

## Human Rights Awareness: Perspectives of Students and Administrators in the University of Cape Coast

Francis Kyeremeh  
*University Primary School, Cape Coast*

### **Abstract**

*The study investigated human rights awareness of administrators and students at the University of Cape Coast (UCC). The cultural reproduction and structural violence theory offered the theoretical frames for understanding human rights in higher education in Ghana. The study adopted a qualitative research design, using the case study approach to interpret the human rights situation in UCC. Thirty students and 10 administrators were purposively selected for interview. Inductive analysis process was used to analyse the data into themes. The study revealed that the administration of the University has shown great commitment to the application of the principles of human rights, but some traces of structural violence have been transferred from society into the University. I recommend the establishment of a human rights centre to handle human rights complaints and promote respect for human rights at the UCC.*

**Keywords:** *human rights; civil rights; freedoms; basic rights; social justice.*

### **Introduction**

Human rights education has been seen as a global concern. It has been the cherished agenda for the United Nations (UN) that all nations irrespective of their status should

adopt and pursue human rights and freedom issues very diligently (Tibbitts, 2006). This has come as a result of an era in which constitutional bills of rights and freedoms are being constantly violated. The most vulnerable victims include children, women, people under colonial rule and those under dictatorial rule. In Africa, we observe even more frequent, serious and unabashed violations of fundamental rights, administrative powers, constitutional pledges and guarantees. Some nations in Africa such as Libya, Guinea Bissau, Republic of the Congo, Niger and Madagascar still live under one-party dictatorship, even though their new constitutions adopted in the wake of their liberation from colonial rule, contained liberal bills of rights or made the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights an integral part of their text (Brownlie, 2006).

While the goal of social justice-oriented educational leadership programmes is to develop administrators, who are sensitive to the lives and well-being of all children, these approaches may well mean that social justice-minded

administrators are essentially conflicted in their daily practices. Public school administrators' daily professional lives are guided by a host of statutes, regulations and court decisions – all of which might be hostile to the well-being of many children (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006). Moreover, over the past decade, university administrative preparatory programmes have increasingly focused on issues of social justice. Part of this growth has been fuelled by concern for the growing number of public-school students who have been considered at-risk for a host of dismal academic and life outcomes (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006).

The references to human rights in the Charter of the UN have provided the bases for elaboration of the content of standards and the machinery for implementing protection of human rights. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1948, the General Assembly of the UN adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the quest for peace and development, all modern constitutions recognise the importance of free expression. Their bills of rights guarantee freedom of speech, of the press, and freedom of the citizens peaceably to assemble. To improve the situation further, governments tend to prioritise education. Every modern constitution provides for free compulsory primary/basic and secondary education. “Education

protects against injustice and exploitation by increasing the individual's knowledge and skills to articulate demands ...” (Brownlie, 2006, p. 145).

According to Brown (2004), the goal of education is to develop the whole personality. This means, through education one should be versatile and function well in society. There should be improvement and change in the person's social life, spiritual up-lift, and intellectual development. The more modern concept of education is essentially the familiar territory, often described as the ‘eye-opener’, ‘key to development’, ‘liberator’, ‘vision for tomorrow’, ‘our future’, to mention but few.

The goals of education can only be achieved when the rights and freedoms of students and pupils are protected and pursued vigorously since there can be no meaningful learning or education under hostile and stringent conditions. It, therefore, behoves on researchers, educational stakeholders and the state to combine efforts to eliminate all negative tendencies or attitudes towards human rights and seek to create the enabling and conducive conditions for learning. This is because, according to Chaffee (1966), living in families and neighbourhoods where there is violence, neglect or substance abuse poses an obstacle to school success.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical perspective upon which the present research is based is Cultural Reproduction and Structural Violence (Odora, 1998), which provides useful frames for an analysis of social justice and human rights in higher education in Ghana. By the *Reproduction and Structural Violence Theory*, teachers and administrators as members of society carry societal perceptions of human rights and gender role socialisation in their interactions with workers and students. Social justice and human rights issues are hegemonic and power holders in society would maintain the *status quo* in order to cling to power. Therefore, not introducing equity and human rights in schools means an annihilation of oppressive structures that limit the life chances of students, which in effect reduces the amount of power held by oppressive groups. This gives rise to conflict between two opposing groups - the conservative and the progressive - in society. As observed by Odora (1998), in every society there are always two groups with strong interests. The progressive group questions the *status quo* while the conservative works to maintain it, thereby reproducing such things as socio-economic structures and decision-making processes created by society to limit the life chances of a group.

Existing evidence suggests that the study of rights and social justice in an institution are greatly influenced by the structure of the community. For example, Nick and Branka (1996) observed that learning and thinking are always situated in a cultural setting. Structural violence can manifest itself in various forms at the school level. The way teachers and pupils think and act on gender and equity issues are, to a large extent, culturally determined (Ankumah, 1996).

