

Creative Pedagogy, Human Rights Education (HRE) and Sustainable Development in Ireland and Nigeria

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Abstract

This educational research paper explores creative pedagogy as a tool for promoting innovative, inclusive and quality HRE particularly in Nigeria and Ireland in order to foster sustainable development in both countries and other nations that apply the lessons in this study. The paper argues that creative pedagogy promotes teacher creativity, co-construction of knowledge by teacher and learners, playfulness and other attributes of creative pedagogy. With these attributes, HRE can become innovative, inclusive and of good quality for enhancing sustainable development. The paper through literature review shows that HRE has challenges which need to be tackled well. These challenges include lack of awareness and understanding of HRE, lack of knowledge of HRE pedagogies, etc. In order to tackle these challenges effectively and promote innovative, inclusive and quality HRE for sustainable development, the study recommends the application of creative pedagogy in HRE, making HRE a separate subject and quality intervention of stakeholders.

Keywords: Creativity; Creative Pedagogy; Quality Education; Human Rights Education; Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Human rights underpin human dignity, peace, justice, equality and development. Awareness, understanding and protection of these rights are therefore indispensable. Human

Rights Education (HRE) serves as a major vehicle for promoting such awareness and protection. However, HRE can only fulfill its transformative purpose when it is innovative, inclusive and of good quality. One pedagogical approach capable of achieving this is creative pedagogy.

Creative pedagogy promotes teacher creativity, co-construction of knowledge, learner agency, collaboration, playfulness and problem-solving (Aleinikov, 2013c, 2020; Cremin & Chappell, 2019). These attributes align closely with the aims of HRE. Teacher creativity fosters innovation; collaboration promotes inclusion; and reflective, engaging processes enhance quality. This paper argues that creative pedagogy can transform HRE in Ireland and Nigeria into a more effective tool for advancing sustainable development.

The study adopts a reflective and comparative literature-based approach. It examines:

1. Creative pedagogy in global, Irish and Nigerian contexts;
2. The relationship between innovative, inclusive and quality HRE and sustainable development;
3. The application of creative pedagogy to HRE;
4. Policy, practice and research implications.

The significance of this study lies in its philosophical and comparative exploration of creative pedagogy as a framework for strengthening HRE in two different educational contexts.

Creative Pedagogy in Ireland, Nigeria and Beyond

Aleinikov (2013c, 2020) describes creative pedagogy as a process of transforming learners from passive, closed and unmotivated individuals into open-minded, active and self-developing learners. It involves resetting mindset, introducing traditional content, applying creative thinking processes and achieving improved learning outcomes.

Key attributes of creative pedagogy include:

- Exploration and generation of ideas
- Autonomy and agency
- Playfulness
- Problem-solving
- Risk-taking
- Co-construction and collaboration
- Teacher creativity (Cremin & Chappell, 2019)

Creative pedagogy encourages open-mindedness and intellectual flexibility. It recognizes that creativity requires emotional and intellectual positivity, motivation and responsibility. Motivation enhances reflection and inquiry, while autonomy allows learners to contribute original ideas. Ideal learners are therefore not merely knowledgeable but reflective, adaptive, ethically grounded and socially responsible.

Historically, creative pedagogy can be traced to Socratic dialogue and to the works of Dewey and Vygotsky, who emphasized inquiry, independence and experiential learning. Aleinikov (2020) reports successful application of creative pedagogy across disciplines and age groups.

International Evidence

Research across contexts supports creative pedagogical approaches. Cremin et al. (2006) identified play, collaboration, curiosity and reflection as central to creativity in early education. Dababneh et al. (2010) found that teachers in Jordan promoted creativity through classroom climate and instructional practices. Hui (2015) demonstrated that arts-enriched curricula enhance imaginative participation. Jeffrey and Craft (2004) distinguished between teaching creatively and teaching for creativity, both of which are relevant to HRE.

Ireland

In Ireland, creative pedagogy has been linked to social justice education. Connolly (n.d.) argues that creative critical pedagogy equips learners to challenge injustice. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Irish teachers demonstrated creativity in transitioning to online learning (McGillicuddy, 2021). However, HRE in Ireland faces challenges including limited curricular clarity and uneven teacher knowledge (Waldron et al., 2011; Mallon & Martinez-Sainz, 2021).

Nigeria

In Nigeria, innovative teaching strategies such as peer instruction and student-centred learning have been recommended (Hassan & Salihu, 2020). National policy advocates creative and functional education (FRN, 2014), yet implementation gaps persist (Ebuta, 2017). Human rights topics are embedded within subjects like Civic Education and Government rather than taught as a standalone subject.

