

Strategies for Promoting Peace Education among Youths

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Abstract

While it has been widely acclaimed that there can be no meaningful development in the midst of violent conflicts which characterize most societies in contemporary times, and the involvement of youths in violence, little has been done in applying theories into practice in the course to reduce harmful societal conflicts especially in utilizing peace education to achieve desired aims. This paper examines the need for peace education and youth re-orientation for sustainable development in the Niger Delta. It outlines strategies to enhance the teaching of peace education and also x-rays the role of the youth in national development while making policy recommendations at achieving sustainable development especially in the region through youth participation. The researchers assert the necessity for both in-school and out-of-schools approach for the teaching of peace education to be effective.

Keywords: Development, Peace, Education, Niger-Delta, Violence, Youth

Introduction

Violent conflicts have inflicted immeasurable damage on man and his environment, yet there seems no end to conflicts. Efforts to reduce the incidences of violent conflicts all around the world have included researches into the roles that young people play; and strategies to curb youth involvement in violence. In most cases, while youths have been identified as potential agents of societal transformation and development (Aluigba, 2010), the youths have also been spotted as instruments of violence (Faleti, 2004); creating an atmosphere not conducive for

the sustenance of developmental initiatives. While social, cultural, and economic forces all contribute to young people being conscripted as agents of violence, these are reinforced by normative expectations in many societies and traditions that youths are – in some manner – inherently volatile, and even dangerous. As Friedenberg (1964) aptly observed in reference to one particular context, the 'teenager' seems to have replaced the Communist as the appropriate target for public controversy and foreboding.

Because of the vulnerability of youths to violence, developments in other sectors including the emergence of peace education, speak to the central role of youths to the global project of achieving peace. In the present world, an ideal global citizen is only the one who understands the importance of peace to his well-being and that of his neighbor. He acknowledges and respects the human rights of other people; and is prepared to work cooperatively to end poverty, to improve the health and well-being of the world's populations. He also aims to reclaim and protect the environment, and to effect peaceful co-existence among individuals, peoples and societies. Thus it is the responsibility of the society to raise the awareness of the individual towards the sole goal of peace for sustainable development.

The necessity for peace education was emphasized by a foremost Indian nationalist, Mahatma Gandhi when he once stated that if real peace is to be achieved, then we shall have to begin with the children. Achieving lasting peace for sustainable development depends on educating future generations into the competencies, perspectives, attitudes, values, and behavioral patterns that will enable them to build and maintain peace. Thus, this paper intends to examine the importance of peace education for youths in order to achieve sustainable development. Hence, to understand how to make peace education effective for sustainable development, it is first necessary to define the concepts of peace and peace education; understand the connection among development, violence, youths and peace, and the need for peace education. There is need also for knowledge of the components and

strategies of enhancing peace education. Finally, the steps of conducting an effective and sustainable peace education must be understood.

Concept of Peace

Peace is not just the absence of wars; the real definition of peace emerged from the clarification given to violence and war, which could happen even in the absence of wars. According to Dasgupta (1968), violence is everything which prevents the full realization of innate somatic and mental human potentials; anything which produces a gap between the physical and mental potentials of human beings and their actual conditions. Therefore, from this perspective of violence, such factors as poverty, underdevelopment, oppression, human rights abuses and other social ills afflicting millions of people largely in developing countries can be seen as manifestations of violence; Tjosvold and Sun (2002) opined that the inherence of these factors in a society make people vulnerable to violent acts.

Peace therefore, can be described as the absence of violence, and not as the absence of war. Contemporary scholars have elaborated on this new definition of peace (Johnson and Johnson, 2006; Clark, 2001, Okolie-Osemene, 2012 and Faleti, 2004). They opined it is a political condition that ensures justice and social stability through formal and informal institutions, practices, and norms; several conditions must be met for peace to be reached and maintained (Kriesberg, 2002; Galtung, 1981).

According to Johnson and Johnson (2006), peace may be conceptualized as having two separate dimensions. On the first dimension, war, violence, and strife are at one end, at the other end are settlements, agreements, or common

understandings that end or avert hostilities and violence. On this dimension, if war or violence is absent, then peace is assumed to exist. Thus, they defined peace as the absence of war or violence in a mutually beneficial, harmonious relationship among relevant parties (i.e., aspects of a person or among individuals, groups, or countries). Peace must be activated; building and maintaining peace takes active involvement. Generally speaking, these peace values can only be realized at the level of a domestic society or group within a state (Johnson and Johnson, 2003c).

