

Human Rights Education in Japanese Universities: Challenges and Suggestions*

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THE UNITED NATIONS WORLD PROGRAMME FOR HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION (WPHRE) stresses human rights education at the tertiary level in its Second (2010-2014) and Fourth (2020-2024) Phases.¹ The Fourth Phase is focused on youth and is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically with target 4.7.²

The Fourth Phase of the WPHRE “defines ‘youth’ as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years.”³ This age bracket falls within the age bracket for most of the students at the tertiary level. The Fourth Phase of the WPHRE provides for “human rights education for youth within formal education (secondary, higher and vocational education).”⁴

Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 (SDG 4.7) on Quality Education states:

4.7 Education for sustainable development and global citizenship by 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.

There is a clear mention of human rights, gender equality and cultural diversity as some of the key topics on which knowledge and skills must develop to support sustainable development. While SDG 4.7 does not mention levels of education, the inclusion of “university” in SDG 4.4 indicates the coverage of tertiary level in SDG 4 as a whole.⁵ SDG 4.7 should cover the tertiary

*This article is an expanded version of the paper of the author presented at the Hawaii International Conference on Education on 4 January 2023.

level of education to support the continuous development of knowledge and skills on human rights from primary to the tertiary levels.

A number of universities in Japan are offering human rights courses both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. What do these courses teach? What challenges do they face? And what opportunities exist for these courses?

Review of Human Rights Education in Japan

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan has developed human rights education guidelines for primary and secondary school levels.⁶ But neither policy nor guideline have been adopted for human rights education for the tertiary level. This situation led to the development of contents and methods of human rights education in Japanese universities dependent on either the university or the instructor.

Research on human rights education in Japan from 1990s to the 2000s presents specific characteristics and challenges that reflect the local human rights situation as well as thinking among Japanese educators. However, developments on human rights education in Japan from 2010s onward have yet to be analyzed through research. The review of literature below is based mainly on research done during the 1990s to 2000s period.

Understanding of human rights and human rights education

Yasumasa Hirasawa (1991) sees the tendency of the Japanese people to view social relationships according to dual categories such as “us” and “others” that makes it difficult for them to understand others. He thinks that this view causes a lack of human rights consciousness. He also finds the Japanese view that human rights means being the same and equal as the reason for the thinking that people are the same. This view does not support individual differences and the concept of individual rights according to international human rights standards.⁷

Minoru Mori (2005) views human rights education in the Japanese school system as having a strong image related to the anti-discrimination education movement, one of the main human rights education movements in Japan. This movement has influenced human rights education in Japan and focuses on discrimination, especially “Buraku” problems in certain areas in Japan.⁸ The discrimination against the Buraku people covers employment

and marriage. This anti-discrimination education movement promotes the raising of awareness on discrimination issues in order to resolve them. Mori also points out that since Japanese human rights education focused on the life of the Buraku people, the teaching of human rights law and international treaties is lacking up. This was the situation until the 2000s.

At least up to the early 2000s, another characteristic and also a weakness of human rights education in Japan, is the view of teachers on discrimination. Their involvement in anti-discrimination education movements affects their own personal concerns and thinking about their lives in relation to the lives of the Buraku people. This results in equating human rights issues with those of the Buraku people and failing to link human rights concerns to their own concerns. This makes it difficult for teachers and non-Buraku students to consider the discrimination problems as their own, and to act together with the Buraku people to solve them.⁹

Shuji Ikuta notes two aspects of human rights - moral-philosophical and legal. He sees Japanese human rights education as lacking in teaching the legal frameworks of human rights. Learning the legal frameworks of human rights means making students know how to protect human rights. Ikuta explains that Japanese human rights education tends to be a type of moral education that emphasizes equality and establishment of human relationships as influenced by Dowa education and moral education.¹⁰ Ikuta criticizes Japanese human rights education for failing to teach individual rights from a legal perspective that requires solving human rights issues through the legal process. This further leads to the failure to teach the protection of individual freedoms. Students are therefore unable to develop the skill of critically thinking about rights that should be protected by the legal system.¹¹

Sowa (2008) sees the problem of Japanese human rights education in focusing too much on specific issues in areas where Buraku discrimination exists. This type of human rights education might be meaningful in those areas, but not in other places with different human rights concerns. This situation prevents people in other areas or regions of the country from learning human rights in their universal sense.¹²

Limitations of human rights education in the university

Katsuki Itayama (2018) explains the different reasons behind human rights education in all levels of education – primary, secondary and tertiary levels – in Japan. At the tertiary level, discrimination was the main issue

that made human rights education important and necessary. He cites, as an example, the case of Buraku discrimination involving a university student in 1950 that led to frequent discriminatory incidents related to Buraku issues at the university. Some students of the university demanded education against discrimination to address the issue. This type of discrimination occurred in several universities and became the origin as well as main reason for starting human rights education at the tertiary level in Japan.¹³ He also explains why Human Rights Centers were established in universities. He cites the example of Osaka City University, a public university. In 1961, a poster containing discriminatory language against a female student was put up in the university premise. Since then, similar incidents occurred such as discriminatory graffiti on a wall and desks. The Osaka City University and its research center saw the need to raise the awareness of students and staff on solving these issues. The university started the course on Dowa Education and Human Rights Education in 1973 in order to respond to students' protests against the discriminatory incidents and their demand to resolve the issue. However, the discriminatory incidents continued. The university established a committee on the issue and adopted an action plan in 1975 based on the policy for resolving the issues.¹⁴

Risa Kumamoto (2010) highlights the complexity of the problems affecting Dowa-related human rights education in Japan. She points out the insufficient number of researchers in the field of Dowa/Buraku issues. She cites the lack of collaboration among departments and fields of study within the university that contributes to the small number of instructors who can teach human rights. Moreover, she points out the lack of opportunity for Buraku people to establish their own academic field as "Buraku issues studies." While there are voices in the academe calling for the establishment of women's studies and gender studies, such voices do not exist in support of Buraku issues studies.

