
BASIC SCHOOL PUPILS AWARENESS OF HUMAN RIGHTS
IN ITESIWAJU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF OYO
STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the basic school pupils' awareness of human rights in Itesiwaju Local Government, Oyo state; Nigeria. It also examined the influence of gender, class and school type. A descriptive survey research, using the questionnaire, was adopted for the study. The target population included all pupils of 10 randomly selected Schools in Itesiwaju Local Government, Oyo State, Nigeria. The sample was made up of 300 pupils, 30 pupils each were selected from the school sampled for study for the purpose of easy analysis. The data collected was analyzed using percentages to answer the research questions. The findings show that the human rights provision in the Nigeria Constitution (1999) is known by very many basic school pupils. Based on these findings, it was recommended that government should make sure that pupils are given a free hand (guided by the adult ones) to enjoy their human rights. Seminars and workshops should be constantly organized for these pupils about the rights they have. Human rights club should be encouraged in the schools and finally, parents should also encourage their children

to join human right clubs for proper awareness of the rights they have as humans.

Key Words: Human rights, basic school pupils, awareness,

Introduction

As another millennium emerges, trends in global human rights are changing. Human rights issues are crossing sovereign boundaries and are no longer just issues of the state. There are more people raising concerns about human rights-related issues as more and more non-governmental organizations are growing, and Internet expands and facilitates a quicker spread of information. One of the great achievements of the United Nations is the creation of a comprehensive body of human rights law—a universal and internationally-protected code to which all nations can subscribe and to which all people can aspire. The organization has defined a broad range of internationally accepted rights and political and civil rights. It has also established mechanisms to promote and protect these rights to assist government in carrying out their responsibilities.

The International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) (2003) was of the opinion that the concept of children's rights is as old as humanity, for children are human beings and human rights apply to all age groups. FIDA (2003) stressed further when they observed that in spite of the recognition of the fact that children have the same general human rights as adults, children all over the world still suffer from poverty, homelessness, abuse, neglect, preventable diseases, and unequal access to education and justice system. In the works of Adamatia and Peter (1979), titled Human Rights "A western construct of limited Applicability", they posited that liberty and democracy, were not a consequence of a particular set of political institutions, but were prior to and supreme to the sovereignty of the state. This view soon became established with the passing of the English petition of Rights in 1627, The American Bill of Right in 1791 and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in 1789.

Human Rights developed jurisprudentially from natural law: the natural law doctrine was partly responsible for the American

Revolution where in its declaration of independence in 1776 it was stated, "We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created that they endowed by their creator with certain unattainable rights that among these are life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness". This later led to Bill of Rights. Human Right doctrine and consciousness appear to have emerged and spread since the end of the Second World War and has succeeded, by and large, in forming part of the international norm of Jus cogens. The United Nation Universal Declaration of Human Right (UNDHR) is viewed as one of the cultural phenomena of all history, which surpassed only historical experience in relation to the universal acceptance of minimum norms in relation to individual rights. And never in history has the awareness of such a norm permeated so widely through the global community.

This doctrine was also responsible for French Revolution, which is mainly about the rule of law, liberty, justice, freedom, conscience, truth, right to life, respect for the supreme values of the human personality, dignity etc. Despite various attempts to ensure thorough enactment of human rights, there are records of human right abuses and violation in various part of the country. In Nigeria, the Nigeria Police Force has been typically viewed as inefficient and corrupt. The Joint Task Force (JTF) has provided inadequate and violent response to the Boko Haram attacks. The JTF has been involved in killing suspects without fair trial as well as killing random members of communities expected in involvement with the Boko Haram. This "heavy-handed" approach violates human rights with its lack of access to a fair trial and use of discriminatory techniques to determine perpetrators of violence. Within the regular Nigeria Police Force, there are high amounts of corruption and violations that include extortion and embezzlement. The police force takes advantage of the people by putting up roadblocks that require a fee to pass and taking money for no legal reason. Within the police force, there is no equal protection under the law.

