

# A Quantitative Study on Human Rights Education: United Kingdom and Malaysian Experiences

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**H**UMAN RIGHTS education is not only about political literacy but is very much linked to economic and social issues. Human rights education in schools should enable students to develop the skills and attributes of active citizenship, and make individuals become tolerant of those who are different. Students should be equipped with the capacity to transfer the knowledge and understanding gained in the school community to the wider world. The study of human rights and citizenship can help develop empathy and understanding of people from different cultures and societies. Hicks and Holden (1995, 2007) maintain that through human rights and citizenship education students learn about issues such as poverty and environment and are encouraged to participate in school activities and to positively engage with the local and international communities. As Ross (2007, 2) states with reference to the role of citizenship and human rights education:

It is the relationship between the individual and society, between the self and others, and our curriculum must reflect this: it must help the individual understand both their own identity and the nature of society, and, most importantly, how to manage the complex relationship of rights and responsibilities that exist between the two.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2009) promotes human rights education that would contribute to the development of individuals who possess the skills to interact in society by providing students with the abilities to accompany and produce societal changes as a way to empower people, improve their quality of life by participating in processes that decide on social, cultural and economic policies.

Young people can learn the fundamental principles of human rights and citizenship in a subject in primary and secondary school system. Alderson argues that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

is “an ideal basis for citizenship education” and argues that “rights are central to concepts of citizenship and democracy in clarifying the standards which the citizens agree to share” (Kiwan, 2005, page 37).

### **Teaching about Human Rights: International Approaches**

Human rights education started to develop after World War II, with initiatives taking place in different parts of the world. In Japan and Taiwan (in 1997) new curriculums were introduced in civic and moral education to teach about democracy and to encourage active citizenship. The 1980s saw proposals on the introduction of human rights education in many countries in Europe, North America and Latin America (Osler & Starkey, 2006). By late 1990s, these proposals became a reality in the United Kingdom with the introduction of the Citizenship curriculum, which included human rights education. In Hong Kong and China, with the “One Nation, Two Systems” (Law, 2004), citizenship education was introduced to focus on democratic citizenship after Hong Kong was handed over to China in 1997. In Korea, human rights education was introduced in 2000 (Lee) and in Singapore in 2001 (Boon Yee Sim & Print, 2005). Citizenship education was later extended to include teachers, policymakers and education officials to strengthen the understanding of this topic. Citizenship education, including elements of human rights education, was also introduced in Australia, Indonesia and Thailand.

### **Human Rights Education in the United Kingdom**

During the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, civics education attempted to instil a sense of belonging and create responsible citizens. Civics and later, citizenship education, predominantly concentrated on teaching about the Constitution, war and the monarchy and was designed to encourage patriotic loyal citizens. It grew out of the work of the League of Nations in 1918 which was created to protect the rights of nations, especially small nations, affirmed the duty of states to maintain fair and humane treatment of labor and to secure just treatment of the native inhabitants of their territories (Wright, 1954, pages 46-47).

The League formed an education committee to “promote teaching about the League and international affairs generally” (Heater, 2001, 115). During this time, the term “education for world citizenship” was coined to indicate this approach to citizenship education (Heater, 2001, page 115). The last few decades have seen civics and citizenship education take many forms. An attempt to include citizenship education as a cross-curricular theme in the 1980s died as it was non-statutory and other National Curriculum subjects took precedence. Human rights education became associated with citizenship education in the 1990s when there was once again a call for education which helped prepare young people for a responsible and active role in society. The work of Bernard Crick was influential here. He was supported by the government of the time to find ways of redressing the political alienation of youth and the perceived lack of values among the young (Frazer, 2000; Kerry, 2003). The Crick Report of 1998<sup>1</sup> cited the low turn-out of the 18-24 age groups in the 1992 and 1997 elections as alarming (Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998; Heater, 2001). Research carried out by Halpern at the same time demonstrated that citizenship education was needed in the school curriculum and that there would be support for its introduction (Halpern, John et al., 2002).

Meanwhile, in 1997, the Council of Europe embarked upon the Education for Democratic Citizenship project to focus on the meaning of participatory democracy and the status of citizens within Europe (Derricott, 2000). The movement in the United Kingdom (UK) was thus part of a wider European and international drive to ensure effective political and social education. In 2002, citizenship education was introduced into the National Curriculum in UK, with an explicit reference to understanding rights and responsibilities. Thus human rights education was firmly embedded in this new curriculum subject (Gearon, 2003). Starkey (2000) who had long worked in the field of human rights education welcomed this inclusion. He saw this as part of the government’s attempt to create a multicultural society based on a “revitalized civic culture and to promote inclusiveness” (page 52) and to encourage and enable students to learn about and become engaged with political issues both locally and internationally.

