

VIABLE PEACE EDUCATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS: A SYNERGISTIC APPROACH TOWARD SUSTAINING UNITY AND INTEGRATION FOR NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

This Paper Examined The Employability Of Viable Peace Education And Public Relations In Strengthening The Electoral Process In Nigeria's Democracy. The Paper Used The Qualitative Research Design To Collect Data. It Was Found Out From Independence In 1960 Till Now, Nigeria Has Been Struggling To Be A Democratic Nation Having Been Ruled By Military Juntas Who Ascended To Positions Of Leadership Through Military Coup' D'etat. Also, Data Collected Revealed That Elections In Nigeria Have Not Been Free And Fair Due To Vote Buying, Rigging, Killings, Abductions And Violence. These Ugly Scenarios' Have Culminated Into Loss Of Faith In The Conduct Of Elections, Low Turnout During Elections And Ethnic Rivalry Among Nationalities. The Paper Recommends That Electoral Laws Should Be Amended To Reflect Democratic Principles, Subjecting Electoral Offenders To The Wrath Of The Law, That Viable Peace Education Should Be Adopted In All Educational Institutions In

Nigeria The National Orientation Agency Of Nigeria Should Create Opportunities For Professional Development Of All Educators In Relation To Issues Of Peace And Non-Violence, Justice, Rights, Culture, Leadership And Responsible Citizenship. On The Other Hand, The Citizenry Should Be Made To Imbibe Public Relations Education Of Changing Hostility To Sympathy, Prejudice To Acceptance, Apathy To Interest And Ignorance To Knowledge. This Will Enhance Unity, Integration and Peaceful Co-Existence For Nigeria's Democracy.

Keywords: Viable peace education, public relations, unity, integration and Nigeria's democracy

There is no gain – saying that education is the bedrock upon which any meaningful development as regards to political, economic, social and democratic processes of any organization, community and nation is rooted. Supporting this assertion Obunadike (2013) opines that education is the process of transmitting societal loves, values and desirable attitudes from one generation to another. Education seeks to socialize individuals so as to equip them with the desired mode of behavior that is conforming with the way of life of the society in which they live.(p.265) Also, Sharma,(2011, p.3) sees education as “ a lifelong social process of directed learning which enables both the individual to use the past's treasure of cultural inheritance to operate effectively the institutions of the present and to plan and invent wisely for the future.” From these definitions it is evident that individuals live in society to satisfy not only their well being but that of others and this is what democracy is all about. Taking cognizance of these submission, it is imperative to allude that the success of any democratic process depends on how enlightened the citizens are in understanding manifestoes of political parties, voting procedures, avoidance of vote buying and selling; electoral violence vis-à-vis snatching of ballot boxes and destruction of electoral materials and killing and maiming of fellow citizens. Nigeria's journey toward becoming a democratized nation has been fraught with these afore stated negative tendencies. Corroborating, Odionye (2016), sees democracy as any system of government that is rooted in the notion that ultimate authority in the government of the people rightly belongs to the people, that everyone is entitled to an equitable participation and share in the equal rights and equitable social and economic justice as the birthright of everyone in the society. The basic characteristics of democracy include the existence of the mechanisms for political and economic choice, balanced political structure and stable political system...” (p.213)

According to the definition above, when people are actively involved in the selection of those that can lead them in a society, it results in the stability of the political system. This implies the absence of instability, which may ignite a crisis, and where there is crisis, there will be no development. (Chiakaan, Egbulefu, Kpera and Kiagama 2022, p.336) Similarly, Nwankwo (2002) cited in Chiakaan, Egbulefu, Kpera and

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Kiagama (2022,p.336) defines democracy as “a system that gives periodic opportunities for the masses to choose their leaders... a system of government in which the will of the people prevails.” Nwankwo further defines democracy as “a majority government; a government elected by the majority of the electorates who are qualified adult citizens,”

This paper is of the view that viable peace education and public relations strategies if properly explored will improve the democratic process where free and fair elections will prevail thereby sustaining the peace, unity and integration of Nigerian nation.

