



Transforming Education: Safeguarding Human Rights in India

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ABSTRACT

Education is not a privilege. It is a fundamental human right. Yet, education is undervalued even at the best of times. We often fail to bridge the gap between the right to education and the realization of all human rights. As noted by the Nobel-winning economist Amartya Sen, we have failed to give ‘this massive potential in transforming human lives’ the attention it deserves. Education is a fundamental human right. It is the key to unlocking all other human rights – be it social, economic or cultural rights, or political and civil rights. The right to employment, the right to health, freedom of expression, the right to a free and fair trial, and the overarching prohibition against discrimination – all of these rights rest on the foundation of a quality education: to be able to claim, enjoy, protect and respect these rights. This is ever more important in countries affected by armed conflict, where the rule of law often is replaced by the rule by force. This study focuses on how education plays its role by safeguarding human rights among citizen.

Introduction:

Education plays a crucial role in promoting and safeguarding human rights by raising awareness, fostering understanding, and empowering individuals to advocate for their rights. It equips people with the knowledge and skills to recognize human rights violations, understand their own rights, and take



action to defend them. Education also helps build a culture of respect for human rights and promotes a more just and equitable society.

Objectives: This study has the following objectives.

1. To be familiar with the concepts of Human rights education and related terms.
2. To point out the growing significance of Human Rights Education.
3. To find out the crucial roles of Education in safeguarding human rights.
4. To find out the learning conditions of human rights education.
5. To find out the teaching strategies of human rights education.

Human Rights:

Human rights are inherent to all human beings, regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. They cannot be given or taken away.

Human rights are the foundation for freedom, justice and peace in the world.

They are formally and universally recognised by all countries in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948, UDHR). Since the adoption of the UDHR, many treaties have been adopted by states to reaffirm and guarantee these rights legally.

International human rights law sets out the obligations of states to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights for all. These obligations impose specific duties upon states, regardless of their political, economic, and cultural systems.

All human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent, and interrelated (Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, 1993, para. 5).

Equality and non-discrimination are foundational and cross-cutting principles in international human rights law. This means that all human rights apply to everyone. There are 4A in human rights.

Available – Education is free and there is adequate infrastructure and trained teachers able to support the delivery of education.



Accessible – The education system is non-discriminatory and accessible to all, and positive steps are taken to include the most marginalised.

Acceptable – The content of education is relevant, non-discriminatory and culturally appropriate, and of quality; schools are safe and teachers are professional.

Adaptable – Education evolves with the changing needs of society and challenges inequalities, such as gender discrimination; education adapts to suit locally specific needs and contexts.

Why human rights education matters?

Despite significant progress, human rights and fundamental freedoms are violated every day around the world. These violations range from barriers to educational access, discrimination based on gender, race, and religion, to racism, hate speech and violent conflicts. For example, 2023 marked the 13th time peacefulness has deteriorated in the last 15 years, and 79 countries witnessed increased levels of conflict.

Human rights violations are an affront to just, peaceful and inclusive societies and require urgent, collective and sustained efforts at all levels. Education lies at the centre of these efforts to achieve human rights. Effective human rights education inculcates knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and attitudes that encourage all individuals to uphold their own rights and those of others.

Why is the right to education fundamental?

Both individuals and society benefit from the right to education. It is fundamental for human, social, and economic development and a key element to achieving lasting peace and sustainable development. It is a powerful tool in developing the full potential of everyone and ensuring human dignity, and in promoting individual and collective wellbeing.

Learning Dimensions of Human Rights Education: To understand the content, methodology and aims of human rights education, learning can be divided into three levels- distinguishing between knowledge through information, awareness and values through emotion and action through skills.

- Cognitive learning is the level of gaining knowledge and understanding. This level places little emphasis on the development of communication, conflict resolution and action. Though being an important starting point, the cognitive level does not necessarily lead to action.
- The emotional and awareness level is when learning transforms values, attitudes and behaviour through self-respect and critical thinking. Knowledge is a prerequisite for awareness, raised by a process of



contextualising every day examples, experiences and reflections. Knowledge and skills have to be supported by human rights values, to contribute to a right-respecting democratic society. Values and attitudes are developed through experience. Acting according human rights values implies the ability to act in balance with one's own interests and the interests of the community as a whole.

