

PEACE EDUCATION FOR CHARACTER AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT TO ENHANCE CHANGING COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss ways of enhancing peace education for character and skills development to enhance changing communities in Africa. Education is the key and in this era of information and communication technology no one can do without it irrespective of one's biological affiliation. Students of all ages attend schools to learn. Most Nigerians agree that a good education is associated with success in life, so the learning enterprise prepares pupils for a better future. Ideally, students throughout their schooling acquire the knowledge, character, skills, values, and attitudes they need to become contributing members of society. The UNESCO charter helped to make the invaluable point that since wars originate from the minds of men (and women) it is in the same minds that the defences of peace must be constructed. This implies that deliberate effort must be made to ensure that everyone is educated and enlightened about peace and young persons made vanguards of peace. This paper discussed some basic concepts such as peace, peace education, the goals of peace education. The paper recommended among other things that adequate attention need to be given to peace education in every school in the communities in order to promote peace, character and skills development.

Keywords: Peace, Education, Character, Skills and Development

Character building is one of the important aims of education. Men of character are very rare in our vast population. The world always needed men of character in large numbers. A man of character will possess various qualities expected of a true human being. He is generally a man of word, action, conviction, clean image, a true citizen and a respectable person.

Children and young persons have been repeatedly used as instruments to fight wars for reasons which they have very little knowledge about. In many of Africa's conflicts like those in Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone, the phenomenon of child soldiering became a menace that needed to be tackled. Peace education set out to address this culture of violence and aggression and to inculcate values of non violent change among young persons and adults alike. It opens up people's eyes and minds to see and understand actions taken and their consequences. Children and young persons have to know what peace is and guard themselves against embracing or being used to create violence. Peace education is also seen as an application of positive peace content as opposed to negative peace (Galtung, 1996) and processes concerning the achievement of peace to individuals who are still growing and learning. Early peace education is vital in making it life-long for all citizens of all ages in all countries of the world. Experience is not always the best teacher, children and young persons must not be exposed to war and violence to be able to learn to live in peace. Through peace education, human beings could be taught to suppress their instinctive nature of violence and instead be strengthened in their spirit-oriented nature so that it becomes dominant. Children and young persons are doorways to a peace continuum.

This paper focuses on peace education its significance in helping to create a culture of peace among young persons and adults in the community schools in particular and in Africa in general, hoping that the skills they acquired will be useful for life. In this paper, the following concepts were discussed: peace, peace education, use of school subjects for teaching peace, types of peace education and goals of peace education.

The Concept of Peace

Peace is one of humanity's highest values and there are many definitions of what Peace is. According to Ikejiani and Ani (2009) meaning of peace is multilateral and multi-disciplinary, depending on which notion is central in the determination of peace as a concept. The most common use of the concept of peace is in the absence of dissension, violence or war; the New Testament meaning of the Greek word for peace is *Irene*.

Peace is also seen as a state of mind in concurrence with serenity: a state of harmony, tranquility, concord and a balance of equilibrium of power. Peace is the opposite of conflict; it abhors violence and war. Peace is also a state of justice, fairness,

goodness and civil government. Ikejiani and Ani (2009) also stated that peace can be empirical or abstract, normative or descriptive, active or passive.

Peace has been variously expressed in literature with phrases such as the absence of war; state of freedom, friendliness, and a state of equilibrium (Nwafor, 2007). It has been defined variously as attainment of harmonious relations between humans and their environment that promotes health and survival (Nwana, 1992), an expression of harmony and mutual benefit, requiring co-operation of parties in solving problem, the opposite of war and opposed to it (Igwe, 1992). Some have also attempted to categorize peace. For instance, Sills in Nwafor (2007), in addition to defining peace as absence of war, categorized it into two; Negative peace (warning situation) and positive peace (pattern of co-operation and interaction between the human groups). Odukoya in Nwafor (2007) categorized peace into person-based peace (within and between individuals and groups) and environmental-based peace (which is intra and inter related). In recent times, a more generally used definition of peace expresses peace not as absence of war but harmonious relationship between humans and their physical and social environments.

