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Towards a Culture of Human Rights: Navigating Education and Equality in Turkey

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to investigate the landscape of human rights education (HRE) in Turkey, examining its current state, problems, development, and ideas for improvement. Despite the progress that has been made in incorporating human rights concepts into the curriculum, there is still a large amount of opportunity for improvement. Concerns such as insufficient depth, inconsistency, and discrepancies in resources continue to exist. In this article, we identify areas of strength and areas for improvement in human rights education (HRE) activities by drawing on the findings of research, including a study on human rights awareness among college students in Istanbul. HRE programs that have been successful in schools and colleges are exemplified by success stories, while recommendations emphasize the necessity of curriculum integration, educator training, and interactive teaching approaches. At the end of the document, a call is made for ongoing efforts to create a culture of human rights. The article also highlights the significant role that education plays in fostering equality, justice, and active citizenship in Turkey.

1. Introduction

Human rights education (HRE) is fundamental to building a culture of equal dignity and justice. It is key to equipping people with the knowledge of their rights and those of others so that we can actively participate in creating a more inclusive and fairer world [33]. In our globalized world, dominated by social inequalities and discrimination, that sets the foundation for respecting human rights, such as mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence, critical thinking, and independent judgment, providing a sound basis for active citizenship [10]. In a nation as rich in cultural tapestry and complexities of socio-political dynamics as Turkey, the potential of HRE to tackle various structural inequalities and establish the path to social cohesion is very high. Yet, despite progress in embedding human rights in education, enormous challenges are ahead [39].

The Turkish public education system also teaches human rights issues through such classes as social studies, history, and civics [13]. Such initiatives recognize how important it is to educate students about their rights and responsibilities in a learning environment [8]. However, in practice, it lacks the depth and consistency needed for implementation. High-quality HRE does occur in urban schools, but poor rural areas, such as those in India, do not have the advantage of well-trained educators and robust resources [23]. These regional disparities impede the development of a consensual foundation of human rights ideals at the national level [16]. Additionally, societal norms and traditional values often conflict with progressive ideas about human rights, making embedding HRE within the curriculum increasingly troublesome [40].

As per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), education is a right and a means to promote other rights [41]. Article 26 asserts that education should promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and, at least in higher education, serve understanding, tolerance, and peace [12]. However, more than papers on human rights ideas are needed to attain these ideals. This requires an integrated, hands-on, and practical approach, where the students learn about justice, equality, and dignity and how they function in practice [36]. What is conspicuously lacking, unfortunately, even in the latest approaches of Turkey towards HRE, is an adequate examination and absorption of this more practical aspect; each time we discuss engagement with students, most of them only leave the classroom having had a theoretical overview without finding any relevance to their lives [24].

Human rights must become more than a concept; it is an experience that engrains these principles in every corner of human life [27]. The anthropological definition of culture includes collective understanding and values inside all human actions, like truth and equity. For Turkey, cultivating this culture calls for bridging some critical missing links in its educational system. Despite advances and remarkable efforts, like integrating human rights principles in national curricula, these can be undermined politically, culturally, or due to the lack of resources [33]. This article investigates these challenges and proposes avenues to shape HRE better to promote a community where human rights are widely comprehended and consistently defended. HRE matters beyond the empowerment of individuals. It plays an important role in developing society by creating a critical mindset among students and providing them with Civic knowledge, information, and skills [38]. Through the study of themes, including gender equality, freedom of expression, and non-discrimination, students are urged to question stereotypes, identify social inequalities, and act for change. This is especially important in Turkey, which faces complex social challenges, including gender-based inequalities, minority rights, and other issues requiring inclusive and transformative educational approaches [5]. HRE acts as a bridge to cross divides and respect each other in a pluralistic society.

