

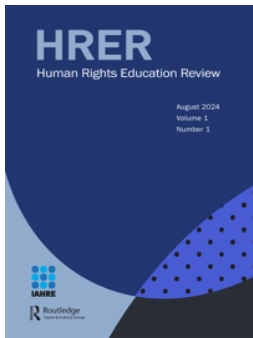
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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Human Rights Education and Global Citizenship: an analysis of Sri Lankan Civic Education curricula

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ABSTRACT

Human Rights Education (HRE) is crucial for Sri Lanka, having endured a 26-year-long civil war and various violent experiences arising from ethnic, religious and political tensions. In the context of post-war reconciliation, schools are one of the primary avenues to educate youths about human rights to mitigate the recurrence of past violence and conflicts. HRE, in partnership with Global Citizenship Education (GCE), can contribute to the development of inclusive and just societies. In this paper, I examine the capacity of school curricula to educate young people about human rights, thereby supporting global citizenship. I analyse the secondary civic education curricula to evaluate their alignment with international requirements of HRE and integration of GCE. The results reveal a prioritisation of knowledge over the processes involved in embodying principles of human rights and an inwardly oriented approach for citizenship education. The study recommends enhancing active citizenship without limiting it to national citizenship.

KEYWORDS

Human Rights Education; Sri Lanka; Civic Education; child rights; Global Citizenship Education

Introduction

Human rights education is crucial for multiethnic and multicultural Sri Lanka, having endured a 26-year-long civil war and various violent experiences arising from ethnic, religious and political tensions. In the context of post-war reconciliation and the development of a more equitable and inclusive society, schools can be recognised as one of the primary avenues for educating youths about human rights, serving as a key agent of socialisation. However, matters related to Human Rights are widely discussed in Sri Lanka regarding alleged human rights violations, especially those that occurred during the war (Deane, 2022). Scholarly attention to Human Rights Education (HRE) as an educational program is sparse. Literature focused on alleged human rights violations during, and post-war situations highlights the importance of sound human rights awareness and education in the post-war reconciliation process. Though human rights have been taught in Sri Lankan curricula since 1983 not as a separate subject but using the ‘infusion method’; content about human rights integrated into Social Studies and History curricula, it has been questioned that it is more of cognitive learning of human rights rather than practical knowledge that is required to create human rights culture (Fernando, 1998). In addition, in the past, certain content related to history subjects has been recognised as contrary to the purpose of human rights teaching related to issues of race relations, religious tolerance and gender equity (Fernando, 1998). To date, despite numerous revisions to history curricula, issues persist regarding the inclusion of minority communities and their histories, as well as the representation of minority communities in history textbooks (Jayasooriya et al., *forthcoming*).

Given the history of political, social, ethnic and religious violence in the Sri Lankan context, knowledge and understanding of human rights are key. The violent history of Sri Lanka dates back to 1971, and the 1987–1989 insurrections caused by Marxist-Leninist JVP (*Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna*- People’s Liberation Front) against the government. The second insurrection, marked by extreme brutality on both sides, claimed around 80,000 lives and disappearances. Both civil uprisings were attributed to youth unrest stemming from unemployment, economic stagnation, rural poverty and educational dysfunction. The most significant conflict in Sri Lankan history is the 26-year civil war, which started in 1983 and ended in 2009. It was

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between the majoritarian Sinhalese government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a group that fought for an independent state for the Tamil minority. In recent history, a youth-led campaign in 2022 stemmed from issues related to fuel shortages, repeated power cuts and political corruption which was initially a peaceful protest was escalated in response to a pro-government violent attack and led to a mass invasion of the presidential mansion in the capital of Sri Lanka forcing president Gotabaya Rajapaksha to resign in July 2022 (Silva & Ramasamy, *n.d.*).

On the other hand, school bullying, cyberbullying, gender-based violence and cyberattacks raise concerns related to human rights and the consequences of a lack of HRE. Sri Lanka is reported to have a higher level of bullying among adolescents, which accounts for around 37% (Jayasinghe et al., 2021). Internet and social media raise human rights concerns, particularly in domains such as data protection, online privacy, online harassment and the preservation of freedom of expression (Karunathilaka & Dahanayake, 2024). The National Research Study on Civic Education (NEREC) was conducted in Sri Lanka both in 2003 and 2017, replicating the Civic Education Study (CIVED) conducted in 28 countries in 1998 by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). This study in 2003 revealed that more than half of the schools in the sample reported issues of truancy, bullying, vandalism and violence, with rates of 74%, 66%, 63% and 50%, respectively. However, there was a slight decline in the percentage of truancy and bullying in 2017, which were reported at 72% and 61%, respectively (National Education Research and Evaluation Centre NEREC, 2018). Given this context, there is a critical need to raise awareness about human rights among students and the general public, in addition to the enactment and enforcement of laws. Human Rights content is currently taught in the Civic Education curriculum. Civic Education is a subject taught from grades 6 to 11, and it is a compulsory subject until grade 9 and an elective subject for grades 10 and 11. Though it is recommended to start HRE from early childhood, from age 3 onwards (Palau-Wolffe, 2016), it has been limited to the secondary level for decades in the Sri Lankan context. On the other hand, Yeban (2001) highlights the fact that HRE in Sri Lanka is undertaken by nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in both the nonformal (community-based) and formal (school-based) sectors, like in other parts of Asia. These NGOs are twofold: national and international, and they work on promoting and protecting human rights, aligning with widely endorsed human rights declarations (Haans, 2012). However, it is questionable how much access these kinds of nongovernment organisations have to formal sectors like schools in Sri Lanka, given the centrally developed curricula structure and intensive teaching targeting competitive exams. Haans (2012) reveals that the role of Sri Lankan NGOs in promoting and protecting human rights is limited, partly due to government interference, despite their representation of numerous human rights cases in the courts.

