

PEACE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA, A PRACTICAL ANTIDOTE TO VIOLENCE APPROACH IN SCHOOLS AND THE SOCIETY AT LARGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a critical attempt to highlight the role of peace educators in schools and the society at large as well as the relevance of peaceful relationship among individuals, groups and the society in general. The work covered the concept of peace and education. Through qualitative method of rigorous research ranging from field work, use of libraries, review of books, the role of peace education was examined. Interesting issues such as the meaning of peace, challenges of peace education and peace educators were studied. Similarly, critical study on how to achieve peace both in schools and the society were highlighted. The paper, therefore, argues that, the introduction of peace education both in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria will inculcate discipline in young ones and create a road-map for future leaders that are devoid of restless inclination.

Keywords: Peace, Violence, Education, Schools.

INTRODUCTION

The peculiarity of peace education in schools is indispensable to the overall development of the society. This is true because, the work proposes in-depth understanding of the nature of our contemporary time and what the future holds for us, considering the targeted audience that revolved around young ones and adult in the society. In reality, for every Community of people, there is a time when they must consciously recognize who they are, things that form the corner stone of their existence, excitement, things that characterize them [culture of peace], so that they may set their true representation in some form of behaviour and cultural expression (Nwoga, 1984). The necessity of peaceful coexistence is one that stands at the epi-centre of socio-economic and political development of the society and schools in particular. It is a known fact that, human and material development cannot take place in an atmosphere of war, uncertainty, chaos and unfriendly situations. In most schools in Nigeria, the menace of lack of peaceful atmosphere has not only created an irreconcilable issues among students and parents but also sow a seed of perpetual lack of understanding of what was taught in the classroom among students. Consequently, the unfriendly situation among students in the classroom most times extends to parents who could not investigate properly before naively involving themselves. Therefore, in consideration of the immediate few lines above, National Open University handbook states that, “the core of peace education is the consciousness and conscience of the human being. It seeks to develop persons with rational, ethical minds whose vision of the world and its inhabitants is that of unity” (National Open University, n.d. 105). Violence which simply means, an act caused by physical force that is intended to hurt or kill somebody is the major reason for introduction of peace education at this point in our society.

Also, at the core heart of peace education are the school children whom I earlier mentioned as one of the targeted group for a total compliance of the goal and objectives of teaching and learning peace education in schools. The over concentration on school children revolve around the-all-important status of children in the society. These are group of people some writers refer as “The future leaders”, meaning that, they are yet to become adult, and if the principles of peace is inculcated in them, the resultant effect should be in tandem with the objectives of peace education and by so doing, the society have achieved mass peace educators and leaders devoid of chaos and restless inclination. According to basic processes of growth and development in Developmental Psychology,

The teacher should have knowledge of how children grow and develop in order to guide and shape their future development. It is at the early formative years that the child’s personality and behaviour are determined. The child is a product of both nature and nurture. This implies that, the hereditary factors interplay with the environmental factors to determine how the child grows and develops. (National Teachers’ Istitute, n.d, 76)

Therefore, developmental Psychology which is primarily the function of teachers, deals with development, growth and behaviour in human beings right from the time of conception to the period of adolescent, when most functions of the body become matured. It also deals with the factors which determine what a child will be in future.

Admittedly, the mind and heart of a child is like an empty writing-board which is ready to be filled with either negative or positive impact. It is at this juncture that, teachers as peace educators should as a matter of utmost importance inculcate into school children the ingredients of peace for harmonious coexistence both in the school and outside the school.

THE CONCEPTS OF PEACE AND EDUCATION

Peace

To a layman, peace is defined as the absence of war, and war is defined as the absence of peace. In a broader sense, peace encompasses the above definition. There can be peace even when there is war, as in situations when there are peaceful interactions between countries that are engaged in active war. For instance, the war in Ukraine/Russia is still on, while they agreed on the use of Sea to convey their food stuffs. Also, Palestinian and Israel have been able to establish peaceful use of Water Resources, even as the war between them has raged (Oke, 2006). Therefore, the social conditions of war as against physical form, such as poverty, intimidation, oppression, fear, police brutality, monopolization of resources by few people are conditions of ill-peace. There is no peace in such a country experiencing the above threats, even when there is no war. The most common use of the concept of peace is in the absence of dissension, violence or war that makes peace associate with the happy and fortunate instead (Greene, 1998). 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 could also mean “the opposite of conflict; it abhors violence and war as well as a state of justice, goodness and civil government” (Ikejiani-Clark & Ani, 2009, 3).

Succinctly put, peace refers to a situation and or condition that create room for life, free from threats which eventually enable individuals and groups to relate well with each other or one another (Uwaoma, 2018). Peace also involves inner calm, serenity, contentment, social justice,

absence of war and conflict, non violence, harmony, reconciliation and forgiveness, cultural and religious understanding and personal growth and development (Nwosu, 2024). Finally, peace is generally defined as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering, violence, torture, bad governance, etc., and about peaceful coexistence.

Education

The term education is used in four main senses in which it is seen to connote a process, a product, a discipline and an institution. Education as a process represents the conscious activity of either imparting and/or acquiring knowledge or skill or information whether in organized or not so organized ways with the intention of bringing about some desired behavioural outcomes in the participant. Education as a product is the outcome of the teaching and learning activity which is the corollary of the process. It is evidenced by the skill or knowledge or attitudes which individuals possess after acquiring education. Education as a discipline represents an organized branch of learning or a subject of study like Physics, Chemistry or Geography, etc., which may form part of the curriculum of the teacher, while education as an Institution represents all the enduring network of relationship, structures and establishments by which a society or country provides its members with the relevant educational experiences they required to function effectively within the society (Obasi, 2004).