The development of HRE in Turkey: If so, its implementation will be full of challenges. Regional disparity is one of the most widely observed, with urban schools enjoying better access to trained teachers and resources, while rural schools often lack materials and expertise [42]. As such, the unequal allocation of resources leads to different levels of human rights consciousness amongst students and reinforces wider social inequalities. In addition, conservative social and cultural tradition often directly conflicts with modern human rights standards, especially when it comes to gender equality and individual freedoms [18]. Such cultural antagonisms, despite existing in only certain circles of society but already significant enough to be labelled as 'cultural resistances', could become hurdles for educators and policymakers striving to improve HRE within Turkey [7]. This confidence and sense of agency are hugely important for elevating the role played by students as active citizens in their local community through HRE [4]. Knowing their rights and responsibilities empowers students to make institutions accountable, fight for change, and contribute to their society's democratic development [28]. HRE will prepare a national mentality for informed, humane, active citizens, whom Turkey needs to address its socio-political challenges through democratic participation [43].

This study aims to investigate the state of human rights education in Turkey and its strong and weak sides. Based on some research results, including a survey of university students in Istanbul, the article emphasizes important issues like superficial program integration, lack of teacher training, and resource inequality [44]. Simultaneously, it spotlights success stories and promising practices that illustrate the promise of a well-designed HRE initiative to catalyze a shift in mindset and action [45]. The study seeks to do this by investigating these dynamics and developing practical recommendations to improve HRE in Turkey, ultimately contributing to establishing a culture of human rights that embodies equality, justice, and active citizenship [46].

2. Review of Literature

Human rights education (HRE) fosters equality, justice, and active citizenship in communities [26]. It is a widely shared view amongst scholars that HRE provides essential tools in the form of awareness, empathy, and advocacy, not only for identifying such things but also for identifying when rights are being violated [20]. HRE has transformative potential and can be considered a multidimensional process based on the interdependence of knowledge, skills, and values to cultivate a culture of human dignity and equality [6]. In the same vein, Wilson et al. [27] pointed out this need to transcend mere theory into an actionable understanding of human rights through everyday lived experience. Human rights education is embedded into the national curriculum in Turkey, which shows the recognition of its significance. Human rights principles are also included in the curriculum in different subjects, including social studies, history, and civics. While this integration is meaningful, it does not go deep enough to help students engage [8]. Theoretical overviews, such as human rights or how they evolved historically, dominate the few lessons, but none ever discuss their use in day-to-day life. This cursory approach inhibits students from engaging in critical perspectives on important issues like gender equality and freedom of speech [36].

A third major issue in Turkey is the difference in HRE quality between urban and rural areas [34]. Studies show urban schools have better access to things like current curriculum and qualified teachers. On the other hand, rural schools may be much more limited in these areas and lead to pitting students against one another if some have higher human rights knowledge than others

[2]. These inequities maintain larger social inequalities and contradict the purpose of HRE as a conceptual framework that seeks to build a more just society [19]. Investing in the training of educators is also key to effective HRE. This method is not practised sufficiently in Turkey, and most teachers complain about a lack of sufficient training for dealing with human rights issues, especially controversial or sensitive matters [25]. As such, they often fail to prepare for passing moments in which they could engage students in important discussions of issues such as minority and discrimination politics [36]. Failure to approach these subjects may support the biases or cultural norms that do not follow human rights. This could be because educators are uncomfortable or lack confidence in discussing them [31].

Culture is another important obstacle to the effective implementation of HRE in Turkey. Conservative cultural backgrounds, especially concerning gendered behaviour and domestic arrangements, clash with progressive human rights norms [32]. This resistance is particularly strong in conservative communities that are sceptical or oppositional to discourse on gender equality or queerness. In many cases, these cultural tensions play out in classrooms – where they present challenges for educators and restrict students from exposure to alternative points of view [21]. Politics complicates things even more with the HRE in Turkey. However, changes in government priorities and policies have sometimes interrupted the continuity of HRE initiatives [22].

Politically sensitive subjects, meanwhile, may be omitted from curricula altogether or treated lightly to conform to dominant governmental narratives [11]. These exclusions neither pave the way to a thorough HRE foundation nor allow students to engage critically with some of the direst human rights issues within their society. To this end, empirical studies are rich in data related to the success of some HRE campaigns today. A recent survey of university students in Istanbul revealed that while there are areas where students did well, students appear to have a lack of awareness about the definition of human rights [29]. Although most respondents showed much literacy, the insight on some topics, like property rights, was undeveloped. It emphasizes the importance of informal sources such as social media and peer interactions in students' understanding of human rights. Though each informal channel is valuable and helpful, it cannot be replaced with the structure that formal education has and provides [17].