### **History of Human Rights**

The belief that everyone, by virtue of his or her humanity, is entitled to certain human rights is fairly not new. Its roots, however, lie in earlier fairly tradition and documents of many cultures. It took the catalyst of World War II to propel human rights onto the global stage and into the global conscience. Throughout history, people acquired rights and responsibilities through their membership in a group—a family, indigenous nation, religion, class, community, or state. Most societies have had traditions similar to the “golden rule”. The Hindu Vedas, the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, the Bible, the Qur’an (Koran), and the Analects of Confucius are five of the oldest written sources which addressed questions of people’s duties, rights and responsibilities (Brownlie, 2006). Again, the Inca and Aztec codes of conduct and justice and Iroquois Constitution

were Native American sources that existed well before the 18<sup>th</sup> century. All societies have had systems of propriety and justice as well as ways of tending to the health and welfare of their members (Shiman, 1993).

### **Meaning of Human Rights**

Human rights are the rights a person has simply because he or she is a human being (Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 1999). They are the basic claims in life for all. Human rights are held by all persons equally, universally, and forever. Thus, human rights are said to possess some distinctive characteristics. Human rights are inalienable - you cannot lose these rights any more than you can cease being a human being. Human rights are indivisible - you cannot be denied a right because it is "less important" or "non-essential". Human rights are interdependent - all human rights are part of a complementary framework. For example, your ability to participate in your government is directly affected by your right to express yourself, to get an education, and even to obtain the necessities of life.

Another definition of human rights is those basic standards without which people cannot live in dignity. To violate someone's human rights is to treat that person as though she or he were not a human being. To advocate human rights is to demand that the human dignity of all people

be respected. In claiming these human rights, everyone also accepts the responsibility not to infringe on the rights of others and to support those whose rights are abused or denied (Risse et al., 1999).

According to Dowrick (1978), 'Rights' has been broadly defined as claims which are supported by some objective standards or general theories. As 'legal rights' are those claims recognised in a system of law, so 'human rights' - to give full value to the affective should, strictly speaking, be defined as those claims made by men, for themselves or on behalf of other men, supported by some theory which concentrates on humanity, which would be in essence an ethical theory. He then narrows down the definition to comment on 'Rights'.

The starting point for the understanding of this key term is still the wider concept of 'claims' that is wants, desires, aspirations people have and express. The claims which people make, it may be on behalf of others, or for themselves, are indefinitely various. These claims which are also supported by or in accord with some objectives standards (or some general theory), whether those of a code of morality or ethical theory, or those of a political system or political theory, or those of a legal system, are usually and aptly called rights. Hence, we have moral rights,

political rights, legal rights and natural rights.

Duchacek (1973) states that the modern concept of human rights is essentially the familiar territory, often described as “Rule of Law”, “Constitutionalism”, “Civil Liberties”, “Constitutional Rights”, and “Fundamental Rights”. He then provides a long list of examples of Fundamental Rights in National Legal system: ‘UK: Bill of Rights, 1688’, ‘France: Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, 1789’, ‘United States: Bill of Rights, 1791’, ‘German Federal Republic: Basic Law, 1949’, and ‘Nigeria: Constitution, 1963’. Duchacek (1973) maintains that modern constitutional rights and liberties may be conveniently examined in six segments, bearing in mind their interlocked relationship and mutual dependence:

1. Guarantees of Personal Liberty, Rights to Privacy, Freedom of Thought, Right to Equality, and Minority and Women’s Right
2. Right of Social Progress and Happiness
3. Right of Imperial Justice
4. Freedom of Expression and the Right to be Informed
5. Right of Access to Decision-Making through the Intermediary of Political Parties and Universal Suffrage

6. The Right to Formulate Groups demands from Interest Groups for this purpose (p.68).

However, according to United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [UNHCHR] (2003), most human rights thinkers now see three related sets of obligations in relation to rights: *Respecting rights* is the obligation not to do something that would interfere with the enjoyment of rights (no arbitrary arrest or eviction from homes); *protecting rights* is the obligation to ensure that other bodies, such as individuals, businesses or foreign governments, do not prevent enjoyment of rights (no-one held in servitude; equal pay for comparable work); and *fulfilling rights* is the obligation to take steps to make all necessary provisions for the enjoyment of rights (establishing an independent judicial system; providing affordable housing). With all certainty, it is the United Nations that has since its foundation, taken as one of its prime tasks the implementation of global human rights for global peace.

### **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**

The Universal Human Rights are fundamental and inalienable rights for every human being. Brownlie, (2006) wrote that the references to human rights in the charter of the United Nations have provided the

basis for elaboration of the content of standards and the machinery for implementing the protection of human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly Resolution 217A (iii) of 10 December 1948. Following this historic act, the Assembly called upon all Member countries to publicise the text of the declaration and to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories (UN General Assembly Resolution, 1948).

