


Please cite the Published Version

Mbada, Kikelomo A., Anthony, Idowu Sunday, Adegbite, Olusola Babatunde and Mbada, Chidozie  (2024) Human rights knowledge and assertion among Nigerian University undergraduates. *Mediterranean Journal of Education*, 4 (2). pp. 105-123. ISSN 2732-6489

Publisher: Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education - University of Patras

Version: Published Version

Downloaded from: <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/639908/>

Usage rights:  [Creative Commons: Attribution 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)

Additional Information: This is an open access article published in *Mediterranean Journal of Education*, by the Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education - University of Patras, Greece.

Enquiries:

If you have questions about this document, contact openresearch@mmu.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in e-space. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/library/using-the-library/policies-and-guidelines>)

Human rights knowledge and assertion among Nigerian University undergraduates

KIKELOMO A. MBADA¹, IDOWU SUNDAY ANTHONY²,
OLUSOLA BABATUNDE ADEGBITE³, CHIDOZIE E. MBADA⁴

¹School of Digital Education
Faculty of Learning and Teaching
Arden University
United Kingdom
kmbada@arden.ac.uk

²Department of Political Science
Faculty of Social Sciences, Ile-Ife
Obafemi Awolowo University
Nigeria

³Hertfordshire Law School, Hatfield
University of Hertfordshire
United Kingdom

⁴Department of Health Professions
Birley Fields Campus, Manchester
Faculty of Health and Education
Manchester Metropolitan University
United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Ongoing human rights (HR) violations question the effectiveness of school-based HR education in empowering individuals. This study investigated how well Nigerian undergraduates understand HR, their knowledge sources, rights assertion, and the socio-demographic correlates. 381 students from the Law, Social Sciences, and Health Sciences faculties at Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria, participated in the study. A structured questionnaire was used to obtain data. Descriptive statistics of mean and percentages, and inferential statistics of Chi-square was used to determine the correlations of HR. Overall, HR knowledge levels were 16.0% below average, 19.2% average, and 64.8% above average. HR knowledge was mostly obtained through peers (79.8%), classroom education (79.8%), and electronic media (78.2%). Newspapers (52.7%) and constitution handbooks (61.4%) were the least reported sources. HR assertion levels were 13.1% low, 14.7% moderate, and 72.2% high. Course ($\chi^2=9.744$; $p=0.045$) and level ($\chi^2=13.625$; $p=0.009$) of study significantly influenced HR knowledge. Course of study ($\chi^2=10.771$; $p=0.029$) alone significantly influenced HR assertion. In conclusion, about 40% had below-average to average HR knowledge, and 30% had high HR assertion. Peer learning was the most effective source of HR knowledge, while handbooks were the least. The course of study significantly influenced both HR knowledge and assertion.

KEYWORDS

Human Rights Education, assertion, curriculum, university, Nigeria

RÉSUMÉ

Les violations continues des droits de l'homme remettent en question l'efficacité de l'éducation aux RH en milieu scolaire pour autonomiser les individus. Cette étude a examiné dans quelle mesure les étudiants Nigériens comprennent les de l'homme, leurs sources de connaissances, l'affirmation de leurs droits et les corrélats sociodémographiques. 381 étudiants des facultés de droit, de sciences sociales et de sciences de la santé de l'Université Obafemi Awolowo, au Nigéria, ont participé à l'étude. Un questionnaire structuré a été utilisé pour recueillir des données. Des statistiques descriptives (moyennes et pourcentages) et des statistiques inférentielles (chi-carré) ont été utilisées pour déterminer les corrélats des droits de l'homme. Dans l'ensemble, les niveaux de connaissance des droits de l'homme étaient inférieurs de 16,0 %, moyens de 19,2% et supérieurs de 64,8% à la moyenne. La connaissance des droits de l'homme a été principalement acquise par les pairs (79,8%), l'enseignement en classe (79,8 %) et les médias électroniques (78,2%). Français Les journaux (52,7%) et les manuels constitutionnels (61,4%) étaient les sources les moins citées. Les niveaux d'affirmation des droits de l'homme étaient faibles à 13,1 %, modérés à 14,7 % et élevés à 72,2%. Le cours ($\chi^2=9,744$; $p=0,045$) et le niveau ($\chi^2=13,625$; $p=0,009$) de l'étude ont influencé de manière significative la connaissance des droits de l'homme. Le cursus ($\chi^2=10,771$; $p=0,029$) a à lui seul influencé significativement l'affirmation RH. En conclusion, environ 40% des étudiants avaient des connaissances RH inférieures à la moyenne, et 30% avaient une affirmation RH élevée. L'apprentissage par les pairs était la source la plus efficace de connaissances en matière de droits de l'homme, tandis que les manuels étaient la moins efficace. Le cursus d'études a exercé une influence significative sur la connaissance et l'affirmation des droits de l'homme.

MOTS CLÉS

Éducation aux droits de l'homme, affirmation, programme d'études, université, Nigéria

INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented magnitude of human rights abuses perpetrated during the Second World War, prompted the United Nations General Assembly to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 (Brown, 2016). The document which has become an essential guiding force for the United Nations (UN) was created to prevent human rights abuses and to advance respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (Danieli et al., 2018). Against the backdrop of humanity's common and moral nature, providing for a universal standard that all political authorities must meet, the ratification of the UDHR represents a watershed moment that supplies the authority for the legislative conception of human rights (Hoover, 2013). Indeed, it is a legacy that the entire human community can rightfully lay claim to (Waltz, 2001). The UDHR stresses the importance of a "common understanding of human rights as necessary to the full realisation of rights and responsibilities and the achievement of freedom, justice and peace in the world" (United Nations General Assembly, 1949). Concerning 'education', the UDHR provides that "*Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship amongst all nations, racial or religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace*" (United Nations General Assembly, 1948, Article 26,2).

