
Peace Education: A Panacea For Curbing Conflict In Nigeria

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Abstract

Humankind needs to take lessons from its past in order to build a new and better tomorrow. Among the lessons not yet learnt are the values of peace, non-violence, tolerance, human right, democracy and good governance. Peace does not come with Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA); to reach peace we need to teach peace, as the world can no longer afford war. People cannot stand by while the numbers of conflict and environmental refugees soar, poverty spreads like an epidemic and money for education, health, job training and other needed service is diverted to pay for weapons. Peace education is the deliberate attempt to educate children and adult on the dynamics of conflict and promotion of peace making skills in homes, schools, communities throughout the world. Since conflict erupts from the minds of man and woman, conscious effort must be made to inculcate in the same mind, the art of peaceful co-existence. The most significant way of promoting a culture of peace is through peace education. The paper therefore x-ray peace education, essence of peace education and how peace education can be facilitated through effective implementation of Social Studies curriculum particularly at the primary and Junior secondary school levels which are critical period of the child's character formation. The paper contends that peace education is pivotal to drive toward development as this cannot take place in a security vacuum.

Key word: Peace, Education, Curbing, Conflict, Panacea.

Peace education can be defined simply as “the process of teaching people about the threats of violence and strategies for peace,” and may take place inside or outside a classroom. (Harris, 2008). With this broad definition, the history of peace education is

arguably, as old as human history, as cultures throughout the world have learned and then, taught the next generation how to live peacefully with others.

Diverse religious and philosophical traditions have been rich and influential sources of peace learning even though people have also promoted violence in the names of these traditions. Peace education in its modern form, however, has its roots in academia and the field of peace studies.

Peace education scholar Ian Harris described this modern peace movement as beginning in nineteenth century Europe with many intellectual efforts to learn about violent conflict, evolving into socialist political thought, and spreading to the United States and elsewhere before World War I.

Scholars then began to study war and started trying to educate the public about its dangers. More and more people tried to persuade each other and their governments to use mediation instead of war to solve international conflicts. For example, influenced by the progressive ideas of the American educational theorist John Dewey, many teachers across the United States began using progressive education to teach their students about common humanity in order to promote peaceful social progress (Harris, 2008).

The Charter of the United Nations has since served as inspiration for the development of peace education as educators aspired to help in the global effort to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war,” “to reaffirm faith in the dignity and worth of the human person [and] in the equal rights of men and women,” “to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained,” and “to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom” (United Nations, 1945). With this mandate, the study and promotion of sustainable peace through education began to take on new urgency and sophistication to achieve these universal ideals.

Peace studies became a more serious academic subject soon after World War II. The threat of nuclear war throughout the Cold War encouraged many scholars to devote their studies to creating a sustainable peace. Since the 1980s in particular, peace education scholarship has developed in many directions. Some have emphasized minimizing masculine aggression, domestic violence, and militarism; others have sought to foster empathy and care in students; and many have argued that critical thinking and democratic pedagogy is vital. With the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), created in 1989, peace education and human rights education took on new importance, as this type of education came to be seen as a fundamental right that all children should have. As UNICEF scholar, Susan Fountain wrote, “It is significant

that the framers of the CRC viewed the promotion of understanding, peace and tolerance through education as a fundamental right of all children, not an optional extra-curricular activity”.

Conceptual Clarification

The concept of peace education has been defined in various ways. Although no universally accepted definition of the concept has been formulated, for the purpose of this paper, some of the definitions shall be examined.

Loreta & Jasmin (2010) defined peace education as education that promote the culture of peace, which is essentially transformative. It cultivates the knowledge base, skills, attitudes and values that seek to transform people’s mindsets, attitudes and behaviors that, in the first place, have either created or exacerbated violent conflict. It seeks this transformation by building awareness and understanding, developing concern and challenging personal and social action that will enable people to live, relate and create conditions and systems that actualize non-violence, justice, environment care and other peace values.

According to Akujra- Aja (2007), peace education is the process of pro-active enlightenment on the knowledge and skills of observing and responding to early warning indicators, beyond the like with early warning system, peace education extends to helping people appreciate how appealing cooperation or peaceful co-existence is; how to analyze conflict situation; the relationship between all the process involved in promoting transnational peace and security.

In her view, Gumut (2012) opined that peace education is a deliberate attempt to educate children and adults in the dynamics of conflict and promotion of peacemaking skills in homes, schools, and communities throughout the world, using all the channels and instruments of socialization. It provides education for global security and focuses on direct, organized violence, particularly of war and armed conflict. Peace education concerns itself with human and social dimension of peace; it introduces the concept of human dignity and human right with specific reference to such issues as economic equity, political participation, ecological balance, and particularly, the formative principles fundamental to international human right standards. Overall peace education is an investment in the younger generation and attests to the fact that by educating younger minds in the virtues of peace, the skills of conflict analysis and management, identification of conflicts and source of conflict, a more peaceable future could be secured for humanity. According Fasokun (2004), peace education in its best form, attempts to change the individuals perception of the others collective narrative as seen from the laters point of view and consequently about one’s own social life as well

as come to practically-related less, hatefully and more trustingly, towards that collective.

