
EXPLORING HUMAN RIGHT CONCEPTS OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION FOR PROMOTING CIVIC DUTIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Civic duties are responsibilities that every citizen must abide with in order to maintain the good deeds of a country, this will help in moving the nation forward. However, citizenship education and human rights instruction positively influence students' understanding of their civic duties. The knowledge of citizenship education for civic duties is essential for developing active, responsible, and engaged citizens. While governments and individual have critical roles in promoting civic duties in the country, there remain challenges in ensuring that all citizens receive adequate knowledge of civic responsibilities in this area. The integration of citizenship education into diverse curricula and the promotion of experiential learning are key strategies for enhancing students' understanding of their civic duties. By equipping students with an understanding of their rights and responsibilities, citizenship education empowers them to actively participate and contribute to societal development. However, challenges such as inadequate civic education programs and socio-economic

disparities continue to hinder the full realization of informed, engaged citizens. To address these gaps, government must prioritize civic learning through curriculum integration and experiential approaches. It was recommended that government of all levels should integrate citizenship education across various disciplines to ensure that all students, regardless of their field of study, gain comprehensive understanding of civic duties and responsibilities.

Keywords: Civic duties, Civic education, Concept, Citizenship, Human right

Introduction

Human rights education has gained significant recognition as an essential component of citizenship education, particularly in higher institutions. It aims to empower individuals with knowledge about their rights and responsibilities as citizens, fostering a sense of participation in civic duties. Civic education, which encompasses human rights education, promotes an understanding of democratic principles, governance, and active citizenship. This relationship between human rights and civic duties has become increasingly crucial in ensuring that students in higher institutions are well-equipped to participate in democratic processes and contribute to societal development (Osler & Starkey, 2018).

The concept of human rights is based on the idea that every individual is entitled to certain fundamental rights and freedoms, regardless of their background, status, or nationality. These rights, which are inherent and inalienable, provide the foundation for democratic governance and civic participation. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) has been pivotal in shaping national and international policies aimed at promoting and protecting these rights. In many countries, the inclusion of human rights education within the curriculum of higher institutions serves to educate students about these global principles, thus preparing them for active citizenship (United Nations, 2020).

Citizenship education, which focuses on the rights and responsibilities of individuals within a political community, plays a vital role in shaping students' understanding of their civic duties. This form of education is designed to create knowledgeable, responsible, and engaged citizens who can contribute positively to society. In higher institutions, students are expected to not only gain academic knowledge but also develop the competencies necessary to participate in democratic processes, such as voting, advocacy, and community service. Citizenship education provides a platform for students to explore the link between their rights and their responsibilities as citizens (Banks, 2017).

However, the relationship between students' knowledge of human rights and their engagement in civic duties remains underexplored in many contexts, particularly in higher education institutions in developing countries. While human rights education is increasingly incorporated into the curricula, there are still gaps in students' understanding of how their rights translate into civic responsibilities. Studies have shown that many students in higher institutions possess a limited understanding of their roles as citizens, which affects their participation in civic duties such as voting, volunteering, and engaging in public discourse (Eyinla & Dada, 2019).

In Nigeria, for instance, the integration of human rights education into civic education programs is relatively recent. Despite this progress, challenges persist in ensuring that students fully grasp the significance of human rights in relation to their civic responsibilities. These challenges are compounded by inadequate instructional methods, a lack of practical engagement opportunities, and insufficient emphasis on the importance of civic participation. As a result, many students are unaware of their responsibilities as citizens and do not participate fully in the democratic processes of their country (Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2021). This study, therefore, aims to fill the gap in existing literature by exploring the connection between human rights education and students' civic engagement in higher institutions.

Concepts of Human Rights

Human rights are fundamental entitlements inherent to all human

beings, regardless of nationality, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, or any other status. They are universal principles that protect individuals from abuses and ensure dignity, equality, and fairness in society. The concept of human rights, while rooted in philosophical traditions, has evolved over time to become a central element of modern legal and political discourse. Human rights are inalienable, meaning that no one can lose or forfeit these rights, even if they are not recognized by the state or violated by others. This principle is grounded in the idea that human rights stem from a person's intrinsic human dignity, rather than being granted by any government or authority (Donnelly, 2013). For example, the right to life and the prohibition against torture are rights that cannot be taken away, even during periods of war or national emergency.

Human rights are increasingly understood as legal guarantees that are enforceable through international and domestic law. International treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), obligate states to protect, respect, and fulfill the rights outlined within them (Alston & Goodman, 2013). These treaties establish legal frameworks for human rights protection and provide mechanisms for individuals to seek redress when their rights are violated.