The preamble of the UDHR shows its importance as can be noted from the following excerpt.

The General Assembly recognised that 'the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world, and that human rights should be protected by the rule of law, friendly relations between nations', must be fostered, 'the people of the UN have affirmed their faith in human rights, the dignity and the worth of the human person, the equal rights of men and women and are determined to promote social progress, better standards of life and larger freedoms' and have promised to

promote human rights and a common understanding of these rights. (Excerpt from the simplified version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, p. 5).

Risse et al. (1999) explained that the 30 articles of the Declaration together with a comprehensive statement covering economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights. The document is both universal (it applies to all people everywhere) and indivisible (all rights are equally important) to the full realization of one's humanity. A declaration, however, is not a treaty and lacks any enforcement provisions. Rather, it is a statement of intent, a set of principles to which United Nations member states commit themselves in an effort to provide all people a life of human dignity. "Now, therefore, *The General Assembly* proclaims this *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by..." (UN General Assembly, 1948, Resolution 217 A (iii)). By the Charter of the UN, all member nations reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in equal rights and freedoms and in the dignity and worth of the human person. By the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, the Declaration is said to be "set up a common standard of

achievement for all peoples and all Nations”, and “might well become an international Magna Carta of all mankind” (UN, 1959, p. 318).

### **Higher Education and Human Rights**

Institutions have a duty to act fairly towards students in cases of disciplinary action or appeal (Tibbitts, 2006). This means that the student must, at the least, be given adequate notice of the allegation against him or her, an adequate hearing (not necessarily oral) and that the appeal body must be unbiased. Human rights are based on principles of equality, dignity and respect. They require a balance to be struck between the rights of an individual and the rights of others or the wider community. Higher Education (HE) institutions are required by the Human Rights Act (HRA) to operate in a way that upholds and protects the human rights of those they deal with. All institutions must pay proper attention to individuals' rights when they are making decisions that affect them. Article 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 stipulates “In the determination of his civil rights everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal” (UNHCHR, 2003, p.). This article sets standards for the way decision-making hearings should be run. Article 6 applies to both civil proceedings and

criminal proceedings (when someone is prosecuted for an offence). An individual can challenge a decision taken by an institution whose procedures fail to satisfy Article 6.

### **The Constitution of Ghana and Fundamental Human Rights**

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana provides the basic principles or laws by which every Ghanaian must live. It teaches the fundamental human rights, the tenets of good citizenship and the necessary punishments that will be meted out to those who violate it. Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms as enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana occupy the Chapter Five, Article 12 to 33 of the Constitution. The Constitution really specifies clearly the various aspects of fundamental human rights under sub-topics. These topics of rights and freedoms cover all pertinent aspects of human life: beginning with the ‘Protection of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms’, ‘Protection of Rights to Life’, ‘Protection of Personal Liberty’, ‘Respect for Human Dignity’, ‘Protection from Slavery and Forced Labour’, ‘Equality and Freedom from Discrimination’, ‘Protection of Privacy of Home and other Property’, ‘Protection from Deprivation of Property’, ‘General Fundamental Freedoms’, ‘Economic Rights’, ‘Educational Rights’, ‘Cultural Rights and Practices’, ‘Rights of Women’, ‘Children’s

Rights', 'Rights of Disabled Persons', 'Rights of the Sick', 'Emergency Powers', 'Persons detained under Emergency Law', and the 'Protection of Rights by the Courts'. This, however, forms the outline or the summary of the fundamental human rights as enshrined in the Constitution of Ghana and consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Higher education environments are expected to be a safe haven where respectable intellectuals interact to promote a peaceful atmosphere conducive for effective teaching, learning and research. Unfortunately, the situation is not most of the time so, and sometimes can be described as being volatile. In such situations, no matter how justifiable it might seem, human rights and freedoms issues are always at stake. In recent times, there have been cases of fundamental human rights abuses and the violation of liberties of all categories of people across the social strata. There are often reports in the media about riots, disturbances, violence, lawlessness and inhuman treatment to people of all categories even in places of higher learning. Examples in recent memory include: students' violent demonstration at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi in October 2018; University of Ghana students –

Police clash that took place in April 2006, Accra; the violent clash between the students of Casley Hayford Hall and Atlantic Hall and the subsequent circumstances that led to the closure of Casley Hayford Hall in the University of Cape Coast (UCC) in April 2008 (Ghana News Agency, 2008, 2018). Yet no study has been done to assess the incidence of human rights awareness in Ghanaian Universities. Hence, the need to examine the awareness level of human rights in the administration of UCC.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the awareness level of human rights in the administration of UCC using administrators and students. In line with this purpose, the study was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the level of human rights awareness among administrators and students in UCC?
2. How do the administrators in the University promote, respect and protect human rights and freedoms?
3. What are the challenges of promoting human rights awareness in the administration of UCC?