Peace Education

Peace education has become an important and most effective means of peace building, especially for societies where there are inherent diversities. It is concerned with helping inhabitants of a particular society to develop an awareness of the process and skills that are necessary for achieving understanding, tolerance and goodwill required for peaceful co-existence. Tjosvold and Sun (2002) observed that peace education implies a process of examining and discussing our values and attitudes towards diversity, cultural differences, tolerance and human dignity, and directing our efforts towards achieving fundamental changes within societies. The people develop language and social interaction skills to promote peaceful relations among themselves, neighbours and the natural environment. (Wenden, 2004).

According to Johnson and Johnson's two dimensions of peace, peace education is teaching the information, attitudes, values, and behavioral competencies needed to resolve conflicts without violence and to build and maintain mutually beneficial, harmonious

relationships (Johnson & Johnson, 2003c, 2005c, 2006). They noted that the ultimate goal of peace education is for individuals to be able to maintain peace among aspects of themselves (intrapersonal peace), individuals (interpersonal peace), groups (intergroup peace), and countries, societies, and cultures (international peace).

Most perpetrators of violence in the society fail to know why violence is not a means to an end; neither do they realize the essence of peace. As discreetly observed by Page (2008), peace education should be viewed as encouraging a commitment to peace as a settled disposition and enhancing the confidence of the individual as an individual agent of peace; as informing the student on the consequences of war and social injustice, the value of peaceful and just social structures and working to uphold or develop such social structures. It also involves encouraging the student to love the world and to imagine a peaceful future; and caring for the student and encouraging the student to care for others. Matsuura (2008) concludes that peace education is broadly defined as the educational policy, planning, pedagogy, and practice that develop awareness, skills, and values toward peace.

Need for Youth Peace Education

At the heart of violent acts is the youth who is already rendered vulnerable by the very ugly scenario created by the imbalances, injustices and intolerance in the society. While hungry and unemployed, the youth becomes a ready tool for prosecuting and unleashing terror on the society. In order to tackle the complex and interwoven problems that confront our society there is need to make the preventive measures and solutions to

these problems deeply rooted in the minds of the populations. The need for peace education for youths cannot be over-emphasized; thus, they are enumerated below.

(i) Enshrining Tolerance in the midst of Diversities: Needless to say, the escalation of societal conflicts is rooted in diversity, which may be looked at in terms of economics, culture, politics, ethnicity, nationality, religion and gender among others. It is because of this diversity that there is a tendency for members of one group not to tolerate the views and actions of others (Johnson and Johnson, 2003c). In Nigeria, cultural and religious diversities have been grounds for violence; and youths have been tools to perpetrate violence (Aluigba, 2010; Faleti, 2004). This leads to a fight for dominance, the result of which is conflict and the consequential breakdown of peace. Hence peace education will teach tolerance and co-operation.

(ii) Raising awareness on Violence and Peace: The high rate of violence and crimes perpetrated by youths which have impeded the growth and transformation of the people and society; and the perceived lack of knowledge of the consequences of these acts have been blamed on lack of peace education. Faleti, (2004) noted that certain conditions make people to adopt controversial approaches to conflict; thinking it is a means to an end. Hence, when the minds of the youths have been eroded by unpatriotic and violent acts, the society is subjected to great dangers.

(iii) Patriotic consciousness: In Nigeria today, ethnic discrimination has become a chronic social menace, in fact

a canker worm, which has eaten deep into the heart of Nigerians especially the youths. According to Adeoye, Ayinla & Muhammed (2006), discrimination based on ethnic nationality is common to all ethnic groups in Nigeria; and this has been manipulated and consolidated the younger generation (Akinyele, 2001). Tribalism emanates from the ethnocentric feeling of dominance, and if nothing is done to change the minds of the youth, danger portends for the country. There is the need to raise national interests above ethnic interests, as this breeds violent conflicts. As rightly opined by Tjosvold & Sun (2002), peace education helps to prepare young people to become good citizens with skills to promote peace, human dignity and above all, national survival.

