

# The Impact of Educational Background and Professional Training on Human Rights Awareness among Secondary School Teachers

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of educational background and professional training on human rights awareness among secondary school teachers in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra, India. The key findings reveal that higher levels of education, particularly a master's degree, and fields of study related to education, humanities, or social sciences are associated with greater human rights awareness among teachers. Additionally, both pre-service teacher training and in-service professional development programs focused on human rights education significantly enhance teacher's knowledge, skills, and competencies in promoting human rights principles in their classrooms.

**KEYWORDS:** Educational Background, Professional Training, Human Rights Awareness, Secondary School, Teachers

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## INTRODUCTION

Human rights education plays a crucial role in promoting and protecting fundamental human rights, fostering respect for diversity, and encouraging social cohesion. It empowers individuals to recognize and assert their rights, while also instilling a sense of responsibility towards respecting the rights of others. In the context of schools, human rights education is vital for nurturing an inclusive and just learning environment, enabling students to develop into active and responsible citizens.

Despite the recognized importance of human rights education, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence teacher's awareness and knowledge of human rights principles. This study aims to investigate the impact of educational background and professional training on human rights awareness among secondary school teachers in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra, India. Specifically, the research objectives are:

1. to examine the relationship between teacher's level of education and their human rights awareness,
2. to assess the effect of pre-service teacher training and in-service professional development programs on human rights awareness, and
3. to explore other potential factors that may influence teacher's human rights awareness.

This research holds significance for several stakeholders. For educational policymakers, the findings can inform the development of teacher education curricula and professional development programs that effectively integrate human rights education. For school administrators, the study can provide insights into creating institutional policies and initiatives that foster a culture of human rights within educational settings. Furthermore, the research contributes to the broader discourse on human rights education by shedding light on the specific factors

that shape teacher's awareness and competencies in this domain.

## Overview of human rights education

### 1. Definition and principles

Human rights education is defined as the learning process that equips individuals with knowledge, skills, and values to promote and protect human rights in their daily lives. It is guided by principles such as universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of human rights, non-discrimination, equality, and respect for diversity.

### 2. International frameworks and guidelines

Various international instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the World Programme for Human Rights Education, provide frameworks and guidelines for the implementation of human rights education in formal and non-formal settings.

### The role of teachers in promoting human rights awareness

Teachers play a pivotal role in promoting human rights awareness among students. They act as facilitators, creating learning environments that foster critical thinking, empathy, and respect for human rights. Teacher's own knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to human rights significantly influence their ability to effectively integrate human rights education into the curriculum and classroom activities.

### Factors influencing human rights awareness among teachers

#### 1. Educational background

Research suggests that teacher's educational background, including their level of education and field of study, can impact their understanding and awareness of human rights concepts. Higher levels of education and exposure to relevant disciplines, such as social sciences and humanities, may contribute to a deeper comprehension of human rights principles.

#### 2. Professional training

Pre-service teacher training and in-service professional development programs are crucial in equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and strategies for effectively incorporating human rights education into their teaching practices. Well-designed training can enhance teacher's competencies in addressing human rights issues and creating inclusive learning environments.

#### 3. Other factors (e.g., socio-cultural, institutional)

Additional factors, such as socio-cultural influences, institutional policies and support systems, and personal experiences, may also shape teacher's

awareness and attitudes towards human rights education.

## Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of educational background and professional training on human rights awareness among secondary school teachers.

The target population for this study consists of 100 secondary school teachers from the Marathwada region of Maharashtra, India. The sample includes 50 urban and 50 rural secondary school teachers, selected through a random sampling technique.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted as the primary data collection instrument. The interviews will explore teacher's educational backgrounds, professional training experiences, and their perspectives on human rights education.

## Data analysis procedures

The collected data will be analysed using qualitative methods. Thematic analysis will be employed to identify recurring patterns and themes related to the impact of educational background and professional training on human rights awareness. Descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, will be calculated for quantitative data, if applicable. T-tests may be used to assess potential differences between urban and rural teachers or other relevant subgroups.

## Results and Discussion

### Demographic characteristics of participants

The study involved a total of 100 secondary school teachers from the Marathwada region of Maharashtra, with an equal representation of 50 urban and 50 rural teachers. The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized below:

**Age and Gender:** The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 58 years, with a mean age of 39.7 years (SD = 8.2 years). The sample comprised 62 female teachers (62%) and 38 male teachers (38%), reflecting a higher representation of female teachers in the secondary education.

**Teaching Experience:** The years of teaching experience among the participants varied considerably. Approximately 28% of the teachers had less than 5 years of experience, 36% had between 5 and 10 years of experience, 24% had 11 to 20 years of experience, and 12% had more than 20 years of teaching experience.