Provisions of leading International Human Rights instruments such as Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966 as well as Article 17,2 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights all require States to make education available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable (Ifesinachi & Tarabinah, 2009). Accordingly, the UN called upon all member states to disseminate, display, read and expound the text of the declaration mainly in schools and other educational institutions to keep their citizens aware of its content (Reardon, 2010; United Nations General Assembly, 1948). According to the 2011 Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UNDHRET) the UN defines HRE as *“All educational training, information, awareness-raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and thus contributing inter alia to the prevention of human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills, and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour to empower them to contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture for human rights”* (UNDHRET, 2011, Article 2,1).

The UNDHRET notes that HRE is all about education about rights, through rights and for rights (UNDHRET, 2011, Article 2,2). While education about rights involves providing individuals with the knowledge of the basic norms and principles of human rights as well as their promotion and mechanisms for protection, education through rights involves delivering learning a manner that safeguards the human rights of both the tutor and the students (Obiagu & Nwaubani, 2020; UNDHRET, 2011). Education for rights entails empowering people with the capacity to both assert their rights and demonstrate respect for the rights of others (Obiagu & Nwaubani, 2020; UNDHRET, 2011). Education about human rights is increasingly recognised as central to the free and full development of persons within the community (Danieli et al., 2018; Gerber, 2011). Hence, human rights education (HRE) is acknowledged as indispensable in developing an understanding of skills and values about human rights, and responsibilities aimed at bringing about attitudes and behaviour which are respectful of those rights (Amnesty International, 2022; Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, 2010;). At the adoption of the UNDHRET in 2011, the General Assembly assigned states the responsibility of promoting and ensuring human rights education and training (UNDHRET, 2011). In line with Article 26,2 of the UDHR, which provides that education should be directed to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, governments have been putting more effort into promoting HRE (Brander, 2012). Advocates are persuaded that transformative HRE is crucial to fostering “a universal culture of human rights” which in turn can add a significant spur to the implementation of legal standards by governments (Brown, 2016).

The state of Human Rights and Human Rights Education in Nigeria

The global status of human rights (HR) has shown a significant decline, characterised by rising authoritarianism, widespread violations of international law, and brutal suppression of dissent (Amnesty International, 2025; Wilson & Mitchell, 2003). This situation underscores the urgent need for HRE, which has seen substantial efforts to integrate human rights principles into educational curricula. Initiatives such as the fifth phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education focus on youth, digital technologies, and gender equality (United Nations, 2025). Ramirez et al. (2007) examine the global rise of HRE, highlighting its increasing importance in organisational, curricular, and discursive developments. Their analysis of educational patterns at both the global and national levels illustrate the expansion and impact of HRE within school curricula. Despite these efforts, challenges persist in effectively empowering individuals to assert their rights in the face of ongoing human rights violations (Amnesty International, 2025). Particularly, in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), the

state of HRE faces significant challenges, including limited resources, political instability, and varying levels of government commitment (Amnesty International, 2025).

Nigeria, like most LMICs is beleaguered by serious human rights violations despite constitutional provisions in the country specifying the protection of a range of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Nigeria had its worst record for human rights violations under the Military, with the regime of General Sani Abacha being unparalleled amongst the lot (Adeakin, 2016). However, despite the end of years of systematic human rights violations under the military, activities of individuals, organs of society and government still continue to undermine the rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens and residents of the country (Nwachukwu et al., 2014). These violations include but are not limited to violence against women and girls, restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture and other ill-treatment, and lack of accountability for human rights violations (Amnesty International, 2019). In some regions in the country, such as in the northern part, these violations are gender-centric, as the victims are mostly women and girls (Adegbite et al., 2020). Generally, human rights violations remain unabated in the country and were further exacerbated during the enforcement of government lockdown measures during the COVID-19 pandemic (Onuh, 2021). When it comes to human rights violations in the country, people from low socioeconomic back grounds are disproportionately affected (Obiagu & Nwaubani, 2020). So abysmal is the country's human rights record that the people have become so used to it, that they don't even recognise it as inhumane (Obiagu & Nwaubani, 2020).

Based upon the recognition of human rights education as a critical measure to addressing human right violations, there have been discussions on how HRE should be implemented in schools. Whereas some scholars have argued for human rights content to be offered either as an elective or compulsory course within schoolwork, others recommend integrating various values related to human rights into courses in curriculum (Blanchard, 2016; Burrige et al, 2013; Pandey, 2005). Overall, there is a dearth of information and studies on HRE implementation in Nigeria.

The stark reality of continuous and rampant human right abuses throughout Nigeria despite her return to democracy raises questions of how much people really know about their rights and the impact of HRE. Could it be that human rights abuses persist because citizens and residents alike lack adequate knowledge of their rights and are therefore, vulnerable? If a culture of respect for human rights will be built, how is HRE influencing knowledge and assertion of rights among young people? Drawing upon the United Nations' mandate to schools, it is assumed that undergraduates should ordinarily be one of the best-informed segments of the educated population, on human rights. Hence, this study investigates the extent to which Nigerian university undergraduates are acquainted with human rights, sources of their knowledge, rights assertion and the socio-demographic correlates of their knowledge and assertion of HR.

Research question

To what extent are Nigerian university undergraduates acquainted with human rights, what are the sources of their knowledge, how do they assert their rights, and what are the socio-demographic correlates of their knowledge and assertion of human rights?