Objective of the Study

The study objective of this paper is to explore the employability of viable peace education and public relations strategies in improving the democratic process in Nigeria, to ensure unity, integration and mutual co-existence of her populace.

Rationale

It is glaring that no one is left in doubt, that Nigeria's journey to becoming a democratic nation has been bedeviled with violence, snatching of ballot boxes, rigging, assassinations and vote buying. These ugly scenarios have infused fear in the citizens that during elections, low turnout of voters is recorded. To worsen the situation, it is believed in many quarters that elections in Nigeria are make believes, seeing that political godfathers install their anointed ones, as election results are written even before elections are conducted. In this regard, it seems that not much is done to inculcate good citizenship behaviours amongst Nigerians. In view of these shortcomings, this paper x-rays how viable peace education and public relations strategies can be employed to improve democracy in Nigeria.

Method

The paper employed qualitative research design which involves the use of secondary data such as newspapers, magazines, books and the websites. The qualitative data showed evidence that viable peace education and public relations strategies can enhance Nigeria's democratic process. That data collected was also contextually analyzed, and conclusion drawn inferentially.

Theoretical Framework

This work is anchored on the system theory which was propounded in the 19th century by George Hegel. It entails the study of things that relate to one another and form a whole. The system theory preaches that the society is made up of different parts which must all function, although independently, for the overall well being of the society (Chiakaan, Egbulefu, Kpera & Kiagama, 2022, p.338). All systems operate within an environment and in turn the environment also affects the system vice versa (Okosun & Olaye, 2011, p.92)

The essence of system theory in enhancing public relations and viable peace education for Nigeria's democracy cannot be over-emphasized. Viable peace education can be utilized in our primary, secondary and tertiary institutions to inculcate the acceptable values of good citizenship and the avoidance of election crisis, vote- buying, ballot box snatching, killing and maiming during elections in Nigeria. Also, public relations strategies are used to change the attitudinal behavior of the citizens to act in the positive affirmation of upholding the values of a given system. All things being equal, public relations education can improve the democratic process of the Nigerian nation, through changing hostility, prejudice, apathy, and ignorance to a positive state of sympathy, acceptance, interest and knowledge. Supporting the above views Okiebunor (2014, p.136) opines that "to change prejudice to acceptance PR practitioners (Nigerian government. My words) will embark on programmes of action that will communicate more and effectively to the target publics, and cause publics prejudice to melt into total acceptance of these things they had hated or discriminated against." There is no doubt, that applying effective persuasive communication to enlighten the Nigerian populace on issues of democracy supported by good governance will go a long way in synergizing public relations and viable peace education aimed at sustaining good citizenship, that will enhance Nigeria's journey to a democratized nation. It is evident that the environment also affects the system; hence the political system in Nigeria must be well defined with acceptable values to direct the conduct of her citizens. This will be the spring board to pigeonhole public relations and viable peace education for Nigeria's democracy.

Concept of Peace Education

There are variegated opinions by several scholars on the concept of peace education which has resulted in not having a clear definition of the concept. According to UNICEF (1999) cited in Okosun and Olaye (2011, p.92) peace education refers to the "process of change in behavioural attitude which allow the learner to avoid personal and structural violence, to resolve conflict peacefully and create condition that is conducive to peace and political level. Fountain cited in Okosun and Olaye (2011, p.92) defines the concept of peace education as the process of "promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavior changes that will enable children, youth and adults to resolve conflicts peacefully and create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at interpersonal, intergroup or international level."

The implication of these definitions is that there must be harmonious relationship for any system to exist which is in tandem with using viable peace education to enhance unity and integration for Nigeria's democracy. According to Solomon cited in Okosun and Olaye (2011) for peace education to bear fruit the under listed points should be considered.

- a) Accepting the others narrative and its specific implications.

