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Secondary school teacher preparedness for the Introduction of human rights education in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study examined Midlands Province secondary school teacher preparedness for the introduction of human rights education in Zimbabwe. The study was based on the awareness that steps are being taken by both the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture and the Ministry of Higher Education and Technology to have the subject taught in schools and colleges (Kamba, 1998). Questionnaires supplemented by interviews were the mode of data collection. The study found out that there is a general lack of clarity on the objectives of human rights education among teachers. The research revealed the need for the training of teachers in human rights education. However, there is no unanimity on how this can best be done. From the findings, it is clear that a lot needs to be done before human rights education can be effectively introduced in secondary schools.

Background

Nziramanga and Jaji (1992) produced a report for UNESCO on *Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace* after a workshop on the same topic. One of the recommendations by workshop participants was that there was need for a policy on Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace (EIUP). Nziramanga and Jaji (1992) carried out a survey to determine the extent to which EIUP, Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms existed in Zimbabwe. This survey, among other things, noted the absence of EIUP programmes, the unavailability of teaching materials and the lack of strategies designed for the implementation of EIUP. Accordingly, the two researchers recommended the formulation of a programme for the development of necessary materials and strategies that would facilitate the implementation of EIUP.

In 1996, Zimbabwe carried out an analysis of its schools' curriculum and instructional materials with a view to determining the extent to which they included human rights issues. This culminated in a survey of five schools that revealed that there was indeed need for the introduction of human rights education in the formal school's curriculum. In 1997, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture came up with a summary of the content of a human rights education programme for inclusion in carrier subjects. It also intended to trial test human rights education in 18 secondary schools before it was implemented in all Zimbabwean schools. It is from

the awareness of the commitment by the Zimbabwean government to the provision of education for human rights that the present study was carried out.

Conceptual framework of human rights education

A discussion of human rights is imperative if human rights education is to be more intelligible. Using the Marxist perspective, Oyugi (1994) traces the historical development of the concept of human rights. For Oyugi (1994), human rights are premised on the rise of individualism in Northern or Western Societies. His emphasis is on human rights as they manifest themselves in post-colonial Africa. He argues that the concept of human rights has its origins in Greek philosophy, with the stoics having formulated the doctrine of natural rights, arguing that these belonged to all people at all times. "Every human being was entitled to these rights by virtue of the simple fact of sharing humanity and rationality with everyone else" (Oyugi 1994; p. 57). Having discussed how Aristotle invented these rights, their restatement in the United Kingdom by John Locke, their adoption by the 13 American States, how they were formulated by the French during the French Revolution and the various versions in Europe, and following his Marxist perspective, Oyugi appears to reject human rights as bourgeois ideology. He points out that human rights are claimed against society, alienating individuals from society, and, in the process, negating the individuals' social being. He further maintains that human rights always reflect class interest. They are expressions of the general will of the classes that espouse them. Thus, they cannot be eternal truths or supreme values. Neither can they claim universality. Thus, they are always the expression of those in position of power.

Wiredu (1996) on the other hand argues that "A human right is a claim that people are entitled to make on others or on society at large by virtue of their status. Human rights are claims that people are entitled to make simply by virtue of their status as human beings" (p. 157). Wiredu (1996) further uses an African theoretical framework to explain human rights. He points out that among the Akan of Ghana, a person (*onipa*) is made up of three elements. These are the life principle (*okra*), which comes from God and is actually believed to be a piece of God which carries a specific destiny; the blood principle (*mogyia*), which is the mother's contribution and determines a person's lineage or clan identity; and the personality principle (*Sunsum*), the father's contribution, though indirectly. *Sunsum* gives a person his or her immanent or distinctive characteristics. However, it is the possession of *okra* that entitles all people to a certain level of respect and equality. Hence the Akan saying, "Everyone is the offspring of God, no one is the offspring of the earth" (Wiredu 1996:158). In the Akan conception, the possession of *okra*, *mogyia* and *Sunsum*

makes one a social being. The individual, therefore, regards herself/himself within a social context. Ramose (1999) explains this very well when he argues that in African communities, life is to be preferred above all else, even the life of another human being. Mbiti (1989) aptly summarised this African philosophy of being when he stated it as, "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (p. 106).

We are inclined to agree with Ramose (1999) that the common thread in all human rights theories is that they regard being human-humanness as their starting point. They attach value to being human. Emphasising that all human rights theories revolve around one fundamental basic human right, the right to life, Ramose (1999) wrote "In this sense, human rights are definite ecological decisions. Human relations are the major context as well as the primary focus of human rights. In spite of their differences in perspective and emphasis all theories of human rights share one fundamental characteristic in common, namely, that the fact of being a living human being deserves recognition by all other human beings" (p. 181).

Purpose of the study

It can be surmised, therefore, that this individual worth, the humanness, the sanctity of every person, is what human rights education should seek to foster. This is based on the recognition and acceptance of the equality of all people. But for human rights education to be successful, the teachers themselves have to be certain of what it is they should impart to the learners. They should also be aware of the philosophical foundations of those rights it is their business to impart, that is, are they individual or communal in their origins? They also need to be aware of the rights of the communities in which they teach to avoid working at cross purposes with the communities in which they are situated. The study therefore examined Midlands Province secondary school teacher preparedness for the introduction of human rights education in Zimbabwe.

