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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN CLASSROOMS: A PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE AT THE BAHRAIN TEACHERS COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

Illiteracy caused by political and economic inequalities and exclusion from education opportunities has left millions of vulnerable people across the globe in a disadvantaged position. Education, however, throughout human history has been a means and an end for human growth. The international community has come to realize the importance of Human Rights Education in contributing to the recognition of Human Rights and consequently international stability of the world. For this reason Human Rights Education has been incorporated in a number of international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Right (HR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), The International Covenant on Civil, Cultural and Political Rights (ICCPR), The Covenant on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This study investigates the perspectives of pre-service teachers at Bahrain Teachers College (BTC) in promoting HR in classrooms. The study uses document analysis research methodology through analyzing students' (pre-service teachers) written reflections on promoting HR in classrooms. The result of the study indicated not only that pre-service teachers exhibited clear understanding of the importance of human rights, but also showed commitment to promote them in their classrooms. The study recommended a number of steps that need to be taken to promote Human Rights Education in Bahrain's classrooms.

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights looks upon education as a crucial apparatus to promote human rights among global citizens. It calls for the promotion of "understanding, tolerance and friendship". It further emphasizes that education should "promote respect for these rights and freedoms". Incorporating human rights awareness and themes in pre-service and in-service teacher preparation programs are essential aspects to prepare effective teachers. Promoting human rights in classrooms constitutes the starting point to advance the cause of human rights at a large scale. It resembles sowing the seeds for a future good harvest that societies are desperate to reap in order to live in peace. UNESCO (2012) provided the following comprehensive definition for Human Rights Education: "HRE can be defined as education, training and information aimed at building a universal culture of human rights through the sharing of

knowledge, imparting of skills and molding of attitudes to prompt action directed at strengthening respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, tolerance, equality and peace, among individuals, within societies and among nations."(p. 1)

This study investigates the perspectives of pre-service teachers at Bahrain Teachers College (BTC) in promoting HR in classrooms. The study uses document analysis research methodology by analyzing students' (pre-service teachers) written reflections on promoting HR in classrooms. This study is expected to answer the following research questions:

- Why do we need to incorporate Human Rights in teacher preparation programs?
- How to promote Human Rights in classrooms?
- To what extent do pre-service teachers understand the importance of promoting Human Rights in classrooms?

Significance of the study: This study is expected to contribute positively to BTC's vision "Achieving Excellence in Education" as well as mission "Empowering educators to build a better future for Bahrain". Besides helping in preparing and graduating highly competent and successful teachers, the study

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addresses the importance of promoting Human Rights in classrooms and essentialness of addressing the subject of Human Rights in teacher preparation programs. The study analyzes pre-service teachers' perspectives of promoting Human Rights in classrooms.

Conceptual Framework: The Human Rights principles of universality, interdependency, accountability, transparency and participation encourage educators to view Human Rights in a holistic framework. Flowers and Shiman (1997) argued that "preparing teachers to become human rights educators means addressing the totality of interrelated and interdependent rights found in these visionary documents [United Nations Human Rights documents]" (p. 161). The holistic framework adopted by this study is grounded in the social constructivist theoretical approach. Constructivist understanding promotes inclusive learning environments where all students have equal opportunity to develop and grow regardless of their gender, ethnic group, race, religion and social or economic status. Human rights education, together with education for democratic citizenship and education for mutual respect and understanding, is vital for all of our societies. It promotes equality, empowerment and participation as well as conflict prevention and resolution. In brief, it is a means to develop societies where the human rights of all are respected, protected and fulfilled (OSCE/ODIHR, UNESCO and OHCHR, 2009). While civil and political rights are called 'first generation rights' and 'social, economic and cultural rights' called second generation rights, "the concept of expanding human rights through education is now popularly present and traveled to encompass as the third generation rights itself" (Mahapatra, 2012).

The Human Rights principles of universality, interdependency, accountability, transparency and participation encourage educators to view Human Rights in a holistic manner. In other words, Human Rights should not only be viewed as a pure legal matter, ignoring the economic, social and cultural aspects. The legal provision of Human Rights is very important but looking at Human Rights from multiple dimensions provides a comprehensive understanding. The holistic approach of human rights is supported by the International Covenant on Civil, Cultural and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). In its preamble, the ICESCR states that: "in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights." Human Rights Education has been also handled in a holistic approach as presented clearly in Article 26 (2) of the UDHR "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality..." and in the CRC article 29 (Aims of Education) as presented in the glossary of the UNICEF official website: States Parties agree that the basic aims of the education of children are the development of the child's personality, talents, mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential and the preparation of the child for a responsible life. Education should also be directed to the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values and for the national values of the country in which the child is living and of the country from which the child may originate, and to the development of respect for different civilizations and the natural environment.

For the holistic approach of Human Rights to be realized in education, educators need to apply an appropriate theoretical understanding. The authors suggests that the social constructivist approach, which is grounded in the social humanistic philosophy, provides the logical theoretical background for human rights education; "Humanists oppose racism, sexism, torture, unfair imprisonment, persecution because of beliefs, and vast inequalities in wealth and education, all of which stand in the way of overall human welfare and progress" (British Humanist Association, 2007).