### **Method**

#### **Research Design**

The study adopted the qualitative research design using a case study



approach within the phenomenological interpretative paradigm to examine, understand, explore and interpret the human rights and freedoms situation at the University of Cape Coast. Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena. Among others, it seeks to find answers to questions relating to how events, programmes and interventions affect people (Silverman, 2004). The qualitative approach provides a unique opportunity to explore and solicit unlimited perspectives and opinions from participants on a phenomenon under study. The study sought to explore the level of human rights awareness and to understand non-quantitative impacts that are not easily captured by quantitative approach.

This study adopted the phenomenological approach, which sought to elucidate the meaning of the lived experience of a phenomenon of a group of people. Patton (2002) noted that a phenomenological study is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience. A dimension of the phenomenological approach is the assumption that there is an essence to shared experience. Eichelberger (1989) asserts that in a phenomenological study, there is the need to conduct an analysis of the

experience so that the basic elements of the experience that are common to members of a specific society can be identified. Again, Van-Manen (1990) adds that phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the everyday experiences of a group of people, students and administrators in this case.

### **Sample**

The purposive sampling procedure was employed to select key informants thought to possess in-depth knowledge about the subject for interviews. Normally, qualitative studies employ a form of non-probability sampling such as accidental or purposive sampling (Sarantakos, 1998). This sampling procedure enabled me to sample views from different categories of people who could provide the needed information. Patton (2002) asserts that the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. In all, 40 information-rich key informants selected comprising 10 administrators and 30 students which included some student leaders from the UCC were interviewed.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Three main sources of data were used for the study – interviews, observation and documents. The interviews and the observations were the sources of the primary data while official documents and related

literature provided secondary data sources. The secondary source of data complemented and supplemented the interview and the observation data. An interview is a purposeful conversation, usually between two people, although sometimes involving more than two, that is directed by someone to get information from the other (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In qualitative research, interviews may be used in two ways. They may be the dominant strategy for data collection, or they may be employed in conjunction with participant observation, document analysis, or other techniques (Rapley, 2004). In all these situations, the interview was used to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher could develop insights on how subjects interpret some situations or phenomena. Two different sets of general questions to serve as interview guides were used in the interview for students and administrators at UCC. The face-to-face interview is presented as enabling a "special insight" into subjectivity, voice and lived experience (Rapley, 2004). These approaches were planned to elicit views and opinions of each participant's experiences of the human rights climate and the obstacles one encounters.

#### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

From the interviews, considerable text data that were generated were

organised, transcribed, edited and coded to ensure that all inferring schedules are complete and contain accurate information. Bogdan and Biklen (2003, p. 54) defined qualitative data analysis as "working with data, organising it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned and deciding what you will tell others". The data collected consisted of personal notes on observation, digital recording of interviews, and institutional documents. After transcribing the data, an inductive approach was used to organise the data into various themes and categories based on the research questions and the objectives of the study. Then, the results of the analysis provided answers to the questions raised. The inductive analysis aimed at uncovering embedded information and making it explicit (Hoepfl, 1997) was used. As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) also noted, this qualitative analysis helps themes and categories to emerge during three phases – (i) Discovery, (ii) Coding and (iii) Interpretation. The discovery is when the researcher identifies themes and develops concepts as research progresses. Coding occurs after data collection, focusing on refining the understanding of the subject matter. This research utilised the tools available through the adopted research design – phenomenological study – which proceeds through the

methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes and a search for all possible meanings (Creswell, 1998; Silverman, 2004).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study necessitated a decisive ethical consideration to protect the rights of the research participants. The principles of *voluntary participation*, as well as informed consent, were required of the participants who must be fully informed and should not be at risk of harm as a result of their participation. Harm can be defined as both physical and psychological (Patton, 2002). The research guaranteed the participants *confidentiality* and *anonymity* throughout the study. The purpose of the interview was explained and permission was sought to record the interviews of consented participants. This is in line with Patton (2002, p. 380) who advises that “no matter what style of interviewing you use and no matter how carefully you word questions, it all comes to naught if you fail to capture the actual words of the person being interviewed”. Separate locations were used for the interview and mostly chosen by the interviewee.