While this research focuses specifically on human rights education, and the ways in which schools foster respect for these rights, it is located within

the broader framework of citizenship education as this is where it sits predominantly in the UK.

### **Curriculum and Practice**

Citizenship and human rights education is now widely recognized in the UK as an essential part of education of all young people. As noted above, citizenship education has been a statutory National Curriculum subject in UK for all young people in key stages 3 and 4 (ages 11 to 16 years) since 2002 (Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998). It is an important dimension of work in primary schools at key stages 1 and 2 (ages 5 to 10 years) where many schools choose to deliver it based on the non-statutory framework for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and citizenship (Flew, 2000, 18). It also features in post-16 education and training where citizenship development projects have provided a range of different experiences for young people throughout the country, backed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) which has designed guidance for post-16 citizenship (National Foundation of Educational Research). The Advisory Group for Citizenship (1998, 40-41) initially identified three strands to citizenship education:

- **Social and moral responsibility**

Students learning from the very beginning about self-confidence and socially and morally responsible behavior both in and beyond the classroom, both towards those in authority and towards each other.

- **Community involvement**

Students learning about and becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of their communities, including learning through community involvement and service to the community.

- **Political literacy**

Students' learning about and how to make themselves effective in public life can be achieved through knowledge, skills and values.

Discussions continued after the introduction of citizenship education about the teaching of diversity and identity, which were considered as ne-

glected key areas of the citizenship curriculum. (Ajegbo, Kiwan et al., 2007). As a result, the 2007 revision of the National Curriculum saw citizenship education revised to include democracy and justice, human rights and responsibilities, and identity and diversity as the three overarching concepts. Thus issues of diversity were foregrounded and human rights education continued to sit firmly at the center of citizenship education (Ajegbo, Kiwan et al., 2007). The current citizenship education curriculum introduces students to the concepts of democracy and justice, rights and responsibilities and informed social action. This includes discussion of the UK's varying national, regional, religious and ethnic identities so that students consider the multicultural nature of British society and what it means to be British.

The debate about whether or not the current curriculum for citizenship is appropriate for a multi-ethnic, multi-faith society continues. A report in the *Times Educational Supplement* on 13 July 2007 entitled "Secularist spoils citizenship" argued that the teaching of citizenship without a context of religion encourages terrorism and religious extremism. Part of the blame was laid at the feet of Bernard Crick, the "founder" of the 2002 curriculum, who was described as a hard core secularist (Hilbourne, 2007). This issue about the extent to which citizenship and human rights education should include reference to religion, and how it should be addressed in faith-based schools, is a key part of this thesis. This reflects current debates in the UK as a whole. As Amin (2002) notes in Flint (2007), "issues of ethnicity and religion are prominent in contemporary public discourses in the UK around immigration, residential segregation, religious and political extremism and conceptualisations of citizenship and national identity" (page 252).

The introduction of citizenship education has been tracked by Kerr (2005), among others. He notes the influence of personal, family, community and cultural factors on students' understanding of citizenship-related issues and indicates that these remain significant challenges to the successful implementation of this subject. Others have noted further obstacles, one of which relates to teachers being expected to cover too wide a ground in the time available (Mansell & Hilbourne, 2007). It is seen as a real challenge for classroom teachers to be able to cover the many areas of the citizenship curriculum, which includes human rights education. With regards to issues of identity and diversity, there is evidence that many teachers avoid issues related to religion because they lack the subject knowledge and skills to deal confidently with these areas (Holden, 2004).

Research by Holden (2004) reveals the lack of confidence of teachers to teach controversial issues central to citizenship education and human rights education and were concerned about the potential views of parents. They are concerned about their own role and the extent to which they are allowed to voice their own opinions. She concludes that better-trained teachers are needed, with the skills to facilitate debates and communicate with parents. While research by Chamberlaine (2003) indicates that pupils are not engaged in political processes, Kerr, investigating student participation in school activities and their attitudes towards civic concepts, finds citizenship education having a central role in young people's lives which can increase participation. He concluded that, "by age 14, they are already part of a political culture in society" (Kerr, Lines et al., 2002, page 166). There is thus a need for further research into the ability of citizenship and human rights education to increase student participation both in school and community contexts, and raise awareness of human rights and responsibilities in young people.