The practice of leaving the teaching of human rights mainly to part-time instructors also causes the lack of instructors who can hold human rights courses.

In the case of universities with human rights centers, researchers in these centers tend to focus on specific human rights issues and fail to share their studies with other researchers. This situation also causes the lack of consistency in research on issues since research is dependent on the individual researchers in the centers. At the same time, some centers suffer from

a lack of researchers in the field of human rights, and researchers assigned to the centers see their posting as added work. These centers also lack collaboration with other academic institutions, and consequently fail to develop research agenda in relation to other academic fields.

An additional factor is the tendency of people in Japan of avoiding human rights issues. They may think that Buraku issues are complicated and may not want to discuss them with others.

These situations prevent the human rights research results from being widely explored and utilized.¹⁵

Mariko Akuzawa (2007), in a comparison of human rights education programs in Asia and the Pacific, finds the existence of graduate-level human rights research and education in a number of countries such as Mahidol University (Thailand), Ateneo de Manila University (Philippines), Kathmandu School of Law (Nepal), University of Colombo (Sri Lanka), and Universitas Gadjah Madah (Indonesia). The programs cover various fields, such as law, philosophy, ethics, theology, history, sociology, cultural anthropology, politics, psychology, and education. They cover not only the study of human rights concepts but also real situations. Therefore, professors do not simply give lectures but carry out fieldwork, and introduce internships by collaborating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations and other human rights organizations. She points out that it is important to introduce human rights degree programs in Japan by learning from other countries' practices.¹⁶

Finally, Kiyoko Majima (2010) points out the lack of research on the practices of human rights education at Japanese universities. She cites her own practice of teaching human rights in a teacher training course. She uses legal cases and analyzes their outcome. The use of legal cases is a unique practice in human rights education. She carefully chooses the legal cases as educational materials in consideration of privacy issues, and makes lesson plans with carefully thought-out objectives. She uses civil cases because it is easier to predict the damage to the victim, to know the needed protection from the problems such as discrimination, and to provide the students with sufficient bases for thinking and making a fair judgment. She has held fifteen classes on the civil cases and analyzed the students' learning outcomes from student questionnaires. She found out that through the course, students changed their minds and perspectives by discussing a case and thinking with others about the judgment. She emphasizes that legal case materials

can be good educational materials for students to encourage them to analyze the issues and make a fair judgment.¹⁷

Based on these studies, there are several challenges that Japanese human rights education is facing. First, Japanese human rights education originally started from Dowa- and Buraku-problems, and discrimination issues were raised as one of the main topics. Human rights education in Japanese universities started because of the discriminatory cases in universities, and Human Rights Centers were established because of the demand by students and university staff to address discrimination incidents (mainly through education). The origin of Japanese human rights education in primary and secondary school levels and that in higher education are slightly different, but they both started with similar focus on Buraku issues. This does not mean that the theme of human rights education in Japan is only about discrimination. There is lack of teaching from the legal aspect of human rights as well as their universal character. Human rights education also tends to teach morality and equality focused on specific individual issues. The method of one instructor in using a legal case in teaching human rights has not been seen among instructors as a good practice. Second, in Japan, people consider discrimination issues as other people's issues, and try not to consider them as their own. This view makes it difficult for students to understand discrimination properly. This point applies to Japanese human rights education at all levels of formal education. Third, since Dowa and Buraku issues are not yet considered as constituting an academic field, these issues are difficult to research and teach in universities. This leads to lack of academics in this field, as well as lack of connection with other researchers in other academic fields. This in turn results in a small number of academics who teach human rights courses in Japan. Fourth, it is important to see other countries' practices in order to review and improve Japanese human rights education. The studies also point to the need to consider human rights education programs that cover a wide range of fields including law, philosophy, ethics and other fields of study.

Human Rights Education in Japanese Universities

The author surveyed the human rights education syllabuses of universities in Japan during the June 2018 to March 2020 period. One hundred twenty-five universities were covered by the survey. They included education universi-

ties, national and public universities, and private universities. Universities with specialized focus were not included in the survey such as universities for medicine, nursing, dentistry, technology/technical field, fashion and sports, and also junior colleges. These higher education institutions offer human rights courses related to their specific areas of study (e.g., medicine and human rights). It is difficult to compare these specialized and unique courses with courses under the General Education framework. Thus, in this survey, the courses under the General Education curriculum (that all students could take) were selected. These courses give insights on what should be taught in human rights education for students in general.

The different categories of universities in Japan are based on the type of structure on ownership, system of policymaking and curriculum development. Academic fees and the number of students of the universities differ depending on the categories. In this survey, each university category is defined in the following manner:

- Education universities: they are teacher training institutions where students study to become teachers after graduation;
- National universities: they are universities administered by the State/national government;
- Public universities: they are universities administered by local governments (city and prefectural governments);
- Private universities: they are privately owned and managed universities.

The survey reviewed human rights syllabuses available in the websites of Japanese universities. Of one hundred twenty-five universities surveyed, three hundred ninety-two courses related to human rights were found. There are likely other courses that were not found using the online search engine. In searching the syllabuses, the key words “Human Rights” were used. Among these universities, the author visited eight universities in different parts of Japan to learn more about practices such as teaching and evaluation methods. The eight universities were chosen due to their unique human rights courses in relation to themes covered. Among the eight interviewees, seven were instructors, who actually taught the human rights courses, and one was an administrative staff. After observing educational practices, a semi-structured interview for approximately one hour was con-

