

Students' Awareness of Human Rights Education at Higher Secondary School level



Praveen Bobby Binjha

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Ravenshaw University, College Square Cuttack Pin 753003, Odisha

ABSTRACT: Human rights education is an integral part of the right to education. The concept of human rights is about knowledge of rights and freedom with respect for the right of all. Education is also a right of every single individual and it is a necessary tool to empower, and develop skills and attitudes, to promote equality, dignity, and respect for all. Human rights education provides a fair understanding of the structure of injustice on the basis of cultural, economical, and social discrimination at various levels of caste, gender, etc. Possibly the knowledge of own rights enhances the sense of self and respect for all. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the levels of awareness of these rights amongst students of higher secondary school levels. The study followed the descriptive survey design method and stratified random sampling techniques were adopted to select the sample. A self-developed awareness scale and focus group discussion were used to collect data. The data were analyzed by using simple percentile and content analysis. The findings of the study indicated that many of the students are aware of fundamental human rights while limited awareness about the right to education as a human right and its provisions. The study recommended that programs should be organized to create awareness of human rights education and the role of various organizations in the protection of the right of a human. Because human rights education could create opportunities to raise critical questions on the violation of rights related to a child, education, injustice, etc.

KEYWORDS: Human Right Education, Awareness, Higher Secondary School student

BACKGROUND

Every living being has a right to live peacefully. Rapid changes in the present world lead to changes in human values, beliefs, and behavior (Piršl et al., 2007), culture, thought, and action. Respecting and valuing the right of every human is of utmost necessity in this changing world. Somewhere and somehow the right of humans is violated by another human. According to United Nations, “Human rights are universal legal guarantees protecting individuals and groups against action and omissions that interfere with fundamental freedoms, entitlements, and human dignity.

Human rights education is an integral part of the right to education. According to the International Human Rights instrument “Human right education is defined as education, training, and information aimed at building a universal culture of human rights through the sharing of knowledge, imparting of skills and molding of attitude to prompt action directed at strengthening respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, tolerance, equality, and peace, among individuals, within societies, and among nations”.

The concept of human rights is about knowledge of rights and freedom in respect for the rights of all. Education is also a right of every single individual and it is a necessary tool to empower, and develop skills and attitudes, to promote equality, dignity, and respect for all. According to Amnesty International human rights education is a process that anyone and anywhere can undertake at any age to learn about their own human rights. According to Emmert and Eur (2011) human right education should be the basic part of the educational system and the teaching the basic principle of non-discrimination and the fundamental rights and freedoms that every human being has these rights and freedom. This may lead to a better understanding of the dignity and respect of every human being. Stellmacher and Sommer (2008) suggested that even short-time human rights education can increase the knowledge about human rights and enhance positive attitude and commitment concerning human rights. The United Nations general assembly has proclaimed human rights is a universal and common standard of achievement for all people and for all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of the society shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedom.

Schools and education are one of the most sensitive and important issues for the transmission of cultural knowledge and the development of attitudes toward one's own and other groups, as well as towards civil society, human rights, and public life in general (Piršl et al., 2007). Human rights education provides a fair understanding of the structure of injustice on the basis of cultural, economical, and social discrimination at various levels of caste, gender, etc. Olanrewaju (2020) urges that stakeholders in the human

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right sector should the approaches of massive sensitization campaign using native language to promote human rights concepts. Possibly the knowledge of own rights enhances the sense of self and respect for all. Respecting, preventing, protecting, and fulfilling the rights of every individual will strengthen society. This value inculcates among students in the school as well as on home premises. The active role of school administration and management should orient the students about the value of respecting and protecting. Issues like discrimination, prejudice, poverty, hunger, and injustice (Zain-Al-Dien, 2015) to this age group will better understand and take steps to disseminate in society. However, De Kort (2018) found that the basic information on human rights is lacking, despite ample opportunities to integrate theme and shows worrisome is the conveyance of potential misinformation about human rights due to the chosen formulation of human rights.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Awareness about human rights is the way to educate people to protect and promote individual rights. Many studies have been conducted to explore and justify the issues and problems of human rights in different contexts. The following studies so far reviewed to rationalize the present problem:

Begum (2021) compared the perception of human rights education between male and female students and found difference in perception in between male and female students.