The wealthy are able to buy the police for security as well as expecting the police to turn a blind eye to illegal activities they participate in. Nigeria has the label of having one of the world's highest levels of corruption. This is especially seen within the public

sector including stealing public funds and accepting bribes. It is estimated that between 1999 and 2007, Nigeria has lost around \$4-8 billion yearly due to corruption. Politicians often siphon public funds to further their political careers and also pay gangs to aid them in rigging elections. The elections since the end of military rule occurring in 1999, 2003, and 2007 were bloody affairs and were openly rigged. In 2007, ballot boxes were visibly stuffed by paid gangs and in some cases, electoral results were simply made up. Human Rights Watch estimates that at least 300 were killed due to the 2007 elections and that is considered to be a conservative estimate as cited from a Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Derrick Marco, Nigeria country director in March 2007. These measures of violence and intimidation discouraged the general public from voting. Those who did come out were subject to attacks by gangs. The current Fourth Republic of Nigeria has strengthened its laws against corruption and established the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in the early 2000s. However, due to the previous institutionalization of corruption, the battle against corruption is ongoing. These anti-corruption institutions have been attempting to combat the issue but they have not been very heavy handed in terms of punishment. Former Edo State governor Lucky Igbinedion pleaded guilty to embezzling 2.9 billion Naira (about \$24.2 million). However, he had a plea bargain with the EFCC and was fined 3.5 million Naira (\$29.167) and did not serve any jail term. Often, many high-level politicians remain uninvestigated and only lower-level officials are arrested. (Source: Human rights in Nigeria Wikipedia, the free-encyclopedia.)

This work cannot be completed without reference to the works of philosophers such as Dicey (1885) who gave the following rules as concept of human right, which he founded on certain principles of rule of law.

- A. That no man is above the law of the land, that is, equality of both the Governed and the governor before the laws.
- B. That no man can be punished or be lawfully made to suffer physically or materially except for the distinct breach of law

established in the ordinary legal manner before the ordinary court of law.

- C. That no man should be deprived of his personal liberty, freedom of speech and association subject to the law of the land.

The socialist-endorsing Marx theory regards natural rights as those rights men possess and can exercise with other members of the community and deny the claim if an individual, as negative individual therefore, could not have a right separate from that groups in the society to which, they belong. To allow an individual to accumulate wealth is to allow him/her exploit others. On the other hand, Western idea having developed the economic doctrine of lesser faire believed that the national judiciary penal systems could have been enhanced through UN training programme and technical advice. The UN machinery to monitor compliance with Human Rights treaties has acquired a remarkable cohesiveness and weight among member state.

Thus, it is blatantly hypocritical for a country to agree to universal human right and then hide behind cultural diversity and relativism when violations are exposed within its borders. Amnesty International asserts that, through cultural diversity and relativism deserve to be respected and promoted but should not be at the expense of the violation of HRs that are even more fundamental. Regrettably, numerous difficulties remain and many desperate situation of HRs as it is likely to become worse rather than better in the near future given the continued growth of population and consumerism which put more pressure on the land, resources and labour of indigenous people and ethnic minorities; and given the interrelated growth in political organizations of the oppressed and exploited societies .One of the greatest challenges for the HRs movement such as Amnesty International, Human Right Internet and Human Rights Watch, which monitor human rights on regular basis, is to help create conditions that will prevent abuses of HRs rather than just reacting to them after it is too late.

HRs are standards that recognize and protect the dignity of all human beings HRs govern how individual human beings live in society and with each other, as well as their relationships with

government and the obligations that government have towards them. HRs law obliges government to do some things, and prevent them from doing others. Individuals also have responsibilities in using their HRs, they must respect the right of others. No government, groups or individual person has the right to do anything that violates another's right.

It is the duty of the government through the police to provide security and to protect the life and property of Nigerian citizens but that has not always been the case. In fact, the Nigerian Police are more known for extorting money on the high way and detaining any driver that refuses to comply. This act is an abuse of the citizen's right. Instances abound on how some drivers are even shot and killed because they refused to be extorted. The Nigerian police do not provide adequate security for the poor masses but they usually provide security and escort for the rich Nigerians that are willing to pay, and government high office holder.

Some notable institutions that were created to protect human rights in Nigeria include: National Human Rights Commission, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Right Education. These institutions have not lived up to expectation because of various problems which include lack of practical punishment for proven cases of human right abuses, corruption, inadequate financing, nepotism, limited independence, and lack of skilled personnel and effective means of carrying out investigations of reported cases of abuses. The failure of some agencies to protect human rights did not only lead to further human right abuses but also created a society where the rights of the citizens are constantly abused by those that are supposed to protect their rights. The Nigerian government is known to oppose anti-government protests and demonstration, for instance, the recent Bring Back Our Girls protests in Abuja, "End impunity now" rally organized by America Network for Environment and Economic Justice (ANEEJ), calling the Nigerian government to end impunity in the oil sector' which was disrupted by the Nigerian police in Abuja, among several other protests both by the academia, labour, civil society etc.