### **Findings and Discussion**

**Research Question 1:** What is the level of human rights awareness among administrators and students in the UCC?

### **Human Rights Awareness**

In theory, it is the responsibility of governments to inform their citizens about the treaties they have signed and ratified. This is a rather minimum obligation tagged on to UN documents that have not generally been taken seriously by governments. The United Nations has through the Decade for Human Rights Education (HRE) and now the World Programme for HRE underlined the necessity of organising HRE at all levels of schooling in order to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The global community of HRE, in turn, have continued to develop clear methodological criteria for quality HRE. With this backdrop of human rights education, the study revealed by the dominant views indicated that the majority of students were aware, to some extent, about their human rights and freedoms. You know that students know and are aware of their rights by the type of questions they ask you. They have access to considerable information and use that to their advantage (A Female Principal Administrative Assistant). The Principal Administrative Assistant in explaining why she thinks that students are aware of their rights and freedoms mentioned how students question issues to demonstrate their understanding of human rights. Many of the participants in the study expressed a similar opinion. Contrary to this

assertion, a minority of the participants especially some of the administrative officers were of the view that some students do not know their rights since they are unable to assert themselves and insist on their rights. However, it was not certain whether the students referred to here, did not actually know their rights or they simply lacked the courage to be assertive. This then does not conform to the expectations of the rights of the child. This is because the Convention on the Rights of the Child attaches particular importance to the process by which education is to be promoted, as underlined in the general comment: Efforts to promote the enjoyment of other rights must not be undermined and should be reinforced, by the values imparted in the educational process. This includes not only the content of the curriculum but also the educational processes, the pedagogical methods and the environment within which education takes place (UNHCHR, 2006, Part I, para. 33).

Accordingly, human rights should be learned through both content transmission and experience and should be practised at all levels of the school system. On the issue of the process and procedure for seeking redress, the responses were unanimously clear. It was agreed among student respondents that when one was seeking redress of an infringement of a right, the first point of call could be either through

the student representative or through the Hall Master/Warden or through a Head of Department. A student leader said it all that: An aggrieved person may report to the Head of Department or through any of the group or association leaders who then can pass it on to a higher authority if the need be (A Male Student Leader, Valco Hall).

But what students omitted is the use of informal approach where the victim asks the perpetrator to stop. If this fails, then the formal procedure may be followed. The Students' Handbook clearly stipulates what should be done (UCC, 2008b). Similarly, when students were asked whether they easily reported cases of rights infringement involving administrators or faculty members, it came to light that students were very hesitant to do so. More than half of the student respondents expressed that it depended on the circumstances. They considered whether the outcome would favour them or not. Else, as they put it "you let it go". The reasons could be that students were afraid of possible intimidation and victimisation or those incidents that are not very common. They could not stand the stigma, the tag or the humiliation they may face if it came to the public domain. This situation points to the fact that students are limited in exercising some of their rights.

When students were asked to state where, when and how they heard about or got information on human rights and freedoms in UCC, this generated varied and interesting results. The greater majority mentioned the media especially television, radio and the newspapers. While others mentioned the orientation provided for freshmen

and women, students' handbook, internet, friends and other printed material like books and magazines as the source of obtaining information on human rights, equity and freedoms. Table 1 provides a tabular presentation of the sources of human rights information for UCC students.

Table 1  
*Sources of Human Rights Information*

Media Electronic	Print	Other Sources
Television	Students' Handbook	Orientation for Fresher students
Radio	Magazines	Relatives
Internet	Journals	School
Movies	Newspapers	Friends
	Books	

*Note:* Human rights information sources to students at the University.

It was revealed that students obtained information on human rights from various sources other than from the University. Apart from the Students' Handbook and the orientation for fresh students that was mentioned by a few students, all the other sources were not provided by the University. This implies that the University was unable to provide an alternative source for information on human rights for students. Students are, at times, at a loss as to where to go and find materials purposely for human rights education.

**Research Question 2:** How do the administrators in the University promote, respect and protect human rights and freedoms?

The answers to this question have been put into three categories: (a) Extent to which the university pursues human rights, (b) Evidence of practice, and (c) Role of the administrator in promoting rights and freedoms.

### **Extent to which University Pursues Human Rights and Freedoms**

The University of Cape Coast by policy and design has made conscious efforts to put into practice the principles of human rights as enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. When asked, how does the University protect and promote the respect for human rights and freedoms, respondents were unanimous in mentioning institutional documents, policies and structures which have been put in place, help in pursuing and promoting the respect for human rights issues in UCC. Many students mentioned the Students' Handbook as the means by which the University has established standard rules and regulations based on human rights and freedoms principles. One student leader stated that: For me, the handbook is the guidance and source of inspiration for a free and just society (A Student Representative, Casley Hayford Hall).

The University is committed to an equal opportunities policy. It believes that all members of the university community have the right to a workplace free from exploitation, harassment, discrimination or any other form of hindrance to the effective execution of their duties. Most of the

participants held similar views as intimated by one female principal administrative assistant, who said: The University has put in place some measures to promote and protect gender issues. Examples include the quota system offered for enhancing the chances of potential female students to access university education and a committee set up specifically to handle sexual harassment cases in the university (A Female Principal Administrative Assistant).

