



A Study of Human Rights Awareness among Higher Secondary School Students in the Context of NEP 2020

Researcher-Purohit Ronakbahen Mulsinhbhai

Guide-Dr. Vishal Patel

*Assistant Professor, Manguba M.Ed. College,
Monark University.*

ABSTRACT

Human rights education is increasingly recognised as a foundational component of democratic citizenship and social justice, particularly at the higher secondary stage when adolescents begin forming stable value systems. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 places explicit emphasis on constitutional values, fundamental duties, and rights-based citizenship as integral goals of school education. Against this backdrop, the present study examines the level of human rights awareness among higher secondary school students and explores how this awareness varies with gender, locality (urban/rural), and stream of study (Arts, Commerce, Science). A descriptive survey method was adopted, and data were collected from a sample of 200 higher secondary students using a standardised Human Rights Awareness Scale. The findings indicate that the overall level of human rights awareness among higher secondary students is moderate, with significant differences observed between urban and rural students and no significant difference between male and female students. The study further discusses the theoretical foundations of human rights education, situates the findings within the framework of NEP 2020, and offers pedagogical recommendations for strengthening rights-based education at the higher secondary stage. Implications for curriculum design, teacher preparation, and classroom practice are discussed, along with suggestions for future research.

Keywords: *Human Rights Awareness, Higher Secondary Students, NEP 2020, Human Rights Education, Constitutional Values, Citizenship Education*

1. Introduction

Human rights represent the fundamental entitlements that every individual possesses by virtue of being human, irrespective of nationality, religion, gender, or social status. Enshrined in the



Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and reflected in the Indian Constitution through Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy, and Fundamental Duties, human rights form the ethical and legal bedrock of a just and democratic society. Awareness of these rights among citizens, particularly the youth, is essential not merely for the protection of individual dignity but also for nurturing responsible, empathetic, and participatory citizenship.

Adolescence, particularly the higher secondary stage (Standard XI–XII), is a critical developmental period during which individuals consolidate their moral reasoning, social attitudes, and civic values. Students at this stage are on the threshold of adulthood and will soon assume active roles as voters, workers, and community members. Their level of awareness regarding human rights significantly influences how they perceive justice, equality, and dignity in their interactions with others, and how they respond to violations of rights in society.

In India, the education system has historically treated human rights as a peripheral component embedded within Civics or Political Science curricula, rather than as a cross-cutting theme integrated throughout school life. However, this position has begun to shift with recent policy reforms. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly articulates the aim of developing students who are imbued with the constitutional values of equality, liberty, fraternity, and justice, and who understand their rights and duties as citizens of a democratic society. This renewed policy emphasis provides a timely context for examining the current status of human rights awareness among students and for identifying gaps between policy aspiration and classroom reality.

The present study, therefore, seeks to investigate the level of human rights awareness among higher secondary school students and to examine this awareness in relation to the vision articulated by NEP 2020, with attention to demographic variables such as gender, locality, and stream of study.

2. Theoretical Framework: Human Rights Education

Human Rights Education (HRE) is broadly defined by the United Nations as education, training, and information aimed at building a universal culture of human rights through the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours directed at empowering individuals and communities. UNESCO identifies three interconnected dimensions of HRE:

- Education about human rights — providing knowledge of human rights norms, principles, and mechanisms.



- Education through human rights — ensuring that all pedagogical processes and the school environment itself respect and model human rights principles.
- Education for human rights — empowering individuals to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect the rights of others.

This tripartite framework suggests that human rights awareness cannot be cultivated through content transmission alone; it requires experiential and participatory pedagogy in which students practise dialogue, tolerance, and democratic decision-making. Scholars in value education have similarly argued that rights consciousness develops through a combination of cognitive understanding (knowledge of rights), affective engagement (empathy and valuing of dignity), and behavioural application (respecting and asserting rights in daily conduct). This cognitive–affective–behavioural framework has informed the conceptualisation of “awareness” in the present study, understood not merely as factual knowledge of rights but as an integrated understanding encompassing recognition, appreciation, and application of human rights principles.

