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On the Topic

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By

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The Impact of Human Rights Education on the Youth

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Abstract

Human rights education (HRE) is important for shaping the views and actions of young people. In today's world, understanding human rights has become even more crucial. This abstract looks at how human rights education affects youth, influencing their attitudes, actions, and involvement in social justice issues. The goal is to explore how HRE can help create responsible and caring citizens who can challenge human rights violations and promote equality. Human rights education focuses on teaching young people about their rights, responsibilities, and how to protect dignity, justice, and fairness. By educating youth on these principles, society can work towards greater inclusivity and fairness. This education is commonly delivered through schools, community programs, and media campaigns, emphasizing core values such as freedom, dignity, and equality. Beyond raising awareness, HRE aims to inspire young people to take meaningful action in fostering positive societal change. Research shows that youth engaged in human rights education are more likely to advocate for justice and equality. They develop a stronger sense of solidarity with marginalized groups and become more aware of social injustices. HRE encourages critical thinking and empathy, allowing youth to challenge stereotypes and discrimination. As a result, it fosters social cohesion and peace by promoting respect for diversity. A key outcome of human rights education is increased civic engagement. Youth who understand the social, political, and economic aspects of human rights are more inclined to participate in efforts to improve their communities. Moreover, the digital age has amplified the reach of HRE, enabling youth to access information, connect globally, and advocate for human rights through social media and online campaigns.

In conclusion, human rights education has a big impact on youth, shaping their understanding of justice, equality, and their role in supporting these values. By giving young people the knowledge, skills, and motivation to stand up for human rights, HRE helps create active, caring, and responsible citizens. It is essential to keep including human rights education in school curriculums and youth programs worldwide to build a future where everyone's rights are respected and protected.

Keywords: Human Rights Education, Youth, Civic Engagement, Social Justice, Equality

1. Introduction

Human rights education has gained significant prominence in global educational discourse over the last decade as societies confront increasing social fragmentation, inequality, and violations of human dignity. Education is widely acknowledged not only as a fundamental human right but also as a powerful means for promoting awareness, respect, and protection of all other rights (United Nations,

2015) [7]. In this context, human rights education plays a critical role in preparing individuals to understand their rights and responsibilities while encouraging respect for the rights of others. Youth, as a dynamic and influential social group, occupy a central position in these educational efforts, as their beliefs and actions shape future social, political, and cultural realities.

Research conducted between 2014 and 2025 highlights the

growing consensus that human rights education contributes significantly to the holistic development of young people. Scholars argue that HRE enables youth to critically examine social structures, challenge discrimination, and participate meaningfully in democratic processes (Bajaj, 2017) ^[1]. The inclusion of human rights education within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 further reinforces its relevance, emphasising education for global citizenship, peace, and social justice (UNESCO, 2015) ^[7]. This paper reviews recent literature to analyse how human rights education influences youth awareness, attitudes, and civic engagement, while also identifying key challenges and future directions.

2. Conceptual Understanding of Human Rights Education

Human rights education refers to educational processes that seek to impart knowledge about human rights norms and mechanisms while fostering values, attitudes, and skills necessary for their promotion and protection. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2012) ^[4], HRE aims to empower individuals to enjoy and defend their rights and to respect the rights of others. Contemporary literature emphasises that HRE is not limited to cognitive learning but involves experiential and participatory approaches that encourage learners to internalise human rights principles (Osler & Starkey, 2018) ^[5].

Over the last decade, scholars have expanded the scope of HRE to include formal schooling, non-formal community programmes, and informal learning through digital platforms (UNESCO, 2023) ^[8]. This broadened understanding recognises that youth encounter human rights issues in diverse contexts and that learning must be responsive to their lived experiences. Research suggests that when human rights education is embedded across subjects and supported by participatory pedagogy, it becomes more effective in shaping youth perspectives and behaviour (Quennerstedt, 2019) ^[6].

3. Youth as Key Stakeholders in Human Rights Education

Youth represent a critical stage of social and moral development during which individuals form enduring attitudes toward justice, equality, and participation. Literature from the past ten years consistently identifies youth as key stakeholders in human rights education due to their capacity for social innovation and activism (Bajaj, 2020) ^[2]. Exposure to HRE during adolescence and early adulthood can significantly influence how young people perceive social issues and engage with their communities. Studies indicate that youth-centred human rights education fosters a sense of agency and empowerment, enabling learners to see themselves as active contributors rather than passive recipients of social norms (Osler & Starkey, 2018) ^[5]. By linking human rights principles to everyday experiences, HRE helps youth understand the relevance of rights in their personal and social lives. This understanding forms the foundation for long-term civic engagement and democratic participation.

4. Impact of Human Rights Education on Awareness and Knowledge

One of the most consistently reported outcomes of human rights education is increased awareness and understanding of fundamental rights and freedoms. Empirical studies conducted across different regions demonstrate that students who receive structured human rights education exhibit higher levels of knowledge regarding civil, political, social, and economic rights (Hossain, 2025) ^[3]. This knowledge enables youth to recognise rights violations and understand mechanisms for protection and accountability.

