

Exploring the Extent of Awareness and Violation of Fundamental Human Rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Ezeodo Calista Chinwe, PhD.

Department of Social Science Education,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
calista.ezeodo@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

The study sought to investigate the extent of awareness and violations of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The research design was descriptive survey. Four research questions were formulated in the study. The population of the study comprised 182 students from the Department of Social Science Education (Political Science Education Unit), University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The entire 182 students were selected using total enumeration sampling technique. A checklist on Awareness of Fundamental Human Rights by Undergraduate Students (AFHRUS)" and a questionnaire titled "Extent of Violation of Fundamental Human Rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka (EVFHRUNN)" were used for data gathering. The data collected was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed among others that undergraduate students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka are highly aware of their fundamental human rights. Recommendations were made that University administrators should establish a dedicated office to monitor, report, and address human rights violations, to provide support to victims and promote accountability.

Keywords: Human rights, human rights awareness, human rights violation, undergraduate students

INTRODUCTION

Human rights are issues with strong impacts on the daily interactions and existence of human beings given that life is precious and property is valuable, and requires protection with rules and regulations or laws. Rights are certain liberties every person in a country enjoys regardless of sex, tribe, color, religion, ethnicity, language, place or residence (Buchanan, 2013). Human beings are endowed with eternal and inalienable rights for peaceful coexistence, and responsible citizenry. Robinson (1999) sees human rights as birth rights every person enjoys as a human being. The American Constitution of (1776) also affirms the neutrality and equality of the fundamental rights as self-evident truth with proclamations on equal and inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness of all humans. Schwöbel (2016) succinctly defined human rights as rights and freedom of every human person. The fundamental human rights are recognized in global scenes because of their importance in guaranteeing human dignity and liberty. This is because if those rights are nonexistent, life in every human society would be meaningless, and likened to Thomas Hobbes state of nature characterized as “solitary, poor, short, nasty and brutish”. Accordingly, Shestack (1998) viewed fundamental rights as those rights possessed by all human beings. Fundamental rights include the inalienable rights human beings possess by virtue of being human beings irrespective of any social circumstances. OHCHR (2004) offered a comprehensive definition of the concept to mean the inalienable rights inherent in nature for human beings. Hence, the constitutional provisions of fundamental freedom helps citizens to fully use address varied societal demands. In another view, Nderitu (2010) sees fundamental human rights are legal and moral standards that established the essential social, economic, political, civil and cultural entitlements of every human being around the globe. To Equitas (2008),

fundamental human rights are rights that belong to every human being. The United Nations (1945) recognized human rights as universal and that respect for fundamental human liberties of all human beings must be devoid of discriminatory tendencies such as race, sex, creed, or ethnicity.

On another note, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights with fundamental freedoms devoid of discriminations. The first article of Universal Declaration clearly imbedded in the French Declaration on rights of citizens acknowledged that every man is created free and equal in rights. Notably, the global acceptance of Human Rights Declaration by the United Nations in 1948 was based on the following conceived importance of fundamental human rights:

- a. Guaranteeing fundamental human rights helps to promote peace, law and order.
- b. It curtails arbitrary use or exercise of power by individuals and governments.
- c. Fundamental human rights serve as decorum that guide every human conducts.
- d. The provisions help to check injustices and man inhumanity to man in the society.
- e. They help to promote peaceful coexistence among the people.
- f. They are inalienable rights.

The grant of fundamental human rights to the citizens and, laying certain positive limitations on the authority of the government considered as one of the pre-requisites of the democratic government. Normally these rights are granted to the citizens by making them a part of the constitutional law, which can be changed only by special procedure of amendment. But sometimes these rights are not reduced to writing, as in England, and still the citizens enjoy certain basic liberties, which are so essential for the proper development of their personalities. In such countries, the rights and

liberties of the citizens are protected by the judiciary. But whether the rights are reduced in writing or accrued to the people by practice, it cannot be denied that they are very essential for the development of human personality. They are invariably given a place in the legal structure of the country. In the eighteenth century, the fundamental human rights included only rights to equality; property, happiness and the right to nonconsensual taxation.

