

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION: THE ZIMBABWEAN CHALLENGE

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***Abstract:** The paper explores the topical issue on Human Rights Education. It first distinguishes between Human Rights Education and education as a human right. Then it traces past and present human right abuses internationally and nationally in the context of education. It then interrogates the attempts and challenges of incorporating Human Rights Education in the Zimbabwean curriculum. The American case study is used for comparison purposes. It came out that Human Rights Education is generally taught implicitly in the existing curriculum than explicitly in both cases. It has also emerged that the attempts to consciously teach these rights to Zimbabwean pupils is often regarded with suspicion at its best and outright resistance at its worst, given the highly polarised political environment which has not spared education. The paper recommends a more robust approach to Human Rights Education which can be a panacea to a culture of human rights abuses.*

***Key Words:** Democracy, Human Rights Education, curriculum, civics education, devil's advocate.*

1.0 Preamble

The concept of Human Rights is a typhoon subject that is both topical and controversial so much that many an educationist, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where democracy issues are fairly foreign (at least from a cultural perspective), opt to leave it alone, lest they ruffle many a feather of the powers-that-be. However, it is this controversy surrounding the issue that necessitates our pursuance of the said subject. But afore we explore Human Rights per se, it is prudent for us to clear controversies and misconceptions, thus, drawing boundaries as a way of putting the thorny issue into perspective.

First and foremost, we need to distinguish between Human Rights Education and education as a human right. Before we think of the content and methodology of Human Rights Education, we need to be cognisant of the fact that education itself is a human right. The African (Banjul) Charter on Human and People's Rights Article 17 categorically states that every individual shall have the right to education. It is the spirit of this statute that is followed up by the Education Act of Zimbabwe Part ii Section iv paragraph 1 on children's fundamental right to education which

states that "...every child in Zimbabwe shall have the right to school education." On the other hand, Human Rights Education is a conscious effort to actually teach human rights in the school curriculum, either as a stand-alone subject or as a core topic in other subjects.

2.0 Background and Introduction to Human Rights Education

Loosely speaking, one can say that Human Rights Education is as old as education itself. From the old adage which correctly states that if culture creates man, then education completes him, we notice that education, in essence, empowers and conscientises him of his basic rights and corresponding responsibilities. Tomsevski (1993) reminisces on the Platonic age noting that human rights can be traced that far, although they were not known as such, but was catered for through corresponding obligations and duties.

In the modern age, we can trace Human Rights Education to the League of Nations of 1920. This was a union of nations formed as a way of finding peaceful means of resolving conflicts thereby avoiding human rights violations. At this particular forum was where Human Rights Education was first, at least formally, suggested. This could have become a firm foundation of Human Rights Education had this organisation survived, but the reluctance of the United States of America to join the league, among other reasons, weakened it unto oblivion (Preserve Articles on-line, 2011). Since the world had just come out of the First World War (1914-1918), the American position led to a lot of suspicion and distrust. Ipso facto, when the Second World War (1939-1945) inevitably came, gross human rights violations were witnessed, many of whose effects are still being felt to date. The vicious attempt by the psychopathic Germany Fehr, Adolph Hitler to totally annihilate Jewish nationals led to the massacre of at least six million of them (*The Nazi Holocaust 1938-1945 6,000,000 Deaths* online). This, coupled with the mass bombardment of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Japan) by America necessitated the 1948 formation of the United Nations where the Human Rights Convention was ratified by all nations of the world. It became apparent that it was the responsibility of all nations to ensure the safeguard and teaching of these rights.

At continental level, the Organisation of African Union (O.A.U.) met in Banjul in 1981 to follow-up on global efforts to promote human rights. The African Charter on Human and People's Rights served as a direct basis for Human Rights Education, especially through Article 25 which explicitly asserts that "[s]tates parties to the present Charter shall have the duty to promote and ensure through *teaching, education* and *publication* the respect of the rights and freedoms contained in the present Charter and to see to it that these freedoms and rights as well as corresponding obligations and duties are understood (emphasis added).