METHODS

This study was a quantitative cross-sectional study carried out at the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, Nigeria. OAU is a federal tertiary institution which provides

education training to students drawn from every part of the country. Respondents were recruited from four out of the eleven faculties in the University. They are the Faculties of Basic Medical Sciences, Clinical Sciences, Law (a single discipline faculty in the University) and Social Sciences (where the Department of Political Science was purposively selected). Respondents from the Faculty of Law and the Department of Political Science represent a sample that is exposed to greater HR course content. On the other hand, students of the College of Health Sciences (comprising faculties of Basic Medical Sciences and Clinical Sciences) represent a sample of the total population that have less HR content in their curricula.

An online sample size calculator (Check Market, 2020) was used to calculate the required sample size for this study. OAU has an enrolment range of 25.000-29.999 students (UniRank, 2020). A sample size of 380 was derived at confidence level of 95% and margin of error of 5%. In order to accommodate non-response and invalid data, 10% of the calculated sample size was added, totalling 418. However, 400 questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 95.7%. Out of the returned data, only 381 were found valid for analysis. The socio-demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1. From the results, the participating departments were fairly represented: Health Sciences constituted 48%, while Law and Social Sciences formed 52% of the total population. The respondents in this study were fairly comparable by sex (male – 46.2%; female – 53.8%).

TABLE 1
Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (N=381)

Category		
Faculty	Frequency	Percentage
Law	96	25.2
Social Sciences (Political Science)	102	26.8
Health Sciences	183	48.0
Level	Frequency	Percentage
300	148	38.8
400	217	57.0
500	16	4.2
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	176	46.2
Female	204	53.8

Source: Author's Field Survey 2019

A five-section questionnaire, which was tested for its face and content validity by experts, was used in this study. The questionnaire was designed to assess knowledge and assertion of HR among students, as well as obtain demographic information on the course of study, level of study and sex (Appendix). The questionnaire was applied to the respondents based on self-administration. Consenting respondents were guaranteed anonymity as no names or identifiers were associated with information obtained.

Data Analysis

Data was summarized using descriptive statistics of mean, percentages and charts. Inferential statistics of Chi-square was used to test association between each of HR knowledge and

assertion levels and socio-demographic variables. Based on the total score obtainable from the questionnaire, percentile cut-points of less than median and 75th centile were used to define HR knowledge and assertion as below average/low, average/moderate and above average/high respectively. Alpha level was set at $p < 0.05$. Analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 21.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the respondents' knowledge about human rights in relation to situations on and outside the university campus. The respondents demonstrated highest rates on knowledge of HR i.e., civil and political rights such as for instance, how to correctly respond in situations of sexual harassment (81.7%), sudden arrest (80.8%) and physical assault by a Lecturer (76.1%). However, the respondents demonstrated the least knowledge of HR i.e., social, economic and cultural rights concerns such as situations of decrepit or total absence of basic social amenities e.g. sealed/dirty toilets, lack of water and power in hostel (61.7%); where awarded scores do not match performance (65.9%) and in circumstance of denial to write exams (66.7%).

TABLE 2
Knowledge of human rights regarding situations within and outside the university campus
(N=381)

S/N	Variable	Yes		No	
		n	%	n	%
1.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of HR in situations of sudden arrest	308	80.8	73	19.2
2.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of HR in situations of eviction by Landlord/Hall Warden	288	75.4	93	24.4
3.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of HR in situations of denial to write exams	254	66.7	127	33.3
4.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of HR in situations of sexual harassment	311	81.7	70	18.4
5.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of HR in situations of harassment during nonviolent protest	274	71.9	107	28.1
6.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of HR in defence of establishment, membership and running of an association	260	68.2	121	31.8
7.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of HR in situations of physical assault by lecturer	290	76.1	91	23.9
8.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of HR in a situation of being hit at a zebra crossing	272	71.4	109	28.6
9.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of HR in situations where I am awarded a score that is not commensurate to my performance	251	65.9	130	34.1
10.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of HR in situations of total absence or decrepit amenities e.g. closed/dirty toilets, lack of water in hostel	235	61.7	146	38.3

Source: Author's Field Survey 2019

Table 3 presents the findings on willingness to assert rights within and outside university campus. The findings indicate that willingness to assert rights when sexually harassed (84.3%), physically assaulted (80.6%), and evicted by landlord/hall warden (80.3%) were the most specified by the respondents. On the other hand, least points were recorded on willingness to

assert rights in situations of lack of access to social amenities (68.2%), where awarded score is not commensurate to performance (70.6%) and when denied the right to establishment and membership of an association (73.2%).

TABLE 3
Willingness to assert rights and within and outside university campus (N=381)

S/N	Variable	Yes		No	
		n	%	n	%
1.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of HR if I'm suddenly arrested	305	80	76	19.9
2.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of HR if evicted by my Landlord/Hall Warden	306	80.3	75	19.7
3.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of HR if I'm denied to write exams	305	80	76	19.9
4.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of HR if I'm sexually harassed	321	84.3	60	15.7
5.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of HR if harassed when I'm involved in nonviolent protest	287	75.3	94	24.7
6.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of HR if I'm harassed or denied the right to establishment, membership and/or running of an association	279	73.2	102	26.8
7.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of HR if I'm physically assaulted by a lecturer	307	80.6	74	19.4
8.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of HR if I'm hit at a zebra crossing	282	74	99	26.0
9.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of HR if I'm awarded a score that is not commensurate to my performance	269	70.6	112	29.4
10.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of HR for lack of access to amenities due to absence or it being in bad shape e.g. closed/dirty toilets, lack of water in hostel	260	68.2	121	31.8

Source: Author's Field Survey 2019

Sources of respondents' knowledge of HR are presented in Table 4. From the results, knowledge of HR was obtained mostly through peers (79.8%), classroom education (79.8%) and electronic media (78.2%). On the other hand, reading of newspapers (52.7%) and constitution handbooks (61.4%) were least reported as sources of knowledge of HR. Public engagement (71.4%) and social media (74.8%) were also reported as sources of knowledge of HR.