Peace has been an age-long desire of human beings but it is becoming scarce as the world is getting more sophisticated. The twentieth century has been described as a century of war; physical, psychological and social warfare. The one time president of Norway, Groharlem Brunttland cited in Nwafor (2007) described the century as one in which human vices reached unfathomable depts, though with unprecedented economic growth, it is marked with poor urban areas where the poor suffer overcrowding and diseases that are linked to poverty. Also in Nwafor (2007), John F. Kennedy warned the world saying “mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind”. In spite of all efforts, more sophisticated weapons of war are being designed and developed. In recent times, the world has come to agree that the efforts should extend to changing the heart of people by introducing the culture of peace. Peace education is an inevitable innovation in educating African youths and adults in the communities.

The Concept of Peace Education

Peace education like the concept of peace itself, has been variously defined but with more commonalities than differences. Peace education is the deliberate attempt to educate children and adults in the dynamics of conflict and the promotion of peace making skills in homes, schools, and communities through the world, using all the channels and instruments of socialization (Gumat, 2006). It introduces the concept of human dignity and human rights with specific reference to such values as economic equity, political participation, ecological balance, and particularly the formative principles fundamental to international human rights stands. It concerns itself with the global ethics, gender issues and various aspects of cultural violence. Global governance is also of great concern to peace education which creates the concept of global civil society. 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 sources of conflict, etc a more peaceable future could be secured for humanity.

Peace education is one means of bringing about rational awakening of humanistic, aesthetic and ethical values, which are the pre-condition for peace in individuals, family, society, national and international life. Students need to be taught the right path to love, harmony and peace, for peace begins in our hearts and begins from you and I. Nwafor (2007) noted that peace education incorporates knowledge of the dangers to human life and human social life by war, violence, poverty and oppression. She added that it is a long learning process in which the individuals' confrontation of the major issues facing the world, begins in childhood or puberty and continues into adulthood. Riita in Nwafor (2007) explained that peace education develops reflective, critical thinking, erasing in the mind of humans, militarism culture, prejudices and all forms of evil tendencies, while inculcating in them the culture of peace necessary for harmonious living and peaceful co-existence. Maura (1991) described peace education as a social process in response to conflicts aimed at developing positive approach to peace making and developing people who internalize the vision of peace, with a real sense of personal and social justice, possessing the knowledge, skills and motivation to work effectively, opposing violence, dealing constructively with conflicts and activities building peace, having a personal commitment to non-violence both as a way of life and as a means of changing society.

Olisa (1992) stated that peace education refers to those aspects of formal and non-formal education, in school and out- of-school aimed at the elimination of groups prejudice, stereotypes and hatred which make people prefer war to peace, violence to non-violence, exclusion to co-operation, discrimination to acceptance and destruction to construction. Okeke and Ore in Nwafor, (2007) adopted a more comprehensive description of peace education by Shelly which stated that:

Peace education is concerned with respect for persons, personal relationships, conflict resolution, social justice, sharing the world's resources, co-operation and community. Peace education deals with oppression, sexism, racism, injustice and recognition that violence has to do with power. Peace education involves a radical approach to the curriculum, the structure of schools and the personal relationship within the schools. Peace education is concerned for the planet, the environment and connectedness of humans to other life. Peace education will make a study of war and its causes, will consider alternative ways of dealing with conflicts, developing the machinery for resolving conflicts internationally, nationally and personally. Peace education is not confined to schools but involves the community as it moves to affect the whole society. Peace education is therefore an interactive, long and continuous learning process which is aimed at inculcating in human beings the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for a harmonious relationship between them and their physical and social environment.

The Use of School Subjects for Teaching Peace

This is primarily directed towards developing the students' capacity for critical thinking, inquiry, and reflective skills that enable them not only to understand obstacles to peace, but more importantly to develop skills and abilities to confront these issues, envision realistic alternatives and device, and implement strategies for the realization of the alternatives. Gumut (2006) identified the following as ways school subjects can be used for teaching peace education in schools.