Human rights education encourages active listening, critical thinking, self-directed learning, conflict resolution, mutual respect and students centered in total alignment with the constructivist learning approach and with the humanistic philosophy. Constructivist understanding also promotes inclusive learning environments where all students have equal opportunity to develop and grow regardless of their gender, ethnic group, race, religion and social or economic status. The social constructivist approach also supports the concept of empowerment that education in general and human rights education in particular provides. When vulnerable and disadvantaged groups such as women, children, the poor and people with special needs are given the opportunity for education, they are empowered with knowledge and skills to better their lives and the lives of their families. As education becomes a human right, misinformation and exploitation are automatically mitigated. Teacher preparation programs, such as BTC's Human Rights Education Program, should be organized in a manner that promotes and encourages teachers to become Human Rights educators and advocates (Flowers and Shiman, 1997). In their research work entitled *Teacher Education and the Human Rights Vision*, Flowers and Shiman adopt Kevin Ryans "Five Es" for moral education to promote Human Rights in classrooms. The Five aspects are (1) Explanation (2) Example (3) Exhortation (4) Experience and (5) Environment. This study embraces the moral aspect in promoting human rights in classrooms; hence it analyzes and interprets students reflections in light of Kevin Ryan's 5Es mentioned earlier. For example, to satisfy children's natural curiosity and answer their questions of moral nature, pre-service teachers need to be able to explain the moral implication related to such inquiries. However, "To teach morality is neither to preach nor to indoctrinate; it is to explain," (Durkheim, 1961). Moral qualities need to be infused in classrooms through modeling.

MATEIALS AND METHODS

To address the research questions, this study employs document analysis which is a qualitative research approach and used in mixed research methods as well. It employs a variety of techniques to analyze and interpret documents such as text, images, videos, audio, maps ... etc. It has been characterized by researchers such as White and Marsh (2006) "as a systematic, rigorous approach to analyzing documents obtained or generated in the course of research." The data consists of students' written reflections and project reports on promoting human rights in classrooms over two consecutive academic years (2014/15 and 2015/16). The project reports focused on right to education, environment, child labor, rights of women, and persons with disability, all have implications on Human Rights Education. Grounded theory was applied to analyze and uncover meanings and findings from the data. According to Charmaz and Henwood (2008) "Grounded theory

as a method provides us with guidelines on how to identify categories and how to establish relationships between themes.” In approaching the analysis of the data, the researchers start to independently examine selected reflections and project reports with the purpose of identifying language related to the importance and promotion of human rights principles and values in schools (Raible and deNoyelles, 2015). Phrases and words relevant to the study were highlighted, subsequently developed into codes by the researchers. The codes developed were then used to code the rest of the project reports independently by the researchers. Document analysis is an appropriate and efficient first level analysis, the documents were available and unbiased (Raible and deNoyelles, 2015). According to Raible and deNoyelles (2015), “the advantage of examining documents is that it provides data on the context, provides background information, and provides a means of tracking change and development” (p.5). The findings are expected to inform the BTC teacher education program to better prepare pre-service teachers. Two hundred written documents, which constitute the students’ project reports and reflections on “Promoting Human Rights in Classroom” during two consecutive academic years (2014/2015 and 2015/2016) have been analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are based on the analysis of project reports and reflections of pre-service teachers who took a course in human rights principles. The following two main themes emerged from the documentary analysis, importance of human rights to education, and methods to promote human rights in classrooms.

Importance of human rights to education: Pre-service teachers exhibited clear understanding of the importance of human rights. Several statements related to the importance of human rights were identified in the project reports of the pre-service teachers. These issues include rights to education, persons with disability, gender discrimination, child rights, and the environment. For example, in the education focused project reports statements such as “Today, education is very important for each one in his/her life” was a common feature in the reports. “Education gives children the opportunity to escape abandonment”. The pre-service teachers acknowledged that with access to education, individuals will participate in the development of their country and earn a decent lifestyle. In addition, in all cases the reports highlighted the acknowledgement of pre-service teachers that part of their responsibility in the classroom is to ensure all students enjoy equal rights. For example, give children equal opportunity to participate in the learning process, building good relationship with students without discrimination. “As pre-service teachers, we have a lot of duties in the classroom we have to make sure that we provide all students their rights in classroom.” From the reports of the pre-service teachers, “human rights enhance people’s freedom and allow them to talk and express their viewpoints confidently and easily”. The pre-service teachers revealed in their reporting that the assignment made them more aware of specific human rights issues. For example the pre-service teachers reported being more aware of the challenges confronting persons with disabilities in relation to their rights as human beings within society. In the case of the CEDAW focused project reports, the following statement was commonly cited in the students’ responses: “CEDAW is the most important convention that

protects women’s rights against any discrimination. It saves women’s dignity and provides the equality with men in different aspect”. Such statements are significant when put forward by pre-service teachers and it strongly predicts their future advocacy to promote human rights in the classroom.

