in and out of schools.
6. The media should also assist governments in correctly informing people of their different rights and how to uphold and preserve such rights.

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