Given this background, what centrally developed curricula have to offer related to HRE is crucial in deciding the level of impact HRE makes on school-going students, as well as the government's commitment to HRE. There is an apparent lack of attention to the field of HRE research in the formal curriculum in Sri Lanka, whereas elsewhere this topic has received due scholarly attention. Accordingly, this paper looks at HRE in Sri Lankan formal education settings through an analysis of secondary-level Civic education curricula and textbooks.

In general, HRE linked with Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is committed to engaging all humans in terms of respecting and upholding the rights of others, whether those persons are formal (legal) citizens of nation-states or not (Fernekes, 2016). Although Sri Lankan ethnic issues are not necessarily based on cross-national migrations, but rather between indigenous ethnic groups in terms of issues related to language rights, land rights, political power and governance, principles of GCE are still valid to develop together with HRE. The main reason for this is that Sri Lanka is still working on its post-war reconciliation projects and peace building to bring together hostile ethnic groups. Therefore, this study also investigates the integration of GCE in secondary Civic Education curricula.

Methodology and methods

In this paper, I examine the capacity of the Sri Lankan school curricula to educate adolescents about human rights, thereby supporting global citizenship through curricula and textbook analysis. Accordingly, I aim to answer three specific questions. What content related to HRE and Human Rights for GCE are included in Sri Lankan secondary civic education textbooks? To what extent is the formal school curriculum related to HRE of Sri Lanka compatible with the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Do the civic education curricula support human rights for the GCE approach? I employed a thematic approach to analyse

the secondary civic education curricula, to evaluate their alignment with the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Accordingly, I selected grade 6–11 civic education textbooks and curriculum documents (Teacher's guides/Teachers' Instructional Manuals) in which human rights-related content is integrated. Accordingly, six textbooks and six teachers' guides are used for the analysis. To answer my key research questions, I first adopted the framework used by Daniels (2018) to understand the international requirements of HRE, based on the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Human Rights for Global Citizenship education. Thereafter, I analysed Sri Lankan civic education textbooks utilising thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). First, I coded the content related to HRE and GCE in the Civic Education textbooks. Secondly, these codes were categorised to identify similar and related codes, which in turn generated themes. Some content was not assigned codes as they were not relevant to the focus of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The themes generated from the analysis are discussed under subtopics and compared with the framework adopted to understand the compatibility. Table 1 shows examples of coding related to the themes generated. Using the coding framework, I have incorporated quotations from the textbooks to support discussions of the relevant themes.

Civic education textbooks and curricula (teacher's guide/Teachers' Instructional Manual), like textbooks of other subjects, are available in three languages, namely Sinhala, Tamil and English (Sinhala and Tamil are official and national languages in Sri Lanka, while English is the link language and a medium of instruction in educational settings). Textbooks are typically written in Sinhala and translated into two other languages. Considering the feasibility of analysis and to ensure the author does not have to use the author's translations for the content of texts, English textbooks are selected for the study. Accordingly, quoted texts are officially accepted translations that are also used in schools where the civic education subject is taught in English. Sinhala textbooks were referred to where necessary. However, it is worth noting that not comparing the texts of all three languages is a limitation of the study. These are the textbooks and curricula documents that are currently in use at schools introduced through the 2014–2017 curriculum reform.

Table 1. Examples of coding related to themes.

Grade/Page no	Text	Codes	Themes
Grade 7, page 35	In relation to the rights that we enjoy, there are a set of obligations and responsibilities that we should perform. Each and every right that we enjoy in turn, binds us with certain obligations and responsibilities attached to them. Fulfillment of these obligations and responsibilities further may lead to establish the rights that you enjoy.	Obligations and responsibilities linked with rights Rights come with a cost To protect rights by fulfilling obligations and responsibilities Establishing rights; an individual responsibility Absence of note on other players in establishing rights Missing examples of fulfillment of obligations leading/not leading to the establishment of rights	Emphasis on responsibilities, obligations fulfilling duties Rote learning and no real life relevance Promoting obedience over participation
Grade 9, page 21	Consolidation and systematization of the administration of the country and protection of rights occur due to the obedience to the rules and regulations	Individuals are responsabilized Protection of individual rights is depoliticalized Obedience is required to protect rights Obedience to rules and regulations Missing context	Emphasis on responsibilities, obligations fulfilling duties Rote learning and no real life relevance Promoting obedience over participation
Grade 11, Page 79	An important fact that you should pay your attention to is the fact that the government spends a great deal of money for the provision of education to you free of charge. Provision of education to you, improvement of your skills and capabilities, presenting you to the society as a good citizen are some of the services carried out by the school. Pay your attention to the duties and responsibilities that you have towards your school. Engaging in educational activities properly, being obedient to your teachers, being disciplined, respecting and safeguarding rules, regulations and traditions of the school, utilizing resources of the school while protecting them are some examples of the duties that you should fulfill towards your school.	Right to education is secured by the government Education is free Right to education supports promoting a good citizen Focus on duties and responsibilities to be fulfilled Be obedient Be disciplined Respect and safeguard rules Duties to fulfill towards the school	Emphasis on responsibilities, obligations fulfilling duties Rote learning and no real life relevance Promoting obedience over participation

