Article

THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING DEMOCRATIC CITIZENS

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The Importance of Human Rights Education in Developing Democratic Citizens

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Abstract: The Importance of Human Rights Education in Developing Democratic Citizens. The research examines how human rights education fosters democratic citizenship by raising awareness of rights and responsibilities, through the promoting of democratic values, and the active participation of citizens in the democratic processes. Through a theoretical framework, the essay explores how human rights education develops citizens equipped to support human rights and democratic principles. It is considered that the key elements of human rights education are inclusive curricula and participatory teaching. Several challenges to human rights education are presented, such as political resistance, cultural traditions, and limited resources. The essay proposes several solutions to the challenges, such as advocacy, policy reforms, collaboration between governments and specialized NGOs, as well as the use of digital technologies, that would aid in consolidating robust and resilient democratic societies.

Keywords: human rights education; democratic citizenship; civic engagement; curriculum design; educational policy

Introduction

The 21st century is seeing the continuing struggle for universal human rights and democracy, that shape societies and cultures on their path towards justice and equity, and which are building resilience, throughout the process. Human rights refer to the fundamental freedoms and protections to which every individual is entitled. They provide a universal foundation for dignity and respect, together with attaining a better quality of life [1]. Democracy ensures that governance is rooted in the free will of the people, promoting participation, accountability, and the rule of law. Human rights and democracy are the framework for individuals and citizens to have a meaningful and thriving life, while contributing to the communities in meaningful ways. Of particular importance is holding political leaders accountable, for complete transparency and following how public projects are being developed for the common good[2].

In any political system, education is the most efficient mechanism to manipulate or develop large masses of individuals, with tailored purposes either for submission or mature democratic thinking. Education instills and fosters values, which prepare students for active citizenship. Knowledge, skills, and attitudes - the elements of competencies – are developed in the educational system and aid students in understanding their democratic rights and responsibilities, the way they could engage in

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[1] Roberto Adorno, "Human Dignity and Human Rights," in *Bioethics in Malawi in the Context of Globalization*, ed. Joseph Mfutso-Bengo and Francis Masiye (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), pp.152–63, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780195386097.003.0010.

[2] Mark Bovens, Robert E. Goodin, and Thomas Schillemans, *The Oxford Handbook of Public Accountability* (OUP Oxford, 2014).

the decision-making process and participate in various democratic processes[3]. In the same context, human rights education has an accompanying role, the general idea being that if human rights education is integrated into the curriculum, society can prepare successive successful generation of citizens, who are aware of their own rights and are committed to upholding the rights of their fellow men. Education that integrated human rights strengthens the fabric of democracy[4].

Human rights education and the development of democratic citizens goes beyond the simple informing of individuals about their rights or entitlements. Human rights encapsulate respect for diversity of opinions, a high esteem for critical thinking, and it promotes active and efficient participation in civic life[5]. Democratic societies develop through the engagement of informed citizens, who understand and know their communities. The ability to engage social issues and challenges, while cooperating for the well-being of all, is one of the foundational elements of modern democracy. The level of digital and cultural literacy of its citizens needs to be addressed, in order to facilitate educational programs that aim at the best possible ways to prepare students for various roles in their democratic society's structure[6].

The purpose of the essay is to explore the way human rights education develops and prepares students to become democratic citizens. There are three theoretical points to analyze in this context. The first point is about the manner in which human rights education contributes to the development of democratic citizens, through the investigation of ways in which this type of education enhances the students' understanding of what democratic principles are, and what motivates them to participate in any democratic process. The second point revolves around identifying the key components of effective human rights education, which promote democratic values. These values might be inclusive curricula, participatory teaching methods, and supportive educational policies. An important element in this context is the integration and development of critical thinking skills. However, critical thinking is not the only type of thinking that is used in developing democratic competencies. The third point regards the exploration of challenges in implementing human rights education in the educational process. Proposing viable solutions, considering political opposition, cultural resistance, and limited resources, play into the wider purpose of the essay, when applied to how education, in general, manages to prepare mature citizens.

The exploration starts from the central point of view, which argues that human rights education is one of the basic elements for developing democratic citizens. The members of a democratic society need to have enhanced awareness in promoting democratic values, and be active, in a responsible way, in a system that does not run by itself, but which needs constant human engagement. An effective democratic system requires strategic solutions, policy reforms, collaborations between state and civil society representatives, and transparent resource allocations.