### **Human Rights Education in Malaysia**

With the ratification by Malaysia of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on 17 February 1995, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia assumed the responsibility of developing a human rights education program and set up an Education Working Group in 2000 based on the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia Act 1999 (Act 597). The Commission was directly under the Prime Minister's Department and answerable to the Parliament. Following this, in 2002, a committee was set up by the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia which included academics, former judges and retired government officers. This group, named "Human Rights Education in School," was created to investigate the extent to which human rights were being practiced in schools and the extent to which students, teachers and administrators understood human rights issues. The committee's research findings served to inform the subsequent recommendations and planning for the delivery of human rights education in the school system.

This nationwide research was administered in 2002-2003 and involved forty secondary schools in urban and rural areas. Four types of schools participated - mixed, single sex, technical and faith-based schools. The re-

search focused on the participants' awareness of the existence of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children's rights and responsibilities, human rights practices in schools and fundamental human rights as outlined in the Malaysian Constitution. The findings from the research indicated that many students and teachers did not have a good level of knowledge of human rights education. SUHAKAM submitted suggestions to the Ministry of Education on ensuring that teachers, administrators, school support staff and education officials had a good understanding of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in order that these rights might be upheld (Human Rights Commission of Malaysia, 2006). This included holding more seminars, conferences, dialogues and training.

### **Curriculum in Theory and Practice**

The National Curriculum for primary and secondary schools was introduced between 1983 and 1989 in Malaysia. One area of focus was the teaching of values. The principal objectives of the subject of moral education at primary school were:

- to enable pupils to be conscious of, and understand, the norms and values of the society;
- to appreciate these values and the use them as a basis for making decisions in everyday life;
- to practice moral habits and behavior in everyday life.

These objectives are meant to enable students to be rational in making decisions and taking action (Haris Md Jadi, 1997). However, at secondary schools students have:

- to strengthen and practice habits and behavior in accordance with the moral attitude and values acquired at the primary school;
- to be conscious of, understand and appreciate, the norms and values of Malaysian society;
- to develop rational thinking based on moral principles;
- to give reasonable justification based on moral consideration when making a decision;
- to use moral consideration based on moral principles as a guide in the practice of everyday life (Haris Md Jadi, 1997).

The principles underlying the teaching of morals and values in Malaysia are based on religion. The official religion in Malaysia is Islam and its philosophical approach implicitly underpins the system. The challenges and complexities of this situation come to the fore when human rights issues arise which involves Sharia or Islamic jurisprudence. While the theory of human rights can be learned at school, in practice the implementation of human rights can conflict with obligations associated with religion. For this reason, the government indicated reservation<sup>2</sup> on certain provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Child in signing the instrument.<sup>3</sup>

Although the National Curriculum included the teaching of values, the Education Bill of 1995 rejected the need for citizenship to be included in the curriculum as a separate subject; it was decided instead to embed it within the history curriculum. Thus, for a decade, priority was given to the teaching and learning of history, with citizenship education seen as of secondary importance (Haris Md Jadi, 1997). It was not until 2005 that civics and citizenship was separated from history subject and made a subject in its own right which allowed human rights education to have more exposure. There are key concepts which underpin the teaching of citizenship in Malaysia and which have distinct links to citizenship and human rights education elsewhere. These have been identified as:

- community (freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of information);
  - nation-building (equality and equal opportunities between genders and races);
  - topical and global issues (freedom of religion and culture).
- (Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center, 2006).

Thus human rights education is located partly within moral education and partly within citizenship education. In both subjects, students learn about their rights and the responsibility to respect the rights of others, including those with different race and gender.

The main aim of this research is to compare and contrast the human rights education curriculums in UK and Malaysia. The main research question is: What curriculums relate to human rights education in UK and Malaysian school systems?