Religious Education: Since most world religions have peace entrenched in their holy books, religion can easily be used as an instrument for peace education among young persons as well as other followers and adherents. Members of different faiths should respect one another's opinions and religious beliefs. There should be unity and respects in the diversity of religions. Religion should teach and promote the virtues of peace, forgiveness, reconciliation, love, respect for life and other values that promote non violent change. Failing to do this, religion have also been known to have the capacity to socialize and indoctrinate young persons into vicious cycles of violence, hatred, discrimination, pride, arrogance and other vices. Therefore, peace education in schools in African communities would be geared up by policy makers to look for the constructive aspect of religion in maintaining peace among the students of the African continent.

Knowledge of Geography: Students should be made to understand the basic knowledge of the country's continent's geography which God in His infinite mercy and wisdom has endowed Africa with. All human beings share basic fundamental things which have been endowed by nature. This is clearly seen in the ability of all humans to live on earth, share the beauty and resources of the earth and protect it for its sustainability and the good of generations yet unborn. This is regardless of which part of it one lives on. Variety, they say is the spice of life, meaning that people differ but should be able to learn from each other's cultures, backgrounds, exposures or suffer the lack of it, without prejudice.

History: Historically, we should respond to the various historical events in the past which have tended to divide rather than unite us. In this case, our experience should not be the best teacher but rather, we should learn from the mistakes of others. History has too many lessons of the inhumanity of human kind propelled by violent conflict. West Africa is a rich case study. The violence unleashed on innocent civilians in the Nigerian civil war, the conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Guinea among others, can constitute rich case studies for the teaching of peace education. The lessons of history as part of peace education should be to expose the ills in the past, and draw attention to the potential good in non-violent alternatives.

Science: Science as a subject avails us with the needs and aspirations of human beings. This knowledge exposes all to the requirements of all beings which should make us have respect for others. It can become an important aspect of peace education at primary and secondary school levels.

Music: Music can also be used to teach peace education. Young people can differentiate between good music and bad music, between the musical notes and instruments that are in harmony and those that are riotous. As good music that is sweet to the ear and soothing to the soul is likened to peace, so is bad music likened to conflict.

Fine Art: Fine art coming in the form of drawings, paintings, designs, cartoons, etc, also helps to graphically portray the message of peace and conflict. The creativity in art students can help to depict the ills of war, the beauty of peace and how young persons may be channeled to love and pursue non-violence.

Types of Peace Education

Education for peace sets out to let people see that we do have choices to every action. It is possible for us all to live in harmony with one another, and with the planet. People cannot remain passive to achieve peace, but active participants in the quest for peace. Participation can be:

- as a long-term broad-based programme focusing on important problems and trends of a society and promoting mostly through schools and colleges as positive peace and
 - as a more focused activity aimed at addressing or preventing a specific conflict.
- Education for peace could be formal or informal.

Formal Peace Education

Formal peace education can be incorporated into the school curriculum and taught within many school subject areas including religion, geography, history, science, social studies, literature, drama, music, art, and mathematics. In formal peace education, the following programmes are emphasized.

1. **Knowledge:** Since the saying goes that, “knowledge is power”, students should therefore know the following about: themselves and others; the poor and the rich; of peace and conflict; our environment and the world tomorrow.

- **Ourselves and others:** We should learn about our own society and culture and place within it. It is not enough to know our own society and ignorant of societies and cultures around us. It does not matter whether other cultures are minorities. That knowledge helps us gain an insight into the life style of others and thereby help us appreciate diversity and learn to live with others from such diverse societies.
- **Rich and poor:** All fingers are not the same; so also is the distribution of wealth to different strata of our society. Power is another area where there is disparity of distribution. Such inequalities have been the major causes of conflicts in many areas within and between countries. Governments of Countries have the responsibility of ensuring that power and wealth are shared equitably as much as possible.

