

EXAMINING THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AMONG PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OWERRI MUNICIPALITY, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined the role of education in the promotion and protection of human Rights among secondary school students in Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State. The paper sought to examine the rights of the students in public secondary schools, the extent students of public schools know their rights, the ways by which education can help the students know their rights and spotlight the various factors that militate against the respect for and observance of human rights among students of public secondary schools. In order to achieve the above objectives, four research questions were posed. Questionnaire that contained 15 question items drawn from the research questions were administered to 364 respondents for data collection which were analysed using frequency counts and mean. The findings of the study showed that majority of the students of public secondary schools know that they have the right to life, freedom of movement, freedom of association etc. Majority of students of public secondary schools know who need to be educated. There are factors that militate against the respect and observance of human rights, such as poverty, ineffectiveness of the judiciary, bribery and corruption and quest for power acquisition. Based on the findings, the write recommended that; the Government should ensure the independence of the judiciary in order to ensure justice and fair play. Political education of the masses should be effectively pursued by our schools, Universities, and National Orientation Agency (NOA). The privileged in the society should not violate other peoples right because they want to acquire one position or the other

Keywords: Education, Government, Human rights, Poverty, Promotion, Protection, School.

Introduction

Every society is made up of individuals of distinct classes, tribes and races. The existence of these sets of individuals is based on the amount of struggle they put up for survival in the societies in which they live. Most times, some individuals of higher classes attempt to trample upon the rights of those of the lower classes for one selfish reason or the other. Human rights in Nigeria are protected under the most current constitution of 1999. As a country, Nigeria has made serious improvements in human rights under this constitution though the American Human Right report of 2012 notes where improvements is needed, which include, abuses by Boko Haram, killings by government forces, lack of social equality, and issues with freedom of speech (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour: Human Rights Practices for 2012).

Ordinarily, the concept of human right could be explained as the freedom individuals have as members of society. More so, human rights are rights inherent in our nationality, race, colours, sex, religion, place of residence, language or any other status. According to Okeke (2003), "We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interdependent and indivisible. Universal human rights are often expresses and guaranteed by law in the forms of treaties, customs, international law, general principles and other sources of international law."

International Human Rights Law stipulates the obligations of governments to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts in order to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens or any other individuals or group. Human rights entail both rights obligations and one of the duties and obligations of the state is to protect and fulfill human rights. The obligation to respect means that states must refrain from interfering with or restricting the enjoyment of human rights. It requires States to protect individuals and groups against human right abuses. The obligation to fulfill means that States must take positive actions to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights by citizens.

With the growth of idea of individualism, especially in the 17th century, natural law doctrines were modified by writers like John Locke and Thomas Hobbes to stress that fact that individuals are natural beings. An example of natural rights is the right to life. Political rights on the other hand refer to those rights that justify the everyday activities of individuals or groups in the society which ensures that individuals participate in the governance of their society. Such rights include; freedom of expression, the right to vote during election, right to contest for public position, right to be counted during census etc.

They are equally rights which are classified as economic, social, cultural and collective rights. Such rights include; the right to work, social security, education and right to development and self determination. All human rights including natural and political rights are indivisible, interrelated and interdependent. The improvement of one right facilitates the advancement of the others and the deprivation of one right will no doubt affect the others.

These fundamental human rights among students of public secondary schools cannot be over emphasized. They should be inculcated in the minds of students through the instrumentality of education. Education refers to the process of acquisition and habitual utilization of knowledge that is geared towards changing the behaviour or perception of individuals on issues. It is the process of facilitating, learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits. Therefore this paper seeks to examine the role education plays or the contributions of education towards the promotion and protection of human rights among public school students.

Statement of the Problem

Victimization of man by his fellow man has been a worrisome issue in our society. Irrespective of the institutional provisions of fundamental human rights, the abuse of the human rights of students by the privileged class in the society is still high.

Generally, the abuse of human rights of students in public schools takes the form of unlawful detention, denial of rights to vote, and be voted for, human trafficking, rape, assassination, kidnapping and victimizations (Akirinda, 1996). Several human rights violation commissions have been set up by the Nigerian government at different times as a result of the increasing cases of human right violation in our society. The reasons for this could be traced to mass illiteracy in the society and inequality of educational opportunities in the system. The effects of human right violations are numerous and cut across every ramification of life. Given the situation, the writer is faced with examining the role education plays or the contributions of education towards promotion and protection of human rights among public school students.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the paper;

1. What constitutes human rights of students in public schools?

2. What are the ways by which students can know their rights?
3. In what ways can education help the students to know their rights?
4. What are the factors militating against the respect of human rights among students?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was a survey. The population for the study comprised of 728 teachers from the seven (7) public Schools in Owerri municipality. From the population, simple random sampling technique was used to sample a total of 364 respondents who are teachers from the seven (7) public schools. The samples were contracted at their various staff rooms, after due permission had been sought and gotten from relevant school authorities of the schools.