Key Concepts

There are several key concepts that explain the connection and intersection of citizenship, education, and democracy. The concepts offer a detailed understanding of how education can

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[3] Wojciech Słomski and Paweł Czarnecki, "Ethical View of Manipulation during the School Education," *Prosopon. Europejskie Studia Społeczno-Humanistyczne*, no. 4(25) (2018), pp.57–68.

[4] Peter G. Kirchschlaeger, "The Relation between Democracy and Human Rights," in *Globalistics and Globalization Studies: Aspects & Dimensions of Global Views*, ed. Arkadi D. Ursul et al. (Uchitel Publishing House, 2014).

[5] Eric Hartman, "No Values, No Democracy: The Essential Partisanship of a Civic Engagement Movement," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 19, no. 2 (2013), pp. 58–71.

[6] Thomas W. Bean and Judith Dunkerly-Bean, "Cosmopolitan Critical Literacy and Youth Civic Engagement for Human Rights," *Pedagogies: An International Journal* 15, no. 4 (October 1, 2020), pp.262–78, https://doi.org/10.1080/1554480X.2019.1706524.

integrate human rights elements, and develop the fundamental competencies in students, so that they develop into responsible and active citizens.

Human Rights Education

The evolution of human rights education (HRE) can be traced over several decades, making it clear that it has adapted and evolved in an ever-changing socio-political landscape, facing the complex needs of global societies. HRE is the practical element of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[7]. HRE began as dissemination of information and knowledge about international human rights laws and conventions. In time, it began to emphasize both the acquisition of knowledge and the development of attitudes and skills needed by individuals to properly and effectively support human rights in everyday life[8].

UNESCO describes the objectives of HRE[9] as fostering respect for human rights, promoting understanding of democratic principles, and encouraging active participation in civic life. In a school context, HRE is taught through a range of traditional methods and interactive and experiential approaches. Role playing, debates, and community projects are some of the ways in which HRE education takes place, but teachers may vary and implement even more modern ways of approaching the subject. A key element of the teaching strategies, whether traditional or modern, is relevance. Students learn better and understand deeper when the projects and the information they acquire are relevant to their lives[10].

Integrating HRE into the curriculum allows for greater awareness and understanding of human rights issues among students. Experiential learning, on the other hand, manages to enhance empathy and critical thinking skills, which is useful in addressing human rights issues. The issues with HRE revolve around the identification of the best teaching methods and strategies. The two camps in the debate move either towards the rights-based approach, emphasizing legal frameworks and individual entitlements, or towards the values-based approach, which is based on social justice and ethical considerations[11]. In spite of the approach debate, HRE is influenced by cultural and political contexts, where the levels of acceptance of human rights vary from one region to another[12].

Democratic Citizenship

An integral part of democratic citizenship is active participation, coupled with informed decision-making, and the commitment to the collective well-being. Becoming an informed and active democratic citizen requires political literacy, critical thinking, empathy, and a deep sense of responsibility, manifested towards the community one belongs to, and to the nation. Education is the environment in which these attributes are developed, through exposure to knowledge, skills, and values, that characterize all democratic processes. The debate about the purpose of education is ongoing, but it can be divided into two specific strands: the transfer of information from the teacher

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[7] United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," United Nations (United Nations), accessed July 6, 2023, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

[8] Felisa Tibbitts and William Fernekes, "Human Rights Education," in *Teaching and Studying Social Issues: Major Programs and Approaches*, ed. Samuel Totten and Jon Pedersen (IAP, 2011).

[9] "UNESCO and Human Rights Education - UNESCO Digital Library," accessed November 12, 2024, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000131836.

[10] Tibbitts and Fernekes, "Human Rights Education."

[11] Nina Burridge et al., *Human Rights Education in the School Curriculum* (Sydney, Australia: UTS Publishing Service, 2013).

[12] Felisa Tibbitts and Susan Roberta Katz, "Dilemmas and Hopes for Human Rights Education: Curriculum and Learning in International Contexts," *PROSPECTS* 47, no. 1 (June 1, 2017), pp. 31–40, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-018-9426-0.

to the students and the development of competencies through collaboration, project or problem-based learning, to name just a few. The latter promotes critical inquiry, collaboration, and civic engagement[13]. Democratic citizens are trained more efficiently through experiential learning, which encourages dialogue, debates, and learning in which students are active participants.

