

DEEPENING THE TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION THROUGH TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Violations of human rights cut across all cross-sections of the country - the crowned and the crowd, the rich and poor, workers and students, no one is spared. Nigerians experience on regular basis; the police brutality and harassments, election maneuvering, contracts exaggeration, poor infrastructures, gross unemployment and meager wages/poor incentives for workers, among others. Efforts of the human rights groups have been more on advocacy than education. However, the UNESCO's strategy and action in the field of education for human rights are based on a comprehensive approach, recognizing the indivisible and interdependence of all rights - civil, culture, economic, political and social rights. This paper showed how transformative learning increases opportunities for students, teachers and parents to take decisions on human rights issues. It is only an enlightened citizenry – those who know, demand and exercise their human rights that can create a civil and progressive society.

Keywords: Human rights, rights violations/abuses, transformative learning, human rights education.

Introduction

Human rights violation was a routine under the military rule in Nigeria, and 1993 was a particularly challenging year for Nigerian human rights groups. In that year, the former military president General Ibrahim Babangida (rtd) annulled the results of a president election, which would have brought the country back to civilian rule, and installed an interim government to resign, thus 'maradonically' staging the seventh coup d'état since Nigeria's independence. As reported by Toye (2005), the regime banned all political meetings and associations and no timetable was set for the regime to civilian rule thereby giving prospects for inhumane and cruel treatments of Nigerians. The worrisome violations of human rights cut across all sections of the country - the crowned and the crowd, the rich and poor, workers and students, none was spared in the

ordeal and the country was in disarray. As if these were not enough, abuses by members of the police and security forces remained a persistent human rights problem.

Nkiru (2002) further observed that during this time, there were frequent cases of harassment and extra-judicial killings by law enforcement officers. Abysmal prison conditions have also been highlighted by the human rights community. Marginalization against the Ogonis, a minority group inhabiting the oil-producing region of rivers state was another dimension of human rights deprivation. Ogonis have always protested against the destruction of their lands and vegetation by multinational oil companies and Nigerian military forces. As a result, hundreds of Ogonis have been killed in attacks believed to be sanctioned by government authorities. During this fracas, that veteran journalist – Dele Giwa

was killed and further derivation led to the emergence of nasty militants' attacks; which shook the nation to its foundation through their nasty operations in kidnapping, assassinations, oil-bunkering and vandalization of oil-pipelines.

In reaction to these gross human rights abuses, a number of human rights advocacy and awareness groups evolved in Nigeria. Notable amongst them were Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), the Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR), and the Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (IHRHL), National Institute for Advanced Legal Studies (NIALS), Human Rights Africa and the Legal Research and Resource Development Center, Women In Nigeria (WIN), the Ogoni People's Organization, the National Association of Democratic Lawyers and Campaign for Democracy (CD). These human rights groups mounted campaigns and conducted fact-finding and documentation work. Other organizations produce materials and held conferences and seminars to raise human rights awareness among Nigerians.

The Study Problem

Notwithstanding the return to democracy since 1999, Nigerians still experience countless numbers and wide dimensions of human rights abuses. To say the least, in this current democratic experiment, we still record police brutality and harassments, election maneuvering, contracts exaggeration, poor infrastructures, gross unemployment, meager wages/poor incentives for workers, among others. Efforts of the human rights groups have been more on advocacy than education. This thus creates a vacuum yet to be filled. Olubela (2001) posited that the educative aspect of human rights (which has been less emphasized) can be substantively and significantly promoted by school's Social Studies Education. It is said that 'knowledge is power' and ignorance cannot be a defense. But the maxim that says 'ignorance of the law is no defense' is in itself a flagrant violation of human rights; when over 65 per cent of the population of a country is ignorant of their basic rights and the laws that

protect them. It is only an enlightened citizenry that can create a society, which make politics both civil and capable. Is it then possible for justice and ethics to be extended to the global sphere through human rights education; and if so, what constant and diverse approaches are applicable, in Africa and Nigeria in particular, for the realization of this goal? Can human rights education be achieved by Nigerian schools? What impact can transformative learning have on deepening understanding and practices of human rights principles in Nigeria?

UNESCO and Human Rights

In the light of the global human rights violation, the United Nations declared 1995-2004 human rights education decade. The decade set in motion both formal and informal activities to promote and develop respect for human rights culture through human rights education worldwide. (Katarina, 2005). Human rights education is both a lens through which to observe the world and a methodology for teaching and leading others. Amnesty International (2008) explained that learning about human rights is the first step toward respecting, promoting and defending those rights. Human Rights Education program (HRE) was established to facilitate the teaching of human rights, designed to support teachers of kindergarten through college as well as educators working in non-formal setting such as community association and cultural forums. HRE teaches and nurtures the values and attitudes that lead to the support of those rights. Human rights education is dedicated to promoting human rights principles and positive value system that are set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Furthermore, Art, 26.2 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Right states that:

