



Education and Human Rights

The Evolution of Human Rights and Their Socio-Cultural Implications

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Abstract

The principle that all individuals are born with inherent freedoms and equal in dignity and entitlement to certain rights, regardless of factors such as religion, race, caste, gender, or nationality, is a widely accepted understanding of human rights. These rights are universal and serve as a reflection of the essential dignity of every human being. Central to the concept and movements surrounding human rights is the need to raise awareness against exploitation and oppression, as well as to mobilize efforts to realize these fundamental rights. Therefore, a primary contemporary concern revolves around the question of how to ensure that each citizen is informed about and capable of advocating for human rights, both for the betterment of individuals and the broader community. Education emerges as a critical instrument in achieving this objective. It is imperative to recognize Human Rights Education (HRE) as a purposeful, participatory approach designed to empower individuals, groups, and communities by fostering knowledge, skills, and attitudes aligned with internationally recognized principles. This paper underscores the idea that if we are genuinely concerned about our society and the preservation of its culture, we must educate our society about its human rights.

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Introduction

The inherent dignity and equality of all human beings at birth form the bedrock of human rights, representing fundamental values that transcend the boundaries of diverse civilizations. Our world is characterized by a rich tapestry of cultures, each with its unique way of life, customs, and adaptations to the environment. However, amidst this diversity, there exists a common thread, a set of shared principles that underpin the core of human civilization and rights. These rights hold a place of profound significance in the hearts of individuals worldwide, transcending geographical and cultural divides.

Within the realm of human rights, we encounter a distinction between inherent rights, those innate to our very humanity, and legal rights, which are codified within the legal systems of nations and the international community. The term

‘human rights,’ as expounded in a UNESCO publication titled “Human Rights” (1996), underscores the idea that every person is born with an equal measure of dignity and entitlement to rights. These rights are not mere legal constructs; they are moral claims rooted in the essence of being human.

Over time, these moral claims have been translated into concrete legal rights through the evolving processes of societal development, both at the national and international levels. This evolution reflects the ongoing commitment of societies to uphold and safeguard the principles encapsulated within the concept of “human rights.”

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a) A Holistic Perspective on Human Rights: Individual Rights, Free from Interference

Human rights are not merely confined to individual rights, which are the entitlements possessed by each person without undue interference from others. These rights emphasize the intrinsic value and dignity of the individual.

b) Social Rights: Rights Held by Collectives and Defined by the State

In addition to individual rights, human rights also encompass social rights, which pertain to groups and are defined and safeguarded by the state. These rights recognize the importance of collective well-being within society.

c) International and Global Rights: Universal Rights Enforcing the Idea of Human Unity

Furthermore, human rights extend to international and global dimensions, emphasizing the universality of these rights and reinforcing the concept of the unity of humanity. They transcend borders and apply to all groups, underscoring our shared human identity.

It is essential to acknowledge that rigidly categorizing human rights into distinct groups is not always practical, as many rights intersect and overlap. Macfarlane aptly asserts that all human rights possess a universal character, belonging to every individual, irrespective of factors such as caste, creed, historical context, or prevailing circumstances. These rights uphold the principle of individual equality and

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are of paramount importance, as they cannot be arbitrarily deprived.

Human rights are not mere theoretical constructs; they hold practical significance and are enforceable in various ways. Given their paramount nature, they serve as a potent source of inspiration, contributing to the well-being, happiness, and contentment of individuals. In essence, human rights ensure that the fundamental needs, desires, values, ideals, and aspirations of individuals receive the recognition they deserve, a fundamental characteristic of any democratic society.

Evolution

Throughout history, numerous prominent poets, philosophers, politicians, and thinkers tirelessly advocated for the recognition of human dignity and equality. It was an era when ideologies like Mussolini's Fascism in Italy and Hitler's Nazism in Germany demonstrated flagrant disregard for human rights. Similarly, in the communist regime of the USSR, individual freedoms were often sidelined. Amidst these tumultuous times, the Second World War played a pivotal role in reshaping the discourse on human rights. In 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt, the President of the United States, boldly declared that the four essential freedoms – freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear – were indispensable guarantees for global peace.

This historical backdrop set the stage for the eventual declaration of human rights. On December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This significant document was crafted over a span of two years, from January 1947 to December 1948, culminating in its adoption by the General Assembly. Since then, December 10 has been celebrated worldwide as Human Rights Day.

Originally consisting of 18 member states, the Human Rights Commission has since expanded to include 53 members who convene annually in Geneva to address human rights issues, develop and amend international standards, and provide recommendations. While the Universal Declaration itself does not possess the legally binding force of a treaty, it has achieved universal recognition and acceptance. This foundational declaration encapsulates human rights in 30 succinct articles, all grounded in the fundamental principle that human rights derive from the "inherent dignity" of every individual.

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Social and Cultural Implications

Now, let's delve into the crucial role that education plays in not only imparting and safeguarding human rights but also in preserving socio-cultural unity and promoting the well-being of both individuals and societies.

Education serves as the linchpin for the development and advancement of fundamental human rights. It stands as

a primary tool for the promotion of human rights values. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights underscores this role, stating that "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for Human Rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations."

Education is a lifelong process that encompasses individuals at all stages of development and across all societal strata. It instills in people the imperative of respecting the dignity of others and equips them with the means to ensure such respect is upheld in all societies. In essence, human rights education emerges as an indispensable component of an entire society's fabric, serving as a prerequisite for harmonious and peaceful coexistence.