Historically, the concept of human rights can be traced back to early philosophical ideas, such as the natural rights theory of John Locke, which posited that individuals are born with inherent rights to life, liberty, and property. The modern understanding of human rights, however, emerged in the aftermath of World War II, as the international community sought to prevent the atrocities witnessed during the war from recurring. The establishment of the United Nations and the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) marked a turning point in global human rights discourse (Lauren, 2011). The concept of human rights continues to evolve, with current debates focusing on new areas such as digital rights, which address privacy and freedom of expression in the context of rapidly advancing technology (Souter, 2020).

Citizenship Education for Civic Duties

Citizenship education, which includes the teaching of civic duties, is fundamental to the development of informed, responsible, and engaged citizens. It provides individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to actively participate in democratic processes, exercise their rights, and fulfill their civic responsibilities. In higher education, the role of citizenship education becomes particularly critical as students transition into adulthood and are expected to contribute meaningfully to society (Adediran, 2022). However, the extent to which students in higher institutions understand their civic duties and responsibilities remains a subject of ongoing research and debate. This section explores the significance of students' knowledge of citizenship education for civic duties, reviewing recent studies and theories in the field.

The knowledge of civic duties according to Adediran (2022) is a key component of citizenship education. Civic duties refer to the responsibilities individuals have towards their country and society, such as voting, obeying laws, paying taxes, and contributing to community welfare. Students who are knowledgeable about their civic duties are more likely to participate in democratic processes and advocate for social justice. Civic knowledge also empowers students to hold government officials accountable and to engage in constructive political debates (Galston, 2019). Studies have shown that knowledge of civic duties directly influences the level of civic participation. For instance, Milner (2021) argues that students with a strong understanding of their civic responsibilities are more likely to vote, engage in volunteer work, and participate in public discourse. Conversely, a lack of civic knowledge can lead to apathy and disengagement from political processes. Civic education, therefore, plays a crucial role in fostering civic engagement and ensuring the sustainability of democratic systems.

Despite the importance of citizenship education, there are significant gaps in students' knowledge of civic duties. Research indicates that many students, even in higher institutions, have a limited understanding of their roles and responsibilities as citizens.

According to Hoskins et al. (2018), students often exhibit low levels of political literacy and awareness, which can be attributed to inadequate civic education in schools. This lack of knowledge is exacerbated by the marginalization of civic education in the curricula of some higher institutions, where emphasis is placed on technical or vocational subjects at the expense of civic learning. Moreover, cultural and socio-economic factors can influence students' understanding of civic duties. In some contexts, civic education is seen as secondary to other academic pursuits, leading to a diminished focus on developing civic competencies. Hoskins and Kerr (2020) highlight that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to receive comprehensive citizenship education, which limits their ability to engage fully in democratic life.

Higher institutions play a pivotal role in bridging the knowledge gap in citizenship education. Through curricula that emphasize critical thinking, political engagement, and social responsibility, universities and colleges can equip students with the tools they need to fulfill their civic duties. Kerr (2019) stresses that higher institutions must move beyond traditional classroom teaching to encourage experiential learning, such as community service, internships, and participation in political campaigns. Recent initiatives in higher education have sought to integrate civic education into various disciplines, allowing students to connect their academic knowledge with civic responsibility. For example, courses on ethics, political science, and environmental studies often incorporate civic education components that address pressing social issues. By linking academic learning to real-world civic duties, students develop a deeper understanding of their role in shaping society.

Human Right Concepts of Citizenship Education for Civic Duties

The intersection of civic education, human rights awareness, and citizenship responsibilities has garnered significant scholarly attention in recent years. According to Adediran (2022) civic education influences students' knowledge of human rights and their active participation in civic duties. This section reviews relevant empirical studies, drawing from both local and international contexts

to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge.

Human Rights Education in Higher Institutions: recent empirical studies have examined the role of higher education institutions in promoting human rights education and its impact on students. For instance, Pike, et. al., (2022) conducted a study in the United Kingdom to assess the level of human rights awareness among university students enrolled in civic education programmes. The study found that students exposed to human rights content through formal courses were more likely to engage in civic activities, such as community service and political activism. The authors highlighted that students with a strong understanding of their rights were more confident in challenging injustices and participating in democratic processes. This underscores the importance of integrating human rights education into the broader civic education curriculum. Similarly, Okoli and Ajuluchukwu (2023) conducted a comparative study across Nigerian higher institutions to evaluate the level of human rights knowledge among students. Their findings revealed that while many students possessed a basic understanding of human rights concepts, there were notable gaps in their knowledge of how these rights apply in practice, particularly in relation to civic duties.