Zain-al-Dien (2015) conducted a perception study on human rights education in secondary school students and found there is a significant difference in gender and department but no significant difference in the types of schools on human rights education. In his case study (Shepherd, 2014) found that a lack of human rights education leads to violations of human rights in the community. Agharuwhe (2013) in his study suggested that human rights education should be part of school subjects so that students will get more understanding of human rights their protection and promotion. Bedir and Arsian (2013) found secondary school students perceived positive human rights and peace education. Çayır and Bağlı (2011) found that human rights education at the secondary school level has had little impact in empowering students or in facilitating them to consider their own or others' human rights as an integral part of their lives. Kepenekci (2005) concluded from his study that at the elementary level human rights education is mainly for informative purposes and courses are not effective based on human rights education. Nava et.al (2005) in their sample survey on human rights awareness among secondary school students and suggested more emphasis on teaching human rights in teaching as a set of concepts rather than a practice.

From the research studies, the findings suggested that the practice of human rights education should be given emphasis at the school level so that the students get familiar with their rights, their protection, promotion, and prevention of rights in case of violation. Awareness of human rights education will empower the individual to minimize the violation of human rights. Educating students about human rights is of utmost necessity to empower them to respect or consider the rights of others and stop the violation of human rights. Human rights education in the present time is a need of the hour. There are many constitutional provisions and legal support for human rights at national and international levels, but awareness and integration in daily life are very important. Thus, the investigator determined to conduct exploratory research to know the awareness level of human rights of students at the higher secondary level.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.To study the awareness level of human rights education amongst higher secondary school students.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. What is the students' understanding of human rights education?
2. What is the students' understanding of the role and responsibilities of human rights instruments and institutions?
3. How can a human rights violation can be protected and prevented or minimized?

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study followed the descriptive survey design method and a random sampling technique was adopted to select the sample. Ninety students (41 girls and 49 boys) from two higher secondary schools were selected as a sample for the study. A self-developed awareness scale on Human rights education and focus group discussion was used to collect data. The data were analyzed by using simple percentile and content analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The main focus of the study is students awareness on human right under six different dimensions as follows

- a) Human Rights
- b) Knowledge about Human Rights (Instruments and Institutions)
- c) Environment related Human Rights
- d) Sources of human right education.

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- e) Human right knowledge and its understanding
- f) Awareness across the variable "gender"

a) Human Rights: The higher secondary students of Bhubaneswar city had shown remarkable awareness on term human rights with 92%. This result shows that students' understanding of human rights is likely to motivate them to respect and promote the rights of others. Students are highly aware of the basic fundamental rights of humans.

b) Knowledge about Universal Human Rights instruments and institutions: In the present study, students are more familiar with the term human rights than instruments and institutions of human rights. 49% of students are aware of the term Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on Childs Rights, Right to Information, National and State Human Right Commission, etc. In spite of that, there is 100% awareness of the Right to Education and its provision, United Nations, Fundamental Rights. The majority of the respondents (77%) were partially aware of the constitutional provision of human rights and the role and responsibilities (64%) of government in protecting the rights of an individual.

c) Environment related Human Rights: Students showed high awareness of environment-related human rights. The practice of humans for a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment students' responses is highly appreciable. Environment issues like global warming, climate change, observing world environment day, earth hour, and population day. The students show more awareness about global warming and environmental day compared to others.

d) The sources of Human Rights Education: This study found a remarkable awareness of human rights education among the students. While the question on sources of knowledge and understanding of human rights major source is parents (81%) and school 80%. Other sources like awareness programs by NGOs, Govt agencies, news articles, social media, the internet, family/relatives, and TV/radio.