In the same vein, some students mentioned the formation of ladies' associations and women caucus. They were appreciative of the fact that these women interest groups have been supported by the University to champion the course of women on campus and in society. Caucus used here refers to a special-interest group (of women in this case): a group of people, often within a larger group such as a university community, who unite to promote a particular policy or particular interest. These have been given the due recognition and attention by the authorities and by law and for the purpose of helping to eliminate all forms of gender stereotyping, harassment and discrimination against women. It is worthy of note that this conforms to the Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women which states that: State parties shall

take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on the basis of equality of men and women, the elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programmes and the adaptation of teaching methods (Article 10, 1-3).

#### **Evidence of Practice of Human Rights and Freedoms**

With respect to putting into practice the human rights principles, ample examples were cited by the participants. The most commonly cited evidences emanated from the implementation of policies, principles or philosophies of the University. As a result, a fair and humane community has been witnessed due to increased student participation based on the student-centred philosophy, open administration, unbiased pursuance of rules and regulations and support for democratic values for both students and staff.

The study reveals that UCC has promoted democratic values in its administration. The democratic values are typically defined in

relation to the notion of constitutional democracy, including beliefs related to individual rights and freedoms, popular sovereignty, representative government (voting), justice and human rights. Students are represented on committees, councils and boards in taking decisions that affect them.

This list is not comprehensive. However, in the words of Berman (1997), these values are linked to development: The processes that foster development are not independent of one another. The environments that foster development are ones that are open, nurturing and participatory, where people model and live pro-social values and where conflict is handled instructively and effectively. They are the environments where young people are provided opportunities for taking the perspective of others and reflecting on their own attitudes and beliefs (Berman, 1997, p. 36).

The human rights principles are believed to form the bases for the rules and regulations. These have been put into writing in the *Students' Handbook* and *Code of Ethics* respectively. These documents include principles from relevant rules and regulations that affect the life of the constituents of the University community based on respect for rights and responsibilities. Special attention is always drawn to the communication

channels among students, hall masters/wardens and tutors, faculties; Dean of Students, the general administration and the Vice Chancellor's Office.

When the interviewees were asked in what ways did the university applied the principles of human rights and freedoms, administrators and students alike were unanimous in their response. It was revealed that UCC applies the principles of human rights and freedoms in formulating and implementing all its policies, guiding philosophy, code of ethics and the Students' Handbook that spells out the rules, regulations and responsibilities for all students. More importantly, the university is guided by a student-centred philosophy of education as stated in the Academic Programmes, Policies and Regulations: We focus on serving the needs of students, nurturing and challenging them to grow socially, physically, morally and intellectually. Our major goal is to prepare productive citizens and future leaders who can serve the national and global community in diverse ways (UCC, 2008a, p. 1).

This confirms the provisions of the convention of the right of the child and the Children's Act 1998. These conventions seek among others that, 'in all dealings with the child or consideration of any issue concerning the child, the best interest of the child should be

paramount'. However, responses received on whether there are programmes or courses on human rights in UCC were not favourable. Majority of students, as well as some administrators, mentioned that they were not aware of that. Others who responded in the affirmative were short of providing examples when asked. Nonetheless, few students and administrative staff mentioned that aspects of human rights are taught in some departments such as Social Science, Sociology, Development Studies and African Studies. This implies that currently, there is no 'known programme of study' mounted in UCC solely for promoting human rights education.

### **Role of Administrators in Promoting Human Rights**

The goal of social justice-oriented educational leadership programmes is to develop administrators who are sensitive to the lives and well-being of all students. These programmes may well mean that social justice-minded administrators are essentially conflicted in their daily practices. Public school administrators' daily professional lives are guided by a host of statutes, regulations and court decisions – all of which might be hostile to the well-being of many children (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006).

In addition, when students were asked about the role's administrators



can play to promote human rights in the University. they mentioned among others that administrators should be open and friendly to all who call at their offices. The dominant views included: Administrators as implementers of policy should do so with a human face and also identify policies that are inimical to human rights and initiate the process for a review (A Level 300 Male Student, Oguua Hall).

Administrators can help promote human rights by avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy and break the communication barriers. Another important role an administrator can play is initiating and organising programmes and activities that are meant to sensitise the constituents of the University community (A Level 400 Female Student, Valco Hall).

**Research Question 3:** What are the challenges of promoting human rights and freedoms in the UCC?

In order to answer the research question posed here, the results have been discussed under the following titles: major concerns of students such as sexual harassment, types of sexual harassment and then benefits of human rights education. The study revealed that educational administration principles are perceived to be at variance with the principle of rights, equity and social

justice. This is because the strict of pursuance rules and regulations invariably affect, erode or deny students of some of their rights and freedoms. This confirms Karpinski and Lugg's (2006) claim that educational administration, both as a field of academic inquiry and as a profession, has historically, been at odds with or in direct opposition social justice.

