



Reviewing the role of South African teachers in successful Human Rights Education implementation in public schools

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ABSTRACT

Greater clarification is required regarding what human rights education (HRE) is, does, and implies as HRE becomes a more regular component of international policy talks, national textbook reform, and post-conflict educational practises. This article examines the role of teachers in a successful integration of HRE in various educational settings. This research adopted a qualitative interpretivist paradigm and Critical Emancipatory Research (CER) as a research framework. In light of its goal of fostering a culture that prioritises opportunities for lifelong learning for everyone, regardless of background, the study argues that CER lens is the most appropriate theoretical framework for tackling human rights education implementation in public secondary schools. In order to support peace education, HRE awareness, and social transformation in underserved communities, the application of HRE is critically examined in this study. The purpose of this study was to provide answers to the following questions: What are the present practises of human rights education in Lejweleputswa District public schools by teachers? What role do teachers play in implementing HRE successfully in South African public schools? And, under what circumstances can HRE be implemented in public schools? This article purposively sampled two secondary schools in Lejweleputswa District in the Free State Province in South Africa. The data was collected through focus group interviews that were digitally recorded and the data was analysed thematically and through member checking. The results of this study demonstrated that teachers need to be prepared before implementing HRE methodology. They need to be given more material, information on human rights education, norms and standards, as well as interactive teaching techniques. The study thus adds to the discussion on using HRE as a tool for peaceful education and a substitute for corporal punishment.

Keywords: Critical Emancipatory Research; Human Rights Education; peace education; Role of teachers; learners' human rights.

INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations (UN), schools are one of the main channels through which human rights education (HRE) should be made accessible to children and young people (United Nations General Assembly 1993; United Nations 2006). Discussions of the educational reform should centre on the transformation of the teachers themselves (Adu & Ngibe, 2014; Paseka & Schwab, 2020). Furthermore, many semi-literate communities value teachers (and textbooks), suggesting that their advocacy of human rights may be crucial for HRE to spread outside of the classroom, the ultimate goal of the educational project, even though HRE teachers may be encouraged to equalise power relations in the classroom (Bajaj, 2011; Tibbitts & Fernekes, 2011). However, there is currently little information available regarding the prevalence and nature of HRE in educational settings, and there are no standardised methods for assessing the provision of HRE in educational settings (Hau, 2017; Robinson, Phillips, and Quennerstedt, 2018). South Africa joined the rest of the world with education transformation and curriculum reforms, this followed the banning and abolishment of corporal punishment as the main disciplinary tool in the country. Following the abolishment, the education department tried to introduce several methods of instilling discipline in schools, such as learner-behaviour log books, active parental involvement and detention just to mention few. Due to the learners' human rights, these methods slowly became ineffective, thus leaving teachers frustrated with learners' ill behaviour in the school setting. Due to this, this paper considers HRE as one of the best tools to be tried and tested as the most suitable alternative for instilling order in schools.

A small number of foreign studies have concentrated on school-based HRE; nevertheless, these offer only a scant grasp of the presence and form of HRE in schools, and do not considerably add to our understanding of teachers'

responsibility for HRE (Zembylas, Charalambous, Lesta, & Charalambous, 2015; Jerome, 2016). The results of the aforementioned research thus indicate that HRE is not a well-integrated component of educational institutions or national systems. In line with this claim, it was discovered that while most nations included some mention of children's and human rights in their school curricula, doing so was frequently elective, ad hoc, and not required, which rarely resulted in a thorough education about rights. However, small-scale studies by Tibbitts (2012) and Cove. et al, (2011) highlighted instances where HRE was incorporated into specific schools' practises; they noted notable improvements in participants' the application of human rights principles, comprehension of human rights, and their empathy and concern for others.

According to an Australian study, the goodwill of individual and enthusiasm teachers plays a significant role in the implementation of HRE projects (Bajaj, et al, 2016; Lundy & Sainz, 2018), and any teachers also reported feeling ambiguous about HRE, which made it difficult for them to interact with it. According to McLeod (2018) and Yemini, Tibbitts and Goren (2019), teachers in England, Australia, and Mexico interpreted and carried out their HRE curriculum responsibilities in different ways depending on how they socially construct their ideas of children, the associated values, beliefs, and prejudices they hold, and how they are supported at the school level by school leaders in doing so (McFarland, 2015). In a subsequent study, Tibbitts and Kirchsclaeger (2010) found that teachers lacked HRE professional development and were unfamiliar with the subject matter.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The paper's aim was to comprehend the difficulties teachers have when adopting HRE in a setting where retaining respect for learners' rights is a priority. In order to assist in the development of more inclusive HRE policies at the school level, the purpose of this study was to provide answers to the following questions: What are the present practises of human rights education in Lejweleputswa District public schools by teachers? What role do teachers play in implementing HRE successfully in South African public schools? And, under what circumstances can HRE be implemented in public schools?