(iv) Teaching conflict prevention and resolution strategies: Peace education helps to foster interdependence, integrative negotiation, co-operation and critical thinking before actions. Johnson and Johnson (2005c) observed that a strong sense of positive interdependence is required for peace, so individuals believe they are linked with others; so they cannot succeed unless the others do (and vice versa). For instance, using constructive controversy in schools teaches students how to engage in constructive political discourse (the formal exchange of reasoned views as to which of several alternative courses of action should be taken to solve a societal problem) in a democracy. Johnson and Johnson, 2003c; Paris, 2001), identified

negotiation, problem solving techniques important for peace.

- (v) **Sustainable development:** Wenden (2004) contends that there can be no long-term economic or social development on a depleted planet; thus, at the core of education for sustainable development is the utmost need to develop widespread understanding of the interdependence and fragility of planetary life, support social systems and the natural resource base upon which human well-being lies. Peace and development are interconnected; in fact research has shown that for meaningful development to be sustainable, there must be an atmosphere of peace (Thomas, 2004; Chukuezi, 2009). As observed by UNESCO (2009), a great challenge to Nigeria's emergence from the shackles of socio-economic and political malaise and impairment is the scourge of violence perpetrated by 'helpless' youths.

Ways of Teaching Peace Education

Two major ways of teaching peace education to youths are discussed below. Osemene (2012) noted that peace education could be formal or informal; and Wenden, 2004 argued that the need for informal peace education is based on lack of access to formal education in some; especially developing countries.

- (i) **Formal peace education:** This encompasses school-based peace education programmes - carrying out activities in the areas of and improving the school environment; curriculum development (including the production of materials for teachers and children), pre-service teacher education, and in-service teacher education. Peace

education is most effective when the skills of peace and conflict resolution are learned actively and are modeled by the school environment in which they are taught (Wenden, 2004). This creates a consistency between the messages of the curriculum and the school setting, between the overt and the 'hidden' curriculum. Manuals are used to guide teachers in using these curricula with primary, secondary and tertiary students. Adult literacy classes with stories and poems on peace themes, sports and physical education have also been identified as vehicles for developing skills and attitudes of peace (UN, 2007).

- (ii) **Informal peace education:** The targets here are the out-of-schools youths. Hence, youth forums, clubs, trainings, workshops, community campaigns/sensitizations, sport/recreation facilities / activities and stakeholders' participation are ways to propagate the message of peace to youths. Forums that seek to bring youths from diverse ethnic and religious groups help to teach such youths techniques and the need to manage their differences. Tjosvold & Sun (2002) observed that irrespective of religious and ethnic affiliations, sports and recreation programmes that focus on building teamwork, cooperation, sportsmanship, and decision-making skills are part of the peace education programme that increase coping skills.

Factors militating against peace education

A lot of factors have hindered the effective teaching of peace education and these are analyzed below:

- (i) **Choice of approach in curriculum development:** From the very beginnings

of the development of systematic peace education, there has been discussion about whether it should be added as a separate program in the schools, or if the principles of peace education should be applied through the regular school subjects. The variety of approaches and attitudes on what peace education actually is, leads to the introduction of a series of titles, such as multicultural training, education for democracy and human rights, and education for development.

(ii) Inadequate resources: The introduction of peace education in the school curriculum presents a challenge of material resources. Lack of resources like relevant textbooks, teaching manuals, facilities required for recreational activities etc to be used in the teaching and learning of this subject in schools and out-of-schools camper peace education efficacy. Kester (2008) noted that a country's resources may affect education on peace.

(iii) Inadequate manpower: Unskilled and inadequate teachers and other specialist personnel like curriculum consultants and the civil society may affect the teaching of peace education. Wenden (2004) opined that many if not most teachers and those who act as advocates for peace have never had access to a curriculum consultant or required knowledge for this task. Johnson & Johnson (2003c) opined that most teachers especially in poor countries have limited access to training facilities and special skills for teaching peace education; and this has impeded the teaching of peace education.

(iv) Non-utilization of new technologies: Youths spend more of their time on the internet as a result of

the revolution in ICT; Livingstone et al (2011) noted that 93% of young people aged between ages 9-16 are online every week in Europe and 60% daily; these trends do not extricate the developing societies, as there is rising exposure to the internet through several means. Unfortunately, the teaching of peace education through this medium that has large followers among youths has not been given the required attention mostly due to lack of access by students and teachers.