3.0 Definition of Terms

The following terms need to be defined and explained to ensure that they are understood well since they will recur in this paper:

Human rights are those rights that universally belong to people regardless of their sex, race, colour, language, national origin, age, class, religion or political beliefs. Human rights embody legal and moral values universally accepted and recognised (Tomasevski, 1993:97). Therefore, our working definition of human rights is: those innate freedoms which are non-discriminatory, enjoyed by all and sundry in recognition of other individuals' freedoms.

Education, according to Leinwand (1992), is the impartation of knowledge and skills for the development of an individual to the benefit of the society. So our own definition will be the acquisition and impartation of life skills leading to the completion of man in his society.

Democracy is a system of governance based on consent and elected by the people (UNESCO, 1999:139). Likewise, Reisinger (2013) holds that the basic sense of democracy as a form of governance rests on its etymology as rule by the entire people. Ergo, democracy is the kind of leadership or governance which is mandated by all people in a society through elections.

Curriculum means "a course that has to be completed in order to achieve a specific objective, i.e., a diploma or a degree. Curriculum can be defined as the classes and experiences that schools provide students in the process of educating them" (Leinwand, 1992:96). Similarly, Ebert, Ebert and Corwin (2013) define the curriculum as the means and materials with which students will interact for the purpose of achieving identified educational goals. Therefore, curriculum is that complex whole of learning experiences in a school set-up, both academic and social, both conscious and unconscious, both intended and vicarious.

4.0 Rationale of Human Rights Education

As has been argued before, many human rights violations are a common occurrence in societies. Besides the obvious callousness of the perpetrator, research has established that in many cases ignorance on the part of the perpetrator or victim or both, very often perpetuates human rights abuses (Kabanda, 2012) hence the need to make a conscious effort to acquaint children and elders alike with the knowledge of their fundamental rights and freedoms. The conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, make it urgent for educationists to implement human rights teaching in schools and colleges. The perennial conflicts in Somalia and Ethiopia, the DRC war (1998-2005), the Darfur conflict in Sudan and the Rwandan-Burundi genocide of 1994 all instance such conflicts where gross human rights violations were perpetrated, among which were rape and recruitment of child soldiers, hence the need for teachers to impart human rights knowledge to children before they become victims and perpetrators. More recently, the post-election disturbances in Kenya (2007-2008) and Zimbabwe (2008-2009) present a vivid picture of atrocities and monstrosities which societies (including schools) can ill-afford to ignore.

Besides the conflicts cited above, many a natural disaster make it quite mandatory for us to teach human rights in schools. The Asian Tsunami of 2005, the Chinese earthquake of 2008 and the Southern African Cyclone Elline of 2000 are cases in point. Children need to learn their

responsibilities and how to react in these disasters. All need to know their roles in humanitarian crises of this magnitude.

Furthermore, ecological disasters which are looming and threatening the very existence of mankind make it necessary for human rights education. The threat of global warming, green house effect, as well as destruction of the ozone layer need to be explored with the sole aim of empowering pupils and students to be responsible citizens, friendly to their environment to reduce the prevalence of such ecological disasters. Here the children learn to be very responsible since it is also their human right to a clean environment.

5.0 Content and Methodology of Human Rights Education

The content and methodology of Human Rights Education depends on whether it is taught as a separate subject or module, or incorporated into the existing curriculum. The Teachers' Resource Manual on Human Rights Education (1999) identifies five broad topics to be covered in this important subject. These are: Peace and Conflict, Culture and Diversity, Equal Rights for all, Fundamental Freedoms and Democracy, and Environment and Sustainable Development.

But first, it goes without saying that human rights start in the classroom. It would be ironic for a teacher to teach about human rights which he hardly practises in his classroom. For instance, a particularly short-tempered teacher is likely to abuse deviant pupils through administering severe corporal punishment. Besides corporal punishment being a Zimbabwean educational policy violation, it serves as a bad precedent to the teacher's lessons on human rights because it will appear to be some remote Utopian theory, sounding empty and hollow. However, one can also argue that in the practice of human rights and/or democracy in the classroom, the teacher needs to be aware that unbridled freedom may lead to despondency and anarchy which will yield contrary results. Much emphasis should be placed on responsibility as the twin-arm of the right.