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- b) A willingness to experience and show empathy and display trust towards the other.
- c) A willingness to critically examine one's own group towards the other's and
- d) A disposition to engage and participate in non-violent activities (p.2)

Concept of Public Relations

Public Relations is a universal concept which no organization, individual, government or any establishment can ignore if it wants to succeed in its environment. The existence of an organization is dependent upon the goodwill of people if it wants to succeed in that environment.. The need for public relations according to Musa and Pate (2011,p.22) can be traced to the industrial revolution in the 18th century as institutions expanded with more goods and services to offer, the need for wider markets and favourable public image was sought for.

The first real public relations specialist is attributed to either Ivy Lee (1877-1934) or Edward Bernays (191-1995). Ivy Lee is known for his services to Standard Oil and its founder John, D. Rockefeller, for introducing the term public relations and for pioneering modern press release. Edward Bernays on his path is known for refining Lee's press release as a public relations tool. He was said to have been influenced by Professor Siegmud Freud in his concept of public relations.

In Nigeria, the need for public relations as cited by Nkwocha (1999) in Oboh and Enobakhare (2010, p.307) arose immediately after the Second World War, when there was need for effective public information due to the growing unpopularity of the then colonial government. In Nigeria, late Dr Sam Epelle who headed the information Unit of the Nigerian Railway Corporation was attributed to have articulated the concept of public relations. Public relations according to Orraca –Tetta, (1986) cited in Egbulefu (2018) consists of all forms of planned communication, outward and inwards, between an organization and its publics for the purpose of achieving specific objectives concerning, mutual understanding. Contributing his view, Nwosu and Uffoh (2005) cited in Egbulefu (2018) sees public relations as embracing communication and action which is essentially about positively and systematically using actions and communications to influence peoples' attitude, opinions, beliefs, interests and behavior in a given or desired direction as well as building lasting credibility and reputation for individuals and corporate entities, that include profit and non-profit organizations and even nations, states, local governments or communities.

Communication in public relations deals with two way information process. It serves as a bridge between the organization and her publics. Bernay (1952) cited in Egbulefu (2018) corroborates, that Public relations is not a one way street in which leadership manipulates the public and public opinion. It is a two-way street in which leadership and the public integrate with each other.

In his view, Idemili (1990) cited in Egbulefu (2018, p.19) insists that public relations as a social philosophy and functions of management should be the watch-word of every management because:

It places the interest of the people first in all matters pertaining to the conduct of the organization. It assumes that an organization should function to serve the primary needs of people dependent upon it for employment, wages, income, goods and services, social or spiritual satisfaction. He maintains that to be effective, a public relations philosophy must be expressed in action. Good public relations involve acting in the public interest.

Taking cognizance of the above views, it means that public relations should be in the management team and play the role of a mediator between the organization and the general public. For effective public relations, management must be one that does good because public relations is doing good and publicizing it.

Despite the role public relations play in the society, there exist some misconceptions. It is seen as manipulation of the media, covering lies, window dressing and mere publicity intended to deceive. This is more pronounced in government. But, suffice it to say that public relations cannot be treated with ignominy. It is a pin in the centre of a hole. The success of democracy in Nigerian is no doubt dependent upon doing good and publicizing it, using public relations approaches or tools to convince the populace to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes inherent in the peace education concepts such as inauguration of a peace clubs; establishment of conflict resolution / disciplinary committees; lecture and talk on peaceful co-existence of the Nigerian people.

Viable Peace Education for Sustainable Unity and Integration for Nigeria's Democracy

The development of the culture of peace can be traced to the indigenous system of education in Nigeria. Traditional education laid emphasis on character training. Falade, Akinola and Adejube (2009) cited in Falade, Adeyemi and Olowo (2011) explained that the Yoruba of Nigeria have norms meant for social cohesion and smooth-running of the community. The Yoruba adopt proverbs to teach the virtue of forgiveness, harmony and peaceful coexistence. An example of such proverb is "bi a kogbagbeoroana a konireniba sire" (unless we overlook the past misdeeds, we will not be able to relate). In the traditional community, like any other human society, conflicts or disputes arise. Such disputes are settled through dialogue by the family and community leaders. Viable peace education has become part of school programmes in many nations of the world, Nigeria inclusive. In some countries, viable peace education has been referred to as education for conflict resolution, international understanding and human rights, global education, life skills education, social justice education, environmental education etcetera.