## **Research Contexts and Research Method**

The research took place in four schools, two in UK and two in Malaysia: one secular secondary school and one faith-based secondary school in each country. Faith-based schools were included in this study because researchers wanted to examine whether the curriculum and practices of human rights education and students' understanding and behavior were influenced by the faith context. This sample was an opportunist sample (Wellington, 2000) using the connections of supervisors in UK and personal connections in Malaysia. However, within these parameters, the sample was carefully selected to meet the aims of this research. In Malaysia, the faith-based school was a fully religious, mostly Islamic school and the secular school had children from the majority Malay race who are also Muslims. In UK, the faith school was a Church of England/Catholic school and the secular school had on roll children from different faiths or with no particular religious affiliation. Questionnaire surveys were used to explore the views and experiences of two hundred forty one students in English and Malaysian schools. The questionnaire was structured using a Likert scale requiring students to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. Students could choose one of five different responses: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree and don't know. In all four schools, the questionnaires were administered at the beginning of the school day before lessons began.

## **Research Analysis and Findings**

Analysis of the questionnaire was carried out by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequency and cross-tabulations were produced. The questionnaire was distributed in two schools in UK and two schools in Malaysia. In each country, one secular and one faith-based school were chosen. The questionnaire was designed for students between 13 and 14 years old and was completed by Year 8 and 9 students in UK and Form 1 and 2 students in Malaysia.

## **Knowledge of human rights in UK**

Table 1 below describes the knowledge of human rights displayed by the students in the two schools in UK. The rights referred to are those relating

to their understanding of the rights of children per se, the right to their own beliefs and religion, right to education, participation rights, right to play, rights of children with disabilities, freedom from abuse, and animal rights. As the table below shows, over four-fifths of the children completing this questionnaire know that children, not just adults, have human rights and have a right to their own values and beliefs; that everyone has the right to have a basic standard of living; that every child has the right to relax and play and that children with disabilities have a right to access special care.

**Table 1: Knowledge of human rights in UK**

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
<b>1. Human rights include the rights of children</b>	%	%	%	%	%
Secular School (n=47)	66	34	0	0	0
Faith-based School (n=52)	54	39	2	2	4
<b>2. Everyone has the right to a basic standard of living</b>					
Secular School	51	49	0	0	0
Faith-based School	64	35	0	0	2
<b>3. Everyone has the right to her/his own beliefs and religion</b>					
Secular School	62	34	0	2	2
Faith-based School	78	18	2	2	0
<b>4. Every child has the right to primary school education</b>					
Secular School	65	30	4	0	0
Faith-based School	79	19	0	0	2
<b>5. Every child has the right to say what she/he wants</b>					
Secular School	52	35	7	4	2
Faith-based School	39	44	4	4	10
<b>6. Every child has the right to relax and play</b>					
Secular School	74	26	0	0	0
Faith-based School	56	33	10	0	2
<b>7. Children with disabilities have the right to special care</b>					
Secular School	68	21	4	4	2
Faith-based School	81	19	0	0	0

<b>8. Teachers have the right to hit children</b>					
Secular School	0	2	11	79	9
Faith-based School	4	6	10	80	0
<b>9. Parents have the right to hit children</b>					
Secular School	4	7	24	52	13
Faith-based School	2	19	29	40	10
<b>10. Human rights are more important than animal rights</b>					
Secular School	15	11	37	22	15
Faith-based School	2	31	29	17	21

During the follow-up interviews, most students in both schools demonstrated that they had some understanding of the basic concepts of human rights. One student in the faith-based school commented that “it’s not right to judge people by the colour of their skin.” This same student went on to say “different people have different colored skins and some like to judge.” Another student agreed that “everyone should be treated the same no matter what race they are and religion” while a third student explained that human rights meant “treating people with respect and not different.”

Students interviewed in the secular school gave different interpretations of the meaning of human rights. For example, one student gave the answer “adults or teachers are not allowed to hit children in school or stuff like that.” Another Year 9 student said “human rights are something that can protect you from like laws and stuff.” A third explained that rights were “something that everyone’s entitled to, that everyone has the right to do something, like play a sport or something.”

These responses indicate that the students interviewed have a broad and varied knowledge and understanding of human rights issues and can make connections between the concepts in questions 1-3. It would be interesting to know whether the students are aware of the Convention on the Rights of the Child because the data would suggest that they are aware of Article 6 (the right to life) and Article 14 (right to practice own belief and religion).

However, when these students were interviewed they did not mention anything about freedom of belief or religion despite the majority of them agreeing with this statement in the questionnaire. This is particularly interesting in the faith-based school context. The right to one’s own religion and beliefs (question 3) is fundamental in ensuring tolerance in society and the

implications of this will be discussed further. However, students from both types of school indicated that they were willing to accept new friends with different faiths. One of the students said “I think it is good to learn stuff about people like that” which indicates an awareness of the benefits of a diverse society.