Before we explore the major topics cited, an introductory topic on the nature of human rights would suffice to fore-run the major topics. The Catholic Commission Justice and Peace (CCJP) Manual on Human Rights Education (2006) identifies that human rights are an inner faculty, are innate, universal, cannot be given or taken away, are rational and are legal. The purpose here is to demystify the deliberate misinformation usually peddled by autocratic African regimes that the human rights issue is a Western concept which only serves as a smoke screen to cover-up the world super powers' regime change agenda. The pupils should be conscientised of their equality with the rest of humanity, hence the need to be treated equally.

When exploring the topic on peace, the teacher makes use of words such as harmony, tranquillity, stability and love. Actually, we can start with a Scriptural reading from the book of 1 Corinthians chapter 13 where love and selflessness are discussed at length. All other human rights concepts will naturally flow from the subject of love. The teacher can make use of symbolic teaching/learning aids such as the rosary, with the whole class discussing its meaning.

In addition, the whole class can experience some form of freedom from the four walls by visiting the national flag post, to explore its symbols, particularly the dove (in the Zimbabwean case) which symbolises peace. This aspect can further be linked to Religious Studies where the dove is also symbolic of the Holy Ghost, that is, peace and love (c.f. the baptism of Jesus). Biblical examples of human rights abuses could be given such as the murder of Naboth and subsequent possession of his vineyard by king Ahab (2 Kings 21) and the rape of Tamar by her half-brother Amnon (2 Samuel 13). To make the lesson more interesting, pupils can actually dramatise the expression of peace, such as handshakes, hugs and kisses (on the cheeks). However, the teacher has to hasten to alert the children that the symbols exhibited outside should be reflective of the inner peace within, not a way of concealing hatred and bitterness.

Still on peace, there is a need to expose students to the global efforts towards a peaceful world by identifying peace organisations such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), United Nations (UN), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and so on. On the same note, Onstein and Levine (1985:513) correctly observe that "the nuclear freeze and disarmament movements have swept across the US, Western Europe and Japan; they are filtering down into schools and curriculum under the umbrella of peace education and teaching of peace-making strategies." The knowledge of history, in this case, has helped the student to gain these peace-making strategies which will be taught to them.

Looking at conflict and violence, the teacher can start by brainstorming on the signs of conflict. They exemplify conflict in the home such as shouting between parents, quarrelling between relatives over inheritance and so on. The teacher has to highlight the root cause of conflict which is disagreement. It has to be made clear to students that conflict is normal but they should be aware of ways of dealing with it. A conscientious teacher will instance the problem using the broken telephone game where communication "naturally" breaks down between two or more students. According to Crisp (2013) on-line, "one person whispers a message to another, which is passed through a line of people until the last player announces the message to the entire group. Errors typically accumulate in the retellings, so the statement announced by the last player differs significantly, and often amusingly, from the one uttered by the first." The pupils then identify the cause of conflict in this game and by implication. The children can be asked to give examples in different crises, on even in their social set-ups such as in marriages where the proxy mediates between in-laws to solve the marriage "crisis." In all these situations, the neutrality of the mediator should be emphasised.

Automatically, this leads us to the topic on violence. It has to be inferred by the pupils that failures to resolve conflict is likely to lead to violence. Pupils can begin by giving micro examples like their fist fights right up to the historic world wars. Most importantly, the beliefs about violence need to be demystified like the traditional African belief that a man who really loves his wife should beat her up quite frequently. Even closer to the school, the archaic belief

that a teacher who wants his pupils to pass must not “spare the rod [because he will] spoil the child” should be jettisoned into the dustbin of academic history. Finally, the class should explore the effects of both physical and psychological violence. Teaching/learning aids such as newspaper cuttings with pictures of physically harmed individuals and fragmented property will serve as real life artefacts of the detrimental effects of violence. Even films depicting violence in bad light could be shown to pupils. However, caution should be exercised, especially when dealing with lower grades because some pictures from newspaper and magazine cuttings could traumatise them, or even create animosity towards perpetrators, which might further lead to violence, defeating the whole purpose of the lesson.

In addition, in an attempt to explore the topic of equality and non-discrimination, children can be asked to identify “minority” and marginalised groups of children such as the poor, the physically challenged, some ethnic groups, some races, women and other vulnerable groups. Caution should be exercised, though, when handling gender issues since a fundamentalist approach might instil hatred towards the opposite sex so much that the girls might end up viewing their brothers, fathers and male teachers among others as dangerous raping vampires ready to pounce on any stray girl. The emphasis should be more on creation of equal opportunities for both sexes.