Table 5 shows findings on government/university management strategies to strengthen knowledge of human rights among students. Findings indicate that civic education topics in social studies offered in junior school was the most reported strategy to enhance knowledge of HR (85%), while civic education embedded in university courses (61.7%) was the least reported strategy to enhance knowledge of HR.

TABLE 4
Sources of respondents' knowledge of human rights in Nigeria

S/N	Variable	Yes		No	
		n	%	n	%
1.	I gained knowledge of human rights through reading of newspapers	201	52.7	180	47.2
2.	I gained knowledge of human rights through reading of constitution handbooks	234	61.4	147	38.6
3.	I gained knowledge of human rights through social media (twitter, Facebook)	285	74.8	96	25.2
4.	I gained knowledge of human rights through electronic media (tv, radio)	298	78.2	83	21.8
5.	I gained knowledge of human rights through public engagement	272	71.4	109	28.6
6.	I gained knowledge of human rights through classroom education	304	79.8	77	20.2
7.	I gained knowledge of human rights through peers	304	79.8	77	20.2

Source: Author's Field Survey 2019

TABLE 5
Government/university management strategies to strengthen knowledge of human rights and freedoms among students

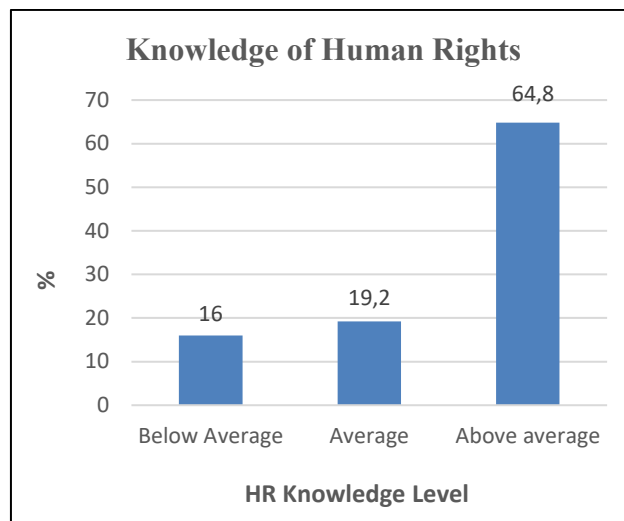
S/N	Variable	Yes		No	
		n	%	n	%
1.	*Civic education topics in social studies offered in junior school, enhanced my knowledge of HR	324	85	57	15.0
2.	*Civic education topics in Government offered in senior secondary school, enhanced my knowledge of HR	272	71.4	109	28.6
3.	*Civic education topics integrated into university courses, enhanced my knowledge of HR	235	61.7	146	38.3
4.	Government sponsored messages on electronic media and newspaper enhanced my knowledge of HR	241	63.3	140	36.7

Source: Author's Field Survey 2019

*In this study, civic education is used synonymously with human rights education for sake of respondents' conversance.

Figure 1 shows the frequency distribution of respondents' knowledge of HR. The results show that there was 16.0%, 19.2% and 64.8% for below average, average and above average HRE knowledge levels rates respectively. Chi-square test was used to test the association between level of knowledge about HR and respondents' socio-demographic variables (Table 6). The result indicates that course of study ($\chi^2=9.744$; $p=0.045$) and level of study ($\chi^2=13.625$; $p=0.009$) significantly influence level of knowledge about HR. Respondents from Law (77.1%) followed by Political Science (64.7%), had the highest rates of above average level of knowledge of HR.

FIGURE 1



Frequency distribution of respondents' levels of knowledge of Human Rights

TABLE 6

Chi-square test of association between level of knowledge about HR and respondents' socio-demographic variables

Variable	Level of Knowledge			X ²	p-value
	Below Average Knowledge n(%)	Below Average Knowledge n(%)	Above Average Knowledge n(%)		
Faculty					
Law (n=96)	9 (9.4)	13 (13.5)	74 (77.1)	9.744	0.045*
Social Sciences (n=102)	17 (16.7)	19 (18.2)	66 (64.7)		
Health Sciences (n=183)	35 (19.1)	41 (22.4)	107 (58.5)		
Level of study					
300 (n=148)	22 (14.9)	32 (21.6)	94 (63.5)	13.625	0.009*
400L (n=217)	36 (16.6)	33 (15.2)	148 (68.2)		
500L (n=16)	3 (18.8)	8 (50.0)	5 (31.2)		
Gender					
Male (n=176)	20 (11.3)	35 (19.9)	121 (68.8)	5.277	0.071
Female (n=205)	41 (20.0)	38 (18.5)	126 (61.5)		

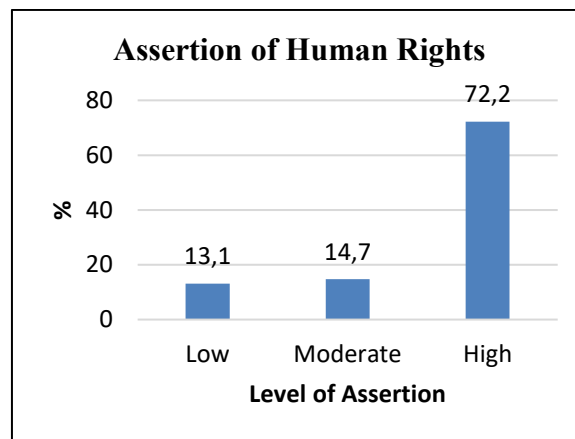
* Level of significance was set at p<0.05 alpha.