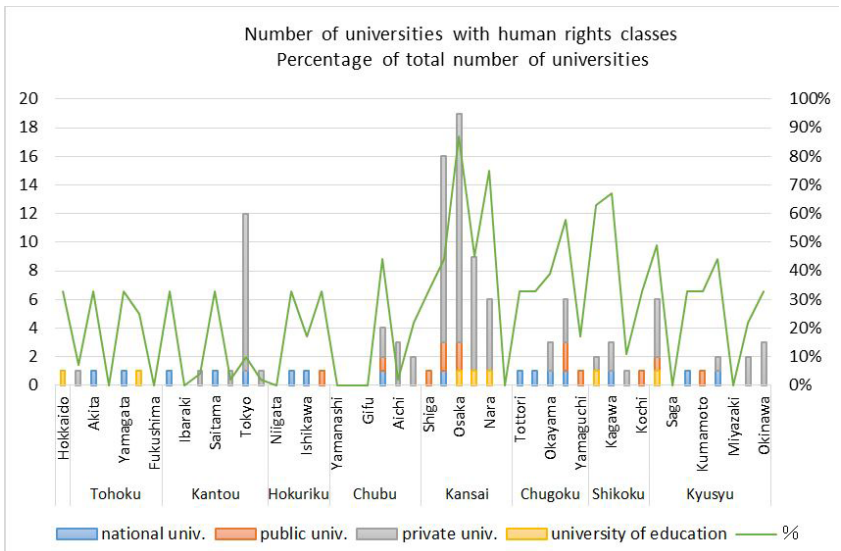
ducted. The interview included: (1) themes raised in human rights courses, (2) methods used, (3) assessment, and (4) challenges. Interviews in these selected universities do not necessarily explain all the characteristics of Japanese human rights education. In addition, Human Rights Centers were surveyed by checking university website.

Human rights education courses

An analysis of the results of the online survey of university syllabuses confirms the lack of human rights degree programs in Japanese universities. There are individual human rights courses offered for undergraduate and graduate students in the Department of Law or as part of General Education subjects. In this article, the author narrows the survey analysis to human rights courses offered under General Education, which is open to all students, in order to find out what students taking any course or studying any field would learn about human rights.

Chart 1 shows the number of courses offered under General Education of universities in different prefectures.

Chart 1: Breakdown of human rights courses by regions



The chart shows the percentage of human rights courses among the universities in each prefecture. Many courses are offered in the Kansai region, especially in Osaka, Kyoto and Hyogo prefectures. The existence of Buraku problems (which have existed for a long time and remain at present) in this region is a likely explanation for the existence of many human rights courses. There are human rights courses in universities in other prefectures and regions but with much less number. The general characteristics of the courses according to the type of universities are the following:

- Education universities offer human rights education as part of teacher training;
- National and public universities do not offer many courses compared to private universities, and
- Private universities offer a variety of human rights courses especially in the Kansai region and in Tokyo. This implies that the practices of these universities do not influence the other universities.

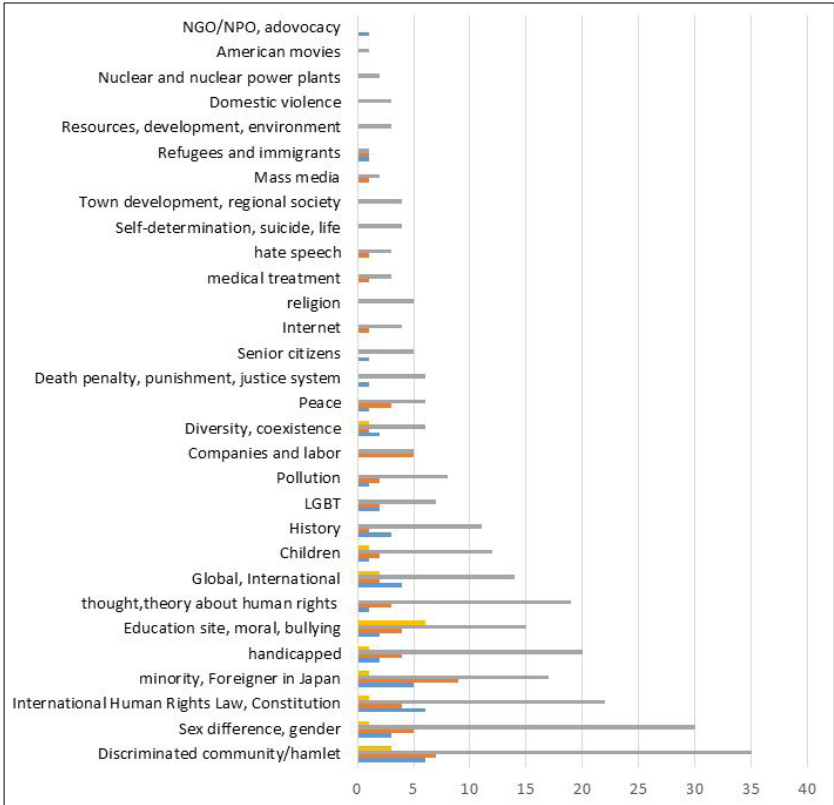
The results of the survey indicate that universities conduct human rights education under their own curriculum, or their instructors make the programs and courses to teach human rights through their own specialty such as gender and Dowa issues. Detailed explanation on why Japanese universities' human rights courses are based on instructor's specialties is provided in the section on human rights education practices in universities.

Chart 2 shows the themes raised in human rights courses in Japanese universities. This survey used key words to search each syllabus, and collected multiple answers of each course. While reading each syllabus, the author and three research assistants who were graduate students in literature discussed and identified the key words in this survey.

Of the themes chosen for human rights education, "Discriminated community/hamlet," specifically the "Buraku and Dowa problem," is most common among the universities. This topic is taken up mostly in the Kansai region. In other regions, the following tendency is observed on themes chosen:

1. "Education site (teaching methods at school), moral and bullying" issues for education universities;
2. "Sex difference, gender" for many private universities in Tokyo;

Chart 2: Themes raised in human rights courses



- 3. “Human Rights Law and Constitution” for national universities; and
- 4. “Minorities and foreigners in Japan” for public universities.

Importantly, content related to “International Human Rights Law, Constitution,” “thought, theory and Human Rights” and “Global and International” issues were listed very frequently in all types of universities.