Shaping democratic citizens through education relies on several key components, such as fostering a sense of agency, the promotion of inclusivity and diversity, and the encouragement of reflective and ethical thinking. The theoretical side of education has limited effects, while students who are engaged in community service and civic projects develop a sense of agency and a deep commitment to democratic values. Education is not effective on its own, as socio-economic disparities, educational inequalities, and varying pedagogical practices can have negative or limited impact in developing democratic citizenship[14]. However, entrepreneurial education can create an economic environment, with a significant impact on both social and political environments, that would foster the promotion and support of human rights, through innovation and development[15]. The possibly negative influences are exacerbated by the media and information overload, which feeds unfiltered data to individuals who may not have the ability to assess properly, through critical thinking in order to take informed decisions[16].

Human Rights and Democracy

Human rights education and democracy are linked because both promote the need to reach an equitable and just society. Individual freedoms, equality, the rule of law, coupled with other democratic principles are taken up by HRE and delivered in various forms to students, in order for them to understand and actively aid the democratic governance. HRE might strengthen democratic institutions through informed and engaged citizenship, which is the result of not only HRE, but all the school educational process. The legitimacy and responsiveness of democratic institutions is developed, in time, through the knowledge and skills developed by students, later engaged citizens. Students are citizens from birth, but through the educational system, their engagement is limited. In time, though, their skills will allow for full and unhindered participation. Being active is not the purpose in itself, because under its guise, people can abuse their rights, therefore, schools educate students in matters of accountability[17].

When human rights are deliberately and systematically taught, students become aware of social inequalities that they can engage by proving and preventing the abuses of power. The stability of the democratic systems relies on citizens being able to discern correctly between abuse and lawful conduct. Educational experts together with experts from politics and social sciences need to delineate where lawful and abusive conduct meets. The educational system needs to provide wider experiences to students, since education might not suffice in developing the needed competencies for democratic citizenship. Even if the classroom and the school can be considered micro-democratic environments, the reality of community life provides further experiences that shape the way students understand

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[13] James Arthur, Carole Hahn, and Ian Davies, "SAGE Handbook of Education for Citizenship and Democracy," 2008, pp.1–592.

[14] Richard M. Battistoni, "Service Learning and Democratic Citizenship," *Theory Into Practice* 36, no. 3 (1997), pp. 150–56.

[15] Casiana Teodora Ille, Alina Badulescu, and Daniel Badulescu, "The Role of Economic Education in Fostering Entrepreneurship. The Case of Romania," in *Current Issues and Challenges in Education. International Conference Materials* (Yerevan: European University Publishing, 2023).

[16] Rolf Gollob et al., *Educating for Democracy: Background Materials on Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education for Teachers* (Council of Europe, 2010).

[17] G. Shabbir Cheema, *Building Democratic Institutions: Governance Reform in Developing Countries* (Kumarian Press, 2005).

their role in society. HRE contributes to social cohesion, through tolerance, respect for diversity, and non-violence, therefore students can develop meaningful strategies to engage in social issues, without resorting to violence. The politization of human rights is an ongoing threat to the effectiveness of HRE, especially in contexts where political ideologies are able to subvert the educational process, in order to promote specific anti-democratic agendas[18]. Education should not be left to fend for itself, but it should be aided by various internal and external players.

Theoretical Framework

At the base of the issue about the relationship between human rights education and the development of democratic citizens, there are three concepts: civic education, human rights education, and democratic education. Each concept presents specific perspectives and insights on the role of education and the shaping of individuals. By extension, the concepts present insights into how education can shape democratic thinking in a given society.

The civic education concept focuses on the role of education in preparing individuals to participate effectively in democratic processes. While it posits that education should extend beyond the mere transmission of knowledge to include the cultivation of critical thinking and ethical reasoning, it also promotes active engagement in civic life. It manages to accomplish this by using learning methods such as discussion, debates, and collaborative projects. Civic education aims, therefore, to develop the necessary skills for informed and active participation of individuals in society[19]. The long-term effects are the enhancement of political efficacy and the fostering of democratic values, among which tolerance and commitment to the common good are among the most important. The issue of political efficacy is of particular importance because it refers to one's ability to influence political processes. A democratic society functions more effectively provided such skills are implemented by its citizens[20].