e) Human Rights knowledge and its understanding: In the present study, almost all the students had heard about human rights but did not well understand the meaning and nature of human rights. Even students are not sure about the various role, functions, and responsibilities of human rights institutions. Areas of human rights its concepts and principle like, the rights of women, the rights of the child, the rights of indigenouse people and minorities, refugees, rights of older people, and rights of persons with disabilities were not well understood by the students despite gender disparity. Many students observed the violation of the rights of children and women but feels helpless. It is because the human rights concept is poorly understood by the students may be due to a lack of content in their curriculum. 87% of respondents are well aware of basic fundamental rights, but never felt they are actually practicing them. Here boys (86.6%) are slightly aware which differs from girls (82.1%).

f) Awareness across the variable "gender": The number of girls (41) who participated in the present study, which a little lower than the boys (49) participants. The present study reveals that there is no difference between boys (93%) and girls (91.7%) in the awareness level of human rights, but in human rights instruments and institutions, boys (80%) show higher awareness than girls (61%). There is no such difference found between boys (97%) and girls (95%) in environment-related human rights like world environment day, earth hour, and world population day (though boys the level of awareness of boys is slightly higher than girls) girls show higher awareness in terms of climate change and global warming.

When the question asked about human rights violations to the students, they show less awareness about how to protect and whom to approach. But the very first answer is to complain nearby police station or solve with mutual understanding.

The girl's respondent was fair (50%) and aware of crime and violation of women's rights and less aware (27%) on prevention and protection of their rights. While boys (31%) as compared to girls (43%) are very less aware of the rights of minorities, women, older persons, persons with disabilities, refugees, and migrants.

When the question on various institutions like schools, families, national and state commissions for human rights and their role in the prevention of violation and protection of rights was asked to the students, very few of them are aware of their role and responsibilities.

One group of five students shared their experience on the prevention of human rights

" One day while returning from tuition at 8:00 PM two policemen saved a woman from her drunken husband who used to beat her regularly and demand money. Later, police arrested that man and protected the woman. " Another incident, we experienced NGO called HelpAge India organized an awareness program on human rights in our school and we came to know how NGOs and the UN are working for ensuring and protecting of human rights"

When questions related to the environment and human rights, almost all students show positive responses and are well aware of their role to protect the environment. They all understand the need and importance of the environment for humans. Both girls and boys were highly sensitive to the impact of global warming and climate change. While the role of various human rights instruments and institutions is to protect the environment, many of the respondents were (71%) unsure that really these agencies/institutions are working to minimize the exploitation of the environment. But they are self-aware of how to protect the environment.

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Another student shared his experience on environment and human rights:

“ During vacation, when I visit my village, I plant a minimum of ten plants with my village friends and relatives. Village people are more attached to plants and animals than town people. But people from the city come to the nearby forest of my village and cut the trees and there is always a severe fight between village members and city people. This hurts me a lot and felt helpless.”

In general, it could be concluded that there is a silent violation of the rights of humans well felt by the students, but the findings of the study reveal boys feel the violation of rights is more but less felt by girls. Creating awareness among them on various issues related to the rights of humans will help to create a peaceful society. Therefore, every student needs to be sensitized and educated so that they can understand the role and responsibility of the institution to prevent the violation and protect the rights of a human.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that various programs should be organized at different levels (inter-intra school, district, and state level) to create awareness of human right education and the role of various organizations/institutions in the promotion and protection of the right of humans. Though the limitation of the present study is confined to two schools with self-instrumented questions and eighty samples and it is difficult to draw conclusions in the larger context. However, the results indicate that school education should introduce human rights content across the subjects as value education. Because human rights education could create opportunities to raise critical questions on the violation of rights related to the child, humans, women, education, injustice, etc. Further, research can be extended to teachers and students at all levels of education, and various stakeholders including parents community members, and administrators.

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