

Education and Human Rights in the Context of the New Pre-Tertiary Education Curriculum Framework of Ghana

Mohammed Adam^{1*}, Linus, D. Nangwele¹ (Corresponding author), Samuel Poatob¹ and Chrispin Mwinkyogtaa Kuupiel²

¹University of Education, Winneba-Ghana

²University of Cape Coast-Ghana

Email:LNANGWELE@UEW.EDU.GH

Abstract

This paper contributes to the ongoing academic debate on human rights education, particularly focusing on Ghana as an ardent advocate of education and human rights. Highlighting the constitutional and international acknowledgment of education as a fundamental human right, as well as the importance of human rights education for social transformation, the study explored Ghana's dedication to human rights education. This study was basically a meta-analysis of which the current curriculum framework for the pre-tertiary education in Ghana was the focus. The findings reveal that while the new pre-tertiary curriculum framework contains elements of human rights within its core values and specific primary school modules, there's a notable absence of explicit articulation of human rights education. The study among others things, recommends that acknowledging and addressing human rights goes beyond incorporating them as cross-cutting issues. Thus, human rights ought to be deliberately incorporated throughout the curriculum for the purpose of providing a more comprehensive approach for their teaching and learning, ensuring their significance is not overlooked.

Key Words: Education, Human Rights, Curriculum, Framework, Pre-Tertiary

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Introduction

Education is regarded as a basic human right by many organisations and individuals, including the United Nations (1948), Claude (2005), Kaur and Makkar (2014), Flowers et al. (2000), Aurora (2016), The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and Right to Education Initiative (2019), Patel (2007), Rastogi (2014), Lee (2013), Musheer and Shakir (2017), and the United Nations (2012a). Depriving people of education undermines their capacity to advocate for and exercise other human rights. The value of education has been affirmed by numerous sources, including the United Nations (2012a) and Kuupiel (2019). Inequality, poverty, and war are all mitigated as a result of improvements in human capital and demographic stability (United Nations, 2012ab; Lee, 2013). Kuupiel, Nangwele, and Pufaa (2022) and UNESCO and the Right to Education Initiative (2019) both report an increase in the importance parents place on financial support for their children's education. Research consistently finds that education improves students' capacity for empathy, friendship, and tolerance (Claude, 2005; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) & UNESCO, 2007; United Nations, 1948; World Education Report, 2000). Further, education helps people develop as people, increases their appreciation for others' rights and liberties, and prepares them to take active roles in a free society. This means that educational opportunities are prioritised as "pathways" to national development (Musheer & Shakir, 2017, p. 379). In Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), it is stated that "everyone has the right to education." In 1948, this proclamation established the first link between schooling and human rights.

In Ghana, there appears to be a divide over how best to promote human rights education. One school of thought holds that human rights should be taught as a subject (Odumah, 2014) and another school holds that human rights should be integrated throughout all that goes on in the classroom. When a nation ratifies an international treaty, it assumes the responsibility of protecting the rights it guarantees to its inhabitants. This paper examines the new pre-tertiary education curriculum framework in Ghana through the lens of the human rights paradigm in order to draw conclusions about the relationship between education and human rights. This is so because, first, pedagogy, philosophy of education, and other educational programmes, policies, and strategies are implemented in accordance with the requirements set forth in the curriculum. Second, when compared to other West African countries, Ghana's educational system is arguably the best since it receives more financing per student than any other area of the economy (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2018). Finally, Chapter five of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana guarantees the protection and enhancement of essential civil liberties and rights, including the right to an education for all citizens. Thus, education is highly valued in Ghana. Due to Ghana's commitment to the realisation of the right to education and the promotion of rights in general, the country's years of continuous investment in education, and the consensus among policymakers, non-governmental organisations

(NGOs), and education stakeholders on the capacity of education to produce significant outcomes, a review of the new pre-tertiary education curriculum in Ghana is warranted to determine if it includes any human rights orientation elements.

