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# Promoting human rights education through teaching and learning resources in Kenyan universities: challenges opportunities and implications

Khaemba Ongeti<sup>1</sup> and Arthur Nzau Kalanza<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Media, Moi University, P.O. Box 3900 Eldoret, Kenya.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Educational Foundations, Moi University, P.O. Box 3900 Eldoret, Kenya.

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### ABSTRACT

Human rights education has gained increasing importance in higher education as evidenced in UN declarations. This paper documents the rationale for Human rights Education/objectives of world programme on human rights education, principles for human rights education activities teaching and learning materials for human rights education, recommendations concerning teaching and learning practices and methodologies in human rights education, teaching and learning support and resources for human rights education, challenges and opportunities of implementing human rights education in public universities in Kenya.

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### Introduction

The international community has increasingly expressed consensus on the fundamental contribution of human rights education to the realization of human rights. Human rights education aims at developing an understanding of our common responsibility to make human rights a reality in every community and in society at large. In this sense, it contributes to the long-term prevention of human rights abuses and violent conflicts, the promotion of equality and sustainable development and the enhancement of participation in decision-making processes within a democratic system. (Commission on Human rights resolution 2004)

Human Rights Education(HRE) can be defined as any learning, education, training and information efforts aimed at building a universal culture of human rights, including:(a) The strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; (b) The full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity; (c) The promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples and minorities; (d) The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free and democratic society governed by the rule of law; (e) The building and maintenance of peace; (f) The promotion of people-centred sustainable development and social justice( Dolan ,Gundara and King 2011)

Human rights education encompasses: (a) Knowledge and skills — learning about human rights and mechanisms, as well as acquiring skills to apply them in a practical way in daily life; (b) Values, attitudes and behaviour — developing values and reinforcing attitudes and behaviour which uphold human rights; (United Nations:2010)

The role of human rights education in higher education is fundamental. As education concerns “not only the content of the curriculum but also the educational processes, the pedagogical methods and the environment within which education takes place” , human rights education in higher education should be

understood as a process that includes: (a) “Human rights through education”: ensuring that all the components and processes of learning, including curricula, materials, methods and training are conducive to the learning of human rights and b) “Human rights in education”: ensuring respect for the human rights of all actors, and the practice of rights, within the higher education system. (Committee on the rights of Child, 2001)

### Objectives of world programme on human rights education

The world programme on HRE developed in 2010 seeks among other things to; promote a culture of human rights; to promote a common understanding based on international instruments basic principles and methods of HRE; To ensure a focus on HRE at the national, regional and international levels ;To provide a common framework for action by all actors; To enhance partnership and cooperation at all levels; To survey ,evaluate and support existing HRE ,to highlight successful practices, and to provide an incentive to continue and/or expand them and to develop new ones (UN,2010:6)

### Principles for human rights education activities

Based on the objectives of the world programme on Human rights education activities should ;promote the interdependence, interrelatedness, indivisibility and universality of human rights including civil, political ,economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development; Foster respect for and appreciation of differences and opposition to discrimination based on the basis of race, sex, language, religion political or any other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin ,physical or mental condition, sexual or any other bases; Encourage analysis of chronic and emerging human rights problems (including poverty, violent conflicts and discriminations),also in the view of the rapidly changing developments in the political ,social ,technological and ecological fields, which would lead to responses and solutions consistent with human rights standards; Empower individuals and communities to identify their human rights and to claim them effectively; Develop the capacity of duty bearers (in particular ,government officials ) who have an

obligation to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of those under their jurisdiction, to meet such obligation ;build on the human rights principles embedded within the different cultural contexts and take into consideration the historical and social developments in each country; Foster knowledge of and skills to use local ,national, regional and international human rights instruments and mechanisms for the protection of human rights ;make use of participatory pedagogies that include knowledge, critical analysis and skills for action furthering human rights; Foster teaching and learning environments free from want and fear that encourage participation, enjoyment of human rights and the full development of the Human personality ;and be relevant to the daily life of the learners, engaging them in a dialogue about ways and means of transforming human rights from the expression of abstract norms to the reality of their social, economic, cultural and political conditions (UN,2010:6)