Human Rights Education and Global Citizenship Education

HRE is an international movement that promotes awareness of the rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and related human rights conventions (F. Tibbitts, 2008, p. 99). Effective human rights education fosters knowledge about human rights and the mechanisms that protect them and develops skills and attitudes that enable learners to take action, promoting, defending and applying human rights in daily life (UNESCO, 2022, p. 2). Educators emphasise the need for HRE programs to include both content and processes related to human rights (Bajaj, 2011; Palau-Wolffe, 2016; F. L. Tibbitts, 2017). A framework designed for human rights-friendly schools states three prepositions linking human rights in the education process which was also introduced in UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UNDHRET): education about human rights (providing knowledge and understanding of human rights), education through human rights (learning and teaching in a way that respects human rights) and education for human rights (empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others) (Amnesty International, 2011; Daniels, 2018).

Education for human rights is closely linked with active citizenship. Westheimer and Kahne (2003) identify three visions of 'citizenship' that are needed for an effective democratic society. They are personally responsible citizens (who act responsibly in the community); participatory citizens (who actively participate in civic affairs and social life); and justice-oriented citizens (who critically assess social, political and economic structures and consider collective strategies for change to challenge injustice). In extension, Global Citizenship is more about living together with other cultures and morality (Veugelers, 2021, p. 1182) and is oriented towards the world (Goren & Yemini, 2017; Veugelers, 2021). Nevertheless, global citizenship and GCE are understood and interpreted differently by different scholars. The content of global citizenship education is interdisciplinary, encompassing multiple fields of inquiry, including but not limited to HRE, moral education, development education, democratic education, education for cosmopolitan citizenship, peace education, international education and education for sustainable development (Fernekess, 2016; Oxley & Morris, 2013; Veugelers, 2021). The concept of global citizenship corresponds to the universal notion of human rights (Cho, 2019) as global citizenship is 'a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity' (UNESCO, 2015, p. 14). This is important because it is common to misunderstand human rights to mean a collection of fundamental rights exclusive to people who belong to a particular country (Cho, 2019).

HRE for global citizenship can be considered a type of HRE among others, such as HRE for coexistence and HRE for transformative action (Bajaj, 2011). With increasing issues related to conflicts, migration and refugees, HRE addresses the moral and legal obligations we have towards others (Daniels, 2018). Furthermore, HRE necessarily includes child rights, especially when the target group is young children or adolescents. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 29. 1) 'States parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations' (United Nations, 1989, p. 9). Article 29.1(b) makes explicit reference to the right to human rights education (Osler & Starkey, 1998). Therefore, child rights should be enacted and promoted through HRE. UNESCO (2022) introduces four components for effective human rights education for youth: 1. Policies and related implementation measures, 2. Teaching and learning processes and tools, 3. Training of educators and 4. An enabling environment. This principle is equally applicable to the education of adolescents. This paper primarily examines the second component, although it also involves the first component. Before moving to the analysis of curricula, the following sections provide a discussion about education and human rights in conflict-affected societies and a background of the context of human rights and HRE in Sri Lanka.

Education and human rights in conflict-affected societies

Despite education being considered a key factor in post-conflict societies like Sri Lanka, with the potential to contribute to reconciliation and social cohesion, it could exacerbate social divisions and identity-based conflicts (Jayasooriya & Vickers, 2025; Tawil & Harley, 2004). Osler and Pandur (2019), referring to Bosnia and Herzegovina, state that subjects such as language and literature, history, nature and society, and fine arts can be used to promote hatred and intolerance. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a unique example of the fragmentation of educational governance as there are three parallel school curricula which reflect mutually exclusive

ideologies of the people from its three constituents (Tawil & Harley, 2004). This segregation hinders children's right to education for peace and tolerance in terms of developing respect for human rights and fundamental freedom as per the Charter of the United Nations (Osler & Pandur, 2019). Similarly, the conflict-ridden Northern Ireland school system is segregated on the grounds of religion and class (Tawil & Harley, 2004). This pattern resembles Sri Lanka, as schools are mostly segregated based on religion and ethnicity. As in Bosnia and Herzegovina, curriculum development and the type of curricula are also contested in many conflict-laden societies. School textbooks have become sites of competing local and global demands (Bentrovato, 2022). For example, as one of the major aid-dependent countries, Mozambique's school curricula choices are influenced by donors (Tawil & Harley, 2004). Nevertheless, the donor-driven model of global citizenship education championing a rights-based discourse contrasts with patriotic models of civic education aiming at nation-building (Bentrovato, 2022). On the other hand, incidents of human rights and child rights violations are reported worldwide, including in countries like Myanmar, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and Ethiopia (UNICEF, 2021). Added to this complexity, child rights violations on online platforms affect children from all around the world.