The Declaration of the United Nations on human rights, on December 10, 1948, outlined all rights that every human ought to possess; affirming that all human beings are equal and no distinction should be made between individuals on the ground of birth, race, religion, wealth or status. And must enjoy the liberty to participate in politics, have access to public services and; that human liberties must be safeguarded or protected from slavery, torture, arbitrary arrest, discrimination, private life, freedom of religion, speech, association, movement, right to education, freedom to own private property and of the press. A careful study on Universal Declaration of Human Rights depicts its wholesome adoption in the world constitutions. However, the interpretative application differs from society to society. The freedom of the press in some society may be taken to mean freedom to criticize the government, the private ownership of the press, to support the decision of the government. For example, in Britain, the individual enjoys maximum freedom to do anything which does not come in conflict with laws passed by the British Parliament guarantees. The British Parliament recognizes the liberties granted by Writ of Habeas Corpus Act of 1679 and the Bill of Rights of 1689. The writs of Habeas Corpus includes, the right of petition, the right to election, right from protection from cruel and unjust punishment, right to protection fines and forfeitures prior to conviction. British citizens also enjoy fundamental political liberties like freedom of association, religion, speech, assembly freedom of speech, assembly, the press,

right to private property, right to private life based on common law.

More so, the United States of America Magna Carta issued in 1215 was the first constitution to incorporate Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights which is the corner stone of American constitutional system made its way into American constitution through the first ten amendments in 1791. The first amendment guaranteed religion, speech, press freedom; rights to peaceful assembly and incase of redress of grievances can petition the government. Second amendment guaranteed the right to keep and bear firearms to the Americans. The third amendment enshrined that no soldier can be accommodated in a house during peacekeeping at the expense of the owner at the time. Fourth amendment guaranteed the citizens the right to security of life, houses, and protection against unwarranted searches and seizures. The Fifth Amendment stipulated that the trial of persons for major crime is forbidden except after indictment by grand jury. And that no one should be punished more than once for the same crime.

Meanwhile, the Sixth Amendment guaranteed swift open court trial by an impartial judge of the state and district where the crime was committed and granted individuals the right to be defended by the counsel of his choice. The seventh Amendment recognized the right of trial by jury lawsuits value controversy that exceeded twenty dollars. By the Eighteenth Amendment granted against the imposition of excessive bail fines, and subjection to cruel or unusual punishment. The Ninth Amendment enshrined that the rights contained in the US constitution shall not be construed as denial of other recognized rights of the people. While the Tenth Amendment established the reservation of powers not delegated to the United States by the constitution, nor prohibited by the states for the state or the people.

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Judging from the above, it can be said that the first eight amendment spells out the procedural personal rights, while the last two are the general rules for interpretation of the relation that exists among the states and the federal government. In addition to the rights granted by these ten amendments, the constitution of the federal and states government guaranteed certain additional rights through Habeas Corpus, which cannot be suspended except when there is rebellion or invasion. All the rights guaranteed to US citizens are protected from infringement by the federal or state governments and the Supreme Court. However, some of these rights in the US constitution are not fully implemented.

The Citizens Committee on Civil Rights constituted by President Harry Truman in 1946 reported that there was discrimination against the Negroes exists in private employment, government and military appointment, racial segregation, violation of fundamental freedom of speech, press, religion and assembly, as well as involuntary servitude under state peonage laws. In spite of these limitations in the actual operation of the fundamental liberties in the American constitution, it cannot be denied that the constitution protects the citizens' liberties against arbitrariness by the federal and state governments. Thus, fundamental human rights are the *sin qua non* of individual liberty and the absence of these rights, life will be likened to the state of nature as brutish, short, nasty, solitary, and poor.

Fundamental Human Rights under Nigerian Constitution

The world conference held in Vienna, 1993, gave states the responsibility of guaranteeing and safeguarding rights and fundamental freedoms of all regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems. Hence, every country, nation, state, community or organizations has some spelt out duties, obligations, rights and liberties which are

entrenched in the constitution to guide the behavior of its citizens. Meanwhile, it was mainly to curtail man inhumanity to man that led to the United Nations Declaration on the fundamental human rights on December 10, 1948 and its further adoption in world constitutions. The chapter four, section 33-46 of Nigerian constitution of 1999 stipulated the following fundamental human rights of the citizens:

- a. to life.
- b. to dignity of human person.
- c. to personal liberty.
- d. to fair hearing
- e. to private and family life.
- f. to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- g. to freedom of expression and the press.
- h. to peaceful assembly and association.
- i. to freedom of movement.
- j. to freedom of discrimination.
- k. to acquire and own immovable property.

These rights which are contained in the Nigerian constitution of 1999 ought to be preserved by constitutional laws like treaties, customary law, international law and general principles. The essence of international human rights law is to mandate governments of different countries with the obligations of upholding and defending individuals or group freedom. Thus, the reason chapter four of Nigerian Constitution enshrines the fundamental rights of its citizens which if violated can be enforced in any court of law in Nigeria.