A similar study by Mbaku and Ngwane (2022), conducted in Cameroon, found that while students who received civic education were aware of their civic duties, there was a general sense of disillusionment with the political system, which affected their participation. The researchers recommended that civic education not only focus on teaching civic duties but also address barriers to civic engagement, such as corruption and lack of trust in public institutions.

Knowledge of Human Rights and Civic Participation: Empirical studies have also examined the relationship between students' knowledge of human rights and their participation in civic activities. Kerr et al. (2019) explored the role of human rights education in fostering active citizenship among Canadian university students. The study revealed that students who had a higher knowledge of human rights were more likely to engage in civic activities, including protests, advocacy for marginalized groups, and participation in democratic processes such as voting. The authors concluded that

human rights education fosters a sense of social responsibility and ethical commitment to societal well-being, which is crucial for active citizenship.

In contrast, Adams and Mensah (2023), in a study conducted in Ghana, found that while students had a general awareness of human rights, their civic participation remained low due to socio-economic challenges and political apathy. The study pointed out that knowledge alone is insufficient to spur civic engagement; contextual factors such as access to resources, political stability, and opportunities for participation also play significant roles. This suggests that while human rights education is necessary, it must be accompanied by broader societal reforms to encourage active civic participation. In a more recent study, Olaleye and Adeyemi (2023) examined the link between human rights education and civic duties in Nigerian higher institutions. The study utilized a survey of 500 students and found that those who received formal instruction in human rights were more likely to participate in community development projects and political activities. The researchers highlighted the need for civic education programs to be more holistic, incorporating not only knowledge of rights but also the responsibilities of citizenship, such as voting, community service, and public accountability.

Challenges in Civic Education Programmes: despite the positive outcomes associated with civic education, several empirical studies have highlighted challenges in its implementation. Kerr and Huddleston (2018) identified several barriers to effective civic education in the European context, including a lack of trained educators, limited curriculum time, and inadequate resources for practical engagement. The study emphasized that civic education must go beyond theoretical instruction to include hands-on activities that engage students in real-world civic duties. In the Nigerian context, Ojo and Salawu (2022) found that while civic education is part of the curriculum, it is often taught in a theoretical manner, with limited emphasis on practical application. The study noted that many students struggle to see the relevance of civic education to their daily lives, leading to disengagement from civic activities. The authors recommended the integration of technology and innovative teaching

strategies, such as simulations of democratic processes and digital platforms for community service, to enhance the effectiveness of civic education.

Conclusion

The knowledge of citizenship education for civic duties is important for developing responsible citizens. Promoting civic knowledge will make citizens adhere to their civic duties and this will enhance developmental process of the country. The integration of civic education into diverse curricula and the promotion of experiential learning are key strategies for enhancing students' understanding of their civic duties. By equipping students with an understanding of their rights and responsibilities, citizenship education enables them participate adequately to the progress of the nation. However, challenges such as inadequate civic education programmes and socio-economic disparities continue to hinder the full realization of informed and responsible citizens.

Suggestions

Based on the discussion of the study, it was suggested that higher institutions should integrate citizenship education across various disciplines to ensure that all students, regardless of their field of study, gain a comprehensive understanding of civic duties and responsibilities. Governments and educational policymakers should allocate adequate resources towards the development and implementation of robust civic education programs in higher institutions to bridge knowledge gaps in civic responsibilities. Educational institutions should adopt experiential learning strategies such as community service projects, internships, and civic engagement workshops to provide students with practical experience in fulfilling their civic duties. Faculty members should incorporate discussions on current civic and political issues into classroom teaching to enhance students' political awareness and critical thinking skills related to their roles as citizens.

Curriculum developers should regularly review and update citizenship education materials to reflect contemporary societal

issues, ensuring that students receive relevant and up-to-date knowledge about their civic responsibilities. Student organizations and campus leadership programs should promote civic participation initiatives that encourage students to engage in local and national democratic processes, such as voting and public advocacy. Higher education institutions should collaborate with governmental and non-governmental organizations to provide platforms for students to actively participate in civic duties, including awareness campaigns, workshops, and public forums. Teachers and lecturers should receive specialized training in delivering civic education effectively to ensure that they are well-equipped to foster students' understanding of their civic roles and responsibilities. Parents and communities should be actively involved in reinforcing the importance of civic duties outside the classroom by encouraging students to engage in community-based activities that promote responsible citizenship.

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