It remains challenging for societies that have experienced conflict to educate school children about the past and human rights amidst ongoing human rights violations. Multiple countries have attempted to navigate these challenges through curriculum revisions and reforms. Northern Ireland citizenship education reforms focus on 'what it meant to be a citizen in Northern Ireland in the 21st century: its focus was not in teaching them about what it was, but in helping them to be part of the process of making what it might be' (Gallagher & Duffy, 2016, p. 14). Recent curriculum reforms in Rwanda have introduced aspects of human rights education through the concept of 'cross-cutting issues', which includes peace and values education, inclusive education, gender education, environment and sustainability, genocide studies and financial literacy (Ntawiha et al., 2022).

Osler and Pandur (2019), drawing on their research work, highlight the importance of emphasising students' right to intercultural education, which focuses on living together, and suggest that a grassroots approach where teachers and students take initiatives in education reform needs to be promoted. They highlight three elements required for integrated schooling: integrated classrooms, a reformed curriculum and opportunities for students to work across ethnic divides for peace and reconciliation. A. R. Ben-Porath (2006), whose work focused on the recreation of the citizen identity of countries that experienced fierce war, presents the concept of expansive education to promote democratic citizenship. She denotes understanding educational endeavours through experience and considers it as a political pursuit which responds, 'to the lived experiences of students' (p. 128) is inductive to achieving expansive education. In this context, the potential of global citizenship education as a central element of peacebuilding in divided societies is emphasised by Reilly and Niens (2013), drawing from their study on Northern Ireland, while also highlighting the importance of critical pedagogy in promoting democratic citizenship. Education for cosmopolitan citizenship is another approach that enables social justice and contributes to equipping learners with knowledge and skills, but also with a disposition to take action to promote greater social justice, acknowledging not only our common humanity and global interconnectedness but also learners' diverse affinities and identities (Osler, 2015, p. 47). Osler further emphasises the importance of educating students to make connections between local struggles for social justice and commitments to promote human rights globally.

In light of the above-discussed conflict-ridden contexts and their attempts to navigate challenges and the existing scholarly frameworks contributing to such endeavours, this paper attempts to position Sri Lanka's efforts in HRE and GCE, referring to civic education textbooks and curricula. In doing so, referring to the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with the support of reviewed literature mainly including prepositions of HRE outlined by Amnesty International (2011), framework on the basic international requirements for HRE designed by Daniels (2018) and the framework of ideological orientations of HRE designed by Bajaj (2011), a framework for analysis is developed (Table 2). This framework highlights the knowledge, skills and practices that should be conveyed through human rights education programs to disseminate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and foster global citizenship.

The themes generated through textbook and curriculum analysis are discussed in the following section, referring to this framework. A background in human rights and HRE in Sri Lanka is preceded by the analysis of textbooks.

Table 2. International requirements of HRE and HRE for global citizenship.

HRE		
Education about human rights	Providing knowledge and understanding of human rights	Cognitive learning about human rights documents, principles, issues, and debates
Education through human rights	Learning and teaching in a way that respects human rights	Active citizenship Learning through inclusive, participatory, and democratic methods
Education for human rights	Empowering people to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others	Participation and action Learning that allows the practice of human rights in daily life
GCE		
HRE for Global Citizenship	Fostering knowledge and skills related to universal values	Content related to conventions, treaties, history, and movements. Actions encouraging participation in the community and preparation for potential participation in international fora in the future

The Sri Lankan context: human rights and Human Rights Education

Sri Lanka has engaged with the UN as a member state since 1955 and has a notable ratification record of human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1980 (Udagama, 2015). The Human Rights Commission in Sri Lanka, established under Act No. 21 of 1996, promotes awareness of human rights and provides education about them as one of the commission's functions (Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, 1996). Accordingly, they conduct seminars, workshops and awareness programs. The commission is also mandated to advise the government on international human rights. One of the crucial issues prevailing related to the implementation of international human rights in Sri Lanka is that Sri Lankan law and the constitution are not completely aligned with international requirements, making it legally unviable in certain instances to apply the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) domestically (Udagama, 2015). Therefore, it is accurate to say that in the Sri Lankan context, international human rights are promoted through the Human Rights Commission in Sri Lanka and not necessarily ratified and even though some are ratified not necessarily enacted as law, while countries who have signed and ratified international human rights conventions and treaties are expected to align their domestic laws and practices with international requirements they agreed upon (Fernekes, 2016).