CRITICAL EMANCIPATORY RESEARCH AS RELEVANT THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two considerations that are pertinent to societal transformation serve as the foundation for CER's approach to school relations. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argues that classroom violence shouldn't be considered a normal part of order. In fact, because these interactions create a world order founded on human rights abuses and deceit, researchers must go on intellectual adventures to problematize it as well as to expose and combat problematic school relationships. In addition, Akinsola (2010) pushed for "open discourse on how to engage minds in a critical manner in order to successfully deal with the issue of human rights violations in South African schools." Due to its values of social justice, equity, respect, peace, freedom, and the hope that the oppressed will be empowered and emancipated, a CER lens was selected as the most acceptable theoretical framework for assisting the teachers to review the role of providing peaceful education through HRE (Tutak, Bondy & Adams, 2011; Dube & Hlalele, 2018).

In short, CER is crucial for framing this research because it offers a theoretical basis for a planning perspective that emphasises widespread public participation, information sharing with the public, reaching consensus through public dialogue to improve relationships rather than exercising power, avoiding the privileging of experts and bureaucrats, and replacing the technical expert model with one of a reflective planner (Dube & Hlalele, 2018; Malebese, 2016).

Discourse is desirable even though it is not always easy or feasible, thus in this study I concentrate on three crucial topics that CER researchers identified as having the potential to assist solve the problem in the context of human rights breaches. I contend that through fostering deliberative interactions that lessen the plague of human rights violations in schools, schools and society can channel the energy of conflict into constructive rather than destructive channels (Abu-Nimer, Khoury & Welty, 2007), as quoted in Dube & Hlalele (2018). Therefore, the paper concurs with Mahlomaholo (2009) that CER appears to be one of the most successful strategies for combating this perverted consciousness and fostering a healthy academic identity.

RESEARCH PARADIGM AND METHOD

Within the confines of this paradigm, participants were free to express their opinions regarding their own practises and role as long as they had time to reflect and were encouraged to provide clarification when necessary. The basis for this study was given by interpretivist qualitative research, which enabled the involvement in discussions about Human Rights Education and CER. This paradigm was applicable in this situation because it recognises that participants have consciousness, thoughts, the capacity for reflection, feelings, and the ability to evaluate human rights breaches from a range of perspectives (Coberta, 2003; Flick, 2010; and Payne & Payne 2004). According to Terre Blance, Durrheim, and Painter (2006), realities taken into account in the framework of human rights discourse recognise the participants' individualised perspectives of human rights discourses prior to, after, and beyond 1994. In order to gain participants' trust and involvement, the study acknowledged the significance of treating them fairly and with respect.

SAMPLE

Purposive sampling was used in this study to gather data. Purposive sampling is carried out with a specific objective in mind, as Maree and Pietersen (2016) imply. Therefore, in order to critically evaluate the role of teachers and its effectiveness in fostering a peaceful environment through HRE, this research used this method to deliberately sample various schools in Lejweleputswa with various backgrounds. In terms of race, gender, culture, schools, and teaching experiences, the participants were diverse. For instance, the principals of each school, four teachers from the old Model C school, four teachers from a township school, and a member of the school governing body (SGB) from each school were chosen for this study. It was intriguing that there were no rural or agricultural schools, as this would have given the philosophy and approaches to teaching about human rights in South Africa a fresh viewpoint. The participants' teaching experience ranged from zero to five, six to ten, and eleven to twenty-five years. To elicit varied opinions and thoughts from the participants, this categorization was carried out.

DATA COLLECTION

To create environments that promote empowerment, this study required a practical intervention in the form of participatory action research. Through the construction of environments that foster involvement and empowerment, the PAR research strategy seeks to advance social justice (Tracey & Marrow, 2012). PAR bridges the gap between power structures and enables researchers to implement CER, ensuring that everyone with a stake in the partnership has a voice in the decision-making process (Tracey & Marrow, 2012). To put the PAR's CER-informed concepts into practise, a team was established. Team members collaborated at a school to contextualise and conceptualise issues of human rights violations in schools and how the clear roles of teachers in HRE implementation can be successful in curbing the violations of rights in schools. Salas, Reyes, & McDaniel (2018), Driskell, Sala, & Driskell (2018), Schmutz, Meier & Manser (2019), and Driskell, Sala, & Driskell (2018) all draw conclusions about how stakeholders often feel more empowered to support learning and are eager to seize any opportunity to motivate the learners when they are involved. With the chosen team, the shared goals were to improve HRE application and reduce risks to school environment safety by critically reviewing the role of teachers in public schools.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