Despite growing work on creativity and HRE, little scholarship has comparatively examined creative pedagogy as a framework for innovative, inclusive and quality HRE in Ireland and Nigeria. This study addresses that gap.

Innovative, Inclusive and Quality HRE and Sustainable Development

Human Rights and Sustainable Development

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 2015) affirms equality, dignity and freedom. These principles align directly with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly:

- SDG 4: Quality education
- SDG 5: Gender equality
- SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions

Similarly, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) emphasizes equality, protection, participation and education. Protection and promotion of these rights through HRE contribute to sustainable development.

Understanding HRE

HRE involves education:

- **About rights** (knowledge),
- **Through rights** (rights-respecting pedagogy),
- **For rights** (empowerment and action) (United Nations, 2011).

Innovative HRE requires creative methods that contextualize rights and encourage critical engagement. Bajaj (2015) emphasizes imaginative and contextualized HRE that enables learners to critique inequalities.

Inclusive HRE

Inclusive HRE ensures access regardless of gender, disability, ethnicity or socio-economic status. UNESCO defines inclusive education as responding to diverse learner needs and reducing exclusion. Inclusion is central to SDG 4.

In Nigeria, challenges include inadequate infrastructure, poor teacher motivation and curriculum-labour market mismatch (Sofoluwe, 2015). Obiagu and Nwaubani (2020) highlight teachers' limited knowledge of HRE and reliance on non-participatory pedagogies.

In Ireland, studies reveal limited familiarity with human rights institutions among teachers (Waldron et al., 2011). Mallon and Martinez-Sainz (2021) note ongoing challenges including marginalization and limited explicit curricular focus on children's rights.

Quality HRE

UNICEF (2000) identifies components of quality education: prepared learners, safe environments, relevant curriculum, child-centred processes and meaningful outcomes. HRE must embody these elements to be transformative.

Without innovation, inclusion and quality, HRE risks becoming abstract and ineffective. Creative pedagogy offers a pathway to address these concerns.

Creative Pedagogy as a Framework for Transformative HRE

Creative pedagogy directly strengthens the three dimensions of effective HRE:

1. Innovation

Exploration and idea generation encourage critical analysis of existing rights frameworks and development of context-sensitive solutions. Risk-taking allows learners to test new strategies for rights advocacy.

2. Inclusion

Co-construction and collaboration ensure learner voice. Autonomy affirms participation rights. Playfulness reduces fear and promotes psychological safety, enabling marginalized learners to engage confidently.

3. Quality

Teacher creativity enhances lesson design, assessment and engagement. Problem-solving connects HRE to real societal issues. When classrooms model respect, dialogue and fairness, education occurs “through rights,” not merely “about rights.”

Creative pedagogy therefore operationalizes the principles of human rights within classroom practice. By modeling dignity, participation and justice, it prepares learners to contribute to sustainable development.

Implications and Recommendations

Policy

Educational policies in Ireland and Nigeria should:

- Explicitly integrate creative pedagogy within HRE frameworks
- Provide structured teacher training in participatory methods
- Consider establishing HRE as a standalone subject
- Support community-based and mass awareness programmes

Policies must move beyond rhetoric to implementation, aligning national curricula with SDG commitments.

Practice

Teachers should adopt:

- Dialogic and participatory methods
- Case-based and problem-based learning
- Arts-based and inquiry-driven activities
- Reflective and collaborative classroom cultures

School leaders must foster democratic environments where rights are respected. Counsellors, librarians and administrators should promote awareness and ensure inclusive access to learning resources.

Research

Future research should explore:

- Empirical studies on creative pedagogy in HRE classrooms
- Comparative teacher training models
- Measurement of creativity-driven HRE outcomes
- Longitudinal studies linking HRE to civic engagement

Theory: Creative Pedagogy–Human Rights Education (CP-HRE)

This study proposes a conceptual framework termed Creative Pedagogy–Human Rights Education (CP-HRE). The framework posits that integrating core attributes of creative pedagogy into Human Rights Education (HRE) strengthens innovation, inclusion and quality, thereby enhancing the transformative capacity of HRE and contributing to sustainable development.

Foundational Premises

CP-HRE rests on four core premises:

1. HRE is inherently transformative and aims at cultivating critical, responsible and rights-conscious citizens.
2. The effectiveness of HRE depends not only on curriculum content but on pedagogical approach.
3. Creativity in education includes critical thinking, moral imagination and problem-solving for social justice.

4. Sustainable development requires citizens who understand, protect and actively promote human rights.

Core Components of CP-HRE

The framework connects key attributes of creative pedagogy with the three dimensions of HRE—education *about*, *through*, and *for* rights.