In the context of education in Sri Lanka, progressive steps can be seen to implement Article 26 of UDHR: 'Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages' (United Nations, 1948, p. 7). Education in Sri Lanka is free of charge from grade 1 to first-degree level in government schools and state universities from 1945 onwards, with the introduction of the Free Education Policy. School textbooks and school uniforms are also distributed free of charge, further ensuring the right to education. However, there are instances where Article 26 of UDHR is not facilitated. A compelling example is that, under the Muslim Law of marriage, girls as young as 12 are allowed to marry if their parents consent, which is opposed to the general law, in which the age of marriage is 18 for both men and women (Udagama, 2015). Udagama (2015) further describes that the continued operation of discriminatory customary law regimes is made possible by Article 16 of the 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka, which preserves the status of all existing laws at the time of the Constitution's adoption, although such laws may be inconsistent with constitutional guarantees of fundamental rights. Therefore, this permission to exercise the aforementioned Muslim Law of marriage can be recognised as a challenge to the right to education as well as child rights. Given that, the lack of legislative incorporation of UN treaties can be stated as a hindering force in implementing international human and child rights.

Moving to the situation of HRE in Sri Lanka, content related to human rights is integrated into secondary civic education curricula used from grades 6–11 (for 10–15-year-old students) and Advanced Level political science (from grades 12 to 13) curricula. Advanced Level political science is an elective subject followed only by students who choose to take Advanced Level in Arts Stream (Social science stream) as opposed to biological, physical sciences, technical and commerce streams. There are no textbooks developed for A/L classes, but secondary school curricula and textbooks are centrally developed and used by all the government schools. There is no apparent inclusion of human rights in the primary education curricula (from grades

1 to 5), though teachers have the autonomy to introduce certain age-appropriate content in the classroom. As for higher education, human rights education programs are offered through some higher education institutes, such as universities.

A National Research Study on Civic Education in Sri Lanka, conducted in 2003 and 2017, showed that students have minimal opportunity to learn topics such as citizens' rights, human rights, environmental issues and media (National Education Research and Evaluation Centre [NEREC], 2018). The survey further revealed that students' understanding of being a good citizen has changed over time. In 2003, students considered knowing about the country's history, showing respect for government representatives and following political issues in the newspaper, on the radio or on TV, as the three most important factors in being a good citizen. In contrast, in 2017, those three choices changed into obeying the law, taking part in activities and participating in activities to benefit people in the community (NEREC, 2018). Assumingly, the changing political climate of the country, where people increasingly lose interest and faith in political systems, has influenced students over time. However, students' understanding and engagement in human rights-related matters need further attention to enable students to be involved in post-war reconciliation efforts in Sri Lanka.

Analysis and discussion

Overview of the textbooks and curricula

As briefly explained above, two documents, namely the teacher's guide/Teachers' Instructional Manuals (TIM) and textbooks, are provided by the government. Teachers' guides/TIM include the curricula and instructions for teachers, which are compiled by the National Institute of Education (NIE), while textbooks are more like reading and activity books for students to be used in the classroom and at home, which are written and distributed by the Educational Publications Department (EPD). Both NIE and EPD function under the Ministry of Education. Although there is no regulation requiring teachers to strictly follow textbook content, teachers typically adhere to the curriculum. The fact that government competitive exams are primarily based on textbook content means it is normal for almost all teachers in government schools to rely mainly on textbooks for their teaching. The nature of these competitive exams/standardised testing hinders the creativity and participatory learning of students. The high emphasis on test-taking skills lacks relevance to the lives of most students, but as teachers' job security is increasingly linked with test performance, it is more likely that teachers are forced to 'teach to the test' (Arduini, 2015).

Moreover, textbooks are provided free to all students, making them accessible to those studying in government schools. Teachers' guides/TIMs are used mainly or only by teachers. Curricula focus on learning outcomes or competencies; what students can do with what they have learned (Osler & Skarra, 2021). Therefore, I also analysed competencies, competency levels and learning outcomes of the teacher's guides/TIMs from grades 6 to 11 in addition to the analysis of textbooks.

The civic curricula from grades 6 to 11 include a certain level of knowledge and content about human rights. Each grade contains at least a short lesson that is connected to the concept of human rights. These textbooks have chapters (detailed lessons under a main topic) ranging from three to six. For example, grades 6 and 7 textbooks have three chapters each, whereas grades 8 and 9 have six chapters each. It is only in the grade 11 textbook that a whole chapter is dedicated to human rights under the chapter titled 'Human rights and duties'. Nevertheless, this lesson does not reach all the students as the subject of civic education is an elective subject for grades 10 and 11.

In the year 2022, only 35% of the total number of students who sat for the Ordinary Level (O/L) exam for the first time have taken the civic education subject (Department of Examinations, 2022). This shows that less than half of the student population chooses to follow this subject. Although recommendations have been made based on previous studies to make civic education a compulsory subject for all grades (NEREC, 2018), it has not yet happened. As for the curricula aims, school education is aimed at achieving the overarching eight national goals. Goal number 3 deals with HRE: 'Creating and supporting an environment imbued with the norms of social justice and a democratic way of life that promotes respect for human rights, awareness of duties and obligations, and a deep and abiding concern for one another' (National Education Commission report, 2003 as cited in National Institute of Education [NIE], 2017, p. i). Each subject in the school curricula

carries specific goals catering to the eight national goals. Among 12 subject-specific goals related to civic education, 6th one deals with HRE: 'Building up of a society that acts in conformity with the conventions on human rights and democratic principles' (NIE, 2017, p. v).

The analysis of textbooks and teachers' guides generated key themes related to the content relevant to human rights, and the compliance of this content with the framework for HRE and GCE is discussed below.