However, these highlighted rights may be restricted or withdrawn in case of misuse or emergency in order to ensure peace and stability in the country. For instance making false accusation against others as par freedom of expression is considered a libel, sedition. The right to freedom of movement can be denied citizens in case of social, religious crisis or health emergencies, like the restriction of movement of persons in the era of Covid-19 to contain the spread of the virus, and declaration

of curfews by states to contain social uprisings. Summarily, the fundamental rights of a citizen can be revoked under certain legal conditions. Such as:

- a. A person pronounced culpable of robbery, treason or murder can be denied rights to free movement and life.
- b. Freedom of expression is limited by the law of slander, libel or sedition.
- c. Citizens with mental or infectious health issues can be denied the right to free movement.
- d. Freedom of expression and movement in form of demonstration can be denied of the citizens to maintain orderliness, peace and security.
- e. In the time of national emergencies, wars, unhealthy uprising, or health crisis, the right to freedom of movement, or fair trial may be restricted if such citizen is considered a security risk.

The emphasis on the above legal conditions suggests that Nigerian government through the instrumentality of the Constitution can place restrictions on the fundamental human rights of citizens as a measure of maintaining law and order or containing health emergencies.

Conversely, it is noteworthy to stress that though the duty to grant and protect these fundamental human rights falls on the state, the citizens in turn owes the state some duties and obligations. Just like the words of Abraham Lincoln “we should think of what you can do for your country and not what your country can do for you.” In every society, there are certain civic duties and obligations which citizens are required by law to render to the state in exchange for protection. The citizens are expected to:

1. Payment taxes and rates
2. To obey the law or be law abiding
3. Participate in political activities, to vote and be voted for
4. Respect and protect public properties, monuments, national flags, anthem and symbols.

5. Join the military to defend the country from any kind of aggression
6. Abstain from engaging in criminal activities
7. Show respect for the rights of others
8. Respect political authorities
9. Demonstrate unquestionable loyalty and patriotism towards the country.

These aforementioned duties and obligations are like the 21st century social contract allegiance of the citizens to the state while the state ensures the protection of their fundamental human rights.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the fact that different measure have been taken by international, regional, sub-regional, state, non-governmental Organizations and human rights activists to promote human right awareness and mitigate human right violation, information on level of awareness of human rights among the vulnerable groups of people such as students is still scanty. For instance, there has been public outcry on the level of human rights violations among the students despite the existence of a robust constitutional framework that outlines a comprehensive Bill of Rights that envisions rights for all. As a mechanism of creating awareness on human rights, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and, the Ministry of Education through syllabus coverage and non-governmental organizations have been conducting human right education on the "Bill of Rights" with the aim of reaching out to many Nigerians especially students. However, despite such initiatives there exist cases of human rights violation in the Nigerian universities. This raises the question on whether undergraduate students are aware of the existing fundamental human rights. Therefore, this study sought to find out the extent of awareness and violation of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the extent of awareness and violation

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of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Specifically, the study seeks to find out:

1. The extent of undergraduate students' awareness of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
2. The extent of violation of undergraduate students' fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
3. Factors that can lead to violation of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria Nsukka.
4. Possible ways of mitigating violation of undergraduate students' fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Research Questions

In an attempt to guide the study, the following research questions were raised.

1. What is the extent undergraduate students' awareness of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka?
2. What is the extent of violation of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka?
3. What are the factors that can lead to violation of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka?

Table 1: Mean rating and standard deviation on the extent of undergraduate students' awareness of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Right to life	3.36	0.65	HA
2	Right to the Dignity of Human Person.	3.24	0.77	HA
3	Right to Personal Liberty.	2.86	0.94	HA
4.	Right to Fair Hearing.	2.71	0.89	HA
5	Right to Private and Family life.	2.61	0.94	HA
6.	Right to Freedom of Thought, Consciousness and Religion.	2.62	0.89	HA
7.	Freedom of Expression and the Press.	3.14	0.65	HA
8.	Freedom to Peaceful Assembly and Association.	2.72	0.85	HA
9.	Right to Freedom of Movement.	3.05	0.74	HA
10.	Right to Freedom of Discrimination.	2.98	0.85	HA
11	Right to Acquire and own Immovable Property	2.85	0.66	HA

Keyword: HA-Highly Aware

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4. What are the possible ways of mitigating violation of undergraduate students' fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka?