Societal development is dependent on how its citizens understand and practice their rights. Human rights education aims to emphasize the significance of teaching in such a context. Just societies, that promote both equality and equity, are the result of implementing and developing human rights. The educational aspect of human rights starts with knowledge, which further fosters a culture of respect and protection of such rights. Citizens become capable of recognizing and challenging any human rights violations. Critical thinking is one of the tools which enhance critical awareness and ethical reasoning[21]. The empowerment of individuals prevents abuse and promotes a culture of accountability and respect for human rights in a culture of diversity and various political contexts[22].

Democratic education explores the links between education, growth, and sustainability of democratic institutions. It assumes that better educated individuals are better equipped to participate

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[18] Anja Mihr, "Global Human Rights Awareness, Education and Democratization," *Journal of Human Rights* 8, no. 2 (June 12, 2009),. pp. 177–89, https://doi.org/10.1080/14754830902939080.

[19] Sylvia Hurtado, "'Now Is the Time': Civic Learning for a Strong Democracy," *Daedalus* 148, no. 4 (October 1, 2019), pp.94–107, https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01762.

[20] Judith Torney-Purta et al., "Assessing Civic Competency and Engagement in Higher Education: Research Background, Frameworks, and Directions for Next-Generation Assessment," *ETS Research Report Series* 2015, no. 2 (2015), pp. 1–48, https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12081.

[21] Kenan Çayır and Melike Türkan Bağlı, "'No-one Respects Them Anyway': Secondary School Students' Perceptions of Human Rights Education in Turkey," *Intercultural Education* 22, no. 1 (February 1, 2011), pp. 1–14, https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2011.549641.

[22] Felisa L. Tibbitts, "Human Rights Education: The Good Surf and Reclaiming Human Rights," *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 36, no. 1 (March 1, 2018), pp.64–74, https://doi.org/10.1177/0924051917752419.

in democratic processes[23]. They are also able to make better decisions and hold governing institutions accountable. Through education, democratic values and practices are developed and maintained, thus making feasible the promotion of equality, the reduction of social disparities, and the support for equal opportunities in democratic society, and the opportunities refer to citizen engagement and participation. The values of the rule of law, respect for individual freedoms, and the dedication to collective decision-making[24] are thus nurtured from one generation to the next, through a careful assessment of socio-political and economic contexts, which allow for a more efficient application of education to the development of democratic values[25].

The Influence of Human Rights Education on Democratic Citizenship

Human rights education develops informed and active participants within democratic environments. It increases the awareness of citizens towards their own rights and responsibilities, but also their engagement with others. Citizens understand their entitlements and obligations within the requirements of a functioning democratic society, forming the totality of engagements with one another in civic life. Within the educational system, human rights education covers information about human rights issues, through which students gain a clear understanding of the legal and moral frameworks that protect individual freedoms and various aspects of justice, in a wider context of a intertwined network of human relationships[26]. The knowledge, skills and attitudes of each individual would allow them to react correctly when violations of rights occur. The ability to communicate properly[27], for both teachers and students, helps the process of understanding what human rights are. The reactions presuppose their ability to recognize and respond properly, both at a personal level and even a global one. Human rights issues extend far beyond functioning democracies; therefore, a properly educated generation would be able to address human rights issues and advocate for them at an international level, with local applicability. Advocating human rights should work together with the ability to identify gaps in the system where they need to be applied and address such issues[28].

At the core of human rights lie values such as equality, justice, and respect for diversity, coupled with the valuing of the inherent dignity and worth of every individual. As such, human rights education fosters a culture of inclusivity and fairness. As a result, students are exposed to principles such as non-discrimination, equal opportunity for all, and the protection of minority rights. However, the opinions that are expressed within the larger community, where opposing views on the above-mentioned issues are common, challenge students to form their own informed perspectives and

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[23] Tina Freyburg et al., "Democracy Promotion through Functional Cooperation? The Case of the European Neighbourhood Policy," *Democratization* 18, no. 4 (August 1, 2011), pp. 1026–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2011.584738.

[24] Axel Honneth, *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life* (Columbia University Press, 2014), https://doi.org/10.7312/honn16246.