Another crucial topic to be handled is “Democracy and Freedom.” It has to be made categorically clear that the topic forms the bedrock of Human rights Education. In this topic, human rights per se are explored. Types of rights such as social, economic, political and civil rights are all discussed in more detail. The discovery method of teaching is employed here where pupils can be asked to identify and exemplify these rights, possibly starting from the home to school and then to the wide community. It would be interesting to discuss fundamental freedoms in juxtaposition with their limitations and adjacent to corresponding responsibilities.

Further on, we look at the rule of law, its importance and impartiality in its application. Depending on individual societies, the teacher can choose to start with the Biblical ten commandments and their essence. Then we move on to school rules and their relevance. If the level is upper secondary school, the issues of the national constitution, the executive, the judiciary and legislature are then discussed. Along the way we discuss the law-enforcement agencies, i.e., the police force. The pupils must know clearly that no-one is above the law. By so doing, a sense of justice and responsibility is thus inculcated into the young learners.

In addition, the issue of participation in governance should never be underestimated, hence the need to treat it as a separate topic. The concept of elections, particularly to these African students, needs much emphasis given the dictatorial tendencies of some African states such as Zimbabwe. When dealing with lower classes, this concept could be introduced by way of class elections where the monitor could be elected; then we come to prefects, sports captains and so forth. The aspirants should be given an opportunity to campaign freely without intimidation, vote buying or blackmail. As much as possible, voting should be through secret ballot and fairness

and freedom should be the hallmark for such an exercise. Since vicarious learning is the most efficient way of teaching, when these 'little' elections are held, the teacher should generally lead by example through avoidance of any form of cheating which is tantamount to vote rigging because this will set a bad precedent for future leaders from among the pupils. When all is said and done, the teacher needs to explain the import of participation and what an election actually means, that is, choosing a representative to govern, similar to one governing oneself!

6.0 Human Rights Education in the U.S. Schools: A Case Study

Since the United States is considered as the cradle of democracy, we saw it fit to look at how far it has gone with the implementation of Human Rights Education in their schools. According to the an on-line article "Human Rights Education in U.S. Schools," there is no national Human Rights Education curriculum in use nation-wide in all schools since education is mainly a responsibility of local school boards. This sounds coarsely ironic when the cradle of democracy has not yet quite implemented human rights education at national level. What more of other young democracies? However, some can, in defence, wrongly argue that the human rights aspect is already imbedded within their culture so there is little need to urgently incorporate it into their schools. The many school shootings that occur in US schools and the many human rights abuses in Guatemala, Afghanistan and Iraq in US Army jails fly in the face of such arguments. Therefore, the need to have Human Rights in schools is as urgent as it is in any other country.

Many schools teach Human Rights Education in their social studies or civics classes as part of a locally originated programme. But in recent decades a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have developed curricular designed to use in all schools across the nation. Some NGOs such as Centre for Civic Education based in Los Angeles, California, take a broad approach to the issue, taking Human Rights Education as part of civic education whereas others like Southern Poverty Law Centre, based in Montgomery, Alabama, take a narrower approach. Just like many third world countries, the US government, by leaving this important duty of designing the Human Rights Education curriculum to schools, is mistaken. In this world of rampant human rights abuses, there is a need for governments in the world to take a more serious approach.

The topics commonly covered in this subject are (a) we the people, the citizen and the constitution, (b) we the people, project citizen, and (c) Youth for Justice (when young people are giving solutions that lead to safe, disciplined, drug-free schools and communities). Materials offered include the Teaching Tolerance Magazine (TTM), the Teaching Tolerance Website (TTW) and curriculum packages including "ten ways to fight hate," "Learn more about Civil Rights" and "101 tools for tolerance." All these can be very helpful if they are taken with the seriousness they deserve.