- The active level is when students acquire skills, initiative, and drive to take action for the promotion of human rights through the formal legal system, NGOs, and in their daily lives. When students gain a sense of responsibility, they are motivated to become active. A focus on students' self-esteem is important in this dimension. This, along with personal experiences and introduction to the reality of other people's lives, makes people into active participants and reactors to injustice. The level entails giving students possibilities to act, which makes inclusion of local communities valuable in the learning process. For human rights education to be successful, all three levels have to be included in the teaching.

Teaching about, through, and for Human Rights:

“Information is not knowledge. The only source of knowledge is experience.”

Albert Einstein

Human rights education can be explained as teaching about, through and for human rights. Teaching about human rights provides a theoretical framework for human rights concepts through an introduction to human rights law and history. Students need to understand why liberties require legal structures and also carry a set of responsibilities. Learning about human rights is to accept the human rights framework for negotiation and behaviour within the family, the school, the local, and global community. This must be supported by the way students learn. Teaching through human rights makes the educators into role models, reflecting the values being taught in rights-respecting classrooms where human rights values and principles are supported by a democratic, inclusive, and participatory teaching style. Students need to be active and interact, as they only learn to take responsibility if they are given the liberty to do so. This dimension is a challenge for the whole school since human rights and democracy become the schoolcommunity's pedagogical guideline and the lens through which all of the elements of school governance are judged. Surveys suggest there is a connection between the level of democracy experienced at school and the level of knowledge of human rights and participatory citizenship. Teaching through human rights affects attitudes and values, in getting a sense of responsibility for one's own actions in being committed to social change, in having an open mind, in appreciating diversity, and in understanding solidarity, dignity, and justice.



Teaching for human rights is encouraging and supporting students to take action for human rights. Learning for human rights means developing skills supportive of human rights values, i.e. active listening, dialogical communication, openness and tolerance towards different opinions, the capacity to advocate for both own and other people's rights, critical thinking, and the ability to analyze information, engage in teamwork and non-violent conflict resolution. As explained by Confucius, this is where the educational efforts come together in that "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."

Concrete exercises to facilitate the various learning processes can be brainstorming, case studies, role-plays, debating, interviews and field trips. Brainstorming encourages participation and creativity. Case studies develop analytical, problem solving and corporation skills, which inspire to discussions, debate, and further research. Role-plays and debate are means to foster empathy and understanding for other perspectives.

Interviews can personalize human rights and expand the knowledge of human rights issues in the community. Field trips can create a connection between schools and local communities, and ideally give students opportunities to act. Furthermore, art can be a way of making abstract concepts concrete and can affect attitudes by involving emotions.

A Culture of Human Rights : Culture is a "learned phenomenon; it is acquired, for the most part, through the ordinary processes of growing up and participating in the daily life of a particular ethnic collective." Culture is "manifested in a set of values and norms which help to build up institutions and transform a society to behave according to it." A culture can be explained as a way of constructing identity and understanding differences.

As stated above, the main aim of human rights education is to create a culture of human rights. Creating a human rights culture means creating a culture based on knowledge and understanding, awareness and empowerment of and through human rights.

Essential elements of a human rights culture are respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, valuing human dignity and cultural diversity, developing attitudes and behaviour leading to respect for self and others, promoting gender equality and empowerment, leading to active citizenship and democracy. A culture of human rights encompasses knowledge and awareness of human rights, integration of marginalised groups, a sense of individual responsibility and a self-reflecting education



system where learning is based on dialogue. The basis of such culture is exploring what it means to be human and creating an understanding for the concept of dignity.

A more detailed look at the role of education:

1. Raising Awareness and Understanding:

Knowledge about human rights: Education provides individuals with the fundamental knowledge about human rights, including their scope, principles, and mechanisms for protection.

Understanding of human rights violations: By understanding the different types of human rights violations, individuals can better identify and report them.

Promoting tolerance and respect: Education can foster tolerance and respect for diversity by exposing individuals to different cultures, perspectives, and experiences.