“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human right and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance

and friendship among all nations, racial or religious group, and shall further activities of the united Nation for the maintenance of peace.” (UNESCO, 2005)

Since 1993, the United Nation Decade for Human Right Education (1995-2004), UN has explicitly encouraged members’ states to adopt national human right education programmes. UNESCO’s strategy and action in the field of education for human rights are based on a comprehensive approach, recognizing the indivisible and interdependence of all rights - civil, culture, economic, political and social rights. The basic elements for the broad approach to human rights education include the dimension of peace, human right and democracy. The organization’s strategy consists in mobilizing both individuals and institution so that everyone may receive education and appropriate training, especially those who are in difficult circumstances, such as women, children, the elderly or disabled, minorities and indigenous people, refugees, displaced persons and those living in extreme poverty.

UNESCO operates at different levels of the education systems (formal and non-formal) and targets a wide range of beneficiaries. The main objective is that learning should focus on the esteemed values, attitudes and skills required to meet the emerging challenges of contemporary societies and the full development of the human personality. The activities carried out in co-operation with a wide range of partners are focusing on the following area:

1. Development of national and local capacities human right education, through its co-operation in development projects and programmer at national and sub-regional levels,

2. Elaboration of learning masteries and publication and their translation and adaptation in national and local languages,
3. Advocacy and networking activities,
4. Providing to Governments, on request, human rights education, training, information, fellowships and advisory services programmes. UNESCO is making an important contribution concerning this responsibility through its operational projects,
5. Developing model human rights curricula, pedagogical techniques and teaching materials for primary and secondary schools, to be used in providing technical assistance to requesting State, and
6. Carrying out translation, publication and distribution of appropriate versions of the Universal declaration of human Rights.

Effective teaching of Human Rights Education

According to the Advocates for Human Rights Education(AHRE, 2018), human rights education is learning that develops the **knowledge, skills, and values** of human rights with the broad goal of building a universal human rights culture. In other words, students should be aware of the issues, concerned by the issues, and capable of standing up for human rights. Human rights education will move students from understanding human rights concepts to examining their experiences from a human rights perspective and incorporating these concepts into their personal values and decision-making processes.

The following is a general breakdown of the objectives of human rights education:

Table 1: General Breakdown of the Objectives of Human Rights Education

Knowledge	Skills	Values
Learn about human rights	Learn for human rights	Learn through human rights
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Promote awareness and understanding of human rights issues so that people recognize violations of human rights.</i> ▪ The belief that every human is born with the inalienable human rights listed in the UDHR. ▪ Key concepts such as: freedom, justice, equality, human dignity, non-discrimination, democracy, sustainability, poverty, universality, rights, responsibilities, interdependence, solidarity, and peace. ▪ The idea that human rights provide a framework for negotiating and agreeing on standards of behavior in the family, school, community, and the world. ▪ The interdependence of civil/political rights and economic/social/ cultural rights. ▪ Recognize the root causes of human rights issues/concerns. ▪ Understand human rights terms and concepts according to age/ grade level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Develop the skills and abilities necessary for the defense of human rights</i> ▪ Active listening and communication: being able to listen to different points of view, to advocate one's own rights and those of other people ▪ Critical thinking: finding relevant information, appraising evidence critically, being aware of preconceptions and biases, recognizing forms of manipulation, and making decisions on the basis of reasoned judgment ▪ The ability to work cooperatively and to address conflict positively ▪ The ability to participate in and organize social groups ▪ Acting to promote and safeguard human rights both locally and globally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Develop attitudes of respect for human rights, so people do not violate the rights of others.</i> ▪ A sense of responsibility for one's own actions, a commitment to personal development and social change ▪ Curiosity, an open mind and an appreciation of diversity ▪ Empathy and solidarity with others and a commitment to support those whose human rights are under threat ▪ A sense of human dignity, of self-worth and of others' worth, irrespective of social, cultural, linguistic or religious differences ▪ A sense of justice, the desire to work towards the ideals of freedom, equality and respect for diversity.

Source: theadvocatesforhumanrights.org (2018)

Many teachers often deal with aspects of human rights without giving it that name. HRE provides a common framework through which different subject matters may be taught in relation to one another. The topics of globalization, the environment, peace, citizenship, gender equality, democracy, poverty, and intercultural relations all address human rights issues and attempt to build a

culture that respects human rights. Rather than teaching about these subject matters in isolation, using a HRE framework provides educators and students with a shared value system through which all subjects intersect (Advocates for Human Rights Education, 2018).