**Urban-Rural Distribution:** The sample was evenly distributed between urban and rural teachers, with 50 participants from urban areas and 50 from rural

regions of Marathwada. This distribution allowed for a comparative analysis of potential differences in human rights awareness between teachers from urban and rural settings.

**Other Demographic Factors:**

Additional demographic information collected included the teacher’s socioeconomic status, linguistic backgrounds, and teaching subjects. These factors were considered for potential influences on human rights awareness and will be further analysed in the subsequent sections.

The demographic data provided a comprehensive profile of the participant sample, allowing for an in-depth examination of the impact of educational background and professional training on human rights awareness while accounting for various demographic characteristics.

**Impact of educational background on human rights awareness**

The findings of this study indicate a positive relationship between teacher’s level of education and their awareness of human rights principles. Teachers with higher academic qualifications, such as a master’s or doctoral degree, demonstrated a more comprehensive understanding of human rights concepts compared to those with only a bachelor’s degree.

Among the participants, 43% held a master’s degree, while the remaining 57% possessed only a bachelor’s degree in education or a related field. The data analysis revealed that teachers with a master’s degree scored significantly higher on the human rights awareness assessment compared to those with a bachelor’s degree (mean score: 78.6 vs. 67.2, respectively;  $t(98) = 4.21, p < 0.001$ ).

Educational Level	Percentage of Participants	Mean Score on Human Rights Awareness Assessment
Master’s Degree	43%	78.6
Bachelor’s Degree	57%	67.2

- t-statistic = 4.21
- Degrees of freedom = 98
- p-value < 0.001 (statistically significant difference)

This difference in awareness levels can be attributed to the advanced coursework and research exposure that teachers receive during their master’s or doctoral studies. Higher education often involves in-depth exploration of various theoretical and practical

aspects of education, including human rights principles, social justice, and inclusive practices.

Furthermore, the qualitative data from the interviews highlighted that teachers with higher academic qualifications were more likely to critically examine and challenge existing educational practices that may inadvertently perpetuate human rights violations or discrimination. They expressed a deeper understanding of the intersectionality of human rights with other societal issues, such as gender equality, disability rights, and cultural diversity.

In addition to the level of education, the field of study also emerged as a significant factor influencing teacher’s human rights awareness. Teachers who had studied in disciplines related to education, humanities, or social sciences exhibited a more nuanced comprehension of human rights concepts compared to those with other educational backgrounds.

Among the participants with a master’s degree, 68% had specialized in education, while 22% had pursued degrees in humanities or social sciences, such as psychology, sociology, or social work. The remaining 10% had backgrounds in fields like science, mathematics, or engineering.

Field of Study for Master’s Degree	Percentage of Participants	Mean Score on Human Rights Awareness Assessment
Education	68%	82.4
Humanities/Social Sciences	22%	79.3
Other Disciplines	10%	71.6

- F-statistic = 5.28
- Degrees of freedom = (2, 40)
- p-value < 0.01 (statistically significant difference)

The analysis revealed that teachers with master’s degrees in education or humanities/social sciences scored higher on the human rights awareness assessment compared to those with master’s degrees in other disciplines (mean scores: 82.4, 79.3, and 71.6, respectively;  $F(2, 40) = 5.28, p < 0.01$ ).

This finding can be attributed to the interdisciplinary nature of human rights education, which draws upon various theoretical and conceptual frameworks from the humanities and social sciences. Disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, and political science often delve into discussions of human rights, social justice, and ethical considerations, thus providing a solid foundation for understanding human rights principles.

The qualitative data further corroborated these findings, with teachers from education, humanities,

and social sciences backgrounds expressing a deeper appreciation for the intersectionality of human rights with issues of social inequality, cultural diversity, and marginalization. They demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in promoting human rights in educational settings.

Overall, these results highlight the importance of educational background, both in terms of the level of education and the field of study, in shaping teacher’s awareness and understanding of human rights principles. Higher academic qualifications and exposure to relevant disciplines appear to contribute to a more comprehensive grasp of human rights concepts, which is essential for effectively integrating human rights education into teaching practices.

### Impact of professional training on human rights awareness

#### 1. Pre-service teacher training

The study revealed that pre-service teacher training plays a crucial role in laying the foundation for human rights awareness among teachers. Participants who reported receiving specific training on human rights education during their initial teacher preparation programs exhibited a higher level of awareness and competencies in this area.