- **Our environment:** Knowledge of our basic history, geography and ecology of the earth is very important as a source of world peace. Geographically, all humans share basic-fundamental things which have been endowed to us by nature. This is clearly seen in the ability of all human beings to live on earth. This is regardless of which part of the world we occupy.
 - **The world tomorrow:** The youths as the leaders of tomorrow have the responsibility of investigating and reflecting on a variety of possible futures not only personally, locally, nationally but also for the world as a whole.
2. *Attitudes:* Positive attitude are very necessary for the attainment of peace. Such attitudes affect our responses to conflict and the ways we look at and do things.
- **Human dignity:** All religions value human life. Students should have the sense of worth for their own lives and that of others. Do unto others as you would want them to do to you, is the golden rule. This also includes respects for other cultures, social background and family background.
 - **Curiosity and appreciation of other's culture:** Students are expected to be educated and good in reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as in finding out more about issues related to living in a multicultural society and interdependent world. Valuing and respecting the culture of others should be a virtue taught to young persons.
 - **Empathy:** Knowing and feeling what others feel, particularly the cultural feelings, is important for students. Students should be willing to imagine the feelings and view points of others.
 - **Justice and fairness:** Genuine democratic principles and processes at local, national and international levels should be put in place for a more just world. The relationship between injustice and conflict, the fact that we all love justice, and should allow others to also enjoy justice is an invaluable lesson.
3. *Skills:* Peace is built over time, through processes of encounter and reflection that address not only practical issues of conflict but also deeper issues of relationships, human development and structural realities. Peace education requires that the students acquire skills which will equip them to be peace builders. Some of such skills are:
- **Enquiry:** Students should be able to find out and record information about world issues from a variety of sources, including printed and audio-visual and through interviews with people.
 - **Communication skills and tools:** Students should have good communication skills such as listening and being able to paraphrase and summarize what they heard without distorting the main facts. They should be able to describe and explain their ideas about the world in a variety of ways. In writing, in discussion, within various art forms, and with members of other groups and cultures.
 - **Grasping concepts:** Students should be able to understand. Certain basic concepts relating to world society, to use these concepts to make generalization, support and test them.

- **Critical thinking:** Students should be able to approach issues with an open and critical mind and change their ideas when superior ideas come up so that they can learn more. In this way, dogmas and dangerous ways of doing things which may be embedded in culture can be questioned.
- **Political skills:** Students should be developing the ability to influence decision-making at local, national and international levels.

Informal Peace Education

Informal peace education according to Ughamadu (2009) is a type of education acquired outside the school or college curriculum. This can be obtained from the family, community, outside the school or college classroom. Socialization and initiation rites or ceremonies can expose one to peace education. Since most societies need peace, peaceful people influence the younger ones on peace education through their personal conducts and attitudes to issues. Organization of workshops, seminars, conference and symposia where youths and children are invited, and topic relating to peace, like poems, folklores, stories, music and other talks can be used to impact informal peace education on the younger ones, students and adults in the society. Designing peace posters, distributing peace badges and printing of T-shirts and posters with peace messages will also promote peace education at grass root level and enhance the character and skills development in African communities.

The Goals of Peace Education

The goals are geared towards equipping the students with appropriate knowledge, values, attitudes and skills. Students are encouraged to re-examine the values and that of others and arrive at locally acceptable values but maintain an understanding that these values and attitudes are desired for universal peace. Nwafor (2007) identified seven categories of values and attitudes associated with the goals of peace education.

1. **Values and attitudes related to human rights and democracy:** These include dignity, equality, justice, protection of the rights of all people, freedom of participation, freedom of speech and expression, and freedom of religious belief.
2. **Values and attitudes related to co-operation and solidarity:** The belief in peace and harmony, interdependence of all people, conflict resolution by peaceful means, mutual understanding, co-operation and respect among individuals and societies, and a culture of peace and co-operation.
3. **Values and attitudes related to preservation of culture:** Respect for the family and all of its members, appreciation of ones own culture, appreciation of the world's cultural heritage and human achievement and awareness of social and cultural change.
4. **Values related to self and others:** These include self-awareness, self-reliance, self-esteem and self-discipline, respect and empathy towards others; a considerate and

caring attitude, moral courage, open-mindedness, trustworthy, truthful, tolerant, self-possessed reconciliatory, inquisitive, caring and creative.