[25] Junyeol Kim, "Democracy and Epistemic Fairness: Testimonial Justice as a Founding Principle of Aggregative Democracy," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 60, no. 2 (2022), pp. 173–93, https://doi.org/10.1111/sjp.12440.

[26] Joachim Theis, "Children as Active Citizens: An Agenda for Children's Civil Rights and Civic Engagement," in *A Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation* (Routledge, 2009).

[27] Delia Muste, "The Role of Communication Skills in Teaching Process," 2016, pp.430–34, https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2016.12.52.

[28] Ali A. Abdi and Lynette Shultz, "Educating for Human Rights and Global Citizenship: An Introduction," in *Educating for Human Rights and Global Citizenship* (State University of New York Press, 2009).

present arguments in their favor[29]. The tensions that result from opposing views need to be assessed by students and placed in the perspectives of the rule of law and the way rights, equality, and justice are applied in their societal context. Students could assess the level of transparency and accountability with which governments operate, to evaluate whether the exercised power is ethically applied, and the governing bodies are acting responsibly and in the public interest[30].

Once individuals know and understand what human rights are and how they are applied in a democratic setting, they are able to engage in civic life and can be motivated to be active participants in democratic processes and community activities. Citizens become aware of their rights and the way laws create mechanisms for their protection, therefore, they become more likely to take initiative in advocating for change and contributing to the public good. Within schools, human rights education equips students with the necessary skills to engage in deep and meaningful dialogue, organize community projects, and participate in elections or public consultations. This engagement ensures a healthy democracy, where voices, as diverse as they can be, are heard and that the governing institutions remain responsible and responsive to the needs of the population, as diverse as it might be. Human rights education also fosters a sense of agency at a political level, where citizens hold political leaders accountable for their decisions and actions[31]. This is a possibility through collaborations towards the same civic goals, through which democratic institutions become more responsive and efficient, while societal well-being is supported.

The development of democratic citizens is the result of enhanced awareness, the promotion of democratic values, and the encouragement of active participation, which need to be synchronized in the educational system. Properly educated students will be aware not only of their own rights, but also of the rights of their peers, which translates into awareness of the rights of other fellow citizens, later in life. Collective responsibility and a deep sense of solidarity contribute to the fundamental changes needed in any democratic environment, because they create a milieu in which all citizens are aware of one another. The democratic communities, which form democratic societies, are constantly kept under the watchful care of informed and responsible citizens[32]. The political landscape is assessed through critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills, which citizens developed while in school. Such citizens are able to understand how the political systems function, how they make informed decisions, and thus contribute to the public discourse.

Components of Efficient Human Rights Education

Human rights education needs to be comprehensive for it to have a significant impact on students. Democratic values are to be not only understood, but also lived in daily life, by students and any citizens in any democratic system. Achieving such an objective is no small task, nor is it to be taken lightly. The traditional view on the transmission of information and the expectation to have the knowledge lived in specific situations may fall short. It is in this context that one of the most well-known components for effective human rights education is the development of an inclusive

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[29] Simone Emmert and LL. M. Eur., "Education in Terms of Human Rights," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY 2010, 12 (January 1, 2011), pp. 346–61, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.02.044.

[30] Anthony Cullen and Paul Downes, "Guaranteeing Socially Inclusive Education under International Human Rights Law: A Proposal for the Use of Structural Indicators Addressing Issues of Equality, Non-Discrimination and Wellbeing," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Equity and Inclusion in Education* (Routledge, 2024).

[31] Hugh Starkey, *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2002).

[32] Arkadi D. Ursul et al., *Globalistics and Globalization Studies: Aspects & Dimensions of Global Views* (Uchitel Publishing House, 2014).

curriculum design. It is based on the integration of human rights topics across various disciplines, which ensures that the content is comprehensive, but also culturally relevant. Disciplines that can integrate topics on human rights are history, literature, and social studies, but also science. The more disciplines integrate human rights, the better the view of students on the subject is. Students can study various human rights issues, such as civil rights movements in history classes, but also explore their ethical implications in the field of science. Students become more engaged in issues related to human rights, provided the curriculum reflects the cultural and social realities of their daily lives, therefore creating more relatable learning experiences[33]. Cultural relevance is an important element in curriculum design, because democratic values, such as cultural diversity, become palpable or real to the students who might live in complex and fragile democracies, where their rights might be lost at moment's notice.