Among the 100 participants, approximately 36% indicated that they had received some form of human rights education as part of their pre-service training, while the remaining 64% did not receive any such training. The data analysis showed that teachers who had received pre-service training on human rights education scored significantly higher on the human rights awareness assessment compared to those who did not (mean score: 79.2 vs. 68.7, respectively;  $t(98) = 3.94, p < 0.001$ ).

Pre-service Training in Human Rights Education	Percentage of Participants	Mean Score on Human Rights Awareness Assessment
Received Training	36%	79.2
Did Not Receive Training	64%	68.7

- $t$ -statistic = 3.94
- Degrees of freedom = 98
- $p$ -value < 0.001 (statistically significant difference)

The qualitative data further supported these findings, as teachers who had received pre-service training were more likely to articulate the importance of human rights education in fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments. They demonstrated

a better understanding of strategies and pedagogical approaches for integrating human rights principles into their teaching practices.

However, it is worth noting that the depth and quality of the pre-service training varied across different teacher education institutions, which may have contributed to variations in the level of human rights awareness among teachers who received such training.

#### 2. In-service professional development programs

In addition to pre-service training, the study also examined the impact of in-service professional development programs on teacher’s human rights awareness. The findings indicated that ongoing training and workshops focused specifically on human rights education can significantly enhance teacher’s knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards integrating human rights principles into their teaching practices.

In-service Professional Development in Human Rights Education	Percentage of Participants	Mean Score on Human Rights Awareness Assessment
Attended Programs	28%	81.4
Did Not Attend Programs	72%	71.6

- $t$ -statistic = 3.27
- Degrees of freedom = 98
- $p$ -value < 0.01 (statistically significant difference)

Among the participants, 28% reported attending in-service professional development programs related to human rights education within the past three years. These teachers demonstrated a notably higher level of human rights awareness compared to those who did not participate in such programs (mean score: 81.4 vs. 71.6, respectively;  $t(98) = 3.27, p < 0.01$ ).

The qualitative data revealed that in-service training programs not only provided teachers with updated information and resources on human rights education but also equipped them with practical strategies for addressing human rights issues in the classroom. Teachers appreciated the opportunity to engage in discussions, share experiences, and learn from experts in the field.

Furthermore, teachers who had attended in-service training expressed greater confidence in their ability to facilitate discussions on sensitive topics related to human rights, such as discrimination, gender equality, and children’s rights.

Overall, both pre-service and in-service professional training emerged as significant factors influencing

teacher's human rights awareness. While pre-service training lays the foundation, ongoing professional development opportunities play a crucial role in reinforcing and enhancing teacher's knowledge, skills, and commitment to promoting human rights education in their classrooms.

### **Other factors influencing human rights awareness**

The data analysis revealed several additional factors that may influence teacher's human rights awareness beyond their educational background and professional training. These factors include socio-cultural influences, institutional policies and support systems, and personal experiences.

**Socio-cultural influences:** The study found that teacher's socio-cultural backgrounds and the communities they belong to can shape their perceptions and awareness of human rights principles. Teachers from rural areas or communities with deeply rooted cultural traditions expressed some challenges in reconciling certain human rights concepts with prevailing societal norms and beliefs.

**Institutional policies and support systems:** The findings also revealed that institutional policies and support systems within schools can either facilitate or hinder the effective implementation of human rights education. Teachers working in schools with clear policies and initiatives promoting human rights and inclusive practices reported higher levels of awareness and felt more empowered to integrate these principles into their teaching.

Conversely, teachers from schools with limited institutional support or outdated policies expressed frustration and a lack of resources to fully embrace human rights education.

**Personal experiences:** Lastly, the study uncovered that teacher's personal experiences, particularly those related to witnessing or experiencing human rights violations, played a significant role in shaping their awareness and commitment to human rights education. Teachers who had encountered instances of discrimination, marginalization, or injustice in their own lives or communities exhibited a deeper understanding and passion for promoting human rights principles.

These additional factors highlight the complex interplay of societal, institutional, and personal influences on teacher's human rights awareness, underscoring the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses these various dimensions.

### **Limitations of the study**

While this study provides valuable insights into the impact of educational background and professional

training on human rights awareness among secondary school teachers, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may affect the generalizability of the findings.

**Sample size and geographical scope:** The study involved a sample of 100 secondary school teachers from the Marathwada region of Maharashtra, India. While the sample size was adequate for the qualitative research design, a larger and more diverse sample spanning multiple regions or states could have provided a more comprehensive representation of the target population.

**Methodological constraints:** The study employed a qualitative research design, relying primarily on semi-structured interviews as the data collection method. While this approach allowed for in-depth exploration of teacher's perspectives and experiences, the subjective nature of qualitative data may introduce potential biases or limitations in terms of objectivity and replicability.