5. **Values and attitudes related to internationalism:** Awareness of the rights and duties of citizenship, respect of equality among nations, harmony between nationalism, regionalism and internationalism, awareness of global issues and their peaceful resolution.

6. **Values and attitudes related to the protection of the environment:** The interdependence of people and nature, appreciation and commitment to maintenance and improvement of the environment so as to favour the survival of all species, and promotion of a sustainable environment.

7. **Values and attitudes related to Spirituality:** Aspiring for inner peace, freedom of thought, conscience and creed, freedom of religious practice, mutual respect for the religious observances of others and equality of treatment of religions by the state.

Skills and Attitudes: Three categories of skills emphasized in the guideline are thinking, communication and personal skills. According to Nwafor (2007) five areas of thinking skills are suggested:

1. **Critical thinking:** The ability to distinguish among facts, opinions and belief; to recognize bias and prejudice; to identify true issues and problems, as well as personal assumptions employed in an argument to reason correctly.

2. **Information handling:** Ability to inform and test hypotheses, to look for answers, to select and reject information, weigh up evidence, hypothesize about eventual outcomes and consequences in order to choose the most appropriate action.

3. **Creative thinking:** To seek novel solutions and answers, think laterally and approach problems from multiple perspectives.

4. **Reflection:** To stand back from a problem and identify its component parts, to understand thought processes and produce appropriate strategies for dealing with any particular problem.

5. **Dialectical thinking:** Thinking about more than one point of view, understanding points of view other than one's own, being able to construct an argument from other points of view-sometimes contradictory-based on knowledge about the other.

Communication Skills

- **Presentation:** To be able to explain ideas to others in a clear and coherent manner.
- **Active listening:** To listen carefully, to understand and acknowledge the views of others.

- **Negotiation:** To recognize the role and invitation of compromise as a tool for the cessation of conflicts, to conduct a productive dialogue towards the resolution of disputes.

- **Non-verbal communication:** Recognizing the meaning and significance of body language.

Personal Skills

- **Co-operation:** To work effectively with others towards a common goal.

- **Adaptability:** To be prepared to change one's opinion in the light of evidence and reason.

- **Self-discipline:** The ability to conduct one's self appropriately in difference contexts and to manage time effectively.

- **Responsibility:** To begin and complete tasks in an appropriate manner, being willing to assume one's share of the responsibility.

Respect: Listening carefully to others, making decisions based on fairness and equity, recognizing that others' beliefs, views and ideas may differ from one's own.

Conclusion

The teaching of peace education in various institutions of learning is an invaluable decision. It will go a long way in equipping young persons and youths with knowledge, and skills that would help bring about peace in African communities. Peace education exposes students to concepts of peace, conflict, violence and non-violence with their inherent values and problems. Students gain formal knowledge of self and the environment they live in. Attitudes to human dignity, change, human rights and appreciation of other people's cultures are taught. Students are able to empathize with others in difficult situations; they improve on their values and attitudes, skills and attitudes, communication skills, personal skills, political skills and critical thinking. Peace education encourages character and skill development which empowers young people who are vulnerable to being manipulated into engaging in negative acts which would inevitably lead to conflicts. This knowledge regulates the rise and spread of conflict.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussion, this paper, therefore recommends that:

1. Adequate attention need to be given to peace education in terms of effective and efficient teaching of the subject in every school in Africa in order to enhance peace, character and skills developed in our youths and adults.

2. Religious organizations should teach and promote the virtues of peace, forgiveness, reconciliation, love, respect for life and oneness of brotherhood.

3. Governments of countries should endeavour to have the responsibility of ensuring that power and wealth are shared equitably as much as possible. This will promote political participation and power sharing in governance.
4. Government, schools and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should organize workshops, conferences, seminars and symposia for youths, students and adults on the relevance of peace and peace education in African communities.
5. Various institutions in Africa continent should endeavour to create institutional ethos, encouraging dialogue, co-operation, respect and democratic relations, and establish co-operation with families, communities and the whole society. These approaches will help to promote peace, peace education and peaceful resolution of conflicts in African schools.

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