



Enhancing the Quality of Teaching Human Rights for Nam Can Tho University's - Vietnam Students in the Current Stage

Nguyen Mong Cam¹, Nguyen Chi Hai²

¹Nam Can Tho University, Can Tho, Viet Nam

²Nam Can Tho University, Can Tho, Viet Nam

ABSTRACT

With the aim to achieve the goal of ensuring human rights worldwide, it is crucial for each nation to enact a comprehensive system of policies and laws in this field. However, the successful implementation of human rights enforcement relies on several variables, one of which is human rights education. Consequently, it is vital to bolster knowledge regarding human rights education, particularly among students, in any nation. To accomplish this, it is essential to raise awareness among the administrative staff in the education sector. This article aims to clarify the enhancement of human rights education at educational institutions in general and specifically at Nam Can Tho University in the current stage.

Keywords: Human rights education, quality improvement, Nam Can Tho University.

1. The Significance of Enhancing the Quality of Human Rights Education at Educational Institutions

Human rights encompass all freedoms and privileges inherently recognized by individuals due to their human nature. These human rights stem from the inherent essence of humanity rather than being created by current laws. According to Minh (1945), these are natural, sacred, and inviolable rights bestowed upon humans by their Creator, such as the right to life, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness. These are the fundamental rights of individuals that any government must safeguard.

Human rights are not only recognized from the perspective of natural rights but are also acknowledged from the standpoint of legal rights. According to this view, "Human rights are globally recognized legal guarantees that function to protect individuals and groups against actions or neglect that may cause harm to human dignity, permitted rights, and fundamental freedoms of individuals" (Giao, 2016).

From the analyses above, Giao (2016) mentioned it can be observed that human rights are inherent, innate rights that individuals possess, and without them, we cannot live as true human beings. These include the right to life, freedom, the pursuit of happiness, the right to protection and equality before the law, the right to bodily security, and so on. These rights represent legitimate aspirations for needs that seek a life free from oppression and exploitation, aiming towards noble values that should not be destroyed in any society, and no government has the right to deprive them. In other words, human rights play a role as "the foundation for determining human autonomy, the independence of individuals in addressing personal needs" (Ich, 1995).

In every country, human rights are considered the measure and fundamental metric for the levels of democratic progress, freedom, justice, and civilization. The emphasis on the rule of law to ensure human rights has been extensively developed by renowned thinkers throughout history. This is evidenced by the increasing number of national and international legal documents on human rights and freedoms, such as the Bill of Rights (1689) in England; the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789) in France; the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the Bill of Rights (1789/1791) in the United States; and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and various international human rights instruments issued by the United Nations and other international organizations from the early 20th century to the present. In Vietnam, the state has acknowledged and defended the category of human rights since the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (now the Socialist Republic of Vietnam), acknowledging their significance in society. Ho Chi Minh articulated these rights in the "Declaration of Independence in 1945" and subsequently placed them in the Constitution.

International organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), have additionally issued a series of publications that confirm the rights and liberties of all citizens. The adoption of the UN Charter in 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 were pivotal moments in human history, as they established human rights as a fundamental aspect governed by international law. According to UNESCO, human rights education is an integral part of the right to education and is increasingly recognized as a fundamental human right. Acquiring knowledge about rights, as well as freedom, is an essential means to guarantee adherence to human rights. Hence, education pertaining to human rights must include material concerning principles such as peacefulness, and impartiality towards races, colors, and religions, while also highlighting the importance of fairness, righteousness, acceptance, and the honor of others (UN, 2011). Aiming for unity in the teaching of human rights education globally, since 2005, UNESCO has implemented the Global

Program on Human Rights Education. This program was established based on the resolution No. 59/113 of the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 2005, and built upon the achievements of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (from 1995 to 2004). The program aims to promote a common understanding of the basic principles and methodologies of human rights education, provide a framework for action, and invest in building partnerships and cooperation from the international level to grassroots initiatives. The program is structured into three phases: the first phase (from 2005 to 2009) focuses on human rights education in primary and secondary schools; the second phase (from 2010 to 2014) concentrates on human rights education in higher education; and the third phase (from 2015 to 2019) (Huong, 2022).