Data were collected personally by the researcher using a self-structured questionnaire tagged “Role of Education in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights Questionnaire” (**REPPHRQ**). The questionnaire has two sections. Section A sought information on the biographical data of the respondents, while section B sought information about the respondents’ opinion of the items in the questionnaire. The questionnaire (**REPPHRQ**) was validated using face and content validity approach which involved giving copies of the questionnaire to two experts in measurement and Evaluation at the Imo State University, Owerri Nigeria. They were requested to check the suitability of the items, the clarity of language and the appropriateness of items. Ambiguous items were removed and some were modified. The experts made some recommendations in which modifications were made on the instrument to produce the final instrument. Data collected from the field were analyzed using the mean score statistics.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Research Question 1

What constitutes human right of the students in public schools?

Table 1: Mean response scores on what constitutes human rights of the students in public schools.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	ΣFX	N	\bar{X}	Decision
1	The students in public schools are entitled to right to life.	188	121	39	16	1209	364	3.32	Agreed
2	The students in public schools are entitled to freedom of movement.	163	111	90		1165	364	3.20	Agreed
3	Every students in public schools are entitled to freedom of association	198	166			1290	364	3.54	Agreed
4	Every student in public schools has the right to personal property.	159	148	57		1194	364	3.28	Agreed

Table 1 shows the mean response scores what constitutes human rights of the students in public schools. The table revealed that the respondents agreed to items 1,2, 3 and 4 with their mean scores above the decision rule of 2.50. It indicated that no item was disagreed on since the recorded mean scores were above the cut of mean score.

Research Question 2

What are the ways by which students in public schools know their rights?

Table 2: Mean response scores on whether students in public schools know their rights.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	ΣFX	N	\bar{X}	Decision
5	The students in public schools in Owerri Municipal Council know that they have the right of worship.	139	133	89	3	1136	364	3.12	Agreed
6	The students in public schools in Owerri Municipal Council know that they have right to belong to any association of their choice sanctioned by law	194	161	9	-	1277	364	3.51	Agreed
7.	The students in public schools in Owerri Municipal Council know that they have right to express their opinion on bad representation by government officials.	202	162	-	-	1294	364	3.55	Agreed

The analysis above shows that the respondents agreed to all the items on table 2 as responses scores on whether students in public schools know their rights since their mean scores were above the cut off mean of 2.50. It was indicated that item 5 had a mean score of 3.12, 6(3.51), and 7(3.35) leading to the agreement of the items on the issues raised for research question two.

Research Question 3

In what ways can education help the students in public schools know their rights?

Table 3: Mean response scores on whether students in public schools know the ways education can help them know their rights.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Σ FX	N	\bar{X}	Decision
8.	Through education, the students will be made to know their fundamental human rights	221	143			1313	364	3.61	Agreed
9.	Education will teach the students the importance of fighting for their rights.	186	139	39		1239	364	3.40	Agreed
10.	Education as a socialization agent helps the students to inculcate the habit of upholding social justice	177	147	39	1	1228	364	3.37	Agreed
11.	Education exposes the students to be able to express their opinion on national issues	192	169	3		1281	364	3.52	Agreed

All the items in table 3 were rated and scored above the expected mean of 2.50 showing that the respondents agreed to the items as how students in public schools know the ways education can help them know their rights. It was indicated from the table that the mean scores were 3.61, 3.40, 3.37 and 3.52 for items 8, 9, 10 and 11 respectively.

Research Question 4

What factors militate against the respect of human rights among students in public schools?