2. Empowerment and Advocacy:

Critical thinking and analysis: Education develops critical thinking skills, enabling individuals to analyze situations, identify injustices, and advocate for their rights.

Skills for advocacy and participation: Education can equip individuals with the skills to participate in democratic processes, raise their voices, and advocate for change.

Empowerment to claim rights: Knowledge of rights empowers individuals to claim their rights and seek redress when they are violated.

3. Building a Culture of Human Rights:

Promoting values of peace and tolerance: Education can instill values of peace, tolerance, and respect for human rights, which are essential for building a just and equitable society.

Promoting social justice: By raising awareness and empowering individuals, education can play a role in promoting social justice and equality.

Preventing human rights violations: Education can help prevent human rights violations by fostering a culture of respect and understanding.

Human Rights Education Models: The original HRE Models generally associated program typologies with strategies for social change and human rights activism. The theory of change in these original



models was linked with the learning process within formal and nonformal HRE programming. Thus the first “link” in the logic chain leading from HRE to taking action to reduce human rights violations is the individual (learner) and their experience in the HRE program. In the Values and Awareness Model, there is no specific theory of change in place in relation to social change. The goals of socialization may affirm the existing human rights discourse and provide learners with knowledge of human rights. However, the agency of the learner is not encouraged nor empowerment to take action to reduce human rights violations.

In the Accountability Model, the theory of change was linked with the individual and his or her professional role. A successful HRE experience was intended to influence learners’ knowledge, attitude and actions so that they would respect and promote human rights standards in their professional roles. The theory of change here is linked in part with the quality of the HRE learning experience and the disposition of the learner to apply the goals of HRE within the very specific roles and responsibilities they carried out in their work lives. The related theory of change is that learners who successfully absorb the goals of the HRE program and find them relevant for their work life may have changed behaviors that result in the reduction of human rights violations. Law enforcement officials may be less inclined to single out minority group members and they may restrain themselves against use of excessive use of violence. Journalists may be more likely to report on human rights violations and to characterize them as such. Each of these behaviors, to the degree that they are associated with participation in an HRE program, can be seen as part of a logic chain between HRE and improved realization of human rights. In this approach, HRE methodologies that incorporate critical reflection on one’s own work and capacity development in relation to the application of human rights norms to work responsibilities are key.

In the original Transformation Model, the HRE theory of change is quite prominent. In this approach, the HRE methodologies are associated with transformative and emancipatory learning (Bajaj, 2011; Keet, 2010). HRE methodologies incorporate critical pedagogy and involve a critical reflection on society and conditions that result in injustice. This internal process can be a transformative one for those who have internalized oppression and have a “deficit” resulting from experiences of human rights violations. Thus transformative learning and emancipatory learning – related to critical pedagogy – can bring about profound change in the individual learner. The theory of change is HRE leading to personal transformation, resulting in taking action to eliminate human rights violations. The result is not only the cultivation of agency but specifically its application to reforming relationships and structures so that they are more equal, non-discriminating, participatory and consistent with human rights norms. As mentioned earlier, such changes might take place in the private domain (among family and friends) as well as in the



public domain (in one's community and also including human rights activism).⁷ Thus within the Transformation Model, I locate a theory of change that is explicitly oriented towards both personal and social change.

Conclusion:

Education is the great enabler, but today, in many cases, it is also the great divider. This is a universal challenge, most intense in emergency settings and developing countries. In developed countries, education disparities that are often related to income, race and gender are reinforcing privilege and further entrenching poverty. Across these different contexts, the impacts are greatest on those who are already marginalized or disadvantaged, particularly adolescent girls and people with disabilities. Young people and adults alike report that education does not equip them with the knowledge, experience, skills, or values needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Learning continues to underplay skills, including problem solving, critical thinking and empathy. Employers complain of a major skills mismatch while many adults are left with little or no access to affordable training and re-skilling opportunities. Teachers are often poorly trained, undervalued, and underpaid, and are held back by outdated roles, methods, and tools of instruction. So human rights education is a driving force for building peaceful and just societies; it contributes to the prevention of human rights violations and abuses and promotes equal development outcomes.

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