According to UNESCO, Manuchehr (2010) stated that human rights education (or human rights literacy) encompasses all aspects of learning aimed at building a knowledge foundation, skills, attitudes, and behaviors related to ensuring human rights. This is recognized as an empowerment process that starts with individuals and extends to the community. Human rights education aims to develop an understanding of the shared responsibility of each individual, with the goal of transforming human rights into reality in each community and society as a whole. In this sense, enhancing the quality of human rights education in countries contributes to preventing violations of human rights, avoiding conflicts and violence, promoting equality, sustainable development, and enhancing participation in decision-making processes within a democratic system.

From a practical perspective, the term "human rights education" encompasses education on democratic citizenship rights and education on mutual respect and understanding, all based on internationally agreed-upon human rights standards. Improving the quality of human rights education involves enhancing educational methods, improving the quality of training, and providing relevant information to specific target groups to build a society that ensures human rights. Enhancing the quality of human rights education in the current stage goes beyond merely providing knowledge for individuals to recognize their rights. It also involves creating awareness of methods and mechanisms for self-defense of one's rights. Additionally, Hường (2022) emphasized that education in related subjects should impart the necessary skills to promote, protect, and apply human rights in daily life.

Early recognition of the importance of enhancing the quality of human rights education, on September 5th, 2017, the Prime Minister of Viet Nam signed Decision No. 1309/QĐ-TTg approving the project to incorporate human rights content into the national education system. The goal of the project is to disseminate and educate about human rights to bring about a transformation in the awareness of learners, educators, and educational management personnel regarding the importance and self-protection consciousness of their rights, respecting human dignity, the rights, and the freedoms of others. Additionally, the project emphasizes an awareness of the responsibilities and duties of citizens towards the state and society, contributing to the comprehensive development of the Vietnamese people and meeting the requirements of the nation's integration and sustainable development (Tram, 2022).

According to Chau (2022), human rights education plays a crucial role in raising social awareness and helps prevent and limit human rights violations. In recent times, implementing Decision No. 1309/QĐ-TTg dated September 5th, 2017, of the Prime Minister, the initial results of the project have contributed to enhancing social awareness of the importance of human rights education, especially for officials, managers, as well as educators, students, and learners in the national education system. On December 21, 2021, the Prime Minister issued Directive No. 34/CT-TTg on strengthening the implementation of the project to incorporate human rights content into the national education system. This directive aims to further enhance human rights education suitable for each level and educational stage within the national education system in the current context.

2. Methods of implementing human rights education at Nam Can Tho University

Nam Can Tho University is a private university established by Decision No. 230/QĐ-TTg dated January 25th, 2013, issued by the Prime Minister of the Government of Vietnam. It received authorization to operate from the Ministry of Education and Training through Decision No. 1335/QĐ-BGDĐT on April 12th, 2013. As of 2023, Nam Can Tho University offers education in 41 undergraduate majors, accommodating a total of over 25,000 students. Notably, the Law and Economic Law disciplines alone have more than 1,500 students, a significant figure for a private university located in the Mekong Delta region in the current period.

Recognizing the importance of human rights education as an objective requirement with significant relevance in building and strengthening democracy, as well as contributing to the successful establishment of a socialist rule-of-law state in Vietnam, Nam Can Tho University has developed and continually improved the quality of its bachelor's degree programs. This university has been attentive to integrating and incorporating human rights education content that aligns with the training objectives of its various departments. This integration is carried out through the following implementation methods.

Firstly, for non-law major students, the lecturers teach human rights in the general law course. This course which was compiled by the lecturers of the Law Faculty at Nam Can Tho University consists of 10 chapters. Chapter 2 specifically covers human rights, rights, and basic obligations of citizens. The focus is on imparting knowledge to students regarding the importance and role of human rights under international law and the Constitution of Vietnam.

