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## Availability of the Universal Human Rights Concepts in the Arabic Language Curricula in Palestine

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### Abstract

This study aimed at identifying the human rights concepts which should be included in the Arabic language textbooks of the primary schools in Palestine. It examines to which degree human rights concepts have been included in the Arabic language textbooks of the primary schools in Palestine. The study population consists of all the Arabic textbooks approved by the ministry of education for the academic year 2013-2014 in the primary schools, as the researchers' sample is 12 textbooks. They used the descriptive analysis to identify the concepts contained in the Arabic textbooks, and the content analysis was used to identify the human rights concepts contained in the study sample. It was found that there is a realistic perception to integrate the human rights culture within the Arabic language curriculum in Palestine. It was also found that the Arabic language textbooks of the first and second primary grade focus on rights of essential freedoms over social and economic rights.

Keywords: Arabic language curricula in Palestine; Human rights concepts;

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## 1. Introduction

All nations regardless of race or religion have shown interest in human rights; hence, the United Nations Charter was adopted in June 1945 which particularly shed light on human rights. Thereafter a special office for the coordination of human rights was established as part of the General Secretariat before forming the International Human Rights Commission which possessed broad authorities and adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was approved by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. This Declaration has been considered as an extremely crucial turning point in the realm of human rights in the modern era (Al Tueimat, 2001).

On 20 November 1959, the General Assembly adopted a Charter Document on Human Rights known as "the Declaration of the Rights of the Child". On 21 December 1976, the United Nations adopted a decision to proclaim 1979 as the international year of the child. On 20 November 1989, the General Assembly adopted the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and reaffirmed its support and keenness to make sure all the member states of the United Nations remain committed to the contents of the convention (Abu Shammala, 2012). UNRWA has adopted a human rights project in the elementary and preparatory schools since 2002 to educate students about human rights in the five areas of operation and provide them with the key concepts, general terms, principles, attitudes, values, and behaviours related to human rights and duties. Educating students about human rights principles aims to raise awareness about its significance as a thinking instrument and lifestyle, as it is considered a stepping stone to learning and acquiring freedom by providing the opportunity to learn critical, advanced and creating thinking and enabling the conscious minds to realise their unique circumstances and cultural identity, along with allowing the learners to open up to human cultures with a balanced personality. Hence, understanding human rights concepts is a constructive process implying accumulated knowledge and harmless practices. (Abu Shammala, 2012)

When a child grows up with an understanding and awareness towards human rights, the possibility of his interaction with such rights becomes greater during his growth process, further his readiness to live in a civil community which advocates for self-respect becomes a much easier task. On the other hand, understanding human rights concepts occurs in phases depending on the mental development and social maturity of the individual. Delayed awareness towards human rights and the inability to practice such rights at an early age shall cause educational and social problems which may be difficult to be solved in the future. Thus, it is necessary to secure a convenient environment for the child to enable him to realise the significance of human rights and what they require in terms of the willingness to undertake responsibilities and consciously participate in the human community. (Al Shami, 2002). The world view defines the school today as the effective means for leading change and development processes of human communities, as the school is directly and regularly responsible and concerned with bringing up and preparing citizens who enjoy the duties and rights of true citizenship which is based on conscious understanding and firm commitment towards the principles of democracy and human rights (Abdellatif, Yaqoub and Al Shami, 2002). Hence, the knowledge gained from the school through its curricula is considered highly reliable and rarely dubious, especially for children in the elementary education stage.

In this respect, various studies emphasize that the knowledge, values, principles and ethics learnt by the children in this early age stage shall be imprinted in their minds and memories and shall last for a long time especially if sufficient support and re-enforcement have been offered from the education institutions including families and schools. So, it is not a surprise that one may find researchers and educationalists who may view the formal educational curriculum as the starting point for imparting the principles of democracy, spreading the moral values and allowing the children to understand and respect the human rights. Several studies have been conducted to identify the human rights provided in the school textbooks. However, most Arabic studies pointed out that there has been very little interest in human rights issues. For example, in Morocco (Al Sayeh, 1995) and (Al Saidi, 2006), in Iran (Shikari, 2010), in Qatar (Busherbak, 1995), and in Palestine (Amer, 2013). Based on that, this study

aimed at identifying the human rights concepts which need to be included in the contents of Arabic language textbooks of the lower primary schools in Palestine. Also it aimed at identifying the degree to which human rights concepts have been included in the contents of those textbooks.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

Many studies have confirmed the lack of balance in the treatment of the curriculum to the issue of human rights. Sari (1995) showed that the most common concepts were the ones related to the right of self-determination, equality in the law, while the least common concepts included the right to own property, equal opportunity and health insurance. Additionally, Thabet (2006) revealed the great attention to the values of freedom and citizenship, as Meima (2008) emphasized the significant role of civic education in values of democracy and human rights. Qita (2010) showed that the political civil rights occupy first rank, while economic rights ranked second and the cultural and social rights occupied the third rank. Al Nakhala (2013), pointed out that the rights of development got the highest percentage to be included in the Arabic language books, while the rights of participation got the least percentage. Al Shami (2002), showed the effectiveness of a program she prepared for the development of human rights concepts in Islamic education curricula of the deaf students in Palestine, and the results of Abu Shamala (2012) displayed that the degree of human rights awareness, among the students of Gaza governorates reached up to 78.76 percent.