From all the above definitions, it can be said that peace education is a type of education that glorify peaceful co-existence via the building of the culture of peace into every one's mind, because it is from these mind the conflict generate. So Peace education is therefore a conscious effort to inculcate the virtue of peace and prevent the outbreak of conflict in the society so that development can thrive.

Characteristics of Peace Education

From any angle one looks at it, peace education is geared toward peace building with the following characteristics. According to Fasokun in Umaru, (2010), these characteristics are:

- (1) Speaking for a purpose;
- (2) Listening attentively and reflectively;
- (3) Promoting self esteem, dignity for oneself and respect for the feelings and rights of others;
- (4) Speaking about oneself instead of the other person; and
- (5) Understanding possible barriers for effective communication and how to diffuse them.

Essence of Peace Education

Violent conflict is one of the biggest barriers to development in many of the World's poorest countries. Of the 40 poorest countries in the world, 24 are either in the midst of armed conflict or have only recently emerged from it. Education is perhaps the most important tool for human development and the eradication of poverty. It is the means by which successive generations develop the values, knowledge and skills for their personal health and safety and for future political, economic, social and cultural development. This may be one reason why the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) place so much emphasis on achieving universal, free and compulsory primary education through Education for All (EFA).

Save the Children Alliance has highlighted that, "The number of out-of-school primary-age children in the world has fallen in recent years, but the situation in conflict affected countries has seen little improvement. These countries are home to only 13 per cent of the world's population, yet half of all the children out of school (37 million out of 72 million children) live there. More disconcerting is the fact that they receive less than one-fifth of education aid" (Save the Children 2006). The most recent estimate by the EFA Global Monitoring Report (2011) is that 28 million children live in conflict-affected countries (42 percent of the world total of children out of school).

Education systems face exceptional challenges during times of violent conflict. During conflict, international humanitarian law has a particular importance. The Geneva Conventions make specific reference to protections related to education at times of war, which include:

- a) Parties to a conflict ensure that children under 15, orphaned or separated from their families are provided with appropriate education;
- b) Occupying powers should facilitate the maintenance of education;
- c) Education should be provided for interned children and young people; and
- d) Education should be provided throughout non-international conflicts.

A main weakness of such provisions is that, because the Geneva Conventions were developed just after the Second World War, they relate to situations where a formal state of war had been declared between countries. Later protocols, UN declarations and resolutions have tried to update accepted rules of engagement to accommodate the more complex nature of modern conflicts, but in these situations, where conflicts are often waged by groups within countries and with no sense of accountability to international authority, the main problem is a disregard of the values and norms represented by the Geneva Conventions (Tawil, 2000).

Concerns about the impact of violent conflict and war on children received considerable attention during the 1990s and were comprehensively documented through a study commissioned by the UN Secretary-General (Machel in Matthew 2014). The report identified a number of important implications for the education sector, including arrangements for the education of refugees and displaced persons (Crisp, Talbot & Cipollone 2001), strategies to prevent the use of child soldiers, protection for girls against sex crimes, landmine education and trauma counseling. It provided the basis for a number of initiatives and many issues identified by the report have become specialized areas of international development.

Arguments were also made that education should be an integral part of humanitarian responses (Retamal & Aedo-Richmond 1998). Attention was drawn to the fact that education is a fundamental right as articulated in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1981). Children should not lose this fundamental right to education simply because they live in the midst of a conflict. It has also been argued that education is an important element in the physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection of children during conflict. By providing a sense of normalcy and stability, education may ease the psychosocial impact of conflict. A safe learning environment may shield children from the everyday physical violence of a conflict, while also conveying lifesaving information on how to protect oneself from danger (for example, sexual attack, child recruitment, landmines). Peace Education can also provide cognitive protection by supporting intellectual

development through the teaching of literacy and numeracy and, in some cases, conflict resolution and peace building skills.

There remains considerable debate about the necessity to include peace education in frontline humanitarian aid responses. A significant danger is that immediate responses are disconnected from longer-term development plans for the education sector. This may be exacerbated where the international agencies involved in immediate responses are different from those involved in longer-term development aid for education and where education sector personnel within local education authorities are not involved in the early stages. However, this area has developed significantly since the World Education Forum in 2000 and its resulting Dakar Framework for Action includes an explicit call for donor support to the field, which is now known as 'education in emergencies' (Johnson & Kalmthout 2006). While this field is not defined exclusively in terms of conflict, the disruption of education due to conflict is certainly one set of circumstances that come within the definition of an emergency (Sinclair 2002). An important initiative has been the formation of the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) led by CARE International, Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children Alliance, UNESCO, UNHCR and UNICEF. INEE does not have the mandate to implement or coordinate during crises, but enables members to share information and encourages collaboration. A goal for INEE has been to define minimum standards for education in emergencies and these standards are currently being used in more than 60 countries (Anderson & Mendenhall 2006).