As discussed in the review of human rights education in Japan, domestic issues are frequently listed. This implies the potential of changing Japanese human rights education by introducing not only individual discrimination issues, but also the universal and global aspects of issues in Japanese society.

In addition, the online survey reveals that private universities tend to have a variety of themes, while national and public universities have courses organized under their specific curriculums. Education universities offer courses for students who will become teachers after graduation, thus the focus of their human rights courses was different.

Human rights centers

Some universities in Japan have established human rights centers. The online survey of these human rights centers revealed information on their objectives, see Tables 1 and 2. The surveyed human rights centers generally organize lectures, symposiums, “enlightenment”¹⁸ (awareness-raising) activities along with surveys and research activities, production of publications, and setting up of a human rights library. The research areas in each center differ and cover the following, among others: elimination of Buraku discrimination, race and ethnic issues, disability discrimination, gender, international human rights security, the United States military presence in Okinawa, culture of the Ainu (indigenous people in northern Japan), ethnic discrimination, world peace, the abolition of nuclear weapons, community development, and other human rights issues.

Table 1. List of universities with human rights centers

Type	University
National University	Tokyo University
National University	Hokkaido University
Public University	Osaka Metropolitan University
Public University	Hiroshima City University
Private University	Kansai University
Private University	Kindai University
Private University	Kansai Gaidai University
Private University	Hanazono University
Private University	Kwansei Gakuin University
Private University	Otani University
Private University	Ritsumeikan University
Private University	Tenri University
Private University	Kyoto Sangyo University
Private University	Doshisha University
Private University	Kanagawa University
Private University	Sophia University

Table 2. Human rights centers: Objectives

Center	Objectives
Center for Documentation of Refugees and Migrants (CDR) - Tokyo University	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To collect, organize and disseminate information related to the migration of peoples, and especially the study of migration; 2. To become the center of knowledge and experiences of refugees and migrants.
Center for Ainu & Indigenous Studies - Hokkaido University	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To hold open lectures to share research findings with the public and encourage Ainu people to utilize them; 2. To hold public lectures and other events regularly with researchers specializing on languages, histories, cultures, legal systems, intellectual property rights and other aspects related to Ainu and other indigenous peoples; 3. To research on Ainu and other indigenous peoples in a range of academic fields such as political science, pedagogy and tourism studies.
Research Center for Human Rights – Osaka Metropolitan University	To undertake research on a broad range of issues affecting the Japanese society at present, namely, Burakumin discrimination, gender, ethnic, disability and other minority/human rights issues.
Hiroshima Peace Institute - Hiroshima City University	To establish the framework of "Peace Education" based on the experiences in Hiroshima by systematizing the previous research and continuous research outcome.
Institute of Human Rights Studies - Kansai University	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To facilitate the fulfillment of human rights both within and outside the university; 2. To contribute towards the human rights awareness of people at large; 3. To help advance research in the realm of human rights.
Center for Human Rights - Kindai University	To contribute to the realization of human rights by carrying out research on discrimination at home and abroad, including Buraku discrimination, race/ethnicity, gender discrimination and disability discrimination.
Human Rights Research Institute - Kansai Gaidai University	To learn basic human rights and enjoy them in reality through research and practice.
Research Center for Human Rights - Hanazono University	To contribute to the promotion of human rights education and raise awareness of human rights in the university through collection of information about human rights problems, and investigating and researching on human rights issues.
Institute for Human Rights Research and Education - Kwansai Gakuin University	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To undertake research on human rights issues; 2. To establish and administer regular courses on human rights; 3. To implement awareness-raising programs and produce human rights materials.
Human Rights Center - Otani University	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To respect students' and staff's human rights, and create an environment for study and research; 2. To provide a library of human rights publications and a desk for students and staff to consult on human rights issues.
Peace Education and Research Institute - Ritsumeikan University	To undertake research jointly with the staff and academics from various fields such as peace and human rights.
Human Rights Research Laboratory - Tenri University	To investigate, research, collect publications, and publish books and papers related to human rights.
Human Rights Center - Kyoto Sangyo University	To hold seminars for promoting human rights education, and to provide human rights books and audio-visual resources.

Center for Christian Culture - Doshisha University	To provide various programs such as music concerts and programs for students, staff and the public in order for them to come together.
International Human Rights Center - Kanagawa University	1. To establish a network among students, lawyers, local government officials, NGO/NPO workers, citizens, and to research and practice human rights issues; 2. To protect socially weak people.
Institute of Global Concern (IGC) - Sophia University	1. To raise the consciousness of students and the wider society regarding the promotion of social justice; 2. To apply interdisciplinary inquiries into issues of justice in today's changing world to both the education of Sophia students and its practical activities (primarily refugee assistance).

One notes that human rights centers exist only in few national and public universities. Only two national universities (Tokyo University and Hokkaido University), and two public universities (Osaka Metropolitan University and Hiroshima City University) have established human rights centers. Probably because they are owned by central and local governments, many other national and public universities do not yet recognize human rights as an academic field. In this case, they probably do not find a justification for the establishment of a university-based/academic human rights center.

However, aside from human rights centers, there are also university-based human rights committees. These committees are found in all categories of universities and have the authority to discuss and resolve human rights issues within the university. They work on complaints involving discrimination, harassment (academic and sexual harassment), bullying, violence, privacy, etc. Table 3 provides the list of committees found in university websites. This is a list of universities that have not established human rights centers, but have created human rights committees. These committees hold seminars and symposiums related to human rights for the university staff, students and general public.