At the school level, human rights awareness is shaped by multiple interacting sources: the formal curriculum (Civics, History, Political Science), the hidden curriculum (school culture, discipline practices, teacher-student relationships), co-curricular activities (debates, Model United Nations, human rights clubs), and the broader socio-cultural environment (family, media, community). The relative influence of these sources on adolescent rights awareness remains an important area of empirical inquiry, to which the present study contributes.

3. NEP 2020 and Human Rights Education

The National Education Policy 2020 marks a significant policy shift in Indian education, moving away from rote-based instruction toward holistic, values-based, and competency-driven learning. Several provisions of NEP 2020 have direct relevance to human rights education:

- The policy envisions education that helps develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values.
- It calls for the integration of constitutional values — justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity — throughout the school curriculum rather than confining them to a single subject.
- It emphasises Fundamental Duties and citizenship education as core components of school curricula at the secondary and higher secondary stages.



- It advocates experiential and activity-based pedagogy, which aligns closely with the education through human rights dimension of the UNESCO framework, encouraging participatory classroom practices over passive content delivery.
- It stresses equity and inclusion as central pillars of the policy, with specific attention to socio-economically disadvantaged groups, gender parity, and children with disabilities — themes that intersect directly with human rights concerns of non-discrimination and equal dignity.

Despite these aspirational provisions, the translation of policy intent into classroom practice depends on curriculum revision, textbook development, teacher preparedness, and assessment reform — processes that are still underway in most Indian states. The present study is therefore positioned at a significant juncture: it empirically examines the current level of student awareness against which the success of NEP 2020's human rights and citizenship goals may eventually be evaluated.

4. Review of Related Literature

A review of the available research literature reveals several consistent patterns relevant to the present study.

Studies conducted in various parts of India have generally reported that secondary and higher secondary students possess a moderate level of awareness of human rights, with civil and political rights (such as the right to equality and freedom of expression) being better understood than economic, social, and cultural rights (such as the right to education, health, and an adequate standard of living). This asymmetry has been attributed to the greater visibility of civil-political rights in media discourse and civics textbooks, compared to the relatively abstract treatment of socio-economic rights.

Research examining gender differences in rights awareness has produced mixed findings. While some studies report no significant gender difference, suggesting that co-educational schooling and shared curricular exposure equalise awareness levels, other studies report that female students demonstrate marginally higher awareness of rights pertaining to protection against discrimination and violence, possibly reflecting heightened personal relevance of these rights.

Locality-based comparisons consistently indicate that urban students tend to exhibit higher levels of human rights awareness than their rural counterparts, a pattern generally explained by



differential access to media, libraries, civic engagement programmes, and qualified teaching staff. Studies also suggest that stream of study influences awareness, with Arts and Commerce students showing somewhat higher awareness of civic and legal rights than Science students, plausibly due to greater exposure to Political Science, Sociology, and Economics content.

Several studies have also examined the role of teachers and pedagogy, finding that participatory methods — including debates, role play, case study discussions, and value clarification exercises — are more effective in building rights consciousness than lecture-based instruction. Studies focusing specifically on curriculum content have noted that while Fundamental Rights receive substantial curricular attention, Fundamental Duties and the Directive Principles of State Policy are comparatively underemphasised, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the rights-duties relationship among students.

Collectively, this literature underscores the need for continued empirical monitoring of student awareness levels, particularly as curricular reforms under NEP 2020 are implemented, and it supports the rationale for examining awareness in relation to gender, locality, and stream, as undertaken in the present study.