Emphasis on responsibilities, obligations and fulfilling duties

A central theme that arose from the textbook analysis was 'Enjoy rights while fulfilling responsibilities, obligations, and duties related to rights'. Each grade had a mention of either responsibility, obligations or duties related to rights. The competency levels and learning outcomes in the curricula were also targeted at explaining and expressing duties related to rights. For example, competency levels to be achieved in three different grades clearly state the focus on duties and responsibilities related to rights 'Discharges their own duties and responsibilities while enjoying their individual rights as a member of the school society' (Competency level – Grade 6) (National Institute of Education [NIE], 2014a, p. xxi), 'Performs duties and responsibilities while enjoying rights' (Competency level – Grade 7) (National Institute of Education [NIE], 2008, p. 7) and 'Explains the importance of fulfilling the duties related to child rights' (learning outcome – Grade 8) (NIE, 2017, p. 5). One common activity found in textbooks for students involves filling a grid, where one side represents rights and the other side represents corresponding duties, obligations or responsibilities. While educating children about responsibilities is important, it does not necessarily support active participation when obedience is emphasised. For example, in Grade 8 textbook, one of the duties/responsibilities to fulfil corresponding to the right to education is stated as: "Maintaining discipline, adhering to rules and regulations and following traditions of the school (Educational Publications Department, 2019a, p. 38). This emphasises the fact that each right is connected with duty/responsibility and obligation from the side of the student/citizen. The lessons in the textbooks repeatedly state how connected rights, duties/responsibilities/ and obligations are. Grade 9 textbook (Educational Publications Department, 2019b) states:

When enjoying rights, what we have to fulfill to the society can be regarded as duties. Each duty is bound by a right. In fact duties and rights are like two sides of a coin. As Sri Lankans, we have been fulfilling duties from generation to generation since past. (p. 81)

This approach to educating about human rights resonates with Gandhi's idea of making every right correlating with a corresponding duty, which was accommodated by the third Committee of the UN General Assembly on the draft UDHR therefore, included the fact that 'all rights were born of obligations ...' in the declaration (Cho, 2019, p. 176). The apparent one-sided focus on duties/obligations/responsibilities of citizens corresponding to their rights depoliticises the promotion and protection of human rights. The lack of emphasis on the side of the government, government institutes, media and non-governmental institutes in safeguarding the human rights of citizens is problematic. According to Bentrovato (2022), this approach to civic education 'in ways analogous to other conflict-ridden national contexts, the prominence of a traditional civics discourse clothed in a semantics of peace and democracy yet accentuating patriotic allegiance to the nation state essentially at the expense of individual rights and minority perspectives' (p. 6).

Rote learning of rights and lack of real life relevance

The prevailing education system demands textbook knowledge as the standard answer for examinations. Supposedly corresponding to this requirement, listing rights was common in the textbook. Despite the considerable amount of information and knowledge related to human rights available in grade 6–11 civic education curricula, the competencies and learning outcomes are mainly focused on rote learning of facts, as evident from the action verbs used: 'explain' and 'list'. This type of education falls into the category of passive human rights paradigm as opposed to the participatory one in which students acquire knowledge from teachers by listening and memorising (Bajaj et al., 2016). The United Nations guide (2004) on teaching human rights explains that it is important to note that, even though lessons are delivered by teachers with great care and skill, 'Documents and history alone cannot bring human rights to life in the classroom. Nor does working through the Universal Declaration or the Convention on the Rights of the Child, pointing out the rationale for each article, teach the meaning of these articles in people's lives. "Facts" and "fundamentals", even

the best-selected ones, are not enough to build a culture of human rights. For these documents to have more than intellectual significance, students need to approach them from the perspective of their real-life experience and grapple with them in terms of their own understanding of justice, freedom and equity' (p. 20). This means that the passive human rights paradigm does not empower them with the capacity to collaborate for the promotion of those rights in their social setting (Bajaj et al., 2016).

Lack of perspective from real-life experience of students, such as case studies, is evident in the textbooks. Some lessons and curricula emphasise 'enjoying human rights', 'respecting human rights' and 'performing duties related to human rights'. However, merely stating competencies without enough support to achieve them is nothing more than symbolic. Advocates of HRE highlight the importance of discussing human rights violations and real-life issues in the classroom. According to Fix and Clifford (2015), students may initially fail to notice human rights violations, but if allowed to be exposed to the language and details of the UDHR, they may begin to identify and recognise them. They further highlight that for students to identify strongly with a right like the "Right to education (Article 26)", they must become aware of situations where that right is violated. However, textbooks do not bring real-life examples other than a few examples from other contexts, which impedes building a culture of human rights as students are not given the opportunity to relate rights to their day-to-day experiences and cultural heritage (Osler & Skarra, 2021). A lesson on conflict resolution in Grade 9 textbooks cites conflicts in India and Kashmir, as well as Iraq and Quate, without drawing students' attention to the Sri Lankan past and present conflicts to educate them about human rights. This hinders the ability of curricula for transformative HRE, which could promote critical examination of the present and past to create a just future and empower students to defend others' rights (Osler & Skarra, 2021).

