

Nominalization and the Discourse of Disempowerment in Human Rights Education

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Abstract

This paper aims at throwing light upon the possible impact of over-nominalized classroom discourse on human rights education (HRE) for social empowerment. A key human rights principle as accountability is impaired when whole man-engendered processes are nominalized; that is, deagentialized and reduced to rootless things, events, or states of being. What gives this study a rationale is that when objectified and decontextualized, processes are distanced from their agents in a startling mismatch to the core objectives of HRE which primarily endeavors to empower children by bringing the world closer to them and by teaching them how to take informed action in it for the well-being of its citizens. The study uses classroom observation for data collection and critical discourse analysis for data analysis. Nominalized language by the teacher or textbook instructions tends to breed similarly nominalized responses by the learners. However, non-nominalized language by the teacher or the textbook helps curb the nominalization tendency in the learners. As a result, this would train them to produce agency-sensitive discourse that in turn would affect the way they perceive the network of roles, rights and responsibilities around them; that is, the set-up of responsibility and causality in the world. The findings suggest that de-nominalizing classroom discourse can help bridge the gap between words and deeds. In this breath, de-nominalization might help with the aim of changing the world through the word as Freire and Macedo (1987) advocate; a first step towards HRE for social empowerment.

Key words: agency, empowerment, HRE, nominalization

Cite as: BZIOUI, A. (2015). Nominalization and the Discourse of Disempowerment in Human Rights Education. *Arab World English Journal*, 8 (1).

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol6no2.31>