METHODOLOGY

The research design was descriptive survey. The study was carried out in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The population of the study comprised 182 students from the Department of Social Science Education (Political Science Unit), University of Nigeria Nsukka. Total enumeration sampling technique was used to select all the 182 students from the Political Science Education unit because the population size was manageable. A questionnaire titled "Extent of Violation of Fundamental Human Rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka and a checklist on "Extent of Awareness of Fundamental Human Rights by Undergraduate Students" were used to gather data used for the study. The data collected from the respondents was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Mean score of 2.5 and above was be accepted while a mean score of less than 2.5 was rejected.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Table 1 shows the extent of undergraduate students are aware of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Items 1-11 has mean scores of 3.36, 3.24, 2.86, 2.71, 2.61, 2.62, 3.14, 2.72, 3.05, 2.98, and 2.85, with corresponding standard deviation of 0.65, 0.77, 0.94, 0.89, 0.94, 0.89, 0.65, 0.85, 0.74, 0.85, and 0.66. These mean scores are above the 2.50 acceptance benchmark. This implies that undergraduate students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka are highly aware of the following fundamental

human rights: right to life, dignity of the human person, personal liberty, fair hearing, privacy, freedom of thought, consciousness and religion, freedom of expression and the press, freedom to peaceful assembly and association, freedom of movement, freedom of discrimination, quality education, health and safety, representation and information. Therefore, the results indicated that undergraduate students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka are aware of their fundamental human rights. The standard deviation scores on the other hand shows less variation of the mean responses from each other.

Table 2: Mean ratings and standard deviation scores on the extent violation of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Decision
12	Right to life	1.45	0.53	LE
13.	Right to the Dignity of Human Person.	2.41	0.50	LE
14.	Right to Personal Liberty.	2.37	0.53	LE
15.	Right to Fair Hearing.	2.34	0.54	LE
16.	Right to Private and Family life.	1.29	0.66	LE
17.	Right to Freedom of Thought, Consciousness and Religion.	1.38	0.53	LE
18.	Freedom of Expression and the Press.	1.31	0.58	LE
19	Freedom to Peaceful Assembly and Association.	1.29	0.48	LE
20.	Right to Freedom of Movement.	1.30	0.53	LE
21	Right to Freedom of Discrimination.	1.80	0.69	LE
22	Right to Acquire and own Immovable Property	1.64	0.77	LE

Keyword: LE-Low Extent

Table 2 shows the extent of fundamental human rights violation in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Items 12-22 on Table 2 has mean scores of 1.45, 2.41, 2.37, 2.34, 1.29, 1.38, 1.31, 1.29, 1.30, 1.80, and 1.64. The mean scores of the items are below the 2.50 acceptance benchmark. This implies low violation of the right to life, dignity of the human person, personal liberty, private and family life, freedom of thought,

consciousness and religion, freedom of expression and the press, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, freedom of movement, freedom of discrimination, and right to acquire and own immovable property in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Hence, none of the identified fundamental human rights on Table 2 are violated in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The standard deviation scores indicates less variability of the mean responses of the students.

Table 3: Mean rating and standard deviation on the factors that can lead to violation of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Decision
23	Disregard for the constitution	2.58	0.50	Agree
24.	Cultural and religious beliefs.	2.80	0.50	Agree
25.	Ignorance and illiteracy.	2.61	0.54	Agree
26	Poverty and hardship.	2.30	0.53	Disagree

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27	Judicial corruption.	3.29	0.58	Agree
28	Lack of political will and accountability.	2.42	0.51	Disagree

Table 3 shows the factors that can lead to violation of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The mean scores of items 26 and 28 are below the 2.50 acceptance benchmark thus were rejected. However, mean scores for items 23, 24, 25 and 27 which are 2.58, 2.80, 2.61 and 3.29 are above the 2.50 acceptance benchmark and thus were

accepted as factors that can lead to violation of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka include: disregard for the constitution, cultural and religious beliefs, ignorance and illiteracy and judicial corruption. The standard deviation scores implies that the response from the respondents are not widely dispersed from each other

Table 4: Mean rating and standard deviation on the possible ways of mitigating violation of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Decision
29	Monitoring and reporting verifiable human rights violations	3.06	0.46	Agree
30	Ensuring fair and impartial legal proceedings.	2.98	0.53	Agree
31	Strengthening judicial independence.	2.93	0.58	Agree
32	Providing human rights education.	2.87	0.61	Agree
33	Protecting human rights victims.	2.63	0.80	Agree
34	Promoting mechanisms for human rights accountability.	2.66	0.77	Agree

Table 4 shows the possible ways of mitigating violation of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The Mean scores of items 29-34 which are 3.06, 2.98, 2.93, 2.87, 2.63 and 2.66 with corresponding standard deviation of 0.46, 0.53, 0.58, 0.61, 0.80 and 0.77. These mean scores are above the 2.50 acceptance benchmark hence they were accepted as possible ways of mitigating violation of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. These possible ways of mitigating violation of fundamental human rights include monitoring and reporting verifiable human rights violations, ensuring fair and impartial legal proceedings, strengthening judicial independence, providing human rights education, protecting human rights victims and promoting mechanisms for human rights accountability. The standard deviation scores indicated close variability of the scores from the mean.