Regarding the child’s right to a primary education, the data collected in response to statement 5 indicates that 85 percent of secular school students and 98 percent of faith-based school students agreed with this statement. The figures are similar for the statement “every child has the right to say what [she/he] want[s]” with most students agreeing. The number of students disagreeing was small – 11 percent in the secular school and 8 percent in the faith-based school. One possible explanation for the high number of students agreeing with this statement is that both cohorts experience a high degree of freedom of expression in school and in the home. The higher figure for the secular school may also be a reflection of the differing school ethos concerning students’ rights and responsibilities, school rules and belief systems that enable the students in the secular school to have more voice within the school.

The statement “Every child has the right to relax and play” elicited a high level of agreement from students in both schools. 100 percent of students in the secular school agreed with this statement and 90 percent in the faith-based school. One explanation for the high level of agreement with this statement may be that play and relaxation are at the core of most young people’s lives and thus regarded as a fundamental right that all children should have.

Most students in both schools agreed with the statement “Children with disabilities have the right to special care.” All students from the faith-based school agreed with this statement, while the vast majority in the secular school did so too. These findings indicate that students in both schools are aware of the right of children with disabilities to receive special care. Statements 9 and 10 relate to the right to freedom from abuse and sought to find out whether students believe that adults have the right to use corporal punishment. The data indicate that the majority of students in both schools are aware that teachers do not have the right to hit them. However, one in five students in the faith-based school believes it is acceptable for parents to do so. Interestingly, there are no responses in the “don’t know” column regarding the right of teachers to hit children from the faith-based school

students; however 10 percent appear not to know if corporal punishment is allowed by parents.

The data indicate that students in the faith-based school are more likely to accept being hit by their parents than those from the secular school. This suggests that, although most students have a clear understanding of their human rights and are aware that hitting children is a violation of their rights, some are willing to accept this when it happens at home.

The statement “Human rights are more important than animal rights” produced a highly mixed response in both schools. In the secular school, the number of students who disagreed with the statement was more than double those who agreed. The number of students in the secular school answering “don’t know” was also relatively high at 15 percent. The number of students in the faith-based school disagreeing with the statement was also higher than those agreeing but by a smaller margin of 13 percent. However, the number of students answering “don’t know” (21 percent) was higher than in the secular school.

Domesticated animals are common in the UK with many families possessing dogs and/or cats and other small animals. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, in existence since 1824, regularly prosecutes perpetrators of abuse of animals and these cases frequently receive coverage in the local and/or national media. There is thus a high level of awareness concerning animal rights issues in UK. This prominence of animal rights in everyday life may partially explain why so many students in the English schools disagreed or were unsure whether human rights were more important than animal rights. In conclusion, the survey of students’ knowledge of human rights indicates that there are few differences in the level of understanding between students in the secular and faith-based school. The main differences between students in the two schools occur in their attitudes and beliefs regarding corporal punishment by parents and teachers.

### **Knowledge of human rights in Malaysia**

Table 2 describes the knowledge of human rights expressed by the students in the two schools in Malaysia. As before, the focus is on the rights deemed most relevant to human rights education and thus some questions considered not relevant have been omitted.

Table 2: Knowledge of Human Rights in Malaysia

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
<b>1. Human rights include the rights of children</b>	%	%	%	%	%
Secular School (n=35)	31	46	3	0	20
Faith School (n=67)	31	36	8	6	19
<b>2. Everyone has the right to a basic standard of living</b>					
Secular School	31	51	0	3	14
Faith-based School	34	45	3	0	18
<b>3. Everyone has the right to [her/his] own beliefs and religion</b>					
Secular School	65	24	0	6	6
Faith-based School	55	37	2	0	6
<b>4. Every child has the right to primary school education</b>					
Secular School	51	31	9	0	9
Faith-based School	58	30	8	2	3
<b>5. Every child has the right to say what [she/he] want[s]</b>					
Secular School	24	65	6	0	6
Faith-based School	22	49	10	6	12
<b>6. Every child has the right to relax and play</b>					
Secular School	54	40	0	0	6
Faith-based School	47	41	8	0	5
<b>7. Children with disabilities have the right to special care</b>					
Secular School	66	29	3	0	3
Faith-based School	58	30	8	0	5
<b>8. Teachers have the right to hit children</b>					
Secular School	9	57	26	6	3
Faith-based School	12	40	21	10	16
<b>9. Parents have the right to hit children</b>					
Secular School	26	60	6	3	6
Faith-based School	31	51	8	2	9
<b>10. Human rights are more important than animal rights</b>					
Secular School	13	37	13	7	29
Faith-based School	24	31	24	5	16

Analysis of the responses to the first statement “Human rights include the rights of children” is interesting because an average of 72 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement in both schools. However, nearly 20 percent of students in both schools responded “don’t know” and a small number did not agree with the statement. This would suggest that not all students in Malaysia are aware of child rights and this may be an indication of the newness of the subject within the Malaysian education system.