According to Govil (2013), a researcher's compass is set by ethical ideals. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) state that the researcher must take considerable care to ensure that ethical standards are upheld throughout the whole data collection process. The requests to conduct this study were received and approved (HREIC 02/22/11 ST. MED) by the Strategic Planning and Research Unit of the Free State Department of Education and the Ethics Committee of Central University of Technology. The researcher handled the participants with respect and dignity by abiding by all ethical standards. The researcher in this project was in charge of guaranteeing the rights and welfare of the participants because the main goal of this study is to examine human connections. The researcher also made an effort to win each study's cooperation and trust.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

The following methods were used to assess the reliability of the qualitative investigation; the researcher and a senior researcher separately transcribed the interview transcripts. According to Gunawan (2015), Schrink (2009), Connelly (2016), and Rose & Johnson (2020) (Rose & Johnson, 2020), in order to validate any results that were ambiguous, the researcher must also conduct a member check, in which she/he got in touch with the participants once more. Due to this, member checking was also performed to validate the data.

DATA ANALYSIS

Regular development tracking was done through meetings and team member involvement. The discussions at the meetings were also recorded for data analysis. This study used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which Qian, Wei, & Law (2018), Li, Pearce, & Low (2018) define as a cross-disciplinary approach that includes the analysis of text and dialogue in all disciplines, in order to gain deeper insights from the opinions of co-researchers. CDA analyses the data to properly comprehend the information obtained (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018). CDA and CER are equivalent to one another while attempting to identify a problem's cause and a solution (Chilisa, 2012; Sahputra, 2021). To avoid misinterpretation of uttered words, member verification was also done. The researcher then used text-oriented discourse analysis to assess the data from the FAI approach. The information gleaned from the interviews was written down, converted to text, and given meaning. The words of each responder were examined in order to determine the influence of their ideologies. As a result, the opinions of the respondents were better captured and connected to their actions (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

It is predicted that academics in South Africa and other African nations will be tasked with promoting moral values consistent with the advancement of human rights education. Since they are supposed to be lifelong learners, teachers should also learn new strategies for dealing with complex difficulties in the classroom, such as diversity, culture, and inclusivity. The research on how teachers employ human rights education is presented and discussed in this part. The following themes emerged from the focus group interviews once the qualitative data had been acquired and analysed:

a. Importance and relevance of HRE in South African public schools

Everyone's dignity and liberty are protected by human rights. States are bound by international law to respect, preserve human rights, and uphold as well as make sure that education works to encourage adherence to these basic liberties (Tibbitts, 2012). The necessity of access to human rights education is reiterated in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, 2011). Human rights education implies that either it is unacceptable for there to be human rights breaches in the classroom or that learners' interactions and experiences in schools must be in line with human rights. The post-apartheid educational system should cover human rights given the constitutionally required transition to democracy and adoption of equality based on human rights. Schools play a crucial part in educating teachers and learners about, valuing, and defending their human rights. In many South African public schools, anarchy, racial intolerance, and violence are portrayed as flourishing (de Jager, 2013; Segalo & Rambuda, 2018). The Department of Education (DoE) publicly acknowledged that violence is a problem in South African schools based on evidence from studies done by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (Ferreira & Schulze, 2014; Juan, Zuze, Hannan, Govender, Reddy, 2018). In light of this, teachers must teach their learners about human rights and instil values in them. This justifies the relevance of HRE in becoming the effective alternative to corporal punishment since it has the ability to instil values and morals in both learners and their teachers, where they will treat each other with respect and promote peaceful education in the country.

However, the participants in this study conceded to have lack of knowledge of HRE and thus, did not see its relevance to the curriculum in South African public schools. Unfortunately, the lack of ongoing discussion about what constitutes a human rights education and how to effectively link HRE and other curriculum themes in classroom instruction is the cause of the human rights' absence from the public primary school curriculum (Tibbitts, Nygren, Novak, Bentrovato, Wassermann, Anamika, 2020).

b. Teachers' attitudes towards teaching Human Rights Education

Despite the fact that teachers in all schools expressed support for children's rights, private school teachers demonstrated significantly more support than public school teachers (Covell, Howe, & McNeil, 2010). The majority of research agree that teachers in public schools are generally HRE sensitive, and this is frequently due to a lack of HRE implementation training (Cassidy, Brunner, & Webster, 2014; Chen, 2019; Plantilla, 2009). Bittar (2020) asserts that there is currently no evidence of university-level instruction in human rights education and that teachers are underprepared to instruct in methods other than the conventional ones. It is doubtful that teachers will support rights-based education or feel confident switching to teaching in accordance with children's rights if they are uncomfortable with democratic pedagogy or do not fully understand or have misconceptions about children's rights (Covell, et al., 2010).