Source: Author's Field Survey 2019

More respondents in the 300 level (14.9%) and 400 level (68.2%) had the least and the highest rates of below and above average level of knowledge of HR respectively.

Figure 2 shows the frequency distribution of respondents' assertion of HR. The results show that HR assertion levels were 13.1%, 14.7% and 72.2% for low, moderate and high assertion respectively. Chi-square test was used to test the association between the level of assertion of HR and respondents' socio-demographic variables (Table 7). The result shows that course of study ($\chi^2 = 10.771$; $p=0.029$) alone was significantly associated with the assertion of HR. Thus, respondents in 400 level of study had the highest rate of high level of assertion (74.2%). The highest rates of high assertion were observed among respondents from the Faculty of Law (80.2%) followed by Social Sciences (72.5%) and then Health Sciences (67.8%), however, the differences were not statistically significant ($p>0.05$). Similarly, male respondents recorded higher rates of high-level assertion than their female counterparts (74.5% vs. 70.2%) however, the difference was not statistically significant ($p>0.05$).

FIGURE 2



Frequency distribution of respondents' levels of assertion of Human Rights

TABLE 6

Chi-square test of association between level of assertion about HR and respondents' socio-demographic variables

Variable	Level of Assertion			X ²	p-value
	Low Assertion n(%)	Moderate Assertion n(%)	High Assertion n(%)		
Faculty					
Law (n=96)	9 (9.4)	10 (10.4)	77 (80.2)	5.929	0.204
Social Sciences (n=102)	11 (10.8)	17 (16.7)	74 (72.5)		
Health Sciences (n=183)	30 (16.4)	29 (34.9)	124 (67.8)		
Level of study					
300 (n=148)	18 (12.2)	22 (14.9)	108 (72.9)	10.771	0.029*
400L (n=217)	28 (12.9)	28 (12.9)	161 (74.2)		
500L (n=16)	4 (25.0)	6 (37.5)	6 (37.5)		
Gender					
Male (n=176)	18 (10.2)	27 (15.3)	131 (74.5)	2.413	0.299
Female (n=205)	32 (15.6)	29 (14.2)	144 (70.2)		

* Level of significance was set at p<0.05 alpha.

Source: Author's Field Survey 2019

DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was to assess knowledge and assertion of HR among Nigerian undergraduate students who ought to have relatively greater knowledge of human rights in light of the UN mandate to teach the UDHR text in schools. The knowledge of human rights cannot be overemphasized as it protects people from abuse by those who are more powerful (Smith, 2016). Therefore, HRE is increasingly acknowledged as an essential and effective approach towards preventing human rights abuses around the world (Gearon, 2011); its goal is to provide understanding that empowers people to respect, defend and promote human rights such that justice and dignity are guaranteed for all (Flowers, 2003).

The ability to assert and defend human rights conceivably is contingent upon the knowledge of human rights, as even human rights activists typically acquire their knowledge and skills of human rights by self-teaching and direct experience (Flowers, 2020). However, it

is crucial that HRE not only equip students with knowledge about human rights and its associated skills and values, but also help them to think about how rights relate to them personally (Osler & Starkey, 2017). This study assessed knowledge of human rights principles as they apply to situations involving human rights violations within and outside the university campus. It is shown from this study that most undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria have average to above average level of knowledge and moderate to high level of assertion of HR. While, knowledge of HR is significantly influenced by course and level of study respectively, the assertion of HR is influenced by course of study only. This fits with the hypothesis of the study that the knowledge of human rights is positively associated with the assertion of rights.

The result of this study shows that students demonstrated the highest rates in terms of knowledge of HR regarding sexual harassment and willingness to assert rights when sexually harassed. The heightened awareness of sexual harassment matters is apparently beyond the instrumentality of HRE in classrooms. Recent media reports on the sex-for-mark scandals that rocked universities in Nigeria including Obafemi Awolowo University in 2019, and the intensified reiteration of the University's stance demonstrated in the enactment of its Anti - Sexual Harassment Policy, may not be unconnected with the high percentages of knowledge and willingness to assert rights on the subject of sexual harassment.

Other aspects where respondents recorded a high level of knowledge and willingness to assert rights comprise physical assault as well as sudden or unwarranted arrest and eviction. The level of knowledge of rights on these aspects, we argue, may have been influenced by factors other than HR content taught in classrooms. In Nigeria, police harassment of university students has remained a problem for years, and is often characterised by acts such as arbitrary arrests, detention, as well as torture of such students (Adenuga & Oyekanmi, 2023). Within this period, the police and security forces have often been heavily criticized by the media for rights violations in these aspects, perhaps this explains students' high level of knowledge and willingness to assert rights on this issue. In addition, the high level of knowledge and willingness to assert HR in these aspects may be traced to the long history and legacy of Nigerian university students' activism and protests against the police and other law enforcement agents and offenders (e.g. landlords, cult members, etc.). Added to this is the long history of agitations against policies of the Nigerian state considered repressive, for example, the 1978 'Ali Must Go' and 1989 'IMF' protests (Odion-Akhaine, 2009). More so, the high knowledge of rights and willingness to assert in a situation of eviction by landlord/hall warden as observed in this study, may be a result of survival instinct. Typically, accommodation for students is in short supply at the University and the cost for rent of an apartment outside of the University is relatively high. Therefore, resisting eviction may be a result of survival drive just as it could be of the knowledge of rights.

The students in this study recorded the lowest percentages on knowledge and assertion of human rights in situations of decrepit or absence of basic social amenities e.g. sealed/dirty/broken down toilets, and lack of water in hostels. The pertinent question that arises here is - do students consider the lack of amenities on campus as a violation of their rights? Typically, the majority of the Nigerian public somewhat considers the provision of social amenities as a favour from the government. The slackness of the Nigerian government in the provision of public goods and the people's poor understanding of the government's responsibility to the governed, is demonstrated in the majority of Nigerians becoming government in themselves, providing for themselves basic amenities such as security, power, water, etc. Aside from the alarming state of insecurity, the non-resolution of several high-profile murder cases increases the tendency of citizens to resort to self-help when they feel threatened (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019). This sense of responsibility for one's welfare despite the presence of governmental structures, is also carried into campus life.