The majority of students agreed with the statement “Everyone has the right to a basic standard of living” but there were also students who did not know if this was correct. This raises some concerns about how much knowledge some students have about basic human rights. However, the “don’t know” responses might be due to the difficulty in understanding the concept of a basic standard of living for some students. Using the term “basic living standards” assumes an understanding of the disparity between living standards which some students may not have.

The data relating to the statement “Everyone has the right to [her/his] own beliefs and religion” indicates that 89 percent of students in the secular school and 92 percent of students in the faith-based school agreed with this statement. One explanation for this might be that these issues are fully addressed in the school curriculum in both schools. It is also important to note here that Malaysia is a multicultural society with three major religions and it is a societal expectation and norm that religious tolerance is exercised and upheld by its citizens. However, there are continuing racial tensions between ethnic groups and there are concerns about fundamentalist teaching in some faith-based schools. Thus, it is encouraging that the knowledge base of these students did not appear to reflect such tensions.

Statements 5, 6, 7 and 8 are related to children’s rights to education, freedom of speech, relax and play and the rights of children with disabilities. The vast majority of students from both faith-based and secular schools agreed with these statements. However, a small percentage of students did not know if children have these rights. This response may be due to the students’ lack of knowledge of child rights or their difficulty in fully understanding the statements. The percentage that disagreed with the statement is similar to that of the “don’t know” responses. The reasons for these responses were explored further during student interviews.

The high percentage of students who agreed with the statements would seem to indicate that students in Malaysia are becoming more aware of child rights issues. The data illustrate that this is especially true for the rights of children with disabilities, where student opinion reflects that of Malaysian society in general where support for special educational provision for children with disabilities has become the norm. Statements 9 and 10 relate to the right to protection from abuse. The data show that more than 80 percent of students believed that parents had a right to hit their children. There was a mixed response regarding teachers hitting children. Half of the students in both schools believed that teachers have this right; however a sizeable minority (approximately 30 percent) disagreed. A considerable number of students from both schools responded that they did not know their rights with regard to this issue. The data suggest that, despite most students being aware of their right not to be physically abused, they are more willing to accept corporal punishment from parents.

It must be noted that in contrast to English schools, it is accepted practice that teachers in Malaysia have the right to use corporal punishment, though as a last resort, as part of school disciplinary policy. It is also common practice for corporal punishment to be part of disciplinary practices within the home and family.

50 percent of the secular school students agreed with the statement "Human rights are more important than animal rights." 20 percent disagreed and 29 percent said they did not know. In the faith-based school, 55 percent of students agreed with the statement, though a higher percentage than in the secular school 29 percent disagreed. There was also a high number of students who ticked "do not know." The number of students in Malaysia who prioritized human rights over animal rights was much greater than in the UK. The low profile of the animal rights issue in Malaysia may explain these responses. Currently this issue is not discussed in Malaysian society and is not on the political agenda. The rights of animals remain insignificant compared to the need to ensure full human rights in Malaysia and as such are unlikely to be considered by most students. It may be that once human rights are fully addressed Malay society will turn its attention to animal welfare and animal rights.

During the interviews with the students the interviewer found it difficult to obtain information from students about their understanding of human rights and their knowledge appeared limited in contrast to the ques-



tionnaire responses. One group of students, when asked about what they knew about human rights, said that they “didn’t know.” Another group gave only one or two-word answers to questions and when asked to explain their answers further declined to do so stating that they “didn’t know very much.” Students appeared unable or unwilling to elaborate on their ideas and gave short responses such as “freedom”, “freedom from oppression” and “freedom from colonialism.” In conclusion, students seemed more confident to demonstrate their understanding of human rights during completion of the questionnaire than in the subsequent interview sessions where they were reticent about discussing their views at any length. It may be that they lacked confidence to discuss the concepts during the interview session.