Table 3. Human rights committees in the Universities

N/P	University	Committee	Main Research Area	Activities
N	Osaka University	Human Rights Issue Committee	Dowa issues, and other human rights issues	Symposium on human rights issues
N	Osaka Kyoiku University	Promoting Human Rights Committee	Dowa issues, and other human rights issues	Symposium on human rights issues for students and staff

N	Saga University	Promoting Human Rights Committee	Gender, Buraku issues, human rights issues	Symposium on human rights issues, and open seminars for citizens
N	Kyoto University	Human Rights Committee	Dowa issues, and other human rights issues	Books and references related to Dowa issues, and human rights issues at library
P	International Christian University	Human Rights Committee, counseling staff of human rights issues	Harassment, human rights violations	Counseling, harassment, consultant of human rights abuse, library
P	Showa University	Promoting Human Rights Committee	General human rights issues (such as handicap, disability)	Seminar on promoting human rights, publishing leaflets
P	Meiji University	Human Rights Committee	General human rights issues (gender, equality, peace education)	Symposium on human rights issues, 2 times a year
P	Rikkyo University	Committee on Human Rights and Harassment	General human rights issues, harassment, human rights abuse	Symposium on human rights issues, and dealing with human rights abuse and harassment
P	Otani University	Human Rights Education Committee	Human rights education	Symposium on human rights education for students
P	Osaka University of Arts	Promoting Human Rights Committee	Advertising promoting human rights words	Seminar and showing films about human rights issues, advertising the human rights words, using Twitter to spread the information
P	St Andrew's University	Promoting Human Rights Issues Committee	Human rights abuse	Seminar about human rights issues, publishing report about the activities related to human rights issues
P	Bukkyo University	Human Rights Education Center	Human Rights Education	Promoting human rights, setting library, consultation
P	Kyoto Koka Women's University	Human Rights Center	Sports and Human Rights, Gender	Symposium on human rights issues, and dealing with human rights abuse and harassment
P	Kio University	Promoting Human Rights Committee	Education	Symposium on human rights issues for staff
P	Otemon Gakuin University	Promoting Human Rights Committee	Human Rights Abuse, Promoting Human Rights	(no information on activities since 2014)

Human Rights Education Practices in Japanese Universities

Based on the data gathered in the online survey, the author chose eight universities belonging to all categories which offer university-wide human rights courses for further research. The author interviewed seven instructors and one administrative staff in the eight universities. Information on such practices were not available in university websites and syllabuses.

On the themes covered by the human rights courses, the interviewees identified not only Buraku issues, but also issues on peace. The discussion of peace issues is linked to human rights issues in the context of the dropping of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the World War II. This is unique in Japan when compared to issues taken up in other countries. University A in Hiroshima is an example of teaching the peace issue. The instructor asks students to visit one of the peace memorials and write a report on the visit. This assignment requires the students to personally visit the place and learn its history. This can be done in Japan since it is the only country in the world that experienced atomic bombing.

The interviews likewise covered the teaching methods employed by the instructors in their human rights courses.

Practices in University A

University A is located in Hiroshima city, also known as a Peace City, where an atomic bomb was dropped for the first time ever in 1945. The city subsequently adopted the principle of “Freedom and Peace.” One of the five mission statements of University A is about the promotion of the “spirit of peace.” In order to achieve this mission, several liberal arts subjects related to peace are being offered for first- and second-year students in the university, such as “Hiroshima and Peace,” “Peace and Human Beings” and “Peace and Human Rights.” The author asked an instructor about the practice of the third subject called, “Peace and Human Rights - Perspective of Globalization and Gender ... a compulsory subject for 1st year undergraduate students.” The instructor said that instructors decide on the teaching method to use due to lack of teaching guideline from the university. She decided to use the discussion method. The university does not provide the guidelines on what should be included and how to teach peace and human rights. She made her own lesson guided by the curriculum and mission of the university.

This was the reason for the decision of the instructor in teaching the topic from the perspective of gender because this was her specialty. She made a portfolio for each student so that they could use it during the class and keep it as their record. The number of students who take the course varied depending on the year, for example, the number ranged from ninety-five to three hundred students. She gave lectures with accompanying student discussion exercise. Since the class size was big, she divided the students into small groups for discussion. She also tasked the students to go to one of the peace memorials either in Hiroshima or Nagasaki by themselves and write what they learned by visiting them.

In her lectures, she raised issues regarding poverty, LGBT, children and women, among others. After teaching various topics, she asked the students to choose the most interesting topics and research on them in group. Each student had to write an individual report as a final assignment. Although the class was big (with about a hundred students on average), the instructor used a teaching technique to make students learn by themselves (such as by making them write their reflections on what they learned from the class).

Practices in University B

The author interviewed an instructor who teaches “Human Rights and Peace” course. This is the course for any undergraduate students, but a lot of students taking this course are freshmen. Ideally, this course should be taken after students have studied the “Japanese Constitution.” The course can accommodate one hundred twenty students, and an average of sixty to one hundred students take the course. The main topics are human rights, peace, and human rights history. Students are required to think about the relationship between human rights and peace throughout the course. There is no prescribed textbook, but handouts are distributed in each class. Lectures are mainly given in the class and the choice of topics is flexible depending on the world events being reported at the time and students’ interest such as gender and human rights, LGBT, equality, disability, freedom of expression, hate speech, and others. For assessment, students are required to write reports (four to five reports), and take a final examination. Attendance in class is also considered. This course aims at not only making students gain knowledge of human rights but also develop a thinking that human rights issues are their own issues as well.

Practices in University C

The author interviewed an instructor who taught the course “Human Rights and Gender.” This course is part of the human rights course that has been officially approved by the university. According to the instructor, while serious human rights incidents do not seem to exist in Kanazawa city, where the university is located, gender issues are evident. People in the city tend to have a male-dominated society mindset. This dominance of men in the society requires the need to raise awareness of gender equality in the society. This provides a context to the “Human Rights and Gender” course.

The human rights course is a compulsory subject for around 1,200 students in the university. With this large number, ten classes are offered with an average of one hundred twenty students taking the course in each class. The course is handled by four instructors, who have different specialties or issues of focus. Thus, the course also includes discussions on disabilities, human rights system and various human rights issues aside from the gender issue. Instructors use textbooks that they wrote and published themselves. This means that the course contents are dependent on the instructors’ specialties, and instructors teach students human rights issues by using their own publications.