The findings in this study on the sources of knowledge of human rights reveal that knowledge was obtained mostly through peers, classroom education, and electronic and social media. The finding of this study is consistent with extant literature on the roles of peers (REF), and electronic and social media (Lukose & Mathur, 2019; Zanzoun, 2017) in promoting human rights awareness. Zanzoun (2017) submits that digital information communication technologies are veritable platforms to advance informal rights education towards promoting citizens' rights and limiting abuse of rights.

From this study, the least reported sources of knowledge of human rights were through reading of newspapers and constitution handbooks. These findings seem to buttress concerns that print media is increasingly becoming out of fashion especially among young adults (Edge, 2019; Nossek et al., 2015). Traditional channels such as newspapers and government documents on human rights are becoming unattractive as a choice means of dissemination of information on human rights (Hammarberg et al., 2011). Emerging studies indicate that newspaper reading among students is on the low, as nowadays they are more interested in using other media (Sharma & Saini, 2019). Results show that peer pressure represents a powerful factor contributing to knowledge and assertion of human rights among undergraduates. In line with this finding, Carraro (2019) demonstrates how peer pressure plays a role in advancing and enforcing human rights.

Another finding of this study indicates that civic education topics in social studies offered in junior school was the most reported strategy to enhance knowledge of human rights while civic education integrated into university courses was the least recorded strategy to enhance knowledge of human rights. This finding supports the assertion that teaching and learning in human rights should commence in the early stages of a child's education (UNESCO, 2013). The recommended Plan of Action for the first phase (2005-2009) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, developed by experts and practitioners, was HRE implementation in primary and secondary schools (United Nations Human Rights, 2012). It is evident that HR knowledge was better enhanced at the junior school level, where teaching of HR content is incorporated into the curriculum and taught as a common mandatory course. Much of what is known at the university level which recorded the lowest percentages concerning strategy to enhance knowledge of human rights, is that various values related to human rights are integrated in different courses in the programmes' curricula. This validates the study's hypothesis that the knowledge of HR among Nigerian university undergraduates is a function of how HRE is incorporated into the programme's curriculum.

Overall, the result of this study shows below-average and above-average knowledge rates of 16.0% and 64.8% respectively among the students. The results indicate that the course of study and level of study significantly influences the level of knowledge about human rights. Accordingly, students studying Law (77.1%) followed by Political Science (64.7%) had higher rates of above-average levels of knowledge of human rights, than their counterparts in the Health Sciences. In this study, students of the Faculty of Law and Faculty of Social Sciences (Department of Political Science) were recruited to represent respondents with more exposure to human rights because of their course content, while students from the College of Health Sciences represent respondents with less human rights course content. Typically, human rights is a component of most universities' curricula for Political Science and Law training at the Baccalaureate and postgraduate levels (Steiner & Alston, 2008). Landman (2005) submits that "human rights have long been a direct or indirect substantive topic in modern political science...". However, the human rights contents and nomenclature of relevant courses vary across institutions globally. Moreover, Banks (2001) states that "students of Law and International Relations or Political Science may study human rights in a university setting, but most people receive no education, formally or informally, about human rights. This study's finding, that the course of study significantly influences the level of knowledge about human

rights, is similar to the findings of Humtsoe and Kapoor (2019) and Sarate (2011) but contradicts the findings of Kaur (2006) and Padmavathy and Pallai (2015).

Students in the 400 levels of study had the rates of above-average levels of knowledge of human rights. Also, low and high assertion rates for human rights in this study were 13.1% and 72.2% respectively. The level of assertion of HR was significantly associated with the course of study only. Although, students in the 400 level of study had the highest rate of high level of assertion and those of the Law Faculty followed by Political Science, however, the differences were not statistically significant. Similarly, male students recorded higher rates of high levels of assertion than their female counterparts, but the difference was also not statistically significant. There seems to be a dearth of studies on the association of the level of study with HR knowledge with which to compare the findings of this study. In sum, to effectively influence knowledge and assertion of HR among Nigerian university undergraduates, there is a need to re-consider how HR content is incorporated in the curriculum taking into account the benefits of common mandatory courses that deliver HR content, integrating various values related to human rights in different courses in curriculum and the disadvantage of presenting HRE as an optional course. Besides, authorities should ensure that the practice of HRE is effective, especially concerning course delivery.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study may not be extrapolated to the general population, as only undergraduates of one university were sampled. In addition, the study assessed the level of knowledge and assertion of HR concerning student-relevant situations involving human rights violations, rather than the general knowledge of the HR principles as found in constitutions. Therefore, future research should be conducted to investigate the level of human rights awareness and assertion among undergraduate students in terms of specific rights such as civil rights, political rights, social and economic rights, and cultural rights. Also, since the course of study was found to significantly influence knowledge and assertion of rights, it is recommended that future studies investigate the impact of HRE implementation strategies.

CONCLUSION

There was overall below average to average HR knowledge rate of about 40%, and a low to moderate HR assertion rates of about 30%. Learning from peers and constitution handbooks represent the highest and least sources of HR knowledge. Course of study significantly influences both HR knowledge and HR assertion.