### **Discussion and Conclusion: Comparative knowledge of human rights in UK and Malaysia**

This section highlights interesting findings (either similarities or differences) between schools in the two countries or between faith-based and secular schools. The discussion focuses on whether the influential factor is the faith or the country context. Upon comparing the research data from the two countries it can be seen that a large percentage of students in both countries understand that children have basic human rights. However, in the Malaysian survey there were approximately 20 percent of students who felt that they did not have the knowledge or information needed to answer the questions. When asked about the right to a basic standard of living and the right to freedom of belief and religion there were no real differences between the views of students in each country. However, in Malaysia between 14 percent and 18 percent of students answered “did not know” compared to a very small percentage on this question in the UK survey. This again may be a reflection of the relative newness of human rights education in Malaysia compared to the UK.

The statements regarding the right to education, freedom of expression and the right to play and relax elicited similar findings in both countries. Overall, majority of the students agreed with these statements. However, there was a significant percentage of students from faith-based schools in both countries who did not agree or did not know if children had a right to say what they want. This can probably be explained by the students’ experience of having less freedom of expression at home and school because of

strict moral and religious practices, which limits their right to disagree and/or express opinions. Most students in UK believed that teachers and parents do not have the right to use corporal punishment, though this view was not so strongly held among the faith-based school students. In Malaysia, the picture is markedly different. One-third of students in both schools disagreed and two-thirds agreed or strongly agreed with the right of teachers to use corporal punishment. 80 percent of students from both schools also agreed or strongly agreed that it was acceptable for their parents to hit them which contrasted sharply with the view expressed by the English students.

These variances may be explained by the cultural differences between UK and Malaysia. In Malaysia, it is a norm for parents to physically chastise their children; whereas in UK this practice is becoming culturally unacceptable. As discussed earlier, it is also the norm for physical punishment to be part of the disciplinary process in Malaysian schools, whereas in UK this is illegal. UK students were much more concerned about animal rights than students in Malaysia. Only around a quarter of secular school students and a third of faith-based school students in UK agreed with the statement that "Human rights are more important than animal rights." In Malaysia, over half of the students surveyed in each school agreed with the statement. As previously discussed, the issue of animal rights does not really exist as such in Malaysian society and is therefore less likely to be of concern. Responses from the faith-based schools showed that 46 percent of the English students also disagreed with the statement as compared to 29 percent in Malaysia.

### **Concluding Statement**

It can be observed that knowledge of human rights among students is greater in UK but students from the faith-based schools in both countries are less sure of their right to voice an opinion and to freedom from abuse. These findings are important because they suggest that teacher education and training need to address the practical realities of implementing the concept of inclusion of human rights education rather than just its theories and principles. Concerns about how new teachers are going to implement human rights education practices in situations with limited resources, large classes and high teaching loads would seem to be most effectively focused in pre-service training. This is obviously a complex area, though overall the more

positive teachers are about including human rights education during initial training they tend to be more accepting and accommodating in practice.

Also, further research is needed on how the benefits of using human rights education as an instrument to focus on child rights generally and rights of children with disabilities particularly in order to safeguard their interest will lead to quality education.

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## **Endnotes**

1 Advisory Group on the Teaching of Citizenship and Democracy in Schools, Education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in schools, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, September 1998, full report available at [www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/sites/teachingcitizenship.org.uk/files/6123\\_crick\\_report\\_1998\\_o.pdf](http://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/sites/teachingcitizenship.org.uk/files/6123_crick_report_1998_o.pdf)

2 “A ‘reservation’ allows a State to disagree with a provision in a treaty. The State can still approve the treaty as a whole, with reservations serving as exceptions.” See “CRC reservations,” UNICEF Malaysia, [www.unicef.org/malaysia/17982\\_crc-reservations-malaysia.html](http://www.unicef.org/malaysia/17982_crc-reservations-malaysia.html).

3 The government of Malaysia maintains reservation on the following provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- Article 2 on non-discrimination
- Article 7 on name and nationality
- Article 14 on freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- Article 28(1)(a) on free and compulsory education at primary level
- Article 37 on torture and deprivation of liberty

“CRC reservations,” UNICEF Malaysia, [www.unicef.org/malaysia/17982\\_crc-reservations-malaysia.html](http://www.unicef.org/malaysia/17982_crc-reservations-malaysia.html).