Also, in the university, active learning is recommended as pedagogy in teaching the course. The instructor interviewed by the author asks students to write the definition of human rights using comment sheet, organizes group discussions, and requires group presentations and discussions in class. For assessment, students choose one topic they find interesting, and write about what they learn in the class. The instructor faces the challenge of raising the students’ motivation in learning the subject. The instructor uses YouTube videos on the latest news in order to engage the students in class and get them interested in starting a discussion.

Practices in University D

In the 1970s, a student in University D complained about a statement in a textbook that declared, “Political community is like Buraku community.” The student complained that this statement was not right because the political community and Buraku community did not have the same meaning. The student thought that equating “political community” with “Buraku community” would give negative connotation to the latter. The university accepted the necessity of providing human rights education to students for them to

become aware of Buraku issues. This incident started the support of the university to human rights education.

The university developed an intensive human rights course held on two Saturdays in May and June for a total of four sessions. An average of forty students takes the course every year, and many of them are taking literature, education and agriculture as their major.

Lecture is the main mode of teaching, with the latest news as teaching material. Students choose topics that they are interested in from newspapers, paste newspaper clippings on the board in the classroom, and express their thoughts about them. The instructor tries to encourage the students to be as active as possible inside the classroom. Students are expected to recognize human rights issues as their own issues. Reference books are also introduced on various issues including Buraku, hate speech, Hansen's disease, gender discrimination, bullying, and others. Students fill out a review sheet at the end of the class and prepare a required final report. The final report has to answer the following questions:

1. Why are Buraku issues being taught in schools?
2. Based on what the students learned about the issues, explain the social structure that causes discrimination.

In the past, students wrote the following statements:

I have never learned Buraku discrimination before. This is the first time that I learned the Buraku issue, and found this issue an important one.

Students raised different topics and issues. A lot of students pointed out that we had to know the facts about discrimination, and education has an important role in order to do this.

The instructor has difficulty motivating students to study human rights, but continues nevertheless with the course.

There were several other challenges raised in teaching human rights in University D. Students who aim to obtain a teachers' license are required to take a human rights course. Thus, some students take the course because it

is a required course, and not because they are interested in human rights. They lack the motivation to learn about human rights. Another issue is about instructors put in charge of the human rights course. They are part-time lecturers who face difficulty in sharing human rights knowledge and experience due to limited time available for teaching.

Practices in University E

Nagasaki has three big human rights issues, namely, Buraku, Atomic Bomb, and “hidden” Christians (Kakure Kirishitan).¹⁹ In western Japan, human rights courses are typically taken by students who are in teacher training. In University E, the human rights course is a mandatory course for 3rd year students who study in the education department. The author interviewed an instructor who has been teaching the human rights course for more than twenty years. The instructor notes that students at present study human rights in relation to issues that were not existing before such as COVID-19. In 2023, new issues like the COVID-19 pandemic were added in the list of present human rights issues.

University E is located near a Buraku area that makes it easy for students to think about Buraku issues. Each class has an average of one hundred thirty students. The course content include human rights in general such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, definition of human rights, United Nations and individual issues such as Buraku, LGBT, non-Japanese living in Japan, hate speech and Ainu issues. The course employs lecture and group discussions. In group discussions, students play different roles such as leader, presenter and others. Normally a group of five to six students work together and share their discussion summaries in the class.

For assessment, students write a report answering this question: “What kind of human rights education is ideal?” Besides the final report, students are required to write two essays in the middle of the course. The first essay is about the students’ impression on human rights after reading the textbook of the course. The second essay summarizes the human rights education in students’ hometown; this refers to each student’s human rights education experience in school.

Practices in University F

University F offers a “Human Rights Education” course. Normally, forty to fifty students join the course. The instructor, who is from Nepal, uses the

technique of giving lectures and making students discuss issues. This class is unique as non-Japanese and Japanese students learn together in English. The instructor introduces quizzes and makes own handout for students to maintain students' concentration on the classes.

The instructor considers human rights as a key topic for students from different backgrounds to start discussing. She designed the course in a way that not only makes students seek knowledge but also make them express their views on the topics. She mainly uses the latest news reports. She introduces human rights activities to explain ongoing issues and how to tackle them. She raises topics such as cultural relativism, refugee, women's rights, child rights, genocide and terrorism. At the end of the class, students watch a video on the Rwanda genocide and other videos to make the students understand what is happening in the world.

Practices in University G

University G offers seventeen courses on human rights for the first and second year students. The courses are held on Fridays. None of these courses are compulsory. The courses have about one hundred fifty students in one class. Also, if students want, she allows the students to do fieldwork during the course. Examinations are given to assess learning, but she gives some questions beforehand so the students can prepare before the test. The contents of the course include the universal concept and history of human rights. She also teaches the human rights mechanisms and provides the latest information related to human rights. She teaches not only the universal character of human rights but also specific human rights issues such as Buraku and gender issues. Since the number of students is big, she gives lectures in class. She makes the effort of making students understand not only the universal dimension of human rights but also the specific human rights issues. She also teaches human rights theory alongside human rights issues, and gives students examples and problems to think about and discuss.

Practices in University H

The author also interviewed the administrative staff member of a private university about human rights courses. She was a chief member of the human rights center and the human rights courses team representing the university administration. The university committed in the 1970s to solve the Buraku discrimination incidents that occurred not only in its Engineering

Department but also in the dormitories of the Departments of Sociology and of Economics and Business. In the engineering department, an instructor made discriminatory statements during a lecture. In the dormitories, discriminatory graffiti was found. Since then, the students demanded the offering of human rights courses and holding of seminars to address the issues. In response, the university established a human rights center to undertake research and education activities to address the problems.

Human Rights Courses started to be offered in 2009, along with about fourteen other courses related to human rights. The Human Rights Courses have four themes including the Buraku issue, Sexuality, Disability and Women. The instructors of the Courses choose one of the four themes for their classes. The Courses are part of the liberal arts subjects (similar to General Education) that students at any year level and specialty could take. But they are not compulsory subjects for the students. There are no guidelines regarding contents and methods of teaching the Human Rights Courses. The instructors make their own decision on what and how to teach the courses.