(v) Lack of commitment by stakeholders: When those expected to play significant roles in enhancing the teaching of peace education to youths are not committed to the aim of the exercise, the achievement of the aim becomes a mirage. For instance, when the government does not play its roles of implementation and support, the process is frustrated. Kester (2008) identified how the vested interests of government can affect the aims of peace education. More so, youths' negative attitude towards peace education can arise from inherent challenges confronting them; Aluigba (2010) noted that the Nigerian youth is confronted with many social 'encumbrances' which compel him to develop apathy to positive initiatives.

Strategies for enhancing the teaching of peace education

Enhancing the teaching of peace education requires the following by schools, the family, religious, traditional and youth leaders, civil society, as well as governments:

(i) Using topics that raise issues related to peace and cultural understanding in our

classrooms. This helps teachers to accord students the basic information to help them develop positive attitudes and values related to peaceful living. For instance, ethnic and religious tolerance lessons will help young people appreciate others; and also remove emphasis on discriminations. There should be emphasis on visual arts especially for younger people in and out of schools.

- (ii) The teaching of different languages can play a special role. Language has enormous real and symbolic significance, especially for minority groups. Linguistic differences, and issues around what language should be used in schools in multi-lingual societies, are often sources of conflict (UNESCO, 2009). Through learning another language, young people have the opportunity to build understanding of those who may not be from their own linguistic group.
- (iii) Engaging in activities that encourage cooperation; Johnson, Johnson & Smith (2000) noted that consensus building and reflective listening gives students skills they need to meet and resolve conflicts. Also, peace education cannot be effective in an atmosphere of violence - schools must be made to serve as peace-centers; teachers must learn to operate on peace.
- (iv) New technologies provide children and youth around the world with the opportunity to discuss issues of common concern. Schools could partner with non-governmental organizations (NGO) and other institutions that carry out advocacy projects to enlighten students on using the internet to promote knowledge of peace. According to Osemene (2012), with the help of new digital media, Nigerians may improve on the following peace education skills, knowledge, and attitudes, including: skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, assertiveness, self-control, sensitivity, cooperation, human rights, justice and power, gender issues, and social justice; and honesty, obedience, open-mindedness, gender equity, tolerance, and adaptation to change.
- (v) Teachers must be provided with the knowledge, skills, approaches and strategies for teaching peace education. Contemporary children's literature can also be used to raise discussion about issues of peace and conflict, even with very young children.
- (vi) Workshops for parents, community leaders, media, and other relevant stakeholders for out-of-schools peace education. The NGOs can facilitate these programmes to encourage relevant leaders to promote ideals of peace.
- (vii) Out-of-schools peace education can take the forms of the use of banners, car stickers and posters in vital and strategic places like bars, health and trading centers as well as use of bill board publicity. Peace campaigns, international peace day celebrations, contests and exhibitions as well as increase peace components in the traditional cultural programmes.
- (viii) Governments commitment to peace education can only enhance the teaching of the ideals of peace - support for teachers' training, sports and recreational activities in and out of school; recognition and support for peace groups, clubs and associations. Also, the need to create the enabling atmosphere for youths to remain committed to learning peace education.

Conclusion

No doubt, it has been proven by this evaluation and analysis that sustainable development in the Niger Delta region can only be achieved by identifying this lacuna between the youth national cohesion. The youths must be made conscious of the need for peace which transcends into their overall wellbeing and that of the society, and this can be achieved through encompassing peace education. The paper has also established the need for all stakeholders' commitment to the teaching of peace education as this is the only way the potentials of the youths can be utilized.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed by this analysis:

- Building bridges of support among key participants. Peace education relies on families, communities, and social networks to affect positive and lasting change. As a peace educator, you need not work alone;
- The relevant agencies must ensure the institutionalization of peace education - this should be fashioned in a way it starts early from the home;
- Youths and youth leaders should be reached through various youth organizations, religious groups, social clubs, market and other group associations - this can be done in conjunction with community and religious leaders, and some relevant government agencies and the civil society groups;
- Youth-oriented programs should be embarked upon in order to accelerate their potentials;
- Concerned citizens, educators and activists of all ages around the world

are promoting and building peace through education, thus there is need for cooperation;

- It is important that the enlightenment of people on the relevance of peace education is carried out. It is pertinent for stakeholders to adopt a holistic strategy to ensure that new digital media becomes effective in shaping the mindsets of youths and adults on issues of peace, especially conflict management, conflict transformation, peacemaking, and negotiation skills. The focus should be on primary and secondary schools, as well as out-of-schools youths.

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