Despite these achievements, those working within other sectors may still need to be convinced about the inclusion of education in frontline humanitarian responses. The evidence suggests that despite a decade of advocacy, education still receives only 2 per cent of humanitarian aid, and receives the lowest response to funds requested for when compared with food, health, shelter, water and sanitation General Marketing research (GMR 2011). Education continues to be perceived as part of longer-term development, rather than as an immediate humanitarian response. Part of the problem is that the arguments that field workers use to justify more funding for education during the humanitarian phase are more about the need for earlier engagement with longer-term issues (such as gathering accurate data, assessing whether and how to reform education, and developing better capacity). Their concerns are that rebuilding the education system during the emergency response period may reproduce old problems such as unequal access and leave legacies that are more difficult to redress in later development phases. It could also be argued that the inclusion of conflict-affected contexts within the broader concept of 'education and emergencies' has not been helpful from a peace building perspective. While conflicts undoubtedly create crises and lead to situations similar to other emergencies (for example, refugees, displaced persons and destruction of infrastructure), it is conceptually confusing to suggest that

understanding the role of an education system during or after conflict is the same as responding to humanitarian or natural disasters such as famine, health epidemics, earthquake, floods or tsunamis.

Imperatives of Peace Education

In the present Nigerian situation which is constantly threatened by security challenges in different parts of the country, it is therefore germane that peace education be introduced into the curriculum of educational system. This calls for radical and urgent educational reform which is a necessary component of the peace process that could engender equity, justice and national unity. Peace education, in the present circumstance, is inevitably necessary because every citizen should be educated so that he/she can understand the society and the dynamics of social harmony. Peace education should be inclusive because, educational inclusion is critical for maintaining peace as it can redress grievances that can motivate individuals to engage in conflicts/violence (Dupuy, 2011). To Mitchell in Dupuy, (2011), inclusive education here, especially within the ambit of “Education for All” perspective does not just refer to those with physical or mental disabilities and/or learning difficulties”, rather it should be seen from the systemic point of view which has to ensure that all pupils can have access to the whole range of educational and social opportunities offered by the school (so that they can) avoid segregation and isolation as well as prejudice.

In addition, education can only be seen as fully inclusive and able to perform its function of building peace if, it is codified as universal rights in national laws and policies, because peace entails the presence of social justice through the protection of human rights including the right to education. Moreover, peace education is necessary for the evolution of a stable polity that would ensure a sustainable socio-economic and political climate needed for national development.

In order to ensure equality and equity which can forestall direct or indirect violence, educational provisions and resources should be equitably distributed in terms of locations and numbers. Where educational provisions are available to all, it will offer citizens ample opportunities to actively participate in the process of national development. This is because if educational opportunity in any country is not equal, invariably, it will create both immediate and long-term disparities that can metamorphose into conflict or violence that could be of high magnitude and dimension, or even result in full scale war. For this reason, peace education cannot be divorced from moral re-orientation, which inclines everyone to do what is right and shun what is wrong. The individual’s sense of what is right and appropriate must not be based on religious imperatives. For Iheoma in Naboth (2012), the individual’s

“... education must enable him to develop the power of critical thinking and moral insight. Such educational programme must take full account of the complexity of social life, the diversity in temperaments, and the variety of perspectives. It must also recognize the necessity for continuous evaluation in moral standards” (p.4).

It could be argued that in a society where most citizens are morally conscious and aided by a reasonable dose of peace education, disruptive conflicts could be relatively absent. Such a situation, no doubt, will engender social cohesion and development.

Conclusion

There are and there have been many methods and ways of preventing and resolving conflicts at various levels in Nigeria: the traditional and judicial methods, but none has adequately checked the upsurge of conflicts and violence. Instead, it appears that violence is increasing at an alarming rate and proportion in such a manner that it has not only threatened our national unity, but also our national development. It is for this reason that peace education should be a veritable tool to promote mutual relationships among Nigerians. The school therefore should be seen as a place where students learn how to communicate freely without inhibitions and prejudices against people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Indeed, if peace education is incorporated in the curriculum, “schools would be able to play the critical role of teaching students how to manage and resolve conflict; how to manage and form interpersonal relationships; and how to enforce authority; as well as for communicating the value and the skill of peace building” (Dupuy, in Naboth 2012), which are essential prerequisites for national development and stable society.

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