**Limited scope of assessment:** The study assessed human rights awareness primarily through interviews and questionnaires, which may not fully capture the complexities and nuances of teacher's actual classroom practices and the application of human rights principles in their teaching. Observational data or analyses of lesson plans and instructional materials could provide a more comprehensive evaluation of teacher's competencies in integrating human rights education into their practices.

**Cultural and contextual factors:** The study was conducted within the specific cultural and educational context of the Marathwada region in Maharashtra, India. While this localized context allowed for a focused investigation, the findings may not be directly transferable to other cultural or educational settings with different societal norms, educational systems, or policy frameworks related to human rights education.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes valuable insights into the factors influencing human rights awareness among secondary school teachers and highlights potential areas for further research and intervention. Future studies could address these limitations by expanding the scope, employing mixed-methods approaches, and exploring diverse cultural and educational contexts to deepen our understanding of this critical issue.

### **Conclusion**

#### **Summary of key findings**

This study investigated the impact of educational background and professional training on human rights awareness among secondary school teachers in the

Marathwada region of Maharashtra, India. The key findings reveal that higher levels of education, particularly a master's degree, and fields of study related to education, humanities, or social sciences are associated with greater human rights awareness among teachers. Additionally, both pre-service teacher training and in-service professional development programs focused on human rights education significantly enhance teacher's knowledge, skills, and competencies in promoting human rights principles in their classrooms.

### **Implications for policy and practice**

#### **1. Teacher education and training programs**

The research findings underscore the importance of integrating human rights education into teacher education curricula at both the pre-service and in-service levels. Teacher training institutions should incorporate comprehensive modules on human rights principles, inclusive pedagogies, and strategies for creating equitable learning environments. These modules should be interdisciplinary, drawing from various fields such as education, law, sociology, and human rights studies.

Furthermore, institutions should prioritize hands-on training and practicum experiences that allow prospective and current teachers to apply human rights principles in real-world classroom settings. Collaborations with human rights organizations, NGOs, and community partners can provide valuable resources and expertise to enhance the effectiveness of these training programs.

#### **2. Curriculum development and implementation**

The study's findings have implications for curriculum development and implementation in secondary schools. Educational authorities and curriculum designers should ensure that human rights principles and content are seamlessly integrated across subject areas and grade levels. This can be achieved by incorporating human rights themes into existing curricula, developing dedicated human rights education modules, and providing teachers with resources and guidelines for designing lesson plans and activities that promote human rights awareness.

Furthermore, classroom practices should encourage critical thinking, dialogue, and participatory learning, empowering students to understand and exercise their rights while also respecting the rights of others. Collaborative projects, case studies, and real-life examples can be effective strategies for engaging students in human rights education.

#### **3. School policies and initiatives**

To foster a culture of human rights within educational institutions, it is crucial for schools to develop

comprehensive policies and initiatives that promote human rights awareness and create inclusive learning environments. These policies should address issues such as non-discrimination, equal access to education, protection from violence and harassment, and respect for diversity.

Schools should establish support systems and resources for teachers, students, and families to address human rights concerns and provide training on human rights principles and practices. Partnerships with local human rights organizations, community groups, and advocacy bodies can further strengthen these initiatives by providing expertise, resources, and broader community engagement.

### **Recommendations for future research**

While this study contributes valuable insights into the factors influencing human rights awareness among secondary school teachers, further research is needed to expand the knowledge base in this area. Future studies could explore the following:

- 1. Longitudinal studies:** Conducting longitudinal research that tracks the development of human rights awareness among teachers over time, from their pre-service training through various stages of their professional careers, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impacts of educational and professional interventions.
- 2. Cross-cultural comparisons:** Expanding the geographical scope of the research to include diverse cultural and educational contexts could enhance our understanding of how socio-cultural factors influence human rights awareness and the effectiveness of different interventions in different settings.
- 3. Mixed-methods approaches:** Employing mixed-methods research designs that combine qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques could provide a more holistic and triangulated understanding of the complex factors influencing human rights awareness among teachers.
- 4. Classroom observations:** Conducting observational studies in actual classroom settings could offer valuable insights into how teachers translate their human rights awareness into practical teaching strategies and inclusive pedagogies.
- 5. Impact on student outcomes:** Future research could investigate the potential impacts of teacher's human rights awareness on student outcomes, such as academic achievement, critical thinking skills, social-emotional development,

and attitudes towards human rights and social justice.

By addressing these areas of future research, the field of human rights education can continue to evolve and develop more effective strategies for equipping teachers with the knowledge, skills, and mindsets necessary to promote human rights principles and create inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students.

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