Additionally, in other chapters of the general law course, human rights are integrated into other contents. For instance, in Chapter 5 - Business and Commercial Law, human rights related to the freedom of business, the freedom to choose an industry, and the form of enterprise are detailed by instructors. This aims to help students understand the fundamental rights of individuals when participating in the global and Vietnamese economy. Similarly, in Chapter 9 - Labor Law, the right of individuals to freely choose employment is specified in the course content, allowing students to grasp the rights of Vietnamese laborers and individuals worldwide in choosing and changing employment based on their interests, abilities, and societal needs.

In Vietnam, human rights education should emphasize the teaching of the Constitution as an indispensable and integral part of the human rights education endeavor. Therefore, human rights, as an intrinsic and fundamental aspect, are one of the crucial contents covered in the Constitutional Law course. This course is taught in the third semester for students majoring in Law and Economic Law.

Human rights education through the Constitution allows students to approach human rights through the lens of state power, representing the will and aspirations of the people, and the nation's desire for the development of a just, free, democratic, and civilized society. Through this approach, students can observe the robust democracy of our state, ensured and implemented by the state power in fulfilling the legal obligations and legitimate rights of individuals and organizations according to the law.

In addition, in the 8th semester, Nam Can Tho University's law majors are given the option to choose the Human Rights elective course with a duration of 30 sessions. Despite being an elective course, with the insightful guidance and encouragement from the University's administrators, the dean's committee, and the Law faculty's academic advisors, students are encouraged to choose the Human Rights course to enhance their knowledge. In this course, students will be taught in-depth knowledge about concepts, aspects, characteristics, and specific contents in each specialized lecture, as well as legal provisions related to human rights. Additionally, through the policies of the Party and the state on human rights, students can delve deeper into the direction of human rights development in our country. The course employs various interesting teaching methods, combining lectures and student presentations on topics related to human rights, aiming to achieve the educational objectives of human rights for law majors at Nam Can Tho University.

On the other hand, in the remaining courses of the bachelor's program in Law at Nam Can Tho University, fundamental provisions on human rights are also acknowledged and taught to students by integrating them into the other course content. For instance, in the Civil Law course, students are introduced to various rights such as freedom of speech, equality before the law, nationality rights, the right to a name, property rights, etc. Besides, in the Criminal Law course, the curriculum addresses citizens' rights protected by the law, including the right to inviolability of the body, dignity, reputation, etc. This approach ensures that students across different legal disciplines gain an understanding of and appreciation for human rights in various legal contexts. The incorporation of human rights principles into these courses contributes to a comprehensive legal education at Nam Can Tho University.

3. The successes in developing and implementing human rights education at Nam Can Tho University

Currently, teaching and learning activities on human rights at Nam Can Tho University in general, and among students of the Law Faculty in particular, are progressing very favorably, with many favorable conditions for developing a career in human rights education at the university. Several specific successes are discovered.

Firstly, the Party and the State have recognized the importance of human rights and have promptly issued directive documents. Specifically, on September 5th, 2017, the Prime Minister signed Decision No. 1309/QĐ-TTg approving the project to incorporate human rights content into the national education system. This establishes a solid legal foundation for investing in and developing human rights education in higher education institutions in general and at Nam Can Tho University in particular. It creates a legal framework for the unified progress of reforms, integrating the development of human rights values into the educational mission, and lays the groundwork for training a workforce that meets the social demands in the context of globalization.