7.0 Recent Efforts towards Human Rights Education (ZIMBABWE)

7.1 Human Rights Clubs

As human rights teachers, we formed Human Rights Clubs with the aim of articulating basic human rights. Lively debates are undertaken in the said clubs. Dramas portraying real life situations of human rights abuses are another interesting activity. Such plays are usually enacted at assemblies, say, on closing day or any such important event to acquaint the whole school with human rights issues. Furthermore, resource persons like the police can be “hired” to come and present on human rights issues, especially child abuse. In a more practical way, the club can visit a court session, especially where there is a case involving abuse. However, the tone set by clubs, usually done in the afternoons as extra-mural activities tend to dwarf the whole exercise. So this is only the starting point before the subject is introduced into the core curriculum.

7.2 Justice for Children Trust (JCT)

Sponsored by Switzerland, this NGO has a programme running in schools, particularly in Harare province. According to the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum on-line, JCT is a non-profit making organisation which was founded in 2002 by a group of registered lawyers to provide free legal services to minors in civil and criminal cases. Its second objective is to educate the society on children’s rights (starting from children themselves). Therefore, it facilitates the teaching of children rights, sponsoring field trips and sometimes paying school fees for disadvantaged children, especially victims of abuse. However, we can argue that its area of influence is not the best taking into account that generally people in Harare are more conscious of their rights than those in remote rural areas where the NGO could concentrate. Moreover, a lot of distrust from the government towards all NGOs in general, and those with a ‘human rights’ flair in particular, has curtailed the operation of such well-meaning NGOs.

7.3 Educators’ Association for Human Rights (EAHR)

Just like the lawyers and doctors who have a human rights arm, charismatic teachers have decided to form their own association. It first empowers teachers who will in turn incorporate human rights issues in class. It was formed in February 2006 by teachers mainly from the combative Progressive Teachers’ Union of Zimbabwe in conjunction with the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP). It holds workshops for teachers on how to teach human rights. Between 2006 and 2008, the NGO reports constant harassment from state apparatus such as the police and the spy agents who suspect the NGO of working with the opposition. This has rendered its activities almost insignificant. Given these teething problems faced by NGOs, the assertion by Smith (2003) that the western world is generally trailing behind developing countries in human rights education because, “[b]y contrast, in many so-called developing countries, there is a great awareness of, if not enjoyment of, rights and freedoms: human rights education programmes are more developed and, with the active support of NGOs,

more successful” (p333) sounds more imaginative than real. . In other words, Zimbabwe still has a long way to go to implement Human Rights Education.

8.0 Incorporating Human Rights Education into the Existing Curriculum

As we have already noticed, Human Rights Education is not yet a subject on its own in Zimbabwe and in many other countries. Therefore, teachers have a daunting task to make a conscious effort to incorporate human rights education as they teach their subjects. A subject such as History, for instance, can identify atrocities committed by the Nazi in Germany during the Second World War in comparison with the monstrosities perpetrated on civilians by the Rhodesian front during the Liberation War. Geography will focus more on ecological disasters and conservation of the environment. Religious Education will be at the fore-front, teaching compassion and respect for others. Teachers, however, may argue that they have been teaching these concepts since time immemorial, but here we argue that they need to make special emphasis, actually mentioning these issues as human rights issues because it makes a difference. Teachers can go further to create learning dilemmas and devil’s advocates (www.urbandictionary.com) around possible reactions to human rights abuses as part of their methodology. Such activities are likely to titillate pupils by their theatrical nature.

9.0 Conclusion

Overall, it can be argued that Human Rights Education is of dear import at both macro and micro levels. The American case study has shown a conscious attempt to incorporate human rights into the curriculum but still much more needs to be done. At least all communities have experienced gross human rights abuses at one time or the other. It is, therefore, important to teach human rights formally to ensure that past vices can be avoided. Even to date, many human rights violations, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, are still rampant. Unfortunately, the victims are vulnerable groups such as women and children, hence the urgent need to consciously teach human rights in schools and colleges. In Zimbabwe in particular, there seems to be a die-hard perennial culture of human rights abuses for political expediency. The Gukurahundi atrocities (akin to civil war in Western Zimbabwe in the early 1980s), the clean-up operation (2005) as well as other election related abuses are all too many to fathom. This scenario makes it extremely urgent for us to introduce Human Rights Education in our schools to break the vicious cycle of callous impunity. Consequently, much more needs to be done on the teaching of human rights both explicitly and implicitly.

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