Table 4: Mean response scores on factors that militate against the respect of human right among students in public schools.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	ΣFX	N	\bar{X}	Decision
12	The students' rights in public schools in Owerri Municipal are denied because they are poor.	207	157			1299	364	3.57	Agreed
13	The effectiveness of the judiciary does not encourage the promotion of human rights of students in public schools in Owerri Municipal.	159	121	84		1167	364	3.21	Agreed
14	The rights of public school students in Owerri Municipal have been conditioned by bribery and corruption.	179	132	53		1218	364	3.35	Agreed
15	Inhuman attitudes and intimidation by some members of the armed forces.	194	161	9		1277	364	3.51	Agreed

All the items in table 4 were rated and scored above the expected mean of 2.50 showing that the respondents agreed to the items on the factors that militate against the respect of human rights among students in public schools. It was indicated from the table that the mean scores were 3.57, 3.21, 3.35 and 3.51 for items 12, 13, 14 and 15 respectively.

DISCUSSION

In relation to research question one, the respondents accepted that the students in public schools are entitled to right to life, the students in public schools are entitled to freedom of movement, every student in public schools are entitled to freedom of association and every student in public schools has the right to personal property are factors that constitute the rights of the students in public schools.

This finding agrees with the provision of 1979 constitution, in Chapter 4 section 30 – 42, that the fundamental human rights are;

- * Right to life
- * Right to dignity of human person
- * Right to personal liberty
- * Right to fair hearing
- * Right to private and family life
- * Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- * Right to freedom of expression and the press
- * Right to peaceful assembly and association
- * Right to freedom of movement
- * Right to be protected by the court, and special jurisdiction of High Court and legal aid.

These basic rights of the students in public schools are provided in the country's constitution and made public for the students to know.

Analysis of research question two indicated that the study sought to know whether the students in public schools know their rights and below are the responses; the students in public schools in Owerri Municipal Council know that they have the right to vote and be voted for, the students in public schools in Owerri Municipal Council know that they have the right to belong to any association of their choice sanctioned by law, and the students in public schools in Owerri Municipal Council know that they have right to recall an ineffective representative. These findings agree with the view of Nwankwo (2002), that rights are basic conditions of happiness which an individual must enjoy in order to live a satisfactory social life. This implies that rights of men are expected to be those rights one has as a member of the human race; while the rights of the citizens are the civil right which include, political, economic, and social rights. It is important to note that when a citizen does not know that he possesses these rights, he/she does not live comfortably in the society with others. Therefore, the 31.3% of the students in public schools who do not know they possess these rights should be made to know their rights as citizens of the country.

On the issue relating to research question three, the result revealed that the respondents agreed to the following item statements which state that; through education, the students will be made to know their fundamental human rights Education will teach the students the importance of fighting for their rights. Education as a socialization agent helps the students to inculcate the habit of

upholding social justice. These students should be made to acquire more education as pointed out by Anderson (1997) that education is the process by which an individual acquires the many physical and social capacities demanded of him by the groups into which he is born and within which he must function. The writer agrees with the view of Anderson in the sense that education will expose their rights to them and teach them how to protect their rights. The findings above equally conform to the assertions of Nnajieta (2011) which states that education plays important roles like; the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity, the inculcation of the right values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society, the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around, the acquisition of appropriate skill, abilities and competence, both mental and physical as equipments for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society. As a matter of fact, when education inculcates these values into the students of public schools, there will be a high degree of respect and observance of human rights. The effect of this could be seen in the relationship between the early Africans and the whiteman as exercised in nationalism. The increase in the tempo of nationalism and the struggle for self government caught up with the nationalists after they had acquired western education.

On the factors militating against the respect of human rights among students, all the respondents are of the view that the factors that militate against the respect of human rights among students include; the students' rights in public schools in Owerri municipality are denied because they are poor, the ineffectiveness of the judiciary does not encourage the promotion of human rights of students in public schools in the municipality, the rights of public school students in Owerri municipal have been conditioned by bribery and corruption, and the quest for power acquisition of public school students in Owerri municipal leads to the disrespect of human rights. Therefore, it is important to note that poverty is a factor that can militate against the respect and observance of human rights and with the position of the present day Nigerian judiciary, a poor student has no case in court because he will definitely lose. Poverty could equally lead some students into theft like armed robbery, which involves violation of people's rights to life and liberty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the writer made the following recommendations;

1. Leaders and followers should avoid seeking selfish interest but create room for others to thrive.
2. The Government should ensure the independence of the judiciary in order to ensure justice and fair play.

3. The Government should utilize the services of media houses in educating the people on their rights and obligations.
4. Political Education of the masses should be effectively pursued by our Schools, Universities and National Orientation Agency (NOA)
5. The privileged in the society should not violate other people's rights because they want to acquire one position or the other.

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