The number of students in each course varies from ten to one hundred. The method is mainly giving lecture, but some instructors invite guest speakers or take students on field trips to learn from the sites being visited. Assessment is mainly done by examination, but participation is evaluated as well. The instructor's fields of expertise are varied - international law, minority studies, social welfare and others.

Besides these courses, the university holds a faculty development activity once a year for those teaching human rights courses. During the activity, instructors share what the students found interesting in the topics and methods of teaching. The university also holds training sessions on human rights for members of the staff and the students twice a year. About sixty to one hundred members of the staff and students participated in these sessions annually. A separate training for all the new members of the staff is held in order to enhance their awareness of human rights.

Analysis of Human Rights Education Practices in Japanese Universities

Human rights education practices in Japanese universities can partly be analyzed based on information from eight universities in different parts of the country.

The eight universities offer different human rights courses, whose components and other characteristics are summarized below:

- Topics: Peace, Buraku/Dowa issue, human rights history, human rights movement, Zainichi Koreans (ethnic Koreans who are permanent residents in Japan), LGBT, global society and human rights, child rights, bullying, issues related to disabilities, women's rights, sexuality, etc.;
- Number of students in class: The number of students attending human rights courses range from ten to two hundred, depending on the type of course involved;
- Assessment: students are assessed through examinations, reports or short essays, etc.;
- Outcome: Students become aware of discrimination and the realities about it (appreciation of the facts involved);
- Teaching Methods: the instructors give lectures, engage students in group discussions, invite guest speakers, do fieldtrips, and use videos (available online) and newspapers as teaching materials.

The instructors and staff members of the universities confirm that they themselves choose topics and teaching methods in the courses. The teaching methods allow students to participate in the class actively, and help them to learn about human rights issues through a variety of means.

A lot of the courses are aimed at developing the thinking among students that human rights issues are their own issues as well. However, there are other problems such as the tendency of some courses to focus on learning facts, not aimed at learning the individual rights, and not developing the concept of taking action to solve current problems for a better society. These limitations mean the lack of intention to empower students.

Some Japanese universities treat human rights education as a compulsory subject, but the universities do not provide guidelines for teaching human rights. Also, while the human rights courses are compulsory, the instructors face the challenge of lack of interest on human rights among students. As a consequence, students take the courses because they are required and not due to personal interest on human rights. This makes it difficult for the instructors to motivate students.

Universities in the Kansai region, where the Buraku/Dowa issue is more well-known, are the most active in offering human rights courses for undergraduate students.

The university human rights centers play a significant role in promoting human rights through research and educational initiatives. The online survey of human rights centers reveals several characteristics of these centers.

First, as summarized in Tables 1 and 2, their research on human rights issues focuses on issues on the local area where they operate, such as Ainu culture, US military base in Okinawa and Buraku. For example, the Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies at Hokkaido University focuses on Ainu and other indigenous peoples. The Hiroshima Peace Institute at Hiroshima City University focuses on peace and abolition of nuclear weapons. There are a few centers that research on global human rights issues, such as refugees. The International Human Rights Center in Kanagawa University focuses not only on domestic human rights issues but also on broader human rights issues in the world. They research on international human rights issues and involve people in the university and NGO/NPO and the citizens to think about their solutions.

There is little indication that the research of the centers on local human rights issues is undertaken in cooperation with other human rights centers or with regional or international organizations, such as the United Nations, in order to address the issues from an international perspective.

This tendency leads to the weakness of human rights education in Japanese universities: focus on domestic issues, especially on the various forms of discrimination which occur in the different regions of the country, and the lack of connection with organizations inside and outside Japan.

Second, the human rights courses being offered are not always part of the activities of the centers. This implies that instructors individually offer human rights courses, and not necessarily as part of a center's program. The human rights centers mainly undertake research and hold seminars for the public, university staff and students. The topics of research and seminars are not always directly related to the educational programs and courses for students. The human rights center websites explain the center program, activities and research areas but fail to present the human rights courses for students on the same page. In some universities, human rights courses are offered separate from the centers.

Third, the content of human rights courses being offered connected to the centers is dependent on the area of research of the instructors rather than based on a broader education program that covers the general human rights issues and systems. This can be seen in the focus on domestic human rights issues, such as the Buraku/Dowa issue, the lack of understanding of individual rights and lack of attention to discussion of solutions to human rights issues. Also, instructors do not have much chance to share their practices among fellow instructors in the university, or to link up with instructors in other fields. The instructors are forced to plan the courses by themselves. A good example mentioned earlier that can address this issue is the Faculty Development and Staff Training for raising human rights awareness in a private university. This program can help instructors in the university to work together for human rights education.

The online survey used here to collect information and to select universities to visit to obtain additional information prevents the making of a general conclusion on human rights education in Japanese universities. Further research and literature review are necessary.

Also, the online survey used only “Human Rights” as key words. Using other key words related to human rights such as gender, child rights, education, and others can provide more information on characteristics and challenges in human rights education programs in Japanese universities.

A Proposal

The findings of the survey of university human rights education programs present a number of issues on the human rights content as well as the pedagogy being employed. They highlight the limitations as well as the good practices in teaching human rights in Japanese universities. These survey findings, therefore, serve as bases for developing a good university human rights education program.

Below is a proposal on what should constitute a university human rights education program:

(1) Name of the Program: Multicultural Coexistence and Human Rights Education

(2) Purpose and Outline of the Program:

This program covers knowledge, skills and behavior needed to become global citizens by learning under the theme, “Multicultural coexistence and human rights.” Students will learn and discuss various topics such as human rights history, multicultural coexistence, outcast people, indigenous people, war and peace, gender, LGBT and others.