Promoting human rights in classrooms: The outcome of the documentary analysis reveals ideas conceived by pre-service teachers to promote human rights in their classrooms. This section presents a discussion of the ideas pre-service teachers reported as likely strategies to employ in promoting human rights in classrooms upon becoming teachers. The suggestions range from planning and preparation, classroom environment, classroom instructions to professional relationships with colleagues. Most of the students reported that respect was the key in promoting human rights in the classrooms. Respecting fellow teachers and students irrespective of their cultural or economic backgrounds or who they are, according to the report of the pre-service teachers is essential in promoting human rights in classrooms. Not only will students model that behavior in the classroom towards their classmates but will likely extend the behavior to their homes and the community at large. Furthermore, pre-service teachers see themselves as role models to students and the degree to which they affect students’ behavior will depend on the degree to which teachers model their behavior according to the principles of human rights.

It was clearly stated in the project reports that, in order to promote the principle related to eliminating discrimination against women, they will treat all students equally through the creation of equal opportunities for learning in the classroom and holding high expectation for all students irrespective of their differences. The most notable teaching method to promote human rights in the classroom emphasizes student participation in the classroom, group work and student-initiated projects (Howard, 1997). Pre-service teachers emphasized in their reports that working as a team encourages students to think, share and participate effectively in the classroom. According to pre-service teachers, cooperative work among students will help students to know one another and promote mutual respect. Student centered teaching methods and authentic teacher methods were frequently mentioned in all the reports analyzed as a way to promote human rights education in the classroom. For example, the use of videos on issues of human rights can be used in combination with other methods to promote human rights. In addition, teachers can make use of extracurricular activities as platforms for the promotion of human rights values and principles among students.

The more obvious and direct method to promote human rights principles in the classroom according to the reports will be to either include human rights issues in the curriculum’s selected subjects or to have a human rights focused subject for teaching young learners. In this case, students will be exposed to the issues related to human rights principles in their early years. In addition, pre-service teachers noted in their reports that use can be made of extracurricular activities as opportunities for the promotion of human rights education among young learners.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Role of BTC to infuse Human Rights in Bahrain’s schools!
Article 26 of the Human Rights Declaration stated that

“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace” (UNESCO (2012). To achieve such ambitious goals international communities must start educating children with human rights values at an early age. In its plan of action for the first phase of the World Program for Human Rights Education, the General Assembly of the United Nations stated that “the education to which each child has a right is one designed to provide the child with life skills, to strengthen the child’s capacity to enjoy the full range of human rights and to promote a culture which is infused by appropriate human rights values” (pp. 6-7).

This study recommends a number of steps that need to be taken to promote Human Rights Education in Bahrain’s classrooms. In doing so, the researchers suggest building a systematic approach to equipping pre-service teachers at BTC with the appropriate knowledge and skills that not only educate them about HRE, but also prepare them to educate children with these values. Therefore, teacher education program at BTC need to ensure that pre-service teachers receive the proper training that not only prepares them to provide fair and equitable education to the students in their classrooms, but also to be able to infuse human rights values in their classrooms. Students need to understand and value their roles as citizens within Bahrain’s national values as well as international human rights principles. In a globally diverse society which presents itself clearly in Bahrain’s classrooms, promoting HRE is no longer a luxury but a necessity. “Because we live in a globally diverse society, the universality of certain rights should be the topic of mutual debate so that a mutually collective understanding can be achieved” (Francis and College, 2012 p. 38). Therefore, the role of the teacher education program at BTC in preparing future teachers who are highly competent in HRE requirements is essential.

The framework for teaching Human Rights suggests that the teacher education program at BTC should include content knowledge about a number of issues such as race, gender, social class and religion and to what extent they are impacting students’ learning. The central value that pre-service teachers must learn and strongly hold on, argues (Francis and College, 2012), is providing all students regardless of their differences with equal opportunity to succeed. Horace Mann stated that, "Education is the gateway to equality." Respect and tolerance are also two qualities that not only that pre-service teachers need to exercise, but also be able to transfer to their students. Although BTC offers a 2 credit hours course entitled Law and Human Rights, the researchers recommended that human rights principles should also be infused throughout the teacher education program. Of course there are courses that are more receptive to such infusion than others. Hence, these courses should be identified and reorganized to include the appropriate human rights values. For example, all teachers practice courses; courses related to child development and courses about learning environment are good candidates to include content knowledge and skills about human rights qualities. Indeed, even in a writing course students could be asked to write about human rights issues or analyze documents that contain human rights matters. Research strongly considers that educating pre-service teachers to create a safe learning environment that builds on respect and rapport should be given

high attention in BTC’s teacher education program. Equity, kindness, tolerance and empathy are important dispositions that pre-service teachers themselves need to possess and be able to transfer later in their classrooms.

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Glossary of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Stands for
BTC	Bahrain Teachers College
CEDAW	Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	The Covenant on the Rights of the Child
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil, Cultural and Political Rights
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Right
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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