The educational system in the country has been bastardised over the years by poor management, most especially by the same

government that is expected to be the custodian of equality education for future leaders. This has now led to top Nigerian officials responsible for the break down of the academic institution, sending their children to foreign schools, leaving the poor children to settle with poor academic upbringing that is plagued with incessant strikes, and constant hike in school fees, most likely unaffordable by poor parents, a resultant effect of crisis and destruction of lives and properties around the country. It is a shame because education is the tool that should be used to instruct and develop the future generation. A recent event is the call for those deployed in the NYSC to pay thousands of naira before getting their call –up letters to serve their father land, even without guarantee of job after service. The Nigerian prison and police cells are over crowded and dirty, and people are kept in such an unhealthy condition. One may be deceived to think that it is only criminals that are kept in such unhealthy environment but the fact is that most states are dirty because of lack of good environmental protection agencies. The conflicts in the Niger Delta region are partly as a result of abuse and denial of their (safe) environmental right. On fundamental human rights Chapter 4 of the 1999 Constitution Sec 35 (3) Any person who is arrested or detained shall be informed in writing within twenty-four hours (and in a language that he understands) of the facts and grounds for his arrest or detention. 39. (1) every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference.

In spite of the beautiful package of Nigerian constitution, we have over time witnessed constant violation of it by those who ought to be responsible in ensuring law and order, especially, when it comes to human right abuses as shown in the constitutional sections above. It should also be noted that such variables such as pupils' gender (male or female), school types (private or public), and pupils' illiteracy can have influence on pupils awareness of their human rights, the influence can be a positive or negative one. The human right awareness to good Nigerian citizenship is relatively key to the realization of the National policy on Education (NPE) major aims in that, human right produces changes in values and attitude; so

also are the national goals which derive from the philosophy of education, which speaks of the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigeria society (Oladejo 2002 P. 75). HRs also produce changes in behaviours, empowerment for social justice, develop attitudes of solidarity across issues and nations, develop knowledge and analytical skill and produces participatory education. The human right develops knowledge and analytical skill. Also, in the philosophy of Nigerian education, there is a portion that spoke of acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of its society. Based on this background, this research intends to find out the extent of the level of Basic School pupils' awareness of human rights.

Statement of the Problem

The concept of children's right is as old as human beings and human rights apply to all age groups without exception. The high level of corruption in Nigeria, especially in the government, makes it absolutely impossible to respect and protect human rights. It is obvious that corrupt system of leadership cannot guarantee the protection of human rights because corruption, itself, is an abuse of the rights of the people. Previous researches have been limited to human rights generally but not to basic school pupils awareness of human right. Also, none of these studies on human rights were carried out in Itesiwaju Local Government Area of Oyo State. Therefore, this research is undertaken to fill the gap. Despite the fact that human rights is of no exception (i.e. for the whole of humanity) yet children still suffer from diverse abuses, such as, poverty, homelessness, child labour, child trafficking, neglect, preventable diseases, sexual harassment, child marriage, mega access to education injustice among others.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide this study:

1. Are pupils aware that they have human rights as Nigerian citizens?

2. Are pupils' level of awareness of human rights low or high?
3. Are pupils aware of specific human rights for Nigerian citizens as stated in the Nigerian constitution?
4. Is there any difference between male and female pupils' awareness of human rights?

Method

The study adopted the survey research design, involving the use of questionnaire. A total number of three hundred (300) pupils were involved in the study as respondents. They consisted of male and female, irrespective of their class, religion and age which comprises of the pupils in Itesiwaju Local Government basic schools (middle). Out of sixty-one public basic schools and four registered private schools in the local government, the representatives of ten (10) basic schools (six public and four private) were selected for the study.

The researcher with the help of teachers of these pupils were actively involved in the study. A Questionnaire on Basic School Pupils Awareness of Human Rights (BSPAHR) was used to collect relevant data for the study. The questionnaire for the study was prepared and subjected to face and content validity to ensure that the instrument measured what it was supposed to measure. To determine the reliability of the instrument a test-retest method was adopted. One basic school was selected by the researcher, the basic schools appear to be comparable but not of the same school sampled for the study.

The instrument was administered on ten (10) pupils by the help of their teachers and after three weeks, the instrument was administered again. Spearman's rank order correlation co-efficient of the instrument was employed to determine reliability co-efficient of the instrument and the value obtained was 0.77. This value is adjudged to be reliable enough for use in this study. The data collected from the respondents were analyzed.