Much can be learned from HRE's best practices worldwide that bear lessons for tackling these challenges in Turkey. Sweden and Canada are examples of countries that have successfully applied a participatory and experiential approach to teaching about human rights [15]. These strategies include exercises such as mock trials, service-learning projects, and role-play that immerse students in human rights issues in an active, substantive way. This approach could strengthen the effectiveness of Turkey's HRE by improving implementation and providing a more active and impactful dimension. This is hogwash, as the literature consistently points out that human rights education can play transformative roles in promoting a just and equitable society [11]. However, its efficacy relies on overcoming challenges such as unequal allocation of resources, resistance from traditionalist segments in society, and a need for extensive teacher training [47]. Within Turkey, these challenges must be approached in a way that considers cultural sensitivities and advances basic human rights norms [48]. Turkey must build on its existing strengths and learn from global best practices regarding implementing HRE to expand such efforts in a way that creates a culture of human rights within the minds of its citizens and acts [49].

3. Methodology

This research uses a quantitative approach to analyze the current situation of human rights education (HRE) in Turkey across three variables: awareness level, sources of knowledge, and attitudes toward basic human rights concepts among college students. The present research intends to deliver evidence on the effectiveness of HRE and implementation within the Turkish education system to provide the base for specific recommendations. The survey was based on the population of college students in university instances with urban and rural geography, primarily from Istanbul in Turkey. Convenient, simple random sampling was used to ensure the representativity of the sample concerning ridding various incentives for advancing human rights. A total of 380 students from universities in Istanbul were randomly selected as a final sample, according to the participant's willingness to participate in the survey [50].

The tool used to collect primary data was a structured survey instrument that measured human rights awareness, sources of human rights knowledge, and attitudes towards gender equality, freedom of expression, and anti-discrimination. This survey was developed as a mix of closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items to obtain a more specific measurement of the dependent variables [51]. The questions were designed by referencing previous frameworks in human rights awareness and piloted on a smaller sample of students before our main study to ensure clarity and reliability. The survey data were subjected to statistical analysis to identify patterns and trends in the quantitative data [52]. The respondents' levels of human rights awareness were summarized using descriptive statistics such as means, percentages, and standard deviations. Awareness level differences between gender, socioeconomic, and urban/rural background were studied using comparative analyses [53]. Inferential statistics (ANOVA) were used to determine statistical differences between groups and relationships between variables. The SPSS (Version 22) software was used for all analyses.

4. Result

A recent study focusing on human rights awareness among college-going youth in Istanbul, Turkey, sheds light on the current state of HRE. The research involved a survey among engineering students, collecting 380 samples using multistage systematic simple random sampling. The data, analyzed with the support of SPSS 22 and visual binning, revealed several key findings.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	171	45
	Female	209	55
Age	18-22	228	60
	23-26	114	30
	27+	38	10
Region	Urban	247	65
	Rural	133	35
Socioeconomic Status	Low	76	20
	Middle	209	55
	High	95	25