The curriculum design coupled with participatory teaching methods manages to develop critical thinking and empathy among students. On the other hand, traditional lecture-based approaches only revolve around imparting knowledge, which limits the interactive and experiential learning techniques, that engage students deeper and more meaningfully. The purpose of interactive teaching is to aid students in expressing and applying what they learned in practical settings. Methods such as role-playing, debates, simulations, and community projects, allow students to participate in the learning process. If the classroom is considered a miniature democracy, students could grasp issues of human rights negotiations and the importance of collaborations for problem-solving[34]. Through project-based learning students develop the skills needed for empathy, ethical reasoning, and viewing issues from multiple perspectives. If students are engaged in their own learning, they develop a sense of ownership, responsibility, and agency.

Challenges for Human Rights Education

Democratic citizenship depends heavily on the manner in which human rights education is integrated and taught in schools. Despite its appeal and obvious usefulness for any democratic system, human rights education is not without challenges. One of the most significant challenges is posed by political resistance. Different and differing political ideologies can create an environment which limits or opposes any values related to human rights. Authoritarian leaders would not favor human rights education, because it might be a threat to the regime or could be seen as forms of Western values, that conflict with local government structures. Restrictive policies, limited funding, or exclusion of human rights topics from the educational curricula are some of the reactions against human rights education in schools[35]. Stronger and more resilient political institutions and long-term benefits for the population are supported through constant advocacy efforts, that are supported either from within or outside the region or the country.

A second obstacle to human rights education is cultural barriers, expressed through beliefs and norms. These deeply ingrained traditions and values may come into conflict with principles of human rights. Freedom of speech and individual autonomy could be regarded as a threat to the cultural fabric of various peoples. The prevailing cultural attitudes and hierarchies can consider human rights as an attempt to change well established norms. Cultural sensitivity and a careful assessment of age-old traditions could provide an easier path to implementing human rights education[36]. Respecting local contexts while promoting human rights creates a space for dialogue, even if it might take longer

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[33] Sabine Hornberg, "Human Rights Education as an Integral Part of General Education," *International Review of Education* 48, no. 3 (July 1, 2002, pp. 187–98, https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1020330131832.

[34] Felisa L. Tibbitts, "3. Evolution of Human Rights Education Models," in *Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, Praxis*, ed. Monisha Bajaj (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), pp.69–95, https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812293890-005.

[35] Tibbitts and Katz, "Dilemmas and Hopes for Human Rights Education."

[36] Makau Mutua, *Human Rights: A Political and Cultural Critique* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

to reach a point of acceptance. Religion, especially an active, socially engaged one, is able to develop a personality that is prone to values that translate into human rights[37]. Religious freedom is considered a basic human right, especially in the light of historical events, where Christians argued that human beings are created in the image of God, thus entitled to their own human freedom[38]. The family environment also plays an important, if not unique, role in the development of self-worth, conduct, academic achievement, and interpersonal relations in children. These elements play an integral role in their views on the worth of democracy for the society in which they live[39].

Inadequate funding, insufficient educational materials, and a shortage of trained educators can hinder efforts to implement human rights education. Educational institutions, especially in developing countries, struggle to allocate the minimum necessary resources to develop and sustain comprehensive human rights education programs. Lack of funding results in either outdated or insufficient educational materials, which, coupled with a shortage of trained teachers, leads to inefficiently used resources[40]. Furthermore, a lack of proper infrastructure and support for schools presents itself as a severely problematic educational environment, that inevitably leads to an inefficient implementation of human rights education. Identifying and being able to use financial sources can be a challenge, which means that in certain contexts, financial support and resources might come from other sources, not necessarily from local or national governments[41]. Through such investments, human rights education could find an easier path for being implemented.

Human rights[42] education can face and overcome barriers, especially through advocacy and policy reform, which could focus on raising awareness about the importance of human rights education. Lobbying for policies that prioritize human rights education within national frameworks could be done through campaigning for the inclusion of human rights topics in the standardized curricula, but also by securing dedicated funding for human rights initiatives. These can be coupled with the creation of incentives for schools and educators to implement human rights education programs[43]. Policy reforms could aim for institutionalizing core issues of human rights, which become the building blocks of the educational system.