#### **Teaching and learning materials for human rights education**

Introducing or improving HRE in the higher education system requires adopting a holistic approach to teaching and learning, by integrating programme objectives and content, resources, methodologies assessment and evaluation Concerning teaching and learning materials the UN recommends : (i) Review and revise textbooks and manuals to conform to human rights principles and support the development of balanced and relevant human rights education and training materials that encourage active participation in teaching and learning processes; (ii) Make sure that human rights education materials stem from human rights principles as embedded in the relevant cultural contexts, as well as historical and social developments; (iii) Encourage the collection, sharing, translation and adaptation of human rights education materials; (iv) Utilize human rights/human rights education materials issued by United Nations entities in the country or region as teaching and learning materials, as well as research documents.

#### **Recommendations concerning teaching and learning practices and methodologies in human rights education**

The (UN 2010)suggests the following : (i) Adopt a teaching style that is coherent with human rights, i.e. which respects human rights, the dignity and self-esteem of each learner, taking also into account cultural considerations; (ii) Adopt learner-centred methods and approaches that empower students, encourage their interactive participation, and activities that encourage the exploration of alternative perspectives and critical reflection; (iii) Employ experiential learning methodologies that enable learners to understand and apply human rights concepts to their lives and experiences, including community research and/or service; (iv) In planning human rights teaching, define the human rights skills and competencies to be acquired and give equal importance to cognitive (knowledge and skills) and social/affective (values, attitudes, behaviours) learning outcomes;

#### **Teaching and learning support and resources for human rights education**

In an effort to improve the teaching of HRE the United Nations suggests that there is need to ;(i) Establish and develop, within higher education institutions, human rights training and resource centres to promote the establishment or enhancement of sustainable human rights training programmes and courses and ensure their quality, as well as to provide facilities for human rights studies and research; (ii) Facilitate access to new information technologies for networking, exchange of human

rights information and discussion. Develop website resources, develop and facilitate e-learning, online learning programmes, e-forums, web conferencing and distance learning programmes;(iii) Encourage scholarships as a means to promote human rights education and training.

#### **Challenges of implementing human rights education in public universities in Kenya**

##### **Teaching space and learning materials in public universities**

The rapid expansion of access to university education has strained the existing facilities and adversely affected the teaching and learning, the morale of staff, research productivity and the intellectual climate of the university as a whole (Republic of Kenya,2005: 256).

The teaching facilities and physical infrastructure of the public universities are the most wanting being ranked very low in the institutions' planning priorities. Yet increasing student population has overstretched the capacities of libraries, lecture theatres, laboratories, residential accommodation and dining halls. In addition to inadequate physical teaching materials are also woefully inadequate in all public universities in Kenya as a result of budgetary constraints. On average teaching learning resources are 6% of the university's budget.( Kilemi &Njuguna 2007).

##### **Library services in public universities**

Libraries are among the worst hit facilities in public universities. In all the universities both regular and self sponsored students complain that universities have not invested much in the acquisition of textbooks to cope with the increased student intakes. (Kilemi &Njuguna 2007).

Apart from inadequate space, most libraries have no holding lists of their journal .Furthermore; entries in the existing catalogues generally do not match what is existing in the catalogues ,shelving leaves a great deal to be desired partly as a result of too few library staff and partly because selfish students deliberately mix textbook of different disciplines so that they are the only ones who know where to find them (Kilemi &Njuguna 2007) scarcity of reference materials has also led to vandalism in libraries . Due to financial constraints students are unable to photocopy the required chapters or pages from the reference books Therefore they simply tear them out.

##### **Information and communication technologies in public universities in Kenya**

Mwiria (2002) asserts that if Kenyan universities are to serve more students and meet their objectives in a context of limited resources, they must become more innovative with regard to teaching approaches especially in the use of information technology. The public universities have no choice but to embrace ICT. Regrettably most of the universities lack adequate computer facilities. Thus the level of computer literacy is generally low. All universities have functioning websites. However there is no evidence that ICT literacy is an integral of the Universities culture and environment (Kilemi &Njuguna 2007).