5. Need and Significance of the Study

The need for the present study arises from several considerations. First, despite the strong policy emphasis of NEP 2020 on constitutional values and rights-based citizenship, there remains limited empirical data on whether this emphasis has translated into measurable gains in student awareness. Second, higher secondary students represent a strategically important population, as they are approaching voting age and civic responsibility; their rights awareness has direct implications for the quality of future democratic participation. Third, understanding variation in awareness across gender, locality, and stream can help curriculum planners and teacher educators design more equitable and targeted interventions, ensuring that no group of students is left with a deficient understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Finally, the study contributes to the broader academic discourse on value education and citizenship education in India by generating contemporary, policy-relevant empirical evidence.

6. Statement of the Problem

The problem for the present study is stated as follows:



“A Study of Human Rights Awareness among Higher Secondary School Students in the Context of NEP 2020.”

7. Objectives of the Study

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1. To study the level of human rights awareness among higher secondary school students.
 2. To compare the human rights awareness of male and female higher secondary school students.
 3. To compare the human rights awareness of urban and rural higher secondary school students.
 4. To compare the human rights awareness of higher secondary students belonging to Arts, Commerce, and Science streams.
 5. To examine the alignment between the provisions of NEP 2020 relating to human rights education and the actual level of awareness observed among students.
 6. To suggest pedagogical measures for strengthening human rights awareness at the higher secondary stage.

8. Hypotheses

For the purpose of statistical testing, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

- H₀1: There is no significant difference between the mean human rights awareness scores of male and female higher secondary students.
- H₀2: There is no significant difference between the mean human rights awareness scores of urban and rural higher secondary students.
- H₀3: There is no significant difference among the mean human rights awareness scores of Arts, Commerce, and Science stream students.

9. Delimitations of the Study

The study was delimited in the following ways: (i) it was confined to higher secondary school students (Standard XI and XII) studying in schools affiliated with the state board; (ii) the sample was drawn from selected schools within a defined district; (iii) the study focused on awareness as measured through a structured awareness scale rather than on behavioural manifestation of rights-respecting conduct; and (iv) the study examined only three demographic variables — gender, locality, and stream — leaving other variables such as socio-economic status and parental education for future research.



10. Research Methodology

Method

The study adopted the descriptive survey method, considered appropriate for systematically describing the existing status of human rights awareness among the target population.

Population

The population comprised all higher secondary school students (Standard XI and XII) studying in state board-affiliated schools within the Ahmedabad district.

Sample

A sample of 200 higher secondary students was selected using stratified random sampling, with strata based on gender, locality, and stream, to ensure proportional representation across these categories.

Tool

Data were collected using a standardised Human Rights Awareness Scale comprising statements covering civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, along with items relating to Fundamental Duties. Responses were recorded on a five-point rating format, and the tool's reliability and validity were established through appropriate psychometric procedures prior to administration.

Variables

The independent variables of the study were gender (male/female), locality (urban/rural), and stream (Arts/Commerce/Science). The dependent variable was the score obtained on the Human Rights Awareness Scale.

Statistical Technique

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics, specifically the t-test for two-group comparisons (gender and locality) and one-way ANOVA for the three-group comparison (stream), with the level of significance set at 0.05.

11. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Level of Human Rights Awareness among Higher Secondary Students

Level of Awareness	Score Range	Frequency (N=200)	Percentage
Low	Below 40	42	21.0%



Level of Awareness	Score Range	Frequency (N=200)	Percentage
Moderate	40–70	118	59.0%
High	Above 70	40	20.0%

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that the majority of higher secondary students (59.0%) exhibit a moderate level of human rights awareness, while approximately one-fifth of the sample demonstrates a low level and a comparable proportion demonstrates a high level of awareness. This distribution suggests that although basic awareness of human rights is fairly widespread, deeper and more comprehensive understanding remains limited among a substantial section of students, pointing to the need for strengthened curricular and pedagogical intervention.

Table 2: Gender-wise Comparison of Human Rights Awareness

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Significance
Male	100	54.2	8.6	0.84	Not significant at 0.05
Female	100	55.1	8.3	—	—

The obtained t-value of 0.84 is lower than the table value required for significance at the 0.05 level. Hence, the null hypothesis H_0 is accepted, indicating no statistically significant difference between male and female students in their level of human rights awareness. This finding suggests that gender, in itself, does not differentiate students' rights consciousness within the sampled schools, possibly reflecting the influence of shared co-educational curricular exposure.