The significance of human rights education is underscored by the contemporary global landscape, as evident in reports such as the "World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy."

In 1993, UNESCO and the United Nations convened the International Congress on Education for Human Rights and Democracy in Montreal, Canada. This congress led to the adoption of a world plan of action, emphasizing the following principles:

These principles epitomize the commitment to fostering a culture of respect for human rights through education, emphasizing its pivotal role in shaping societies that cherish human dignity, democracy, and peace. It states that:

1. Democratic Values and Women's Education for Human Rights and Democracy

The enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms is closely intertwined with the presence of democratic values. It is crucial to emphasize the significance of women's education in the context of human rights and democracy, warranting special attention and focus.

2. Democratization of the Educational Process for Empowerment

Education, in itself, should adopt a democratic and participatory approach, empowering both individuals and civil society to enhance their quality of life.

3. Enhancing Implementation of the World Plan of Action (March 1993) and the United Nations Public Information Campaign for Human Rights

To effectively implement the World Plan of Action established in March 1993 and the United Nations Public Information Campaign for Human Rights, substantial efforts must be directed towards diversifying information sources, documentation, teaching materials, and learning resources. These efforts should be tailored to meet the practical requirements of teaching and training at various educational levels. Equally important is the reinforcement of existing national, regional, and international information networks, which can be achieved through:

- a) Facilitating inexpensive and accessible access to updated information.
- b) Implementing straightforward computerization and search systems.
- c) Identifying, establishing, and strengthening national, regional, and international research centers and clearinghouses focused on human rights information.

4. Promoting Equality and Preventing Conflicts Through Human Rights Education

Human Rights Education plays a pivotal role in promoting equality, preventing conflicts, and averting violations, thereby contributing to the creation of a society where everyone is valued and respected.

5. The Global Significance of Human Rights Education

Human Rights Education is a global imperative aimed at imparting skills, disseminating knowledge, and shaping attitudes that foster a universal culture of Human Rights. This becomes particularly vital when considered through the "4 A" framework:

- **Availability:** Ensuring that education, as a social and economic right, is accessible to all.
- **Accessibility:** Making every effort to facilitate access to education for all.
- **Acceptability:** Guaranteeing a minimum standard of education quality.
- **Adaptability:** Requiring schools to respond to the unique needs of each individual child, aligning with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Integrating Human Rights and Democracy Into Education

Recognizing that human rights cannot exist in isolation, adaptability within education involves safeguarding all human rights while simultaneously enhancing them through the educational process. An integral aspect of this effort is the inclusion of Human Rights and Democracy Education in the curricula at all levels of the educational system:

Establishing a comprehensive and widespread curriculum that permeates various subject disciplines and consistently addresses Human Rights and Democracy Education throughout a person's foundational education. The themes of rights, responsibilities, and democratic processes should be seamlessly integrated into most, if not all, areas of study and instilled as core values within school life and the socialization process. Top of Form

The focus of Human Rights Education should encompass various levels of the educational system and related organizations, including:

- Pre-primary education
- Primary education
- Secondary education

- Vocational training
- Post-secondary colleges and universities
- Teacher training and education programs
- Teacher organizations and unions
- School boards and other levels of education administration
- Parents' organizations

However, there are several obstacles that need to be addressed to ensure the success of Human Rights Education initiatives. These include:

- a) The lack of political will among certain parties to prioritize human rights education.
- b) Insufficient involvement of target groups in the development and utilization of educational materials, processes, and policies.
- c) The need for more extensive training for many participants involved in human rights education.
- d) A lack of coordination and cooperation among national, regional, and international levels in implementing human rights education programs.
- e) The tendency to conflate human rights education with legal training, potentially limiting its broader impact.
- f) The need for a multi-disciplinary approach to effectively address human rights issues.

Recognizing the significant contribution of Human Rights Education, it has been emphasized that schools and communities should collaborate to ensure the promotion of human rights:

- Encouraging interaction among children and youth from diverse ethnic backgrounds.
- Incorporating human rights education within and beyond school curricula.
- Promoting efforts to maintain peace and conflict resolution.
- Developing an understanding of cultural diversities and fostering respect for them.
- Placing greater emphasis on attitude formation.
- Encouraging respect for the ecological and natural environment.
- Promoting a critical and open-minded approach to issues.
- Developing approaches to problem-solving at the local level while adopting a multi-disciplinary approach.
- Giving preference to certain programs in school activities, including oral programs like radio broadcasts, lectures, group discussions, debates, seminars, and written programs such as essay writing competitions, storytelling, and poetry composition, all centred around Human Rights Education.

In summary, the true meaning and purpose of education lie in liberation. Education and awareness-building about human rights lead individuals toward freedom. The World

Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (1993) concluded that human rights are best protected through democracy and development.

This presents a challenge for humanity to construct a peaceful, democratic, prosperous, and just world. Constant and active education and learning are essential to meet this challenge. If we aspire to establish a new and equitable system, we must provide equality in all aspects.

In this context, Human Rights Education plays a critical role in influencing countries and their cultures to respond creatively to the challenges of human rights, giving it the priority it deserves.

In an interdependent and interconnected world, fundamental freedoms are vital for our survival with dignity and self-respect. It is hoped that committed nations, individual groups,

every sector of society, and the international community at large will work together to ensure the full success of Human Rights Education for the benefit of future generations.

In conclusion, while progress has been made, there is still much work to be done to ensure that every citizen enjoys their human rights, and education stands as the most powerful tool in this endeavour.

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