Secondly, the local government has shown appropriate attention to incorporating human rights content into the national education system in the area of Can Tho city. Specifically, on July 11th, 2022, the People's Committee of Can Tho City issued Plan No. 152/KH-UBND to implement Directive No. 34/CT-TTg dated December 21st, 2021, of the Prime Minister on strengthening the implementation of the project to include human rights content in the national education system in Can Tho City. According to this plan, the aim is to disseminate, propagate, and educate on human rights to create a transformation in the awareness of students, teachers, and educational administrators regarding the importance and awareness of protecting one's rights. The plan outlines four main objectives: (1) to intensify information, dissemination, and raise awareness of the significance of incorporating human rights content into the education system at all levels in the city; (2) to enhance the knowledge of human rights for educational administrators, lecturers, and teachers; (3) to improve infrastructure and equipment for teaching human rights; (4) to strengthen the implementation of educational activities within schools, combined with family and societal education.

Thirdly, Nam Can Tho University and the Faculty of Law's administrators have consistently shown interest and provided timely guidance for improving the quality of educational programs. In 2017, when the Prime Minister approved the project to incorporate human rights content into teaching, the Executive Board of Nam Can Tho University immediately directed the Faculty of Law to compile the General Law textbook. In 2018, the faculty members of the Faculty of Law successfully completed the compilation, and Nam Can Tho University published the General Law textbook, incorporating human rights, for teaching all students across the university. The university also creates opportunities and financially supports law faculty members to participate in training sessions on human rights organized in Ho Chi Minh City, aiming to enhance their knowledge of human rights and better serve the teaching activities at the university.

Fourthly, with the active interest of the leadership of the Faculty of Law, the lecturers at the Faculty of Law are aware of the importance of human rights in university teaching. They proactively engage in continuous learning to enhance their qualifications and understanding. They collaborate with the National Political Publishing House in Can Tho city to acquire reference books and textbooks related to human rights, aiming to improve knowledge and introduce them to the university students. They also establish connections with the Library of Nam Can Tho University to acquire reference books on human rights, providing students with study materials. Currently, the library has numerous books on human rights, such as Limited Government Rights concerning human rights and Citizenship Rights in International Law and Vietnamese Law by author Nguyen Minh Tuan (editor-in-chief), the Theory and Law on Human Rights textbook by author Nguyen Dang Dung (editor-in-chief), and the reference book on human rights in international law and Vietnamese law by author Mai Hong Quy (editor-in-chief).

4. Challenges and solutions in developing and implementing human rights education at Nam Can Tho University

There are several challenges in developing and implementing human rights education at Can Tho University.

Firstly, human rights are abstract and theoretical, and approaching human rights means dealing with a large body of theoretical knowledge, including the system of international legal texts and the Vietnamese legal system regulating human rights. Therefore, students may encounter difficulties in understanding the core content of human rights. In light of this, to ensure the teaching is effective and engaging and to overcome these challenges, it is necessary to implement several solutions for both lecturers and students. The first solution is for lecturers. While teaching human rights, they should guide through situational teaching methods, apply real-life lessons, and analyze legal situations to enforce laws. Besides, they need to emphasize directing students to relevant materials related to the course, assisting them in researching human rights by exploring international and Vietnamese regulations on this matter. Moreover, the lecturers should encourage students to establish specialized clubs. For instance, students can study, engage in monthly thematic activities related to the course, study in groups, and collectively discuss challenges and difficulties in their learning process. This approach fosters collaborative problem-solving and positive learning methods. The second suggestion is for students. They should regularly engage in discussions and exchanges about human rights in class through group assignments, role-playing as legal consultants, and presenting research topics, guided by instructors. Additionally, students should be tasked with writing research papers on human rights themes and completing case studies related to human rights issues as per the regulations of international and Vietnamese law. These methods will effectively enhance students' understanding and research capabilities. Furthermore, facilitating opportunities for students to participate in national and international scientific conferences, specialized seminars, panel discussions, and professional development activities is crucial. Through these activities, students can easily assimilate new knowledge and gain insights, helping them to navigate and choose new research topics.