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic profile of members comprising a diverse sample that is important for understanding differences in human rights knowledge and attitudes. Of the sample, 55% were women; this has some significance since women tend to be more active in education and social awareness activities [15] and may account for their greater awareness and progressive attitudes found in our study. Most participants (n = 156, 60%) were 18-22, which aligns with researching younger, college-aged individuals who may be most susceptible to structured human rights education (HRE) and informal influences such as social media. Geographically, the sample was heavily weighted towards urban areas (65%), which is unsurprising as urban areas offer greater access to educational resources and exposure to human rights issues. Socioeconomic status margin indicated that most participants represented the middle-income category (55%), while - the income category contained 20% and the high-income group also 25%. The variability in demographic factors found here allows for a deeper understanding of how human rights are understood and perceived among different population sectors, providing key insights into the impact of HRE.
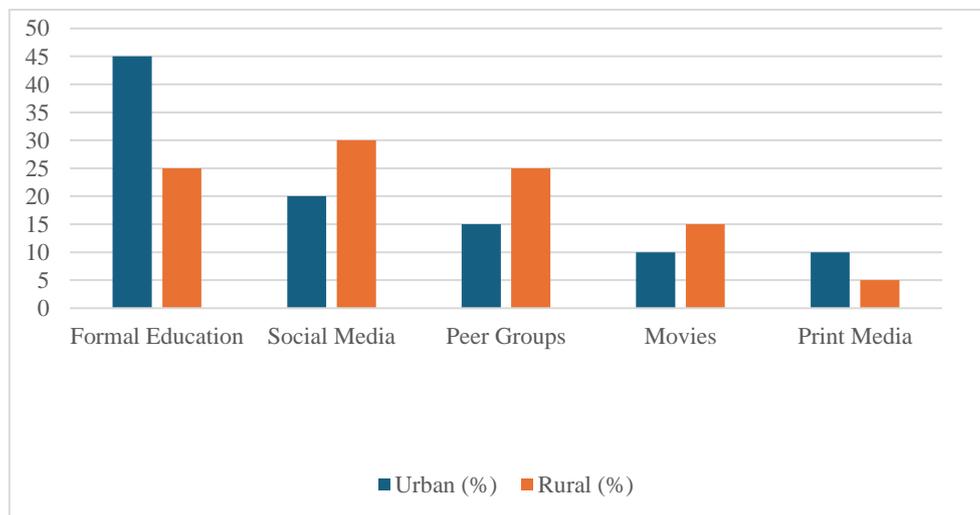
Figure 1: Source of Awareness

Figure 1 demonstrates a source of understanding of human rights concepts, with formal education being the largest contributor (35%) against social media (25%). Other notable influences were peer groups (20%), movies (15%), and print media (5%). These results highlight the complementary effect of formal education and extra-curricular settings on students' perception of human rights. Urban participants preferred and are much more reliant on formal education due to having more access to structured learning pathways than the rural ones, who relied more on informal sources in today's world, like social media and peer group interactions. This score gap indicates focus areas for building formal HRE, particularly rural areas.
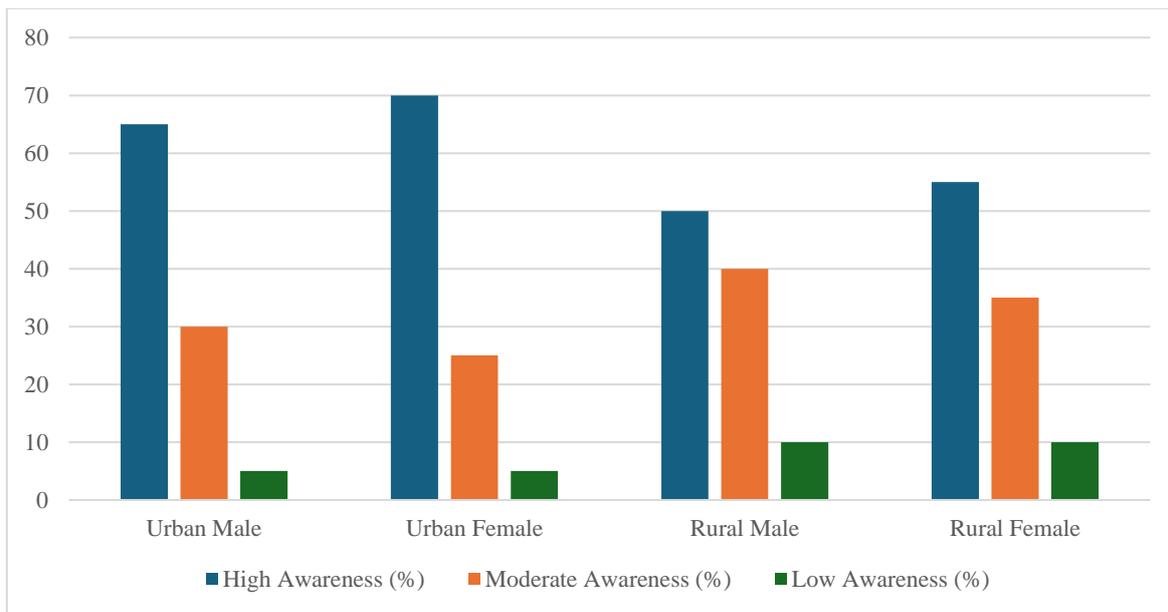
Figure 2: Level of awareness

As depicted in Figure 2, the level of human rights awareness among participants revealed that 59% have high awareness, 37% moderate, and only 4% low awareness. These results suggest that HRE is useful in increasing the number of students with foundational knowledge. Still, there is considerable room to enhance awareness among those at intermediate or low levels. Convincingly, the highest variances were found concerning female and urban respondents and levels of awareness due to higher access to education in urban environments or exposure to human rights themes.