Using the pre-tertiary curriculum framework of Ghana as the main resource, the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, and other local and international human rights documents as the supporting ones, this paper affirms the importance of education in moulding individuals and societies and highlights the role that education can play in the protection and promotion of human rights. Sustainable development cannot happen without prioritising human rights (Patel, 2007). Despite acknowledging the fact that there are conditions in which access to education becomes a privilege, this paper contends that access to education is a fundamental human right. While Ghana has demonstrated a strong commitment to education and recognises it as a human right, it is important to investigate whether the curriculum framework adequately incorporates human rights principles and values. But the question that the paper attempts to answer is whether the new pre-tertiary education curriculum framework of Ghana sufficiently includes human rights education. The paper is outlined as follows:

- Introduction
- The context
- Methodology
- Findings
- Conclusions, Implications of Findings and Recommendations

The Context

In the context of Ghana's pre-tertiary education curriculum framework, it is imperative to conduct a documentary analysis study on education and human rights for several compelling reasons. The study aimed to explore the integration of human rights education into Ghana's pre-tertiary education curriculum, focusing on the country's dedication to education and the significant resources allocated to the sector. It aims to identify deficiencies and areas for improvement in human rights teaching within the Ghanaian educational system. The study contributes to global discourse on sustainable development and the importance of prioritising human rights by highlighting the impact of education on individuals and societies, as well as its role in advancing human rights principles.

The Interaction Between Education and Human Rights

The interaction between education and human rights has been recognised and affirmed by various international human rights instruments. In 1948, education was declared and recognised as a human right in the UDHR. Since then, there has been a consensus among human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966), the Sustainable Development Goal 4, and the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), which have further advanced the discourse on education as a human right.

As a fundamental human right that does not only empower individuals to assert their own rights but also enables them to respect the rights of others, education equips individuals with the requisite knowledge, skills, and values necessary to advocate for their rights, rights of the vulnerable or marginalised and facilitates the ability of duty-bearers to protect and promote the rights of all their citizens. Additionally, other benefits of education such as increasing human capital, improving employability and income earnings, and developing people's capacities and competencies that make them economically competitive. The denial of education is considered a violation of human rights and is seen as a barrier to empowerment of citizens of a nation. It is therefore crucial to recognise and address these barriers that impede everyone from accessing education. Realising the right to education is contingent on all stakeholders and can be achieved through effective collaboration and commitment.

Human Rights Education (HRE) plays a vital role in the preservation and realisation of human rights. It is a lifelong learning process that imbues individuals with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to be aware of their own rights and responsibilities, as well as the rights of others. HRE aims to develop responsible and effective methods of securing and asserting rights. It has been observed that HRE leads to improved social behaviour among students, reducing discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment, and abuse of power (UNESCO, 2020). The international community recognises the importance of education in fulfilling human rights, as evidenced by its inclusion in various human rights agreements and programs. The World Programme for Human Rights Education, the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, and the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World have all contributed to improving human rights education globally.

The incorporation of human rights education into national curricula is crucial for promoting and implementing human rights education effectively. Article 26(2) of the UDHR highlights the importance of education in the development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights.

Similarly, Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child encourages nations to integrate human rights education into educational programs and curricula.

In sum, the interaction between education and human rights is vital for the realisation and protection of human rights. Education not only empowers individuals to assert their own rights but also enables them to respect the rights of others. Human Rights Education plays a crucial role in promoting awareness and understanding of human rights and instilling responsible and effective methods of securing and asserting rights. Governments and stakeholders have a responsibility to ensure the availability, accessibility, adaptability, and acceptability of education for all, and to integrate human rights education into national curricula to promote a culture of human rights.

Methodology

The qualitative documentary analysis method was employed for the study. The main resource used was the new pre-tertiary curriculum framework in Ghana. We analysed the pre-tertiary education curriculum framework in tandem with other relevant documents to identify the presence or absence of human rights education components. The core values in the framework were also analysed to determine the extent of human rights incorporation. Rather than focusing on interpreting latent meaning, researchers conducting qualitative documentary analysis look for explicit meaning in the data (Morgan, 2022). Analysing documents in a qualitative study, such as books and journal articles (Morgan, 2022), policy documents or frameworks and making inferences from them, is beneficial due to the stability of the data they contain. Whereas researchers in a conventional qualitative tradition may influence the participants during interviews or observations, data are unaffected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) in a qualitative documentary analysis. Taking the phenomenon explored in question and in relation to Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) assertion, we saw the need to employ the documentary analysis method in this study.