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The Nigerian government introduced the 9-year Basic Education Programme as one of the means of attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015. This prompted the need 'for the revision of the existing school curriculum. In 2006, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) produced the 9-year Basic Education curriculum which covered current and emerging issues like value reorientation, peace and dialogue, including human rights education, family life and HIV/AIDS education etc. (NERDC, 2007). In the light of this, a new basic education social studies curriculum was developed. The new social studies curriculum incorporated contemporary issues like peace and conflict issues, child/women trafficking, youth unemployment and youth restiveness, gender issues and viable peace education was later introduced in the new social studies curriculum.

Viable peace education and culture concepts have some inherent values and skills which are expected to be acquired by the learners. To develop the culture of peace, learners are expected to acquire collaborative inter-personal attitudes like respect, trust, honesty, humility, fairness, empathy, justice, etc. Also, learners are expected to acquire collaborative interpersonal skills like listening, openness, non-judgmental, tolerance, objective rationality and consistency (Falade, Adeyemi & Olowo, 2011). Other skills necessary for the development of the culture of peace are functional and broad team skills.

Collaborative and participatory approaches are required for the development of the culture of peace in the learners. Canadian Centre for Teaching Peace Education (2009) cited in Falade, Adeyemi and Olowo (2011) expressed that in the classroom, viable peace education aims to develop skills, attitudes and knowledge with co-operative and participatory learning methods. Through dialogue and exploration teachers and students are to engage in a journey of shared learning. The culture of peace cannot be developed through the autocratic curriculum design and implementation that take place in our society today. To adopt a participatory approach for teaching viable peace education concepts in our schools, the peace educator is to move from being a transmitter to being a facilitator (Falade. Adeyemi & Olowo, 2011). Carter (2000) cited in Falade, Adeyemi and Olowo (2011) recommended the following standards for peace educators at the primary and secondary school levels: Facilitating students construction from their collective experience; engage in cross cultural communication with multicultural school participants; train students through molding of dispositions and skills that develop peace, including the practice of non violence before and during conflicts; create a nurturing "school-home" environment which nourishes and provides a safe place for communication about concerns related to violence; use strategies that support peaceful interaction with self and all people;

All these methodology can also be applied to teach viable peace education and culture at all level of Nigerian education system to elicit sustainable unity and integration for Nigeria's democracy where students that are the future leaders of tomorrow are taught how to conduct free and fair elections in Nigeria by registering for the voters card,

participation in elections and refusal to either buy or sell voters card, ballot box snatching and burning and maiming.

Public relations strategies for Sustainable Unity and Integration for Nigeria's Democracy

It is glaring that sustainable democratic experience is achieved through good governance. This assertion explains why Dunu (2013) argues that “countries around the world today work extremely hard to see that balance is maintained between the officials’ role as a representative of the people and the process of governing the people” (p.48). The implication is that the elected representative of the people should encourage good governance by providing social amenities such as good roads, hospitals, electricity, pipe borne water, education and ensure that elections are free and fair. On the other hand, the citizenry are expected to act in a way that encourages good governance by shunning negative tendencies that berate democratic norms such as promotion of ethnicity, rancor, hatred and electoral violence. This will stabilize the socio-economic and political development of the country.