Table 2: Group Comparison of Awareness Level

Group Comparison	F-value	P-value	level of significance
Urban Male vs. Urban Female vs Rural Male vs Rural Female	155.2948463	1.78×10^{-65}	<0.001

The differences in awareness levels between four groups, Urban Male, Urban Female, Rural Male, and Rural Female, were tested by ANOVA (Table 2), which showed statistically significant differences (F=155.29, p<0.0001). Urban participants, especially females, were most aware, while it was least in rural males. The disparities in awareness reported here likely reflect the unequal access to educational resources and differential influences on decision-making by demographics, such as systemic social factors associated with gender and age that can influence health behaviours.

Table 3: Attitude towards Various Rights Concepts

Category	Agreement (%)	Disagreement (%)	Sample Size (n)
Attitudes Towards Equality (Respect for Children's and Adults' Rights)	84.4	15.6	380
Attitudes Towards Equality (Wealth Does Not Grant Greater Rights)	59.4	40.6	380
Gender Equality (Equal Decision-Making Rights for Men and Women)	84.4	15.6	380
Social Security (Agreement with State's Responsibility)	82.1	17.9	380
Unity in Diversity (High Awareness of Concept)	78.3	21.7	380
Property Rights	60.1	39.9	380

Table 3 shows a subtler picture of participants considering human rights concepts. Building on this last finding, an overwhelming 84.4 percent of surveyed youth endorsed equal respect for the rights of children and adults, with more than half (59.4 percent) opposing the notion that wealth means the greater right to be heard, reflecting a stronger commitment to some notions of equality than have been found among a comparable age range (16-24 as compared with 15-25) in other surveys (p. 93). Support for gender equality was very strong, too, with 84.4% agreeing that men and women should have equal rights to

make decisions (again, a positive impact of HRE as many traditional societies do not believe this. The document also garnered support for social security, where the state ensured all citizens' economic subsistence, followed by an agreement of 82.1%, displaying widespread consensus on government accountability in safeguarding social rights. The other area of increased awareness was unity in diversity (78.3%), which leaders said needed to be taught and practised in a multicultural country. However, regarding property rights, the unfamiliarity was evident: 60.1% responded negatively, suggesting an urgent need for awareness and education. This lack indicates that changes are needed in the curriculum to address areas of human rights that are not commonly emphasized.

5. Discussion

These results provide a comprehensive picture of the situation regarding human rights awareness among students in Turkey: certain strengths and weaknesses are identified. It is encouraging to see such high levels of awareness and favourable attitudes towards principles that include equal treatment, social justice, and gender equality; this suggests some success in current human rights education (HRE) initiatives. At the same time, the study reveals critical gaps in understanding some rights (property rights, for example), which need to be addressed urgently. Such findings highlight why a comprehensive yet structured form of HRE is vital, one that delves beyond theory and engages with the tangible and prevalent implications human rights principles can give rise to some important ways humans learn about rights through informal channels. The role of informal channels here is especially valuable when we think of social media and movies. These are platforms with content relatable and engaging to young audiences that help them get their supplement to formal education. The catch is that although these sources are helpful, leaning too much on them can develop into isolationism/ shallow perception [9]. This emphasizes the importance of strong and comprehensive formal HRE programs in schools and universities, which allow students to digest human rights principles within a structured framework [37].