A key element for a successful promotion of human rights education is the collaboration between governments, NGOs and international organizations, that address the complex challenges faced by the implementation of human rights in schools and society. Collaborations work because there is a shared responsibility between experts, who use resources, and support the development

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[37] "Religion and Religious Education in Romanian School (II)," *Educatia 21*, no. 7 (2009), pp. 9–20.

[38] Ioan Gheorghe Rotaru, "Religious Liberty - a Natural Human Right," *Journal for Freedom of Conscience (Jurnalul Libertăţii de Conştiinţă)* 2, no. 1 (2015), pp. 604-605. https://jurnal.constiintasilibertate.ro/index.php/freedom/article/view/47.

[39] "Parenting Styles - A Qualitative Analysis of the Specialized Romanian Literature," *Educatia 21*, no. 25 (2023), pp.193–205.

[40] Kim Sebaly, "Chapter 12 - Education About Human Rights: Teacher Preparation," in *Human Rights & Education*, ed. Norma Bernstein Tarrow, Comparative and International Education Series (Amsterdam: Pergamon, 1987), pp. 207–21, https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-033415-8.50018-7.

[41] Maria Ron Balsera, "Does the Human Capital Discourse Promote or Hinder the Right to Education? The Case of Girls, Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Rwanda," *Journal of International Development* 23, no. 2 (2011), pp. 274–87, https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1769.

[42] Ioan Gheorghe Rotaru, "A look at how the concept of human rights has evolved over time", în *Journal For Freedom of Conscience (Jurnalul Libertăţii de Conştiinţă)*, vol 11, no.2 (2023), pp.825-874. https://jurnal.constiintasilibertate.ro/index.php/freedom/article/view/762/665.

[43] David Suárez, "Education Professionals and the Construction of Human Rights Education," *Comparative Education Review* 51, no. 1 (February 2007), pp.48–70, https://doi.org/10.1086/508638.

and implementation of human rights education programs. Governments can collaborate with educational experts and NGOs, but also with sociologists, to design appropriate curricula, followed by training educators. International organizations can provide the necessary funding and technical assistance, to ensure human rights education initiatives are relevant, scalable, and sustainable[44]. Technology has become a crucial element in the implementation and dissemination of human rights issues and topics, because it creates easy access and innovative approaches for human rights education. Technology manages to democratize access to human rights education through digital platforms, online course, and interactive multimedia resources[45]. Engaging and interactive learning experiences develop critical thinking skills, that pave the way for students to adopt and live in accordance with the principles of democracy, protecting and promoting human rights.

Conclusions

Human rights education is a structural element in the development of democratic citizens, who are capable of sustaining and enhancing democratic societies. The enhancement of awareness of human rights and responsibilities, the promotion of democratic values, and the encouragement of active participation in civic life, provides human rights education with the key elements for the development of individuals who understand what democracy is, what endangers it, and how it can be defended and developed. Critical thinking and ethical reasoning contribute to the development of citizens that become gradually more accountable, in a gradually more transparent democratic system, that promotes social equity, and lives by the principles of democracy.

The implementing of human rights education can be thwarted by political resistance, because differing ideologies limit or block access to human rights content, in regions where they are perceived as a threat to the authoritarian governance. Cultural barriers can also block access to human rights education, because they consider age-old traditions as being immutable and renouncing them as a threat to the integrity of a certain culture. Limited resources jeopardize the implementation of human rights education, through lack of funding for educational materials and trained educators. Lack of financial support makes schools unable to deliver comprehensive human rights programs. As societies become aware of the dangers threatening democracy, consistent advocacy for policy reforms, collaboration between governments, NGOs, and international organizations, they create a system that expands the reach of democracy and foster engagement in regions where human rights are lacking.

A resilient democracy functions in full accordance with human rights, by equipping students with knowledge, skills, and values necessary to participate in democratic processes not only effectively, but also as accountable and responsible citizens. They would be able to advocate for justice, address social inequalities, and hold government institutions accountable. Democracies will always face challenges, making investing in human rights education a critical element for sustaining the principles that are foundational for democracy. The empowerment of individuals, a process that begins in schools, leads to meaningful engagement in communities and the world, and the proliferation of cohesive and democratic societies and cultures.

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