Nigeria no doubt, is a democratic nation having embraced democratic rule since 1979 after thirty years of military dictatorship. In this regard, Nigeria’s democracy is still evolving when compared with true democratic ethics of the developed nations of the western world such as the United State of America, Germany and England etc. To evolve good democratic principles public relations has proved to be a veritable instrument. Supporting this view, Achor and Okoye (2013) assert that public relations practice in Nigeria, whether in the corporate world or area of governance is not new.”(p.12). This imply that Public relations have assumed a sustained status in government in Nigeria. According to Udeze and Nwosu (2020):

There is clear evidence that PRs is not new in Nigeria; it is not also new as one of the platforms that leaders and administrations have stood on to run the affairs of the country. In other words, it is correct to assert that PR, as an important tool for governance, has been employed by present and past leaders of Nigeria. No matter how effective it has been. (p.61)

This is true because the practice of public relations in Nigeria can be traced to the Second World War when there was need for effective public information due to the growing unpopularity of the then colonial government. This is why Stromback and Kiouis (2014) note that PR in governance means “the management process by which an organization or an individual actor for political purpose through purposeful communication and action, seeks, to influence and to establish, build and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals.” (p. 202).

According to Udeze and Nwosu (2020) what this presupposes is that PR effort in this area is particularly geared towards political purposes and political purposes could be an effort to achieve purposeful governance and enduring democratic experience. To

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realize democratic political purposes, public relations strategies such as press conferences, Newsletters, community relations, visits and tours, opinion leaders and the use of media- radio, television, newspaper, magazine and internet are employed. Agreeing with the afore stated submission Achor (2011, p.11) observes that PR is a veritable tool for effective governance as it:

1. Gives regular information on policy, plans and achievement of government and reforms, educates the public on legislation, regulations and all matters that affect the daily life of the citizenry.
2. Provide accurate, full and timely information about government activities, policies and programmes to the public, and building not only accountable, but responsible public officers and active citizenry.
3. Institutionalizes PR in governance and ensures good governance which demands some obligation from the leaders and a number of duties from the led. Such complementary demands and expectations combine to define the nature of government/citizenry relationship.

Conclusion

Peace education is an on-going and life-long learning process. It can be disseminated formally in the school system or informally at the family or community levels. In the school system, elements of viable peace education are incorporated and taught as part of existing curriculum of subjects at the different levels. Generally, the objectives of viable peace education in the school focus on increasing the knowledge of the recipient, helping them to develop positive attitudes and acquire the skills to become peace builders in life (Osaigbovo, 2015). It must also be emphasized that school children at whatever levels especially at the primary school should be exposed to history of the country to further strengthen their sense of appreciation of the dynamics of sustainable unity and integration for Nigerian's coexistence.

Similarly, public relations is geared towards making people to be good citizens by inculcating in them the habit of living harmoniously, accepting one another, and avoidance of promotion of ethnic cleavages, clashes and embers of discord among fellow citizens. Public relations employ opinion leaders, seminars, town hall meetings, visits and tours etc to achieve mutual relationship of her various publics. It is believed that if viable peace education is synergized with public relations that the Nigerian populace despite ethnic leaning, will imbibe peace, love and togetherness that will ensure free and fair elections that will launch Nigeria into the sphere of our dream.

Recommendations

For sustainable unity and integration for Nigerian's democracy to take place, the following recommendations are made:

1. That viable peace education should be adopted in all educational institutions in Nigeria

2. That electoral laws should be amended to reflect democratic principles, subjecting electoral offenders to the wrath of the law,
3. The National Orientation Agency of Nigeria should create opportunities for professional development of all educators in relation to issues of peace and non-violence, justice, rights, culture, leadership and responsible citizenship.
4. The citizenry should be made to imbibe public relations education of changing hostility to sympathy, prejudice to acceptance, apathy to interest and ignorance to knowledge. This will enhance unity, integration and peaceful co-existence for Nigeria's democracy.
5. There is need to expose our political leaders to viable peace education and public relations strategies to enhance their understanding of the democratic process.
6. Religious institutions, mass media, civil society, and work places should provide effective and relaxed avenues for the inculcation of viable peace education in the society.
7. There should be proper understanding, coordination and interest in viable peace education by all stakeholders to enhanced sustainable unity and integration for Nigeria's democracy.

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