This indicates the importance of human rights and the need to be aware of them and work on orienting school students about them as well. We, the Palestinian people, had our rights violated before the eyes of the whole world, like what happened in the war of 2014 on Gaza, so such that necessitates that we educate students in the schools on human rights in order to ensure they are aware of such rights, and claim and defend them to be able to live in a civilised community which respects human rights and remains committed to their rights, duties and responsibilities. As part of our desire and keenness to raise our children and enable them to be aware of their rights and duties and seek to protect and share such rights with the other community members, and in response to the recommendations and suggestions of some pedagogic studies which indicate the need to pay attention to human rights, the researchers believes that it is imperative that human rights should be included in the Palestinian curricula in general and the Arabic curricula in particular, in addition to the need to educate students in the schools about such rights and raise their awareness in terms of knowledge, feelings, and practices, so this current analytical study emerged to identify the degree to which human rights concepts were included in the Arabic language curricula of the lower primary schools in Palestine.

This study is limited to analysing the Arabic language textbooks of the lower primary education in the Palestinian schools from the first to the sixth grade for the year 2014-2015, which is 12 textbooks. The researchers used the content analysis method to identify the Human Rights concepts contained in the study sample. They used a list of provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes 30 provisions, which have to be included in the contents of Arabic textbooks. They calculated the coefficient of concordance between the two analysts using Holsti formula (Teima, 1987:178), and the coefficient of concordance was found 94 percent which is a high coefficient that can verify the reliability of the analysis tool. Thereafter, the researchers measure the reliability of content analysis, and the coefficient of analysis reliability was 0.96 which is a high average that can verify the reliability of the analysis.

## **3. Study Sample and Methodology**

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#### 4. Results & Discussion

The researchers analysed the content of the Arabic textbooks of the lower primary school in Palestine, to find out the extent to which the human rights concepts are included in those textbooks, besides sum of all frequencies assigned to each of the human rights provision. The results are shown in the following table, as it shows the sum of all frequencies (F.) and order (O.) assigned to each human rights provision included in the study sample:

**Table 1. The sum of all (F.) and (O.) of human rights provision in the study sample**

Provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights	F.	O.
Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and safety of person	44	1
Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion	38	2
Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms, without distinction of any kind.	37	3
Everyone has the right to education.	35	4
Everyone has the right to work.	34	5
Everyone has the right to a standard of living ... motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.	32	6
All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.	28	7
Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.	28	7
Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality. Everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are solely determined by law.	23	9
Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.	22	10
Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.	16	11
Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation.	13	12
Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community ... Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.	13	12
Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.	11	14
Everyone is entitled in full equality with the others.	10	15
No one shall be held in slavery or servitude.	9	16
No one shall be subjected to torture ...	9	16
Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.	9	16
Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realised	8	19
Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.	7	20

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.	7	20
Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.	6	22
Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.	5	23
Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, access to public service, the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections.	5	23
Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the law.	4	25
No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.	4	25
Everyone has the right to a nationality.	3	27
Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial. No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed.	2	28
All are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.	1	29
Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family.	1	29

It is evident from the table that the lessons of Arabic textbooks taught to the students of the lower elementary school include all the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, the sum of frequencies of all provisions varies from one provision to another, and the frequencies gathered for the six grades vary in terms of the number of provisions included in each grade textbook. From the table, it can be inferred that the provisions which were assigned a number of frequencies from 10 to 44 are the ones related to freedoms and social rights.

This is a logical result as the rights of our Palestinian people are being continuously violated by the aggressive occupation before the eyes of the whole world. Therefore, the researchers' curricula focus on the provisions and rights which are related to freedoms so that the child can realize these rights and defend them to restore her/his freedom against the will of the Zionist usurpers, political pressure and the suffocating siege on our community which has a negative impact on the living conditions of families and their decreasing income levels. Such rights include the right to live and enjoy freedom, the right to free thought, conscience and religion, the right to work, the right to have a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, the right to education, and the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This is a natural matter due to the social conditions and all forms of pressure experienced by the Palestinian human. So, it is imperative that the curricula enhance human rights through introducing lessons which explain the rights related to the duties of students towards their community and the right to relocate and choose his residence within the borders of each state, their right to rest, leisure and social security, the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits, and the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property. These rights are necessary for the Palestinian human to be able to defend his land and holy places and restore his land and homeland which was arbitrarily seized after being expelled to all parts of the world and forced to abandon his homeland. This result is consistent with the results of Badi (2003) in France which highlighted the significance of freedom rights in the curricula, however this result was inconsistent with the results of Sari (1995) where provisions relating to freedoms in the curricula were not assigned a high number of frequencies.