The literature further suggests that awareness gained through HRE enhances youth confidence in asserting their rights while respecting the rights of others (Bajaj, 2017) ^[1]. Knowledge-based outcomes are particularly significant in contexts where marginalised youth face systemic discrimination and limited access to information. By equipping young people with accurate knowledge, human rights education contributes to greater social awareness and empowerment.

5. Influence on Attitudes and Value Formation

Human rights education has a substantial impact on the formation of values and attitudes among youth. Research from the past decade indicates that HRE promotes empathy, tolerance, and respect for diversity, particularly in multicultural societies (Quennerstedt, 2019) ^[6]. Exposure to human rights-based curricula encourages young people to reflect critically on social norms and challenge discriminatory beliefs.

UNESCO (2023) ^[8] highlights that participatory HRE approaches, such as discussions, role-plays, and collaborative projects, foster moral reasoning and ethical sensitivity. Studies reveal that students engaged in HRE demonstrate more inclusive attitudes toward marginalised groups and show greater willingness to oppose injustice (Osler & Starkey, 2018) ^[5]. These attitudinal changes are essential for building cohesive and equitable societies.

6. Human Rights Education and Civic Engagement

A growing body of literature establishes a strong relationship between human rights education and youth civic engagement. Research suggests that young people who understand human rights principles are more likely to participate in community service, social movements, and democratic processes (Bajaj, 2020) ^[2]. HRE provides youth with the conceptual tools to analyse social problems and motivates them to contribute to positive change.

Studies within the framework of global citizenship education indicate that HRE enhances skills such as dialogue, cooperation, and peaceful conflict resolution, which are vital for civic participation (UNESCO, 2015) ^[7]. By linking rights education to real-world issues, educators can encourage youth to engage actively with their communities and advocate for social justice.

7. Contribution to Social Justice and Equality

Human rights education plays a crucial role in sensitising youth to issues of inequality and social injustice. Literature from the last decade emphasises that HRE helps learners

understand structural inequalities related to gender, caste, class, ethnicity, and disability (Bajaj, 2017) ^[1]. This critical awareness enables youth to recognise systemic barriers rather than attributing social problems solely to individual shortcomings.

Empirical studies show that youth exposed to HRE demonstrate stronger commitments to fairness, equity, and human dignity (Osler & Starkey, 2018) ^[5]. By encouraging critical reflection on power relations, human rights education supports the development of socially responsible attitudes and behaviours that are essential for inclusive development.

8. Human Rights Education in the Digital Era

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed the landscape of human rights education. Recent literature highlights that online platforms, social media, and digital campaigns have become important tools for disseminating human rights knowledge and engaging youth in advocacy (UNESCO, 2023) ^[8]. Digital spaces allow young people to connect globally, share experiences, and mobilise support for human rights causes.

However, researchers caution that digital HRE must be accompanied by critical media literacy to address misinformation, online harassment, and digital exclusion (Quennerstedt, 2019) ^[6]. Effective digital human rights education empowers youth to engage responsibly while amplifying their voices in global human rights discourse.

9. Challenges in Implementing Human Rights Education

Despite its documented benefits, human rights education faces several challenges in implementation. One major issue identified in the literature is the lack of adequately trained teachers who can facilitate participatory and critical discussions on sensitive human rights topics (Osler & Starkey, 2018) ^[5]. Curriculum constraints and limited institutional support further hinder the systematic integration of HRE.

Political and cultural resistance also presents significant barriers, particularly in contexts where human rights education is perceived as controversial (Bajaj, 2020) ^[2]. Addressing these challenges requires sustained policy commitment, teacher professional development, and collaboration between educational institutions and civil society organisations.

10. Emerging Trends and Research Gaps

Recent literature points to emerging trends such as the integration of human rights education with peace education, sustainability education, and global citizenship education (UNESCO, 2023) ^[8]. Scholars emphasise the need for longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of HRE on youth behaviour, leadership, and civic participation (Quennerstedt, 2019) ^[6].

There is also a growing call for context-specific research, particularly in developing countries, to explore how social, cultural, and economic factors influence the effectiveness of human rights education (Hossain, 2025) ^[3]. Addressing these gaps will strengthen the evidence base and inform more effective educational practices.

11. Conclusion

The literature reviewed from 2014 to 2025 provides strong evidence that human rights education has a meaningful and positive impact on youth. HRE enhances awareness, shapes values, promotes civic engagement, and fosters a commitment to social justice and equality. Although challenges related to curriculum design, teacher training, and sociopolitical resistance persist, the overall findings support the integration of human rights education into formal and non-formal learning systems.

By investing in inclusive, participatory, and context-sensitive human rights education, societies can empower youth to become informed, empathetic, and active citizens. Such education is essential for strengthening democratic institutions and promoting respect for human dignity in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

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