FINDINGS

Expressions of Values in the Curriculum Framework

The new pre-tertiary curriculum framework in Ghana places significant emphasis on expressing values to promote educational excellence. The framework highlights values such as respect, diversity, equity, commitment to excellence, teamwork, and integrity. It encourages learners to show respect for their nation, its institutions, laws, and diverse cultures and citizens of Ghana. The framework also recognises the importance of tolerance, the avoidance of discrimination, and the fair distribution of resources based on the unique needs of learners and schools. While the framework does not explicitly address human rights principles, integrating human rights education would reinforce values related to equity, diversity, and respect. Furthermore, the framework promotes teamwork, collaboration, and integrity as essential values, aligning with the principles of cooperation and mutual respect in human rights frameworks. By cultivating these values and integrating human rights education, the curriculum framework can enhance students' understanding and promotion of human rights which in essence will contribute to a culture of respect for human rights in Ghanaian schools and in society at large.

Fundamentals of the Curriculum Framework

In the development of the curriculum framework, several fundamental principles and implementation strategies were considered. These include essential learning, curriculum outcomes, cross-disciplinary skills, and performance standards. The framework emphasises the importance of cross-disciplinary learning, such as communication, critical thinking, and social responsibility. However, it does not explicitly mention human rights principles, which are crucial for shaping responsible citizens. The implementation principles of the curriculum framework include inclusion, development of key competences, integrated teaching and learning, accountability, autonomy, and flexibility. Inclusion and accountability align with fundamental human rights principles, as they promote equal access to education and ensure that educational institutions are responsible for providing quality education that respects the rights of all individuals.

The framework also highlights the need for integration and coherence in teaching and learning. It envisions the incorporation of emerging areas into the curriculum, reflecting changes in society, economy, culture, and science. However, it is not clear how emerging areas are identified and incorporated into the curriculum. The lack of clarity in this aspect leaves room for interpretation, which may impact the intended competencies that learners are meant to develop. Considering the growing significance of human rights education globally, it would be beneficial for the curriculum framework to explicitly incorporate human rights principles and education. This would ensure that learners are educated about their rights and responsibilities, fostering a culture of respect for human rights. By incorporating human rights principles and education into the curriculum, Ghana can empower its students to become informed and engaged global citizens who not only possess cross-disciplinary skills but also understand and promote human rights in their communities and beyond.

Standards and Competencies in the Curriculum Framework

In our investigation of the curriculum framework's competencies, we found that critical thinking and problem-solving skills are a major focus. While human rights knowledge and attitudes were not specified, these skills can contribute to a broader understanding of societal issues. The framework also emphasises creativity and innovation without addressing the potential human rights implications of technological advancements. However, collaboration and communication, another highlighted competency, align with the principles of respect, tolerance, and non-discrimination central to human rights. Although not explicitly mentioned, the curriculum seems to cultivate essential competencies for human rights promotion.

Within the framework, the development of learners' cultural identity and global citizenship is highlighted, but there is no explicit mention of human rights. This poses a concern, as a global citizen requires an understanding of both their own and others' rights. Personal growth and leadership are also emphasised, focusing on self-awareness, talents, and fulfilling others' needs. While this competency includes aspects of human rights education, the framework fails to explicitly address it. Similarly, digital literacy and ICT communication skills are emphasised, but without considering the potential human rights implications. Upon examination, these competencies appear to indirectly support human rights, but the framework lacks explicit instruction on human rights education.

Academic Subjects and Learning Domains in the Pre-tertiary Curriculum Framework

In our analysis of the pre-tertiary curriculum framework in Ghana, we explored the presence of human rights components at the various levels of education. At the early grade/lower primary level, human rights are not explicitly taught as a subject. However, the curriculum includes instruction on fundamental human rights within the context of beliefs and values, recognising the importance of instilling a human rights orientation in learners. Moving on to the upper primary level, human rights education is not mandated. The curriculum focuses on subjects such as reading, writing, mathematics, and history, with the introduction of a new course called 'Our World and Our People' (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA), 2019a&b). While civics may potentially contain human rights-oriented components, it is not explicitly specified. Nonetheless, the curriculum indicates that fundamental human rights will be part of the instruction under beliefs and values, ensuring learners are oriented to their rights. At the Junior High School level however, human rights orientation is once again absent from the curriculum. The subjects covered in this level do not demonstrate a focus on human rights. While Social Studies, previously introduced students to their rights and responsibilities, has been eliminated, 'Our World and Our People' has been introduced, yet it provides no explicit human rights elements.

