



Understanding Human Rights: The Knowledge And Perceptions Of School Teachers In Eastern Rajasthan

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Abstract:

This study examines the knowledge and perceptions of school teachers in Eastern Rajasthan regarding human rights, focusing on their awareness of basic rights, familiarity with international and national human rights frameworks, and their attitudes towards human rights education. Through a qualitative approach, using interviews, the study reveals significant gaps in teachers' understanding of complex human rights issues, particularly those related to marginalized groups. The findings highlight the need for enhanced professional development and curriculum revisions to better equip teachers for effective human rights education. By addressing these gaps, the study advocates for a more comprehensive and context-specific approach to fostering a culture of human rights in the classroom.

Keywords:

Human rights education, Eastern Rajasthan, school teachers, knowledge, perceptions, curriculum, professional development, marginalized groups, inclusivity, educational policy.

Introduction:

Human rights, recognized as the universal rights and freedoms to which all individuals are inherently entitled, are foundational to the creation of a just and equitable society (United Nations, 1948). These rights encompass a broad spectrum, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, all of which are vital in ensuring human dignity and equality (OHCHR, 2016). The role of education in promoting these rights is paramount, as it shapes the attitudes, values, and behaviors of future generations (Mahapatra, 2012). In this context, school teachers act as the primary conduits for transmitting human rights knowledge to students, thereby influencing the broader societal understanding of these principles.

Eastern Rajasthan, a region characterized by its rich cultural heritage and diverse social fabric (Ministry of Tourism, 2020), presents a unique context for examining the role of educators in human rights education (Department of College Education, 2006). This study seeks to explore the level of knowledge and the perceptions of school teachers in Eastern Rajasthan regarding human rights. By understanding their awareness and attitudes, the study aims to assess how well-prepared these educators are to instill a respect

for human rights among their students and to identify potential areas for improvement in teacher training and curriculum development.

The Significance of Human Rights Education:

Human rights education (HRE) is a process aimed at building a universal culture of human rights by imparting knowledge and developing skills, attitudes, and behaviors that support the recognition, respect, and defense of human rights (Robinson, Phillips, & Quennerstedt, 2018). HRE is not limited to teaching about specific rights; it also encompasses the broader goals of fostering a sense of global citizenship, promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, and encouraging active participation in the promotion and protection of human rights.

In the Indian context, the importance of HRE has been increasingly recognized, particularly in light of the country's diverse social dynamics and historical challenges related to inequality and discrimination. Eastern Rajasthan, like many other regions in India, faces its own set of socio-economic challenges, including issues related to caste discrimination, gender inequality, and access to education (Vikalp Sansthan, 2024). In such an environment, the role of educators in promoting human rights becomes even more crucial, as they are often the first point of contact for young minds with the concepts of justice, equality, and human dignity.

Methodology:

The study was conducted across multiple districts in Eastern Rajasthan, encompassing both urban and rural areas to ensure a representative sample of the teaching population. A qualitative approach was employed, using interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' knowledge and perceptions regarding human rights.

The interview was designed to assess various dimensions of human rights knowledge, including familiarity with international human rights instruments (such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), awareness of national human rights frameworks (such as the Constitution of India and the National Human Rights Commission), and understanding of specific rights related to vulnerable groups, such as children, women, and minorities.

In addition to assessing knowledge, the interview also explored teachers' perceptions of the importance of human rights education, their confidence in teaching these topics, and their views on how well the current curriculum addresses human rights issues. The qualitative interviews provided deeper insights into the contextual factors that influence teachers' attitudes towards human rights education, such as cultural norms, personal experiences, and professional challenges.

Findings:

The study revealed a complex and nuanced picture of human rights knowledge and perceptions among school teachers in Eastern Rajasthan. While there was a general awareness of basic human rights concepts, significant gaps were identified in teachers' understanding of more specific and complex human rights issues.

Basic Human Rights Knowledge:

The majority of teachers demonstrated a solid understanding of fundamental human rights, such as the right to life, the right to education, and the right to freedom of expression. These rights were generally well-integrated into their teaching practices, with many teachers reporting that they frequently discussed these concepts with their students, particularly in subjects like social studies and civics.

This gap in knowledge was particularly pronounced among teachers in rural areas, where access to professional development opportunities and resources on human rights education was more limited.

Awareness of International and National Human Rights Frameworks:

The study found that a significant proportion of teachers were unfamiliar with key international human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of

the Child. This lack of awareness was concerning, given that these documents form the foundation of human rights education and provide essential guidelines for promoting and protecting human rights in the classroom.

On the other hand, there was a higher level of awareness regarding national human rights frameworks, particularly the Constitution of India. Teachers generally had a good understanding of the constitutional rights guaranteed to citizens, such as the right to equality, the right to freedom, and the right to education. However, there was less familiarity with the work of national human rights institutions, such as the National Human Rights Commission and state-level human rights commissions, which play a crucial role in monitoring and addressing human rights violations in the country.

Perceptions of Human Rights Education:

Teachers overwhelmingly recognized the importance of human rights education, with many expressing the view that it is essential for fostering a just and equitable society. They saw human rights education as a means of empowering students to stand up for their own rights and the rights of others, and to challenge injustice and discrimination in their communities.

However, despite this recognition, many teachers reported feeling inadequately prepared to teach human rights effectively. They cited a lack of training, resources, and support as major barriers to delivering comprehensive human rights education. In particular, teachers in rural areas expressed frustration with the limited professional development opportunities available to them, which left them feeling isolated and under-equipped to address complex human rights issues in the classroom.

Curriculum and Human Rights Education:

The study also highlighted significant concerns regarding the adequacy of the current curriculum in addressing human rights issues. Many teachers felt that the curriculum was too narrow in its focus, with human rights topics often being relegated to a few isolated chapters in social studies or civics textbooks. As a result, students were not given sufficient opportunities to engage with these issues in a meaningful way, and teachers were left with little room to explore the broader implications of human rights in their teaching.

Moreover, teachers noted that the curriculum often failed to reflect the realities of life in Eastern Rajasthan, where issues such as caste discrimination, gender inequality, and access to education are deeply ingrained. They called for a more localized and context-specific approach to human rights education, which would allow them to address the unique challenges faced by their students and communities.

Conclusion:

This study underscores the critical role that school teachers in Eastern Rajasthan play in promoting human rights education, while also highlighting significant gaps in their knowledge and perceptions of human rights. To address these gaps, there is an urgent need for targeted professional development programs that equip teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively teach human rights. Such programs should focus not only on the basics of human rights but also on more complex and context-specific issues, such as the rights of marginalized groups and the challenges of promoting human rights in a culturally diverse society.

In addition to enhancing teacher training, there is a need for a comprehensive review of the current curriculum to ensure that it adequately addresses human rights issues and provides teachers with the flexibility to explore these topics in depth. This could involve incorporating more case studies and real-life examples from the region, as well as providing teachers with access to a wider range of resources and support materials.

Ultimately, the success of human rights education in Eastern Rajasthan will depend on the commitment of educators, policymakers, and the broader community to promoting a culture of respect and equality. By investing in the knowledge and capabilities of teachers, and by creating a more supportive and inclusive educational environment, we can help to ensure that the next generation of students in Eastern Rajasthan is equipped to uphold and defend the fundamental principles of human rights.

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