Promoting obedience over participation

Sri Lanka, being a 'democratic socialist republic', the civic education curriculum has taken steps to include more about democracy, including chapters titled 'Democratic society' and 'democratic government' in grades 8, 9 and 10. Grade 10 lesson titled 'Conflict resolution in democratic society' could be an ideal platform to promote education about, through and for human rights. However, it is not being utilised for that purpose. Grades 8 and 9, in which civic education is a compulsory subject, contain chapters titled 'Contemporary Issues' and 'Contemporary Challenges' but do not discuss issues related to human rights or human rights violations. Instead, the grade 8 chapter focuses on natural disasters and accidents, while the grade 9 chapter focuses on changes in technology and economy, and qualities for well-being and co-existence. The discussions on democracy focus more on compliance and conformity in different settings, such as family, schools and society. Limitations of rights are stated in certain extreme ways, highlighting the well-being of society. For example, the following excerpt from the Grade 9 textbook shows how controlling media and prohibiting picketing are justified without giving much context.

When enjoying rights some limitations are imposed with the intension of protecting social well-being and peace. Some examples for that are media prohibition during war conditions, rallies at times of destroying lives and public property and prohibiting picketing can be taken as some examples. That is highly effective towards the social well-being as well as the national development. (Educational Publications Department, 2019b, p. 82)

According to the United Nations, ABC: Teaching Human Rights guide (2004), multiple activities are essential to "create opportunities for students and teachers first to examine the basic elements that make up human rights – life, justice, freedom, equality and the destructive character of deprivation, suffering and pain – and then to use them to work out what they truly think and feel about a wide range of real-world issues" (p. 20). Hence, teaching for human rights should empower people to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others (Fernekes, 2016). Since human rights exist to protect the vulnerable, HRE must address issues related to human vulnerability, societal differences and power differentials (Osler & Skarra, 2021). In contrast, the Sri Lankan civic education textbooks do not explicitly deal with such matters but overemphasise the importance of controlling emotions and becoming a good and obedient citizen. Therefore, curricula lack 'action' that would encourage and empower individuals to defend human rights and prevent human rights abuses.

HRE for Global Citizenship

The textbooks from grades 6 to 11 do not adequately support HRE for Global Citizenship. Although details of the conventions and treaties are provided, there is inadequate engagement with such documents. It is apparent that civic education curricula are more inward-oriented, which promotes national citizenship education. There are competencies and competency levels in the curricula that promote co-existence in multicultural settings. For example, 'lives in peace as a good citizen in a multicultural society'. (competency – grade 10) (National Institute of Education [NIE], 2014b, p. xix) and 'works as a good citizen in a democratic society' (competency – grade 8) (NIE, 2017, p. 5). However, the learning outcomes under these competencies and competency levels mainly promote knowledge. For example, 'explains the importance of working in the school society adopting the democratic values' (one of the learning outcomes-Grade 8), 'explains the concept multicultural society, Describes the main features of a multicultural society' (Learning outcomes – Grade 10). This suggests that the term 'multiculturalism' has been used without necessarily adhering to a multicultural approach in civic education. Explicitly referring to conflict-ridden societies, S. R. Ben-Porath (2005) highlights the importance of multicultural education, peace and democracy, as well as the role of civic education in promoting these effectively. She states that acknowledgement and empowerment are two key aims of multiculturalism, emphasising the importance of not confining students to a narrow perspective of the past, but rather acknowledging the multiplicity of a nation's history and the different points of view people hold. However, S. Ben-Porath (2012) also points to the democratic nations' attempt to strike a balance between celebrating and accommodating diversity while maintaining a common foundation. This resonates well with the Sri Lankan context, as the government attempts to strike a balance between the Sri Lankan identity and the identities of different ethnicities. Nevertheless, orienting the curriculum inward does not help this endeavour. This can result in a narrow interpretation of what diversity and multiculturalism entail, leading to a limited understanding of global citizenship.

Preparing students to be global citizens is yet to be included in the curricula. Though teacher autonomy is granted to be creative and do activities such as debates, role play, model UN or other simulations that prepare learners for potential participation in international fora in the future, these are not adequately encouraged through the curricula. Encouraged activities in the textbooks are more knowledge-oriented, which focus on 'define', 'list' and 'find information', whereas learning outcomes target 'explain', 'define' and 'name'. Moreover, though the terms 'member of the globe' and 'global citizen' are used in the textbooks, there is no adequate content or activities to support Global Citizenship.

Moving forward

'Knowing about human rights can be helpful, but people need to practice and value those rights to gain the capacity to act upon and transform the world together' (Bajaj et al., 2016, p. 17). Therefore, the curricula should be reformed, promoting the participatory approach necessary for fostering active citizenship. Transformative HRE, which falls into the participatory paradigm, is an effective way to approach HRE. Transformative human rights education (THRED) 'brings human rights to life and fosters in learners an awareness of global citizenship and a respect for human rights' (Bajaj et al., 2016, p. 3). It encourages learners to identify gaps between rights and actual realities, initiating group dialogue on the necessary actions to close these gaps. This enables learners to engage in critical reflection, social dialogue, and individual and collective action to pursue the realisation of human rights locally, nationally and globally (ibid).