Results

The following tables show the analysis of the data collected in relation to the raised research questions.

Research question 1: Are pupils aware that they have human rights?

Table I: Summary of pupils' level of awareness of HRs

Table I: Summary of pupils' level of awareness of human rights.

		YES %	NO %	TOTAL
1	Are you aware of your rights as citizen of this country?	195 (58.5)	105 (41.5)	300
2	Do you think you are entitled to human rights?	237 (71.1)	63 (28.9)	300
3	Do you know that you can claim your rights if other people step or deny you your rights?	242 (72.6)	58 (27.4)	300
4	Is there human right club in your school?	- -	300 (100)	300
5	Are you a member of human right club	85 (25.5)	215 (74.5)	300

Table I: Showed percentage analysis of responses to pupils awareness of human rights. It could be seen that almost all the pupils that participated had the awareness of human rights. Hence, the level of their awareness of human rights is high.

Research question 2: Are pupils' level of awareness of human right low or high?

From Table I above, it would be seen that the level of human right awareness of basic school pupils is high.

Research question 3: Are pupils aware of specific human rights for Nigerian citizens as stated in the Nigeria constitution?

Table 2: Summary of pupils Awareness of human rights

		YES %	NO %	TOTAL
1	Right to life	296 (88.8)	04 (11.2)	300
2	Right to dignity of labour	243 (72.9)	57 (27.1)	300
3	Right to personal liberty	278 (83.4)	22 (16.6)	300
4	Right to fair hearing	249 (74.7)	51 (25.3)	300
5	Right to private and family life	158 (54)	142 (46)	300
6	Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion	194 (58.2)	106 (41.8)	300
7	Right to freedom of expression and the press	262 (78.6)	38 (21.4)	300
8	Right to peaceful assembly and association.	272 (81.6)	28 (21.7)	300
9	Right to freedom of movement	261 (78.3)	39 (21.7)	300
10	Right to freedom from discrimination	231 (69.3)	69 (30.7)	300
11	Right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria	239 (71.7)	61 (28.3)	300

Provisions in the Nigeria Constitution (1999)

Summary of pupils' responses as shown in Table 2 above revealed that most of the pupils are aware of the specific human rights provisions as entrenched in the Nigerian constitution. Almost all the pupils have the awareness of their human rights as stated in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Their awareness goes beyond average. These include Right to life. Right to dignity of labour and right to personal liberty, which have 88.8%, 72.0% and 83.4% awareness. Also, Right to Fair Hearing, Right to Private and Family Life, to freedom of thought conscience and religion have 74.7%, 54% and 58.2% respectively. There are also some of these specific human rights that have 78.6%, 81.6%, 78.3%, 69.3% and 71.7%. These rights are right to freedom of expression and the press, right to peaceful assembly and association, right to freedom of movement and right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria.

Discussion

The findings from the study showed that the level of awareness of human rights by most pupils is high. The list of human rights as

stated in the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria is known by very many basic school pupils. Also most pupils are allowed to watch news-related programmes on Radio and Television such as N.T.A. which has helped to boost their awareness of human rights. The finding is in correlation with United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UNUDHR) (1948) stated that member states of the UN (pupils inclusive) recognized the inherent dignity and equal and inelible rights of all members.

Conclusion and Recommendation

From the results of the data analysis obtained, the following conclusions can be drawn from the study. That the greater number of percentage about pupils' awareness of their human rights' occur, and it is advisable to keep the pace going among the pupils, so that few pupils that do not have total awareness about their human rights would also make up with their equals who have such awareness. There is the need to carry the female children along very well as their male counterpart so that they would not be subjected to inequality or rated as second class citizens. It therefore, follows that government should follow the rule of law. It has to ensure, for instance, that corruption in the judiciary is stopped and checked by another agency (checks and balances) and not to use it as a tool to weaken the efforts of those who seek justice or as a political weapon against opposition. Pupils should be giving free hand (guided by the adult ones) to enjoy their human rights. Government should provide human right education to the citizens through media, workshop, and as part of academic curriculum in the absence of none. Parents should encourage their children to join human rights club. Human right offenders should be brought to book without fear or favour, by proper application of retributive justice where necessary because it will act as an example to other human right offenders. It is important to overhaul the judiciary, if the problems of human right abuses will be tackled effectively. The judiciary should be self dependence, proper funding and absence of corruption within it, as it is the last hope of the common man. Likewise other agencies established need to be checking the abuses of human rights in the country.

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