Secondly, during the process of teaching human rights, instructional materials also significantly impact the quality of education. Currently, at Nam Can Tho University, the main teaching resources are textbooks and reference books authored by various scholars, similar to other universities in Vietnam. The university has not yet published materials specifically on human rights to support teaching and learning for law major students. Therefore, in the upcoming period, the university and the department need to focus on developing teaching materials on human rights for law major students and publishing reference books and human rights textbooks as research materials for students studying law at Nam Can Tho University.

Thirdly, enhancing the quality of lecturers, especially in the field of human rights education, is an extremely important issue that needs to be emphasized and developed in the plan to develop a human rights training program at the undergraduate level. To address this issue, it is recognized that the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics could periodically organize training sessions every quarter for the lecturers at Nam Can Tho University to expand their knowledge. Subsequently, these lecturers can then disseminate the acquired content to other lecturers. With this approach, each lecturer would be informed and responsible for reminding and motivating students to study human rights more effectively.

Fourthly, the communication efforts regarding the government's human rights education initiative currently have not reached many target audiences, mainly in Can Tho city. These audiences include not only lecturers teaching human rights, and the Constitution, and local leaders but also the university's leadership who are just catching up with the information. The solution to this issue involves intensifying communication channels through television, online competitions, human rights debate contests, and promoting information through social media advertising applications (ADS). This approach aims to ensure that a wider range of audiences are informed. Additionally, there should be a collaboration with law schools to organize competitions that explore global and Vietnamese legal perspectives on human rights, ensuring that the content of human rights is better known and applied more effectively in practice.

REFERENCES

1. Chau, M. (2022). *Enhancing Quality and Effectiveness of Human Rights Education*. Communist Party of Vietnam Magazine. <https://dangcongsan.vn/xay-dung-dang/nang-cao-chat-luong-hieu-qua-giao-duc-ve-quyen-con-nguoi-622401.html#:~:text=Giáo%20dục%20quyền%20con%20người%20cố%20vì%20trò%20đặc%20biệt,và%20biết%20tôn%20tr%E1%BB%8Dng%20phẩm>
2. Giao, V. C. (2016). *Q&A on Human Rights and Civic Duties*. Hanoi: National Politics Truth Publishing House.
3. Giao, V. C. (2022). *Enhancing the Efficiency of Human Rights Protection in Building the Socialist Rule of Law State in Vietnam*. *Legislative Research*. <http://www.lapphap.vn/Pages/TinTuc/211039/Nang-cao-hieu-qua-bao-dam-quyen-con-nguoi-trong-xay-dung-Nha-nuoc-phap-quyen-xa-hoi-chu-nghia-Viet-Nam.html>
4. Hoi, Q. (2013). *Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*.
5. Huong, V. L. (2022). *Human Rights Education in Vocational Education- Opportunities and Challenges*. *General Department of Vocational Education*. <http://gdm.gov.vn/AIAdmin/News/View/tabid/66/newsid/39236/seo/giao-duc-quyen-con-nguoi-trong-giao-duc-nghe-nghiep--nhung-thuan-loi-va-kho-khan/Default.aspx>
6. Ich, P. K. H. (1995). *Human Rights in the Modern World*. Institute of Social Sciences and International Relations.
7. United Nations. (2011). *Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training*.
8. Manuehr, T.-N. (2010). *UNO and the Human Rights Education*. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2.

9. Minh, H. C. (1945). *Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam*.
10. Tram, N. (2022). *Strengthening the Implementation of the Project to Integrate Human Rights Content into the National Education System. Nha Trang Province Electronic Information Portal*. <https://nhatrang.khanhhoa.gov.vn/vi/van-hoa-xa-hoi/tang-cuong-thuc-hien-de-an-dua-noi-dung-quyen-con-nguoi-vao-chuong-trinh-giao-duc-trong-he-thong-giao-duc-quoc-dan#>
11. Yen, N. T. (2019). *Research and Training Base in Implementing UPR Recommendations on Human Rights Education in Vietnam. Legislative Research*. <http://lapphap.vn/Pages/tintuc/tinchitiet.aspx?tintucid=210302>