This course aims to apply human rights knowledge in analyzing various topics, discussing and writing about human rights issues from personal perspective, and develop a plan on taking action on human rights issues. The program also aims to create a classroom environment, where students learn from each other by knowing each other’s views and taking them into consideration. More specifically, the program aims to allow the students to participate as facilitators in group discussions, and leaders in making group presentations.

(3) Study Goal

The program aims

1. To deepen understanding of human rights and how to cooperate with others in a multicultural society;
2. To develop skills in expressing views and listening to others’ views;
3. To acquire skills to think creatively and critically;
4. To develop skills and perspectives on active participation in the classroom and in the society;
5. To understand others and ways to cooperate with others in multicultural society;
6. To gain the ability to take action and practice human rights in reality.

(4) Important points in teaching practice:

1. Approach the learning of human rights from not only universal but also from individual and regional perspectives;
2. In order for students to be active, give students tasks and examples to make them think of the issues as their own;
3. Set classroom rules that establish a human rights culture by discussing what is necessary to make this happen with the students;
4. Aim at changing the society in a better way and coexisting with people of different backgrounds.

(5) Teaching methods:

Lectures, classroom discussion, video viewing, fieldtrips, interacting with guest lecturers and other methods will be part of the teaching methods in the program. After each class, students review their study outcome and write their thoughts in a portfolio so that they record their learning and compile them at the end of the course.

(6) Number of participants

In order to ensure effective classroom discussion, a class size of less than thirty students is an ideal number that allows instructors to handle the class better. Having more than thirty students in class limits the interaction of students with each other, and of the students with the teacher. Also, discussion groups with five to six members in each group allow more participation for students.

Since students have their own experience related to human rights and since the classroom can become a “human library,” students can share experiences and learn from each other. For assessment purposes, the students discuss human rights problems and practical solutions in writing. This supports human rights education that does not only aim at learning human rights knowledge but also related skills and attitude.

(7) Assessment (if necessary)

As shown in the following criteria, grading is based on regular attendance and active performance in each discussion:

- Participation in the class (20 percent)
- Worksheet and Review Sheet (30 percent)
- Group Presentation and Peer Review (30 percent)
- Test or Report (20 percent).

(8) Evaluation of participants' study outcome:

Evaluation of the progress of students' learning is necessary. A questionnaire can be used for this purpose.

This program can be used in different education levels - primary, secondary and tertiary levels, or even for adults. This program is for students/participants to recognize human rights issues as their own, and share their experiences to understand the reality. In the end, stu-

dents/participants think about the solutions, and take action to create a society where people can cooperate with each other and show respect for multicultural perspectives.

Conclusions

The analysis of the results of research and survey identifies the challenges and suggestions for human rights education in Japanese universities.

First, human rights education in Japanese universities tends to focus on individual issues, and lack the universal dimension of human rights. Human rights education should include not only local issues such as discrimination, atomic weapons, natural disasters and rights of individuals but also the history of human rights, and theory and philosophy of human rights.

Second, human rights education in Japanese universities tends to focus on learning facts. It should teach how to analyze problems and find solutions by themselves. Also, it is important to empower them by providing knowledge of their individual rights.

Third, there should be human rights degree programs at university level in Japan. This requires Japanese universities to have more academics to do research and human rights education. Human rights should be recognized as a separate academic field. It is important that research outcome and educational practices are shared among universities, human rights centers and even individual researchers.

Lastly, it is important to provide a guideline for human rights education in higher education in Japan that universities can follow in setting the curriculum and instructors can make the course programs according to it. This gives university instructors the guide on what to teach and how to promote human rights education in Japanese universities.

Throughout this article, the author explains the situation of human rights education in Japanese universities, identifies the challenges and weaknesses, and finds ways of improving them. The conclusion may not be particularly new, but if the suggestions are taken into consideration among the Japanese universities, human rights education in higher education of Japan will be changed. Since the final goal of human rights education is to provide people with the knowledge, skills and behavior supporting human rights,

this will empower people to create a society where they respect each other according to human rights principle.

Endnotes

1 See World Programme for Human Rights Education, www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training/world-programme-human-rights-education.

2 See II. Youth empowerment through human rights education: plan of action for the fourth phase (2020–2024) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/OHCHR-OSGEY-UNESCO-World_Programme_for_Human_Rights_Education_Fourth_Phase.pdf.

3 II. Youth empowerment through human rights education: plan of action for the fourth phase (2020–2024) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, *ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 SDG 4.4 states as target the ensuring of “equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.”

6 学校における人権教育: 文部科学省, www.mext.go.jp. This is the website of Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, which explains the objectives and important points in practicing human rights education at school.

7 Hirasawa, pages 18–19.

8 “Buraku people are a Japanese social minority group, ethnically and linguistically indistinguishable from other Japanese people. They face discrimination in Japan because of an association with work once considered impure, such as butchering animals or tanning leather.” See International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism, www.imadr.org/sayama/buraku.html.

9 Mori, pages 10–11.

10 Ikuta, <http://mailsrv.nara-edu.ac.jp/~ikuta/research1.html>.

11 Ikuta, page 18.

12 Sowa, page 64.

13 Itayama, pages 64–65.

14 Itayama, page 6.

15 Kumamoto, pages 17–19.

16 Akuzawa, pages 39–49. For more discussion on university courses on human rights in Southeast Asia, read Mike Hayes, “Developing Networks of Human Rights Teaching Universities in the Asia-Pacific: The Establishment of SEAHNR and AUN-HRE,” *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific*, volume nine, 2019, www.hurights.or.jp/archives/asia-pacific/section1/hreap_v9_formal_education.pdf.

17 Majima, page 120.

18 The term “enlightenment” (啓蒙) is frequently used as English translation of promoting human rights and awareness-raising on human rights.

19 Watch “The secret world of Japan’s ‘Hidden Christians,’” for a short introduction to the “hidden Christians in Japan. BBC, www.bbc.com/reel/video/pob3frjr/the-secret-world-of-japan-s-hidden-christians-.

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