On the other hand, university students, particularly those training to teach, can improve understanding of the Convention and rights-supportive attitudes (Shuayb, 2015). Differences in how they view resources and training show how influential early views are in shaping how teachers react to education that respects human rights and the importance of early training.

c. Role of teachers in the successful implementation

Teachers must unquestionably play a significant role in HRE programmes. The majority of HRE research focused on teacher education as a means of boosting learners' knowledge, pedagogical skills, and classroom conduct (Bajaj, 2011). This is due to the fact that educators act as rights education's messengers, role models, and mediators, therefore, the impact of teaching human rights education on teachers individually and in terms of how they behave, however, has not been thoroughly explored in earlier HRE studies. According to the South African Schools Act, Act No. 84 of 1996, order must be maintained in classrooms and schools to avoid disruptive behaviour and other transgressions limiting learners' capacity to learn (SASA, 1996). This duty fell to teachers to uphold discipline and devise strategies that consider students' rights and protection because the Schools Act outlaws the use of corporal punishment in schools, and those who break the law face fines.

The majority of teachers in this study nonetheless maintained their belief that the act is silent on the corrective measures that educators should implement, despite the act making it clear that regardless of the strategies teachers employ to keep the peace in the classroom, they are still required to protect, uphold, and advance the learners' human rights. The prohibition of corporal punishment has made it more difficult for teachers to uphold classroom

discipline and because of problems with the current judicial system, some teachers are virtually shunning their responsibilities for upholding order in the classroom. Since violence and violations of human rights are on the rise, it is essential and vital to teach about human rights education, particularly in South African public schools. Discourse found that learners who no longer revere or fear their teachers have more freedom as a result of the emphasis on children's rights and the related outlawing of corporal punishment (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011; Bajaj, 2011; Tibbits & Kirchsclager, 2010). Even though they think that alternatives to corporal punishment were ineffective, most educators recognise the value of protecting children's rights while also making sure that they were disciplined (Segalo & Rambuda, 2018; Churr, 2015; Maphosa & Shumba, 2010).

d. Conducive conditions for HRE implementation in South African public schools

Members usually use the shared objective as inspiration and guidance to continue learning from one another, if your perspective is distorted, you cannot learn anything. Clear direction-setting and coordination of the work of the teachers and learners are required for the team members to work towards a shared goal. As a result, a shared vision that enables the team to advance as a unit towards its goals is established after carefully considering the values of the individuals working at the schools (Mills & Spencer, 2005). But this hasn't happened in our secondary schools, according to the majority of the study's teachers, who also indicated that when teamwork does happen, it's challenging, biased, and lacks vision.

In order to create an environment that is favourable for the application of the HRE, the respondents underlined the importance of objective and impartial teamwork in schools.

CONCLUSION

In order to fill in any gaps and examine teachers' experiences with HRE, including both individual changes and actions, as well as how HRE students use their teachers as resources in addressing injustices they have witnessed, the aim of this article was to examine the role of teachers in a successful implementation of human rights education in South African public schools. In debates on HRE, it was emphasised how important it was to include teachers' pre- and in-service human rights education training. Teachers must be ready before implementing HRE pedagogy. They require access to additional resources, knowledge of the development, laws, and principles governing human rights, as well as participatory teaching techniques.

The systemic change required for HRE to be more apparent, consistent, and ubiquitous in classrooms and throughout the educational system includes a classification of teachers' HRE activities. In order to further develop understandings about the nature of the systemic change that would support embedding HRE within schools, it is now necessary to find routine and pedagogical practises, as well as curriculum components in classrooms and schools as a whole, that support educating students about, through, and for human rights.

The study's participants believed that the district department's services needed to be coordinated. In order to improve services for themselves, the majority of the instructors showed their enthusiasm and desire to take part in all stages of service planning and policy-making activities. Principals and several members of the school governing body claimed that the schools didn't seem to have given students the required instruction, knowledge, or tools to promote effective collaboration and HRE implementation for a more secure and tranquil environment for teaching and learning. Principals and other members of the support staff frequently asserted that they were not aware of any institution-specific implementation guidelines for human rights teaching. Even some instructors were not aware that human rights were recognised by the UDHR and other human rights treaties.

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