The historical record is replete with examples of indifference or outright hostility by practitioners and scholars towards issues of rights and social justice. For instance, some students have been complaining bitterly about the payment of fines slapped on late registration of courses, and students think that this is a form of abuse of their rights. On the other hand, to ensure effective and smooth administration, school administrators find it as a necessity to 'persuade' students to conform to the laid down regulations.

### **Challenges of Promoting Human Rights**

Commenting on the major challenges in pursuing rights, equity and social justice in UCC, participants' responses to the question of major challenges raised mixed reactions. The participants mentioned the following as the dominant factors: "our socio-cultural orientation", "people's attitudes", "our mindset", "our belief systems", "ignorance" and

“misrepresentation”. The most frequently mentioned factor was the cultural orientation, then people’s attitudes, mindset, belief system, conflict and illiteracy/ignorance. Other factors mentioned included limited resources, both human and material, and lack of social/political will to pursue rights, equity and social justice principles. Moreover, one female Assistant Registrar lamented the tendency of some students to conceal or withhold the truth. She said: The situation where students distort or falsify information in order to be accorded with some considerations was worrying. And this irresponsibility on the part of students is unacceptable (A Female Assistant Registrar).

This view implies that an educational administrator in trying to discharge his or her duties equitably, come face to face with human rights concerns: In executing duties as administrator, you have to apply the rules the way they are. Most often it requires closing your eyes to personal convictions and sentiments to save you from queries (A Male Senior Administrative Assistant).

Similar view was shared by Karpinski and Lugg (2006). They were of the opinion that educational administration, both as a field of academic inquiry and as a profession, has historically, been at

odds with – if not in direct opposition to – social justice.

### **Major Human Rights Concerns of Students**

The educational experiences in Ghana are highly affected by socio-cultural factors. As a result, many students interviewed recounted a number of challenging experiences that were related to or caused by some socio-cultural factors. The study revealed that the dominant concerns of students (both females and males) relating to human rights issues in higher education are the hazards of sexual harassment, seeking sexual favours, favouritism, the use of vulgar language especially on ladies, disturbances, intimidation, rustication or dismissal of students, penalties on late registration, withholding information and theft among others. The majority of the students interviewed mentioned sexual harassment and the phenomenon described as ‘seeking sexual favours’ as the most dominant related issues leading to the erosion of students’ rights and freedoms.

As a matter of fact, sexual harassment was frequently mentioned among others. For example, when students were asked about what constituted some of the human rights violations; what were some of the frequent incidents or cases bordering on the abuse of rights; and when asked to state the

situation(s) that can be described as violation of rights and freedoms of students. Sexual harassment was consistently stated. Other issues mentioned alongside sexual harassment included a phenomenon which has been described as 'seeking sexual favours, favouritism, the use of vulgar language especially on ladies, disturbances, intimidation from some faculty members. Others were about rustication/dismissal of students, penalties on late registration, withholding information and theft. These represent some of the major concerns of students.

### **Sexual Harassment**

The study revealed that the most critical and dominant concern expressed by students was sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a violation of women's human rights and it is a prohibited form of violence against women in many countries. It is defined as: Unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favours and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, whether on a one-time basis or a series of incidents that might cause offense, humiliation, awkwardness, or that might reasonably be conceived as placing a condition of a sexual nature on employment, opportunity for promotion, grades, etc. (AWLA 2003, 10; Students' Handbook, UCC, 2008b).

Sexually harassing conduct causes devastating physical and psychological injuries to a large percentage of women in workplaces around the world. Sexual harassment is a form of unlawful sex discrimination. Under federal law in the United States, sexual harassment is unwanted verbal or physical behaviour of a sexual nature that occurs in the workplace or in an educational setting under certain conditions. Such behaviour is illegal if it creates an environment that is hostile or intimidating, if it interferes with a person's work or school performance, or if acceptance of the harasser's behaviour is made a condition of employment or academic achievement (Morley, 2005). Critical to these efforts to combat sexual harassment has been the growing recognition of sexual harassment as a form of violence against women which violates women's human rights. States are obligated under international law to take steps to protect women from violence and to hold harassers accountable for sexual harassment in the workplace. In spite of the efforts made by state institutions to combat sexual harassment, if victims continue to shy away and feel reluctant to report such incidence, it becomes increasingly difficult for institutions to minimise if not eradicate this social evil (Morley, 2005; Tibbitts, 2006).

## **Conclusion**

It could be said from the findings of the study that UCC has demonstrated a strong commitment to the promotion and the protection of human rights and freedoms. It was evident that UCC has endeared itself to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights on campus in spite of the challenges confronting it through the laid down rules and the enabling structures that enhanced the promotion of human rights. The University, as a higher educational institution, has made efforts to fulfil its fundamental mission to secure quality education for all by adopting rights-based approach to education, through the application of the principles of equity, rights and freedoms in its administration. There exists a strong influence of culture on the interpretation and application of the principles of rights and freedoms and the mutual transfer of values between the institution and society. This requires that human rights education should be done in the context of cultural specifics.