In an effort to address the challenges facing universities concerning ICT the Kenya education sector support program notes that "The proposed investments in university education include establishing ICT in all Universities; intensifying the re-development, monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum; enhancing capacity building for management ,lecturers and students; establishing centres of excellence in specialized programmes through upgrading of equipment and facilities and

completion of high priority infrastructural projects”( Republic of Kenya 2005,259)

Enhancement in the use of ICT will involve; integrating ICT In all university programmes ;establishing ICT capacity; training for capacity building and establishing a national centre for OL & DE .The universities will need to develop policy documents in ICT ,ensure presence of ICT in learning and teaching, develop ICT infrastructure, implement ICT plans and train staff in ICT ( Republic of Kenya 2005,259)

#### **Quality & curriculum reform in public universities in Kenya**

In the area of curriculum reform and quality assurance public universities will need to emphasize on the quality of education they offer. They will need to ensure meritocracy in appointment and promotion of academic and support staff and in the allocation of fellowships, research grants and opportunities to participate in seminars and international conferences. The areas of concern will include expanded access to the internet for strengthening research and teaching capacity; increased institutional funding for research; more intensive training for academics and university administrators; strengthened linkages with the private sector especially in the areas of research training and curriculum design.

The government should also play its part in providing a more supportive work environment including adequate and comfortable office space; appropriate infrastructure ,computer and internet facilities ,attractive teaching facilities including lecture theatres laboratories and libraries and opportunities for conference attendance and research

#### **Implications for teaching in public universities in Kenya**

Universities should strive to be places where human rights are lived and practiced. It is essential to ensure that educational objectives, practices and their organization are consistent with human rights principles

Teaching personnel have a major responsibility to transmit human rights values, skills, attitudes, motivations and practices, both in the performance of their professional responsibilities and as role models .To this end recognition of and respect of their professional status as well as training in human rights is essential Ensure university lecturers have opportunities to developing and implementing innovative good practices in human rights Education Universities should adopt policies that protect and respect the rights of all who teach in Universities as well as support staff such as librarians administrators research assistants etc

Public Universities in Kenya should develop pre service and in service training curricula; including knowledge and understanding of human rights, their indivisibility and interdependence and of protection mechanisms; multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary human rights perspectives; educational theories underlying human rights education including links between formal, Non formal and informal Education; Teaching and learning methodologies for HRE and the role of teaching personnel ;social skills and leadership skills that are democratic and coherent with human rights principles; rights and responsibilities of teaching personnel and students including human rights issues in the institutions; Information on the existing educational materials for HRE, building the capacity of Higher education personnel to review and choose among them as well as develop new ones The universities should also develop and use appropriate teaching methodologies that ;are appropriate for adult learners in

particular learner centred approaches and addressing motivation ,self esteem and emotional development leading to awareness raising on values and behaviour ;appropriate methods for training in HRE such as using participatory, interactive, cooperative and experience and practice based methods taking into account cultural considerations ;linking theory to practice ;testing learned techniques in the work situation particularly the classroom. The Public universities should also be involved in developing and disseminating appropriate training resources and materials by ; collecting, disseminating and exchanging good practices in HRE ;stock taking and disseminating training methodologies developed by other partners in the Human rights sector such as the Kenya National Human rights commission and civil society/ non governmental organizations and international bodies; development of training materials as part of in service; development of online materials and resources; networking and collaborating with other HRE and training providers; promotion and participation in international HRE and Human rights training and exchanges and; evaluation of HRE training activities including self evaluation and perceptions of trainees on the relevance, utility and impact of training activities (UN, 2010:16)

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion it is clear from the discussion above that public universities have an important role to play in HRE. Despite the challenges that exist there exists potential for the teaching and learning of HRE in public universities. The UN proposal should therefore be domesticated in all Kenyan public universities

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