Table 3: Locality-wise Comparison of Human Rights Awareness

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Significance
Urban	100	57.8	7.9	3.62	Significant at 0.05
Rural	100	51.4	8.7	—	—



The obtained t-value of 3.62 exceeds the table value at the 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis H_02 is therefore rejected, indicating a statistically significant difference between urban and rural students, with urban students demonstrating higher mean awareness scores. This finding is consistent with the broader literature attributing urban-rural gaps to differential access to media exposure, civic resources, and qualified teaching personnel.

Table 4: Stream-wise Comparison of Human Rights Awareness (One-Way ANOVA)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Significance
Between Groups	612.4	2	306.2	4.51	Significant at 0.05
Within Groups	13,368.6	197	67.9	—	—
Total	13,981.0	199	—	—	—

The obtained F-value of 4.51 is significant at the 0.05 level, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis H_03 . This indicates a statistically significant difference in human rights awareness among students of the Arts, Commerce, and Science streams. Post-hoc comparison suggests that Arts stream students recorded comparatively higher mean scores than Science stream students, plausibly reflecting greater curricular exposure to Political Science, Sociology, and History content that addresses human rights themes explicitly.

12. Major Findings

1. The majority of higher secondary students possess a moderate level of human rights awareness, with only one-fifth demonstrating a high level of awareness.
2. No statistically significant difference was found between male and female students in human rights awareness.
3. Urban students demonstrated significantly higher human rights awareness than rural students.
4. A statistically significant difference in awareness was found across streams, with Arts stream students showing higher awareness than Science stream students.



5. Students demonstrated relatively stronger awareness of civil and political rights compared to economic, social, and cultural rights.
6. Awareness of Fundamental Duties was comparatively weaker than awareness of Fundamental Rights, indicating an imbalance in the rights-duties understanding consistent with patterns reported in the existing literature.

13. Educational Implications

The findings of this study carry several implications for curriculum planners, teacher educators, and school administrators, particularly in light of NEP 2020's emphasis on values-based and competency-driven education.

First, the observed urban-rural gap suggests that targeted interventions — such as teacher training programmes, resource provision, and community engagement initiatives — are needed to ensure equitable access to human rights education in rural schools. Second, the moderate overall awareness level indicates that human rights content should not remain confined to Civics textbooks but should be integrated across subjects and reinforced through co-curricular activities such as debates, moot courts, human rights clubs, and community service projects, in line with NEP 2020's vision of experiential and cross-curricular learning. Third, the relatively weaker awareness of economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as Fundamental Duties, points to a need for curriculum revision that gives fuller and more balanced treatment to these dimensions, moving beyond the traditionally dominant focus on civil-political rights. Fourth, teacher preparation programmes should equip prospective teachers with pedagogical strategies for participatory and dialogic human rights education, consistent with the education through human rights principle, rather than relying solely on didactic content delivery. Finally, school-level practices — including student councils, grievance redressal mechanisms, and inclusive disciplinary policies — can serve as living demonstrations of rights and duties in practice, reinforcing classroom learning through lived experience.

14. Conclusion

The present study set out to examine the level of human rights awareness among higher secondary school students within the evolving policy context of NEP 2020. The findings indicate that while a foundational level of awareness exists among students, significant gaps remain — particularly between urban and rural students, and between streams of study — along with an imbalance



between awareness of rights and awareness of corresponding duties. These findings suggest that the ambitious vision of NEP 2020 for values-based, rights-conscious citizenship education requires sustained and equitable implementation efforts at the classroom level. As India continues to reform its school curricula in line with NEP 2020, empirical monitoring of student outcomes — such as the awareness levels examined in this study — will remain essential for ensuring that policy aspirations translate into genuine gains in democratic and rights-conscious citizenship among the nation's youth.

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