REFERENCES

- Adeakin, I. (2016). The Military and Human Rights violations in post-1999 Nigeria: Assessing the problems and prospects of effective internal enforcement in an era of insecurity. *Africa Security Review*, 25(2), 129-145.
- Adegbite, O. B., Oduniyi, O. O., & Aluko, A. O. (2020). International Human Rights Law and the victimisation of women by the Boko Haram Sect. *Nnamdi Azikiwe University Journal of International Law and Jurisprudence*, 11(2), 44-60.

- Adenuga, A. O., & Oyekenmi, A. A. (2023). Empirical investigation of Police Harassment of Private University Students in Ogun state, Nigeria. *Wukari International Studies Journal*, 7(3), 365-384.
- Amnesty International. (2019). *Nigeria: Human Rights Agenda*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/0431/2019/en/>.
- Amnesty International. (2022). *Amnesty International Human Rights Education 2021*. <https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/POL3257062022ENGLISH.pdf>.
- Amnesty International. (2025). *The state of the world's Human Rights*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol110/8515/2025/en/>.
- Banks, D. N. (2001). What is the state of Human Rights Education in K-12 Schools in the United States in 2000? A preliminary look at the National Survey of Human Rights Education. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED454134.pdf>.
- Blanchard, R. A. (2016). Mainstreaming Human Rights Education: What's radical about that? *Radical Teacher*, 104, 4-12.
- Brander, P. (2012). *Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education with young people*. Council of Europe.
- Brown, G. (2016). *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the 21st Century*. Open Book Publishers.
- Burrige, N., Chodkiewicz, A. K., Payne, A., Oguro, S. G., & Varnham, S. (2013). Human Rights Education in the School Curriculum. Report compiled for the Attorney General's Department. <https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/HREReportFinal22July.pdf>.
- Carraro, V. (2019). Promoting compliance with Human Rights: The performance of the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review and Treaty Bodies. *International Studies Quarterly*, 63(4), 1079-1093.
- Check Market (2020). <https://www.checkmarket.com/sample-size-calculator/>.
- Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers. (2010). *Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education: Recommendation Cm/Rec (2010) 7*. Council of Europe.
- Danieli, Y., Stamatopoulou, E., & Dias, C. (2018). *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Fifty Years and Beyond*. Routledge.
- Edge, M. (2019). Are UK newspapers really dying? A financial analysis of newspaper publishing companies. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 16(1), 19-39.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999). *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. Nigeria.
- Flowers, N. (2003). What is human rights education? In *A survey of human rights education* (pp. 107-118). Gütersloh, DE: Bertelsmann Verlag.
- Flowers, N. (2020). *Human Rights here and now: Celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. An introduction to human rights education*. <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-2/HRE-intro.htm>.
- Gearon, L. (2011). From Universal Declaration to World Programme 1948-2008: 60Years of Human Rights Education. In UNESCO, *Contemporary Issues in Human Rights Education* (pp. 39-103). Paris, France.

- Gerber, P. (2011). Education about Human Rights: Strengths and weaknesses of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training. *Alternative Law Journal*, 36(4), 245-249.
- Hammarberg, T., Mijatovic, D., White, A., Olsson, A. R., Haraszti, M., Boev, B., Bukovska, B., Korff, D., & Brown, I. (2011). *Human rights and a changing media landscape*. Council of Europe Publishing.
- Hoover, J. (2013). Rereading the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Plurality and contestations, not consensus. *Journal of Human Rights*, 12, 217-241.
- Humtsoe, A., & Kapoor, K. C. (2019). A study of Human Rights awareness among the post graduate students in relation to various non-cognitive variables. *International Journal for Research in Engineering Application and Management*, 4(10), 349-353.
- Ifesinachi, K., & Tarabinah, W. M. (2009). Universal Declaration of Human Rights Education and citizens rights enforcement in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. *Journal of International Politics and Development*, 5(1), 26-37.
- Kaur, S. (2006). *A comparison of senior secondary students on awareness about Human Rights in relations to sex, locality and stream of study*. M.Phil., Dissertation, HPU, Shimla.
- Landman, T. (2005). The political science of human rights. *British Journal of Political Science*, 35(3), 549-572.
- Lukose, L. P., & Mathur, A. (2019): Human Right and Social Media. In *Human Rights and Digital Age* (pp. 31-39). Bangladesh: ELCOP.
- Nosseck, H., Adoni, H., & Nimrod, G. (2015). Media Audiences is print really dying? The state of print Media use in Europe. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 365-385.
- Nwachukwu, S., Aghamelo, A., & Stanley, N. (2014). An account of Human Right violations in Nigeria (Pre-British, British and Post-Independence). *European Scientific Journal*, 10(10). <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2014.v10n10p%p>.
- Obiagu, A., & Nwaubani, O. (2020). The challenges of teaching for human rights in Nigeria: knowledge, pedagogy and activism. *Human Rights Education Review*, 3(2), 5-26.
- Odion-Akhaine, S. (2009). The student movement in Nigeria: Antinomies and transformation. *Review of African Political Economy*, 121, 427-450.
- Onuh, P. A. (2021). Nigeria's response to COVID-19: Lockdown policy and Human Rights violations. *Africa Security*, 14(4), 439-459.
- Osler, A., & Starkey, H. (2017). *Teacher education and human rights*. Routledge.
- Padmarathy, R. D., & Pallai, P. (2015). Human Rights awareness of University students: An investigation. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 4(4), 46-50.
- Pandey, S. (2005). Human Rights education in schools: The Indian experience. *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools*, 8, 95-107
- Ramirez, F. O., Suárez, D., & Meyer, J. W. (2007). The worldwide rise of human rights education. In *School knowledge in comparative and historical perspective: Changing curricula in primary and secondary education* (pp. 35-52). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Reardon, B. (2010). *Educating for Human Dignity: Learning about rights and responsibilities*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Sarate, B. (2011). A study of Human Rights awareness among senior secondary students in relation to gender area academic stream and personality make up. Phd Thesis, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla.
- Sharma, C., & Saini, R. (2019). Newspaper reading habit among the students of University College Kurukshetra: A case study. *Library Philosophy and Practice*, 2241. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/2241>.
- Smith, R. K. (2016). *Textbook on international Human Rights*. Oxford University Press.
- Steiner, H. J., Alston, P., & Goodman, R. (2008). *International human rights in context: Law, politics, morals: text and materials*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- UniRank (2020). Obafemi Awolowo University. <https://www.4icu.org/reviews/3456.htm>
- United Nations. (2025). Fifth phase (2025-2029) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education. Fifth phase (2025-2029) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education OHCHR. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4065275?v=pdf>.
- United Nations Human Rights. (2012). Human Rights Education in Primary and Secondary School Systems: A Self-assessment Guide for Governments. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/SelfAssessmentGuideforGovernments.pdf>
- United Nations General Assembly. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. UN General Assembly, 302,2. https://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/unhrights_1.pdf.
- United Nations General Assembly. (1949). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Vol. 3381), Department of State, United States of America.
- United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UNDHRET). (2011). Adopted by the General Assembly, Resolution 66/137, A/RES/66/137, 19 December 2011. [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/UnitedNationsDeclarationonHumanRightsEducationandTraining\(2011\).aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/UnitedNationsDeclarationonHumanRightsEducationandTraining(2011).aspx).
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2013). Human rights education. Document code: ED/ADG/2013/07. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000222123>.
- Waltz, S. (2001). Universalizing Human Rights: The role of small states in the construction of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 23(1), 44-72.
- Wilson, R. A., & Mitchell, J. P. (Eds). (2003). *Human Rights in global perspective: Anthropological studies of rights, claims and entitlements*. Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203506271>.
- Yagboyaju, D. A., & Akinola, A. O. (2019). Nigerian State and the crisis of governance: A critical exposition. *SAGE Open*, 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019865810>.
- Zanzoun, M. (2017). The use of social media in promoting human rights among speakers of English in Morocco: The Case of Facebook. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 5(9), 169-184.