Therefore, it is necessary to create opportunities in the classroom where teachers and students can create knowledge together. Including examples of past human rights issues and encouraging discussions on contemporary ones could stimulate dialogues to promote THRE. Studying past and contemporary issues could help students to link local and international human rights with real-life scenarios and develop strategies to tackle challenges and find solutions. As highlighted in the analysis of textbooks, a lack of real-life relevance can be recognised as one of the key issues that is a barrier to implementing THRE. Therefore, allowing students to refer to real case studies in learning human rights is essential. Doing so, students should be given the opportunity to freely and democratically debate human rights and discuss social problems while sharing personal experiences of how such problems affected their lives, while collectively exploring solutions (Bajaj et al., 2016). In addition, understanding and promoting individual rights as a part of the

international community can lead to HRE for Global Citizenship (Bajaj, 2011). While educating students about international human rights conventions, case studies referring to human rights issues from other contexts could be used to promote dialogue. In addition, rather than having students list and memorise human rights conventions, classroom-level human rights campaigns targeting specific human rights violations, referring to both local and global contexts, can be used to facilitate participatory learning. Incorporating poster presentations, poems and artwork can enhance creativity in these types of lessons. Nevertheless, in order to support a participatory approach to learning about human rights, the evaluation system also needs to be reformed. If competitive examinations continue to emphasise rote learning, promoting a classroom-level participatory approach may be unsuccessful. Another successful activity to promote THRE in the classroom could be having students conduct their own research to identify human rights-related issues in the media or their areas and collectively suggest potential solutions.

HRE is expected to use participatory methodologies that emphasise independent research, analysis and critical thinking (United Nations, 2004). Palau-Wolffe (2016) provides a detailed guideline referring to the United Nations document, ABC: Teaching Human Rights (2004), on how to plan HRE for different age groups. Accordingly, human rights problems such as discrimination/prejudice, poverty/hunger, injustice and ethnocentrism are recommended for the age group 8 to 11, and problems such as ignorance, apathy, cynicism, political repression, colonialism/imperialism, economic globalisation and environmental degradation are recommended for the age group 12–14. Accordingly, age-appropriate human rights issues can be included in curricula, such as case studies, to link knowledge about human rights with real incidents. Schools can offer both curricular and extra-curricular activities to cement HRE into their day-to-day activities (Osler et al., 2023). It is essential to promote participatory learning to cultivate a human rights culture and foster global citizenship.

Conclusion

The current curricula resonate with passive education, which follows banking approach where teachers 'deposit' knowledge (through the support of textbooks) and test their retention of information afterwards (Bajaj et al., 2016). The textbook analysis reveals a notable gap in HRE, as curricula have primarily focused on imparting knowledge about human rights rather than promoting education through human rights. Even though basic knowledge about human rights can be considered a prerequisite for facilitating structural change, they do not necessarily enable a more just society (Osler & Skarra, 2021), and it is crucial to teach for human rights (United Nations, 2004), which promotes a participatory approach. Excessive emphasis on individual duties and responsibilities in relation to human rights and a focus on obedience and conformity further impede the potential for critical examination of human rights. As discussed in the paper, educating students about issues related to discrimination, human rights violations and vulnerabilities, giving students opportunities to reflect on their situations and real-life issues and empowering them to promote and defend the human rights of others are crucial. Accordingly, the current curricula do not promote participatory citizens who actively participate in civic affairs and social life, nor do they foster justice-oriented citizens who critically assess social, political and economic structures and consider collective strategies for change to challenge injustice (Westheimer & Kahne, 2003).

The lack of age-appropriate lessons and the elective status of civic education in grades 10 and 11, which includes a significant amount of human rights content, are two other issues. More importantly, there is an imperative need to change the educational climate centred around competitive exams/standardised testing, which is key to promoting education for human rights. On the other hand, as the curriculum is inward-oriented, it does not promote global citizenship. The study highlights the importance of making human rights more engaging and participatory and the need for a globally oriented curriculum that includes content and activities to promote GCE. However, as Quennerstedt (2022) highlights, government-level HRE curricula must be made to systematically align with international standards because if other actors who are seen as experts on human rights, such as NGOs, are involved, there is a risk that the materials these outside actors create can be biased and overly political. As curricula are centrally developed, the government must take responsibility for promoting education for human rights through civic education, while enhancing cross-curricular consistency related to HRE, especially with curricula such as history. For education to contribute to justice and peace in the world, much of history education needs to be reviewed (Osler et al.,

2023) and this is very much true to Sri Lankan context as the content in the history curricula has always been contested and continue to contribute to exacerbate the existing hostile relationship among different ethnoreligious groups in the society (Jayasooriya et al., [forthcoming](#)).

There are also promises to include HRE as a separate subject in the school curriculum and teacher training curriculum, but this suggestion is still under discussion (Hannan, 2024). If this is to be implemented, it is a value addition as educating teachers about HR is crucial to enhance the quality of HRE, as there is evidence that suggests that teachers may lack legal knowledge and are unsure how to tackle everyday injustice or racism (Osler & Skarra, 2021).

Future empirical qualitative studies involving teachers and students about their experience with the curricula are recommended, as they could provide valuable insights and recommendations for future curriculum revisions aimed at transformative HRE.

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