The provisions that were assigned a low number of frequencies from 1 to 9 were the ones related to the economic. These provisions are related to some areas that may be of interest to adults;

therefore, the textbooks of lower primary school did not focus on such rights as the students fall in an age group of 6-12 years old. These provisions are not necessary for them to the extent that freedoms and citizenship provisions need to be strengthened, this could be due to the difficulty experienced by children at such age in terms of understanding these concepts. The researchers calculated the sum of frequencies of human rights provisions contained in the content of Arabic textbooks in each grade of the lower primary school and their frequency ratios, to identify which Arabic textbooks of the lower primary school in Palestine most include human rights provisions, as shown in Table 2:

**Table 2. The sum of Frequencies of human rights provisions included in the content of the study sample**

Grade	Total F. per each right	Total F. per each two grades	F. ration of each right %
First Grade	102	241	%51.9
Second Grade	139		
Third Grade	62	114	%24.6
Fourth Grade	52		
Fifth Grade	51	109	%23.5
Sixth Grade	58		
Sum of overall frequencies of each right	464	464	%100

As evident from the frequency distribution of provisions, the first and second grades are the lower primary school grades which most focus on provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where the sum of all provisions reached 241 with a frequency ratio of 51.9 percent, followed by the third and fourth grades where the sum of all frequencies reached 114 with a frequency ratio of 24.6 percent, followed by the fifth and sixth grades where the sum of all provisions reached 109 with a frequency ratio 23.5 percent. This indicates that the Palestinian curriculum developers had a clear vision and goal which included raising awareness of children towards their rights in order to instill and engrave such rights in their minds at a very early age so that they can firmly embrace and defend them. This result is consistent with the perspectives of psychologists and educationalists who emphasize the importance of this age group in shaping the future personality of humans.

This result was consistent with the result of Al Busaidi (2006), which emphasised that the human rights concepts were largely covered in the contents of Arabic textbooks of the first and second grades of primary school in the Sultanate of Oman, the results were consistent with the results of Qita (2010) which concluded that the civil and political rights were ranked first with a percentage of 91.47 percent, while the economic and development rights came in the second rank with a percentage of 87.96 percent, and the cultural and social rights were in the third rank with a percentage of 81.07 percent in terms of acquisition of the twelfth grade students of such rights which are included in the contents of the Islamic education curriculum of the high school in Khan Younis governorate.

However, the research results were not in line with the results of Al Saidi (2001) which concluded that the planners and developers of history curricula of the high school in Morocco were oblivious about human rights and values, the results were also inconsistent with the results of Sari (1995), which showed that the method in which such concepts were introduced in the textbooks was unprogressive and inappropriate to the age and cognitive levels of students. The results were not in line with the results of Thabet (2006), which concluded that the approach employed for handling human rights values in the textbooks of the preparatory school in Gaza was found to be imbalanced (Arabic, Islamic

education and social studies), and much emphasis has been given to the freedom value (12.2%) while the percentage of the citizenship value was (3.15%).

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

It can be concluded that the planners and developers of Arabic language textbooks had a realistic perception towards integrating the human rights in the school curricula in general, and the Arabic textbooks in particular. It is also concluded that there has been a fairly good coverage of the human rights concepts in the textbooks of the elementary education in Palestine, especially in the first and the second elementary grades. Additionally, it was found that the Arabic textbooks of the elementary education in Palestine emphasised on some concepts related to the essential human freedoms and general human rights, while less emphasised on the social and economic rights. In light of the study results, we recommend the need to integrate human rights concepts in all the Palestinian education curricula and on the general education level; the need to establish cooperation between the Palestinian ministry of education and the Palestinian universities to form a panel of specialists in politics, history, sociology, education and psychology to supervise all the human rights curricula and make sure they are appropriate to each general education stage including tertiary education provided that the contents of these curricula vary from one college to another; integration of the human rights concepts into the curricular activities (such as clubs – student associations – lectures – seminars ....) as part of the parallel curriculum so that the students are able to embrace such concepts at an early age; teaching human rights education subjects in the elementary stages through study materials and especially (Islamic education subject – Arabic language – civics – history) and emphasizing that the human rights education is a cultural and awareness-related issue and that it refers to practices carried out within the educational institution taking into account the interests and achievement levels of students; and using the audio-visual and artistic media education means such as the School Theater, school morning activities, and posters in clarifying the concepts of human rights education.

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