Exploration and Idea Generation (Innovation)

Creative pedagogy encourages inquiry and imagination. Applied to HRE, it enables learners to critically examine rights frameworks, question injustice and generate context-sensitive solutions. HRE thus moves beyond memorization toward reflective and innovative engagement.

Autonomy, Agency and Collaboration (Inclusion)

Participation is both a pedagogical strategy and a human right. Through dialogic and collaborative learning, learners become active contributors to knowledge. Inclusion in CP-HRE therefore extends beyond access to schooling to meaningful participation and recognition of diverse voices.

Playfulness and Engagement (Quality)

Creative engagement fosters motivation, empathy and deeper understanding. Quality HRE is characterized not merely by coverage of content but by reflective dialogue, ethical reasoning and active participation.

Problem-Solving and Responsible Risk-Taking (Transformation)

Human rights issues are complex and evolving. Creative pedagogy equips learners to confront controversial issues thoughtfully and to envision constructive civic responses. This strengthens the “education for rights” dimension of HRE.

Teacher Creativity (Implementation Driver)

Teachers interpret policy, design learning experiences and model rights-respecting behaviour. Their creativity ensures that HRE is lived in classroom practice through fairness, dialogue and inclusive assessment.

Structural Logic of CP-HRE

The CP-HRE framework operates through a three-level relationship:

1. Creative Pedagogical Attributes

(Exploration, Agency, Collaboration, Engagement, Problem-solving, Teacher Creativity)

2. Strengthened HRE
(Innovative, Inclusive and Quality Education)
3. Sustainable Development Outcomes
(Rights-conscious citizenship, democratic participation, social justice and peaceful coexistence)

Through this progression, classroom practice becomes linked to broader societal transformation.

Theoretical Contribution

CP-HRE bridges creative pedagogy and human rights education by operationalizing rights principles within classroom processes. It provides a pedagogical pathway through which HRE can move from abstract legal knowledge to lived democratic practice. The framework is adaptable to different contexts, including Ireland and Nigeria, and offers a practical model for aligning education with Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDGs 4, 5 and 16.

The CP-HRE theory asserts that sustainable development depends on transformative human rights education, and transformative HRE depends on creative pedagogy. When exploration, agency, collaboration and reflective engagement are embedded in HRE, education becomes innovative, inclusive and of high quality—empowering learners to uphold and advance human rights within their societies.

Conclusion

This study examined creative pedagogy in global, Irish and Nigerian contexts and explored its relevance for innovative, inclusive and quality HRE. The analysis demonstrates that sustainable development requires effective human rights protection, and effective human rights protection requires transformative education.

Creative pedagogy fosters innovation through idea generation, inclusion through collaboration and autonomy, and quality through reflective, engaging processes. When applied systematically, it can strengthen HRE in both Ireland and Nigeria.

Accordingly, this paper recommends the mainstreaming of creative pedagogy within HRE to ensure that education not only transmits knowledge of rights but cultivates empowered, reflective and socially responsible citizens capable of advancing sustainable development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the integration of creative pedagogy into Human Rights Education (HRE) in Ireland and Nigeria for sustainable development.

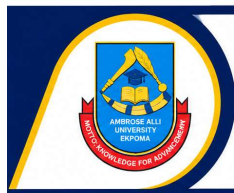
First, at the policy level, educational authorities should explicitly incorporate creative pedagogical principles into national curriculum and HRE frameworks. Policy documents should provide practical guidance for implementing participatory, inquiry-based and rights-respecting teaching approaches. In Nigeria particularly, serious consideration should be given to establishing HRE as a standalone subject to deepen awareness and engagement. Furthermore, curriculum reforms should align HRE more clearly with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDGs 4, 5 and 16, and include monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective implementation.

Furthermore, teacher education and professional development require urgent reform. Pre-service and in-service training programmes should include structured modules on creative pedagogy, participatory learning, inclusive classroom management and human rights instruments. Teachers should be equipped with innovative strategies such as problem-based learning, dialogic teaching, role-play and community-based projects. Assessment practices should also move beyond rote memorization to reflective and experiential evaluation methods that align with creative and rights-based learning.

Finally, at the level of classroom and school practice, teachers and school leaders should: cultivate rights-respecting environments where dignity, inclusion and learner participation are modelled in daily interactions. Creative pedagogical approaches should encourage exploration, collaboration and critical reflection on real-life human rights issues within local contexts. A whole-school approach that integrates human rights principles into governance, discipline and decision-making processes is recommended.

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