Also reassuring is the high support for gender equality and social security measures among study participants. The exceptional support for equal decision-making rights for both genders shows the idealistic attitudes of new generations and the promise that HRE holds in uprooting socialized behaviours. Similarly, strong backing for social security and other initiatives where the state safeguards citizens' well-being speaks to a conception of social rights and government obligations [3]. And those attitudes follow universal human rights norms, indicating that Turkish students not only believe in what they represent but are also ready to conform to such postures when they become active citizens." The weaker recognition of property rights is, however, problematic. Last, while property rights are foundational for individual liberty and almost every form of economic development, they continue to be neglected in the existing HRE framework. This gap indicates an opportunity to incorporate more economic and legal rights discussions. Students could benefit from practical activities like mock debates, role-playing scenarios, or project-based learning on these oft-overlooked rights. The practical outlook of HRE helps ensure that students not only know their rights but also how to claim and secure them.

5.1. Success Stories and Case Studies

The report also highlights successful examples and best practices in the area of human rights education within Turkey. Vicious cycles of denunciation and mistrust can also be addressed through well-designed HRE initiatives, such as the Human Rights in Education Project, and with support from international organizations like UNICEF [1]. It offers teachers useful programs and skills to ensure they reach students with quality human rights education. These initiatives have effectively raised awareness and increased appreciation among educators, students, and others of the timely significance of HRE during such challenging times thereby demonstrating the incredible potential of focused HRE activities [17].

Some universities in Turkey act as exemplary institutions for incorporating human rights education into their curricula [26]. For instance, human rights knowledge and attitudes have improved measurably in law and social sciences students at universities that maintain a requirement that those schools offer such courses [11]. Identifying institutions that emphasize incorporating human rights education into higher education helps create a model for other educational institutions interested in improving their HRE offerings. A closer examination of these universities shows that concerted attention to human rights issues, especially when combined with opportunities for hands-on practice, can lead to more meaningful increases in knowledge and engagement [1].

6. Recommendations

Based on the research findings that calculate the problems and distance in human rights education, it suggests possible solutions for improving human rights education in Turkey. Integration into Curriculum: HRE should be integrated systematically at all levels of education (primary to tertiary). This integration also must involve substantive discussions and critical analyses of actual human rights issues, not just cursory references to the topic. Utilizing case studies and historical examples, in addition to current events, can assist students by linking abstract concepts with real-world scenarios, paving the way for better

comprehension of human rights [36]. Educators are the backbone of successful HRE implementation, and their training must be prioritized. Educators will feel encouraged to broach the subject with their students by offering workshops, seminars, and detailed teaching resources. Teacher educators need to prepare teachers for these contentious conversations, including ways to deal with group members who doubt the scientific consensus on climate change or fear their way of life will be compromised [35].

Interactive and Participatory Methods: Interactive teaching methods of human rights education, like role-playing, debates, or community projects, can increase the impact on students. Activities such as mock trials on human rights violations or debates on current human rights issues can provide students with practical experiences that are valuable adjuncts to the theoretical aspects of education. Moreover, addressing human rights themes in community service projects can enliven the meanings of active citizenship and social responsibility [30]. Targeted Shortcomings: As an example, awareness of property rights is particularly missing. A curricular overhaul and targeted educational campaigns can keep our eyes on the ball for these less-understood rights. It may also help to include greater real-world context for how these rights impact different people and communities to bolster the relatability of the topics and spark engagement [14].

7. Conclusion

HR education is key to building a just, equitable, democratic society. The result of this study, while showing some positive trends in certain areas—also indicates great disparities that still have to be filled. The high awareness and positive attitudes in students imply that HRE is instilling values! Yet variations in awareness levels, dependence on informal sources, and gaps regarding particular rights ideas, including property rights, indicate the need for further effort. Therefore, Turkey should prioritize HRE in developing and implementing comprehensive and effective programs to develop the future generation of informed and active citizens. To address shortcomings recognized in this research, such as poorly framed human rights education, insufficient teacher training, and non-interactive teaching methods, the country must integrate human rights pitching at all curriculum levels into a strong foundation for practice. Moreover, attention directed to narrowing tangible gaps like property rights awareness will ensure that HRE delivers students the confidence and tools they require to advocate for the defence of human rights at local levels. Policymakers, educators, and civil society organizations must work hand-in-hand to strengthen human rights education (HRE) and forge a better world for all.

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