Research Methodology

Considering the fact that the study was meant to establish Midlands teachers' awareness of human rights education, it was found necessary to use the survey method. This method enables the researcher to establish the general level of awareness of human rights education among teachers in the Midlands from a representative sample. Data were collected by a survey questionnaire administered in person by the researcher to 300 teachers out of the 3 500 secondary teachers in the Midlands Province in 1999. This was intended to ensure a reasonable rate of

return; a 75% return rate was realised, i.e., 225 teachers out of the sampled teachers completed and submitted questionnaires. Discussions on issues raised in the questionnaires were also conducted with the participating teachers. This was intended to get those views that the questionnaire may have failed to solicit yet which were viewed as important to the study and which the teachers themselves regarded as important. It must be noted that some teachers were initially hesitant to participate fearing that the government wanted to find out what they thought as individuals, which might lead to victimisation.

Results

Familiarity of teachers with UN Human Rights Charter

One questionnaire item sought to check teacher familiarity with the United Nations Human Rights Charter. Human rights as defined in the United Nations Charter form the basis of those human rights enshrined in the constitution of Zimbabwe, since Zimbabwe is a signatory to the United Nations Human Rights Charter. The researcher is aware that the United Nations Human Rights Charter is not the only source of knowledge of human rights, but is also aware that the United Nations, through its organs has done quite a lot to disseminate knowledge of human rights to people all over the world. The researcher is aware that the United Nations' organs have organised workshops and seminars to conscientise various groups of people in Zimbabwe including teachers about human rights as they are enunciated in the United Nations Human Rights Charter. Just under forty -percent (39.6%) of the teachers were not familiar, with the United Nations Human Rights Charter, (meaning that they had a hazy idea) while 32.9% indicated that they were not familiar with the United Nations human rights charter. Only fifty-six respondents constituting 24.9% of the teachers indicated that they were familiar with the United Nations Human Rights Charter.

Teachers' exposure and knowledge of human rights education

The majority of teachers (89.8%) reported not having attended any seminar, workshop or conference on human rights. Only 9.3% claim to have attended, either, a workshop, conference or seminar on human rights. Having had no exposure to training in human rights explains why 68.9% of the respondents did not think they had sufficient knowledge of human rights education to be able to teach the subject. This can be interpreted to point to a strong need for teacher training in human rights education if the programmes the two education ministries intent to introduce are to

succeed. Table 1 summarises the response patterns of teachers on items that sought to check the teachers' knowledge of and attitudes towards human rights education. More than 68% did not have sufficient knowledge of human rights education to be able to impart it to pupils (item 1). This response pattern is in line with the indication that very few had attended either a conference or seminar on human rights. This would then mean that those who indicated some knowledge of human rights might have obtained the information from other sources like reading books, journals, and films.

While results for item 1 showed that many teachers did not feel confident that they could teach human rights, a lot more teachers (80.4%) either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that they had some knowledge of what human rights are (item 2). A small percentage of teachers (19.6%) felt that they had no knowledge of human rights. What this all adds up to is that there is a general recognition that some knowledge of human rights does not qualify one to teach human rights. Before one can teach human rights, or anything for that matter, there is need for a thorough grasp of what one desires to teach.

Item 3 in Table 1 (p. 44) was intended to verify the authenticity of the responses to items 1 and 2. There is a general agreement in response to items 2 and 3 on having some knowledge of human rights. However, there is a disparity between those who agree that they have some knowledge of what human rights are (80.4%) and those who believe that on the basis of this they can teach human rights (31.1%). There is also a vast difference between those who confessed ignorance of what human rights are (19.6%) and those who indicated that they are not comfortable to teach it (62.6%). Item 5 was also in a way related to item 1 which sought information on whether the respondents had sufficient knowledge to enable them to teach human rights. Only 6.2% strongly believed that they had sufficient knowledge of human rights education to be able to teach it, while 24% indicated that they were ready. It is difficult to explain this disparity where 17.8% who did not strongly believe that they had sufficient knowledge of human rights education to be able to teach it can at the same time have strongly felt they were ready for its introduction in schools. In total, 69.8% were ready for the introduction of human rights education. Only 30.2% felt that they were not ready.

About 47% of the teachers agreed that human rights education was of value to the pupils, while 35.1% strongly believed it would be of value (item 6). Only 17.8% of the teachers believed it was going to be of no value to pupils.

Table 1. Summary of the response patterns concerning teachers' knowledge of and attitudes towards human rights education (N = 225).