The Senior High School level of the Ghanaian curriculum framework lacks explicit provisions for human rights education. Core and elective subjects do not have human rights-oriented characteristics, especially with the "absence" of the previously required Social Studies subject. While the curriculum includes some competencies that could support human rights orientation, such as 'Our world and our people' at the elementary level, human rights is not regarded as a standalone subject. Considering the lack of specific inclusions for human rights education in different educational levels as revealed in this paper, Kuupiel, Nangwele, and Pufaa (2022) and the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2018b) emphasise the need for incorporating human rights elements within academic subjects. Integrating human rights education into disciplines such as History, and Social Studies, as suggested by Kuupiel, Nangwele, and Pufaa (2022) and the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2018b), can provide learners with the knowledge and abilities needed to understand and support human rights. This might guarantee that the Ghanaian education system cultivates a culture of promoting and respecting human rights. This paper similarly argues for the need to incorporate human rights education across all aspects of Ghanaian education, fostering discussions, non-discrimination, equality, and creating a school environment based on human rights principles to effectively educate learners about their rights and how to defend them. The paper also, emphasises the importance of infusing human rights education throughout school life for a sustainable and comprehensive approach.

In sum, the presence of human rights components in the pre-tertiary curriculum framework in Ghana is not only limited but also inconsistent. Although some subjects and courses mention the teaching of fundamental human rights, there is a lack of explicit integration throughout all levels of education.

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study suggests that while embedding significant values that are foundational to human rights, such as respect, diversity, equity, commitment to excellence, teamwork, and integrity, Ghana's new pre-tertiary curriculum framework falls short in explicitly incorporating human rights education across the various pre-tertiary levels of education. Despite acknowledging the importance of values and recognising the necessity of tolerance and non-discrimination for a fair educational system, the curriculum framework does not specifically address or incorporate human rights issues directly. Additionally, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, innovation, collaboration, communication, personal growth, leadership, cultural identity, and global

citizenship are identified as key competencies, yet the direct incorporation and instruction on human rights education remains absent, unattended to and or implicit at best.

The findings and conclusions nonetheless, also come up with a number of implications and also suggest compelling or well-founded ways (recommendations) that could be employed to ensure the explicit incorporation of human rights issues in the pre-tertiary curriculum framework and the various subject-specific curricula and their implementation.

To begin with, the findings and conclusions imply that there is an alignment between the new pre-tertiary education curriculum framework in Ghana and the promotion of human rights education. To capitalise on this alignment, it is necessary for NaCCA to collaborate with curriculum development and design specialists, human rights experts and other relevant stakeholders to create a comprehensive guide on incorporating human rights education into the Ghanaian pre-tertiary curriculum. This should not be an afterthought and must be considered all-through the curriculum development or design process. This guide should include lesson plans, teaching materials, and training programmes for teachers, head teachers, and School Inspection Support Officers (SISOs) to effectively implement and monitor/supervise human rights education in classrooms.

Additionally, to leverage the potential of the curriculum framework in fostering a culture of human rights awareness (while not undermining our Ghanaian values) and respect among learners in the Ghanaian educational system, there is the need for policy makers to actively engage various relevant stakeholders in the area of education including civil society organisations (CSO), such as human rights NGOs. NaCCA, schools and educators should collaborate with CSOs to organise workshops, awareness campaigns, and extracurricular activities focused on human rights education in schools.

Also, the findings and conclusions suggest the need to strengthen specific components of the curriculum framework for a more comprehensive integration of human rights education. Therefore, NaCCA, curriculum development technocrats, in collaboration with teachers and human rights advocates, should review and update the curriculum framework to explicitly incorporate human rights issues across all subjects and grade levels. Regular feedback mechanisms should also be established to assess the effectiveness of these updates and make necessary adjustments.

Furthermore, implicit in the findings and conclusions of this paper is that, further exploration into the implementation and effectiveness of the curriculum framework is essential to drive positive changes in attitudes and behaviours towards human rights. There is therefore, the need for the Ministry of Education and NaCCA to conduct further and comprehensive research and survey to evaluate the impact of the curriculum framework on learners' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours regarding human rights is crucial.

Lastly, a dedicated unit within the Ministry of Education, perhaps, with support from local and international organisations such as T-Tel and UNESCO, should be established to oversee the monitoring and evaluation of human rights education within the national curriculum. Such a unit should be responsible for developing indicators of success, collecting data on a regular basis, and producing annual reports on the state of human rights education in Ghana. The insights from the reports should be used to make informed decisions about curriculum reviews/adjustments and teacher training programmes.

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