Undergraduate students' awareness of fundamental human rights.

The results indicated that undergraduate students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka are highly aware of right to life, dignity of the human person, personal liberty, fair hearing, private and family life, freedom of thought, consciousness and religion, freedom of expression and the press, freedom to peaceful assembly and association, freedom of movement, freedom of discrimination, freedom of movement, freedom of discrimination and; right to acquire and own immovable property. In agreement with this finding, Agarwal (2014) reported that most people had awareness of human rights.

This finding suggest that undergraduate students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka are exposed to various courses and discussions that emphasize human rights, social justice, and democratic values, leading to increased awareness of these fundamental rights. In

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

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addition, university students are typically young adults who are more likely to be aware of their rights and interested in social and political issues. Students also have access to various sources of information, including the internet, social media, and academic resources, which provide extensive information on human rights.

Undergraduate students' awareness of violation of fundamental human rights

The study also revealed low violation of the right to life, dignity of the human person, personal liberty, fair hearing, private and family life, freedom of thought, consciousness and religion, freedom of expression and the press, freedom to peaceful assembly and association, freedom of movement, freedom of discrimination, freedom of movement, freedom of discrimination and; right to acquire and own immovable property in University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

However, the revealed low violation of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka may be due to students' high awareness of their rights, which can lead to increased advocacy and activism, holding the university administration accountable for protecting their rights. This may suggest that Nigeria has a legal framework that protects human rights, and the university may be complying with these laws, resulting in a low violation. It may also imply that the student union or representative bodies are active and effective in advocating for students' rights and interests.

Factors can lead to violations of fundamental human rights

The study found that the factors that can lead to violation of fundamental human rights include disregard for the constitution, cultural and religious beliefs, ignorance and illiteracy and judicial corruption. This finding supports the finding of Buyse (2018) which reported that human rights could be lawfully limited.

Violation of human rights could be linked to widespread corruption and inefficiencies in the judicial system that may prevent students from seeking justice and holding violators accountable. Again, imbalances in power and authority within the university may lead to violations, as those in positions of power may disregard students' rights. Limited resources and funding may hinder the university's ability to effectively address human rights violations. Furthermore, absence of effective accountability mechanisms may allow violators to go unpunished, perpetuating a culture of disregard for human rights.

Possible ways of addressing violation of fundamental human rights

The study found that possible ways of mitigating violation of fundamental human rights in university of Nigeria, Nsukka include monitoring and reporting verifiable human rights violations, ensuring fair and impartial legal proceedings, strengthening judicial independence, providing human rights education, protecting human rights victims and promoting mechanisms for human rights accountability. In addition to this, Akiri (2013) gave several suggestions to create awareness among students such as giving students a copy of the constitution, inclusion of civil and social studies in the curricular and organizing workshops on human rights for teachers, students, administration, and education agencies to create awareness.

This affirms that identifying and documenting human rights violations is crucial for addressing them effectively. More so, ensuring that legal processes are just and unbiased helps to build trust and confidence in the system. Educating students, staff, and faculty about human rights also promotes awareness, empathy, and respect for rights. Furthermore, providing support and protection for victims of human rights violations helps to prevent further

harm and ensures access to justice and by encouraging accountability for human rights violations, there will be prevention of impunity thus ensuring that violators are held responsible.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concluded that undergraduate students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka are highly aware of their fundamental human rights. The extent of violation of fundamental human rights in University of Nigeria, Nsukka was low. However, possible strategies for addressing violation of fundamental human rights were identified to include monitoring and reporting verifiable human rights violations among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made:

1. University administrators should establish a dedicated office to monitor, report, and address human rights violations, providing support to victims and promoting accountability.
2. Curriculum developers should integrate human rights education into the curriculum, providing workshops and training for students, faculty, and staff to raise awareness and promote respect for human rights.
3. Government should strengthen judicial independence, ensuring fair and impartial legal proceedings, and establishing a clear and effective mechanism for reporting and addressing human rights violations.
4. Lecturers should encourage student participation in academic and extracurricular activities, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusivity.
5. Faculties should provide training and resources for faculty members to

address human rights issues, promoting a culture of respect and empathy.

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