The principles of educational administration which seek to run a smooth and effective institution by enforcing rules and regulations have often been erroneously perceived as constantly undermining the rights and freedoms of students of UCC. It could be said that the University has proven to have a strong affinity for the protection of gender issues by

making frantic efforts to protect their interests and ensure gender equity, especially in the face of perceived cases of sexual harassment, assault and gender discrimination.

The University remains a fertile ground for effective promotion and education of human rights issues. Education is meant to protect people against injustice and exploitation by increasing the individual's knowledge and skills to articulate demands.

Finally, the students' handbook provides vital insights and information into promoting, respecting and protecting human rights and gender issues in UCC. The students' handbook is the major source of information on the application of the principles of human rights and freedoms for the majority of students in the University community.

Based on the findings and the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Departmental heads in the UCC should consider integrating human rights themes into their academic programmes, and to provide opportunities to see the application of human rights principles in practice.
2. There is a need for the office of the Registrar to consider

establishing human rights centre that will handle human rights complains and promote respect for human rights at the UCC.

3. Stakeholders and civil society organisations should support UCC to strengthen gender mainstreaming in the admonitive procedures to be the leader in gender advocacy.
4. Administrators and students should read and apply the human rights principles prescribed in the various handbooks and policy documents.
5. The Training and Development Unit should collaborate with Human Rights Institutions to sensitise administrators on human rights issues regularly.

### Implications for Practice

1. Tertiary educational institutions considered as fertile grounds for violent riots can be corrected by creating the needed human rights awareness for administrators and students.
2. In the hope of ensuring better academic and social outcomes for all students, today's administrators need to adhere to the principles of human rights in higher educational administration to

create the congenial atmosphere.

3. Higher education environments could be safe havens to promote peaceful atmosphere conducive for effective teaching, learning and research when administrators promote and respect the principles of human rights in the management of higher education.

### References

- Ankumah, E. A. (1996). *The African Commission on human and people's rights, practice and procedures*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publication.
- Berman, S. (1997). *Children's social consciousness and the development of social responsibility*. Albany, NY: State University of NY Press.
- Bogdan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Brown, K. M. (2004), Leadership for social justice and equity: weaving a transformative framework and pedagogy. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40(1), 77–108.
- Brownlie, I. (2006). *Basic documents on human rights*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Chaffee, Z. (1966). *Documentation on fundamental human rights*. New York: Athenaeum.

- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dowrick, F. E. (1978). *Human rights: Problems, perspectives and texts*. England: University of Durham Press.
- Duchacek, J. (1973). *Rights and liberties in the world today: Constitutional promise and reality*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- Eichelberger, R. T. (1989). *Discipline inquiry: Understanding and doing educational research*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Ghana News Agency [GNA], (2008). Violent clash between the students of Casley Hayford Hall and Atlantic Hall in UCC. <http://www.ghanaweb.com>
- Ghana News Agency [GNA], (2018). KNUST demonstration turns violent. <http://www.ghanaweb.com>
- Hoepfl, M. C. (1997). Choosing qualitative research: A primer for technology education researchers. *Journal of Technology Education*, 9(1), 47-61.
- Karpinski, C. F., & Lugg, C. A. (2006). Social justice and educational administration. *Journal of Educational Administration (JEA)*, 44 (3), 278–292.
- Morley, L. (2005). Gender equity in Commonwealth higher education. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 28, 209–221.
- Nick, W. & Branka, E. (1996). *Partners in human rights education first steps: A manual for starting human rights education*. London: Amnesty.
- Odora, H. C. A. (1998). *Structural violence as a constraint to African policy formulation in the 1990s: Repositioning education in international relations*. Germany: Stockholm.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rapley, T. (2004). Interviews. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, & D. Silverman, (Eds.). *Qualitative research* (15–33). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications,
- Risse, T. Ropp, C. & Sikkink, K. (1999). *The power of human rights: International norms and domestic change*. London: Cambridge Press.
- Sarantakos, S. (1998). *Social research* (2nd ed.). London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Shiman, P. (1993). *Teaching human rights*. Denver: Centre for Teaching International Relations Publications.
- Silverman, D. (2004). *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Tibbitts, F. (2006). *Universities and human rights education: Mapping growth and opportunities worldwide*. Oslo: Norwegian Human Rights Centre.

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [UNHCHR], (2003). *World programme for human rights education: Plan of action*. [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights]. Geneva: UNHCHR.

University of Cape Coast [UCC], (2008). *Academic programmes,*

*policies and regulations*. Cape Coast: UCC.

University of Cape Coast [UCC], (2008). *Students' handbook*. Cape Coast: UCC.

Van-Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. New York: State University of NY Press.