Abridged Items	Response Frequency %			
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
1. Have sufficient knowledge of human rights to be able to teach them.	6.2	24.9	43.6	25.3
2. Have some knowledge of what human rights are.	13.3	67.1	13.8	5.8
3. Have some knowledge of what human rights are but not comfortable to teach them.	14.2	48.4	28.9	8.5
4. Have no idea what human rights are.	5.8	16.0	52.0	26.2
5. Are ready for the introduction of human rights education.	24.0	45.8	22.2	8.0
6. Human rights education will be valuable to pupils.	35.1	47.1	12.0	5.8
7. Schools in Zimbabwe are ready for the introduction of human rights education.	12.4	41.8	30.2	15.6
8. Human rights education will create confusion in schools.	11.1	24.0	44.0	20.9
9. Human rights education is just one of the donor initiated and funded projects.	17.3	35.6	32.9	14.2
10. Human rights education is here to stay.	18.6	60.9	14.7	5.8
11. Objectives of human rights education clear to you.	6.2	37.3	42.7	13.8
12. There is need to train teachers in human rights education.	48.0	40.0	8.0	4.0

While the figure is small, it indicates the need to educate teachers about the value of human rights education, given that among them are the 9% (Table 2) who believed that human rights must not be taught to pupils at all. While 69.8% of the teachers indicated readiness for the introduction of human rights education (Item 7), 54.2% believed that schools in Zimbabwe were ready for the introduction of human rights

education. Forty five percent of the teachers felt that schools in Zimbabwe were not ready for the introduction of human rights education. This calls for more work in terms of making schools conducive for the introduction of human rights education. However, there is a big difference between those who believed they were ready for the introduction of human rights education (69.8%, Item 5) and those who believed schools in Zimbabwe were ready for the introduction of human rights education (54.2%, Item 7).

It must be noted that while only 5.8%(Item 6) strongly believed that human rights education will be of no value to pupils, 11.1% strongly felt that human rights education will create confusion in schools. Discussion with teachers indicated that they felt that once pupils started knowing their rights, they will start to challenge the authority of their teachers. They believed this would encourage deviant pupils to claim their rights even when they are wrong. The major argument of the teachers was that in most cases, the pupils were not mature enough to comprehend the responsibilities that went with the claim to rights. They believed pupils were generally incapable of distinguishing appropriate and inappropriate circumstances for claiming their rights. On the whole, those who foresaw confusion constituted 35.1%. It appears that these teachers were not comfortable with self-assertive pupils. However, the number of those who believed that human rights education would be of value to pupils (47%, Item 6) did not differ much with those who believed that it would create confusion in schools (44%).

While the majority (52.9%) viewed human rights education as a donor initiated and funded programme (Item 9), 79.5% believed the programme was here to stay (Item 10). Only 20.5% believed that human rights education was not here to stay. In fact, during discussion, some teachers pointed out to the fate of political economy and education with production which they erroneously believed to have been donor funded. They were convinced that once donor funds dried up, there would be no money to sustain the programme. However, the majority indicated that if human rights were infused into other subjects, something that did not happen with political economy and education with production, then, human rights education would be able to continue to exist. Responses to item 11 show that only 43.1% of the teachers were clear about the objectives of human rights education; 56.5% acknowledged ignorance about the objectives of human rights education. Eighty eight percent or 198 teachers believed that there is need for the training of teachers in human rights education (Item 12).

Teachers' views on how human rights education must be taught

Forty eight percent (48%) of the teachers preferred the use of workshops while 40% preferred the use of either seminars, or conferences. Table 2 shows teachers preferences on how human rights education should be introduced. Only 9% of the teachers were of the view that human rights should not be taught to pupils. The argument they gave was that pupils who know their rights are difficult to control since they do not always know the responsibilities that go with these rights. From discussion with teachers, the general feeling among most of them was that the curriculum in Zimbabwean schools was already overloaded. This same view was echoed by participants in the research conducted by Nziramasanga and Jaji (1992). Of those who felt it should be taught, 28%, indicated that human rights should be taught as a subject on its own while the majority, (52%), felt it should be taught through carrier subjects, that is, by infusion as is recommended by Nziramasanga and Jaji (1992). Eleven percent of the teachers did not indicate their preference on how human rights should be taught.

Table 2. Teachers' perceptions on how human rights should be introduced (N = 225)

	Items	Response Frequency	
		N	%
1.	Human rights should be taught as a subject on its own.	63	28%
2.	Human rights should be taught through carrier subjects	117	52%
3.	Human rights should not be taught to pupils at all.	20	9%
4.	Not decided.	25	11%
Total		225	100%

Conclusion

It is clear that there is a general lack of clarity on the objectives of human rights education among teachers. While the teachers claim that they are ready for the introduction of human rights education, indications are that a lot still needs to be done to make them truly ready for the introduction of human rights education. This is especially so in the light of the lack of knowledge about the United Nations Human Rights Charter and lack of knowledge of human rights acknowledged by the

teachers. Note should be taken that the majority of the teachers claim to have had no training in human rights education. This casts doubt on the claim to readiness for the introduction of human rights education. Before human rights education is mounted full scale, there is need for more workshops and seminars to make teachers aware of what human rights are as well as familiarise them with the United Nation Human Rights Charter. There is need to decide exactly how human rights education is going to be introduced as well as the conceptual frame work that will inform this education. There is also need for the consideration of human rights education in the context of Unhu/Ubuntu as the overriding philosophy of the people of Zimbabwe (Ramose, 1999).

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