Figure 1: Human rights mind map, hand drawn concepts

Source: Advocates for Human Rights Education (AHRE, 2018)

Human rights education teaches students not only about their rights but also their responsibilities. We all have the responsibility to ensure that we do not infringe upon the rights of others. For example, the right to freedom of expression also carries with it the responsibilities not to hurt, insult, or incite others to prejudicial behavior. Through HRE, teachers can instill in students a sense of respect toward other human beings and inspire them to become, in their own right, educators and activists who will assist in the defense of human rights. Human rights education:

1. Produces changes in values and attitudes
2. Produces changes in behavior
3. Produces empowerment for social justice
4. Develops attitudes of solidarity across issues and nations
5. Develops knowledge and analytical skills
6. Produces participatory education.

Transformative Learning Theory

Mezirow is credited with initiating the theoretical field of transformative learning. He defined transformative learning as the process by which we call into question our taken for

granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. He developed the principle of "perspective transformation" whereby an individual - through experience, critical reflection and rational discourse - has a meaning structure transformation. This transformation is 'rational' insofar as it involves discourse and work with the conscious. Elements are also intuitive, creative and emotional.

Mezirow's initial theory has been extended and, by implication, criticized. The main criticism has been his neglect of the relationship between individual and social transformation. His earlier works, also, have drawn fire for a seemingly lock-step "rationale" approach for designing transformative learning. Nonetheless, Mezirow's initial idea has remained central to the field. Other iterations, such as Boyd, have related transformative learning to adult development theory, linking certain processes to individuation, or the passing through of life phases. Ettlting's study of praxis in relation to transformative changes in women's groups has recognized the essential role of building bonds of friendship and support within the group in order to help claim "oneself and one's beliefs". (Mezirow, 1995)

Transformative learning attempts to explain how our expectations, framed within

cultural assumptions and presuppositions, directly influence the meaning we derive from our experiences. It is the revision of meaning structures from experiences that is addressed by the theory of perspective transformation. Perspective transformation explains the process of how adults revise their meaning structures. Meaning structures act as culturally defined frames of reference that are inclusive of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. *Meaning schemes*, the smaller components, are “made up of specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments and feelings that constitute interpretations of experience” (Mezirow, 2000).

They are the tangible signs of our habits and expectations that influence and shape a particular behavior or view. Changes in our meanings schemes are a regular and frequent occurrence. *Meaning perspective* is a general frame of reference, world view, or personal paradigm involving “a collection of meaning schemes made up of higher-order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs, prototypes, goal orientations and evaluations” and “they provide us criteria for judging or evaluating right and wrong, bad and good, beautiful and ugly, true and false, appropriate and inappropriate”. Our frame of reference is composed of two dimensions, habits of mind and a point of view. “Habits of mind are broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a set” of cultural, political, social educational, and economic codes. The habits of mind get expressed in a particular point of view: “the constellation of belief, value judgment, attitude, and feeling that shapes a particular interpretation”

Transformative Learning Theory and Human Rights Education (HRE)

For Human Rights Education, the idea of transformative learning is complemented by the work of Paulo Freire (1993), who takes the idea of transformative learning beyond that of the individual into social action and change. Freire made direct link between personal and social transformation, as well as the notion of critical reflection as a redistribution of power. Many

human rights educators believe that a transformative learning experience, involving “conscientization” is intended to foster both personal and social change. In the late 1990s, Andrey & Starkey (1996) examined the empirical evidence for practices that fostered transformative learning. To them, Human rights education must be regarded as an integral, indispensable part of social studies curriculum. Human rights education enables students to acquire knowledge and understanding of rule of law and the legal process and equipping them with the essential skills, attitude, and values necessary to become informed and responsible participants in civic affairs.

Katarina (2005) emphasized that the realization of HRE implies the considerations for improving the quality of the curriculum by integrating human values for the realization of peace, social cohesion and respect for human rights and human dignity. In this framework, a more participatory process, and curriculum development is essential. It is also important to change the traditional teaching method in order to make them more participatory and democratic, making teacher training consistent with the educational objectives, democratizing the internal structure of the school and its management. In this context, the participation of children in school life, the creation of school communities and students’ union activities, peer education and peer counseling, and the involvement of students in school disciplinary proceedings. These frameworks should be promoted as part of the process of learning and experiencing the realization of human rights. There should also be increasing opportunities for students, teachers and parents to take decisions in school issues.

Conclusion

Mezirow (2000) reiterated that there are several impacts that transformative learning theory make in classroom practice especially as it relates to human rights education. Transformative learning equips students with the concepts and understanding necessary to make a success in personal transformation. When students are led to a deeper

understanding of concepts and issues their fundamental beliefs and assumptions may be challenged leading to a transformation of perspective or worldview. As we ask students to develop critical and reflective thinking skills and encourage them to care about the world around them, they may decide that some degree of social transformation is required. Students will need the tools of transformative learning in order to be effective change agents. Otherwise, students may feel disempowered, become pessimistic about the future, fear change, or develop a degree of cynicism towards those who promote change. In the period of transformational change in the society and culture, students will be better able to understand and deal with such changes if they understand the nature of transformation and the impact it has on individuals, groups, organizations and nations.

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