APPENDIX

Survey Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

You are invited to participate in this study that seek information on **knowledge of constitutional provisions on fundamental human rights (FHR) and civic right assertion among University students**. Kindly answer all questions below; there is no right or wrong answer. Please be assured that all information obtained is for research purposes only and it will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Thank you.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Age as at last birthday (please be specific): _____
2. Faculty: _____
3. Department: _____
4. Level: _____
5. Gender: Male [] Female []

Section B: Knowledge of Fundamental Human Rights (FHR) Regarding Experiences On and Off the University Campus

Please answer Yes or No to the following statement

S/N	Statement	Yes	No
1.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of FHR in situations of sudden arrest		
2.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of FHR in situations of eviction by Landlord/Hall Warden		
3.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of FHR in situations of denial to write exams		
4.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of FHR in situations of sexual harassment		
5.	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of FHR in situations of harassment during nonviolent protest		
6	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of FHR in defence of establishment, membership and running of an association		
7	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of FHR in situations of physical assault by lecturer		
8	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of FHR in a situation of being hit at a zebra crossing		
9	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of FHR in situations where I am awarded a score that is not commensurate to my performance		
10	I know how to correctly respond via knowledge of FHR in situations of total absence or decrepit facilities e.g closed/dirty toilets, lack of water in hostel.		

Section C: Knowledge Of FHR regarding Experiences On and off University Campus

Please answer Yes or No to the following statement

S/N	STATEMENT	Yes	No
1.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of FHR if I'm suddenly arrested		
2.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of FHR if evicted by my Landlord/Hall Warden		
3.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of FHR if I'm denied to write exams		
4.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of FHR if I'm sexually harassed		
5.	I would react/respond based on knowledge of FHR if harassed when I'm involved in nonviolent protest		
6	I would react/respond based on knowledge of FHR if I'm harassed or denied the right to establishment, membership and/or running of an association		
7	I would react/respond based on knowledge of FHR if I'm physical assaulted by a lecturer		
8	I would react/respond based on knowledge of FHR if I'm hit at a zebra crossing		
9	I would react/respond based on knowledge of FHR if I'm awarded a score that is not commensurate to my performance		
10	I would react/respond based on knowledge of FHR if I'm unable to use facilities due to total absence or it being in bad shape e.g. closed/dirty toilets, lack of water in hostel		

Section D: Sources of Knowledge of Constitutional Provision on Fundamental Human Rights in Nigeria

Please indicate: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Indifferent(ID) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) in each of the statement

S/N	Statement	SA	A	ID	D	SD
1.	I gained knowledge of Fundamental Human Rights through reading of newspaper					
2.	I gained knowledge of Fundamental Human Rights through the Nigeria constitutional handbook					
3.	I gained knowledge of Fundamental Human Rights through social media (twitter, Facebook)					
4.	I gained knowledge of Fundamental Human Rights through Electronic media (TV, Radio)					
5.	I gained knowledge of Fundamental Human Rights through public engagement					
6	I gained knowledge of Fundamental Human Rights through classroom education					
7	I gained knowledge of Fundamental Human Rights through peers					

Section E: Strategies Engaged by Government/University Management to Strengthen the Knowledge of Rights and Freedoms among Students

Please answer Yes or No to the following statement

S/N	Statement	Yes	No
1.	Civic education topics in social studies as a subject offered in junior school, enhanced my knowledge of FHR		
2.	Government as a subject offered in senior secondary school, enhanced my knowledge of FHR		
3.	Civic education encapsulated in university courses, enhanced my knowledge of FHR		
4.	Government sponsored messages on electronic media and newspaper enhance my knowledge of FHR		