There are three forms of education which includes Informal education, Formal education and Non-formal education. Informal education refers to the spectrum of teaching and learning activities that are not governed by any laid down rules, methods, contents and standards. Learners usually acquire knowledge through observation, participation, imitation, practice, etc. Formal education refers to the systematized educational experiences provided in a prescribed way by a cult of professional teachers in specifically designated teaching and learning environments called schools. It is carried out in a protracted period of time during which a desired outcome is supposed to have been accomplished while non-formal education refers to the organized education which is usually provided outside the formal educational system.

In view of our discussion above, education is a system by which one generation imparts the ideals and cultural practices of its society to the next generation in an unending process, (National Teachers' Institute, n.d. 1), thus; we can say that education started as soon as man was created. Generally, education is about shaping or molding people, be they children, youth or adults to behave in certain ways, especially ways that will shun violence and preach peace.

WHAT IS PEACE EDUCATION?

Peace education is multidimensional and holistic in its content and process. Peace education can be imagined as a tree with many robust branches. Among the various forms of peace education practices are: Disarmament Education, Human Rights Education, Global Education, Conflict Resolution Education, Multicultural Education, Interfaith Education, Gender-fair/Nonsexist Education, Development Education and Environmental Education. Each of these focuses on a problem of violence. Generally, all forms of peace education is the process of imparting values, knowledge, attitude, skills and behaviours to live in harmony with oneself, others and things surrounding ones environment. Peace education tends to develop knowledge and skills such as empathy, compassion, nonviolence, conflict resolution and social justice. Peace education or education for non-violence involves training and imparting skills that foster a culture of peace based on human rights. It provides knowledge and also develops skills and

attitudes necessary for recognition and resolution of conflicts. It exposes people to learn about human rights and responsibilities that everyone needs in order to live in a peaceful and just society; to learn to appreciate various worldviews, equipping students to mediate conflicts with deeper understanding of underlying cultural or perspective based causes; to learn and practice social justice to promote fairness, equality, equity, rights and promotion of non-violence in all contexts.

In short, peace education is based on a philosophy that teaches non-violence, love, compassion, trust, fairness, cooperation and reference for the human family and all life on planet earth.

THE ROLE OF PEACE EDUCATORS IN SCHOOLS AND SOCIETY AT LARGE

A teacher or a counselor who teaches peace, non-violence and train people to live in peace is a peace educator. The primary role of a peace educator/practitioner is to change behaviours associated with violence or non-peaceful into non-violence and peaceful behaviour. Thus, peace educators seek to establish democratic classrooms that teach cooperation and promote positive self esteem among their students. Teachers serve as peaceful role models to help counteract images of violent behaviour young people receive through popular culture such as, videos, internet, games, music, homes, etc. Their teaching style will normally adjust to the developmental needs of their pupils, respecting the various identities and concerns about violence that students bring to the classroom (National Open University, n.d. 107).

Consequently, the role of peace educators includes teaching students how to manage conflicts without violence, respect all forms of life and engage in social justice activities. They also teach students to appreciate intercultural diversity, inform students the consequences of war and social injustice as well as to learn the skill set for peaceful engagements and envision a future without war. Above all, it is the duty of peace educators to care for the students and encourage the students to care for others and most especially, to shun selective justice and peace management with suppression tools.

THE CHALLENGES OF PEACE EDUCATION

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society. This factor has a lot of implication on the unity of Nigeria. Most of the ethnic crises are caused by no other factor than tribal sentiments, greed, selfishness and chauvinism (Uche, 2011). Tribalism is used to describe situations where people are overly loyal to their own group as well as behaviour or attitude that stem from strong loyalty to one's own tribe or social group and posed a serious challenge to peace education in schools.

Cultism and few other related social vices have dangerously infiltrated into primary, secondary and tertiary schools in Nigeria. Secret cults are the agents of murder, arson, victimization and oppression in educational institutions. Recently, it had metamorphosed into cult of kidnapers, organized armed robbery, political thuggery, etc. Cultism has had an extreme negative impact on learning and discipline in the schools. It has claimed the lives of students and teachers in a very alarming proportion and made teachers to seek for transfer out of those affected areas thereby lowering the standard of education.

Another challenge facing peace education in Nigerian schools is inadequate funding of both materials and human resources on the part of government for effective teaching and learning. In most cases, materials meant for teaching are diverted for selfish purposes. Also, policy formulators on education is yet to inculcate peace education fully into primary and secondary schools curriculum and that amounts to lack of political will and unacceptability of peace education by government at grass-root level.

Cultural intolerance among different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria both in the classroom and in the larger society is also a serious threat to peace education in schools. Culture, been the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment is what gives order and meaning to the linguistics, social, political, economic, aesthetic, religious, philosophical modes and organization of a people, nation, ethnic or group (Asiwaju, 1997). The belief of the Ijaw, Ibibio, Itsekiri, Eko, etc., who are in the riverine areas tended to be more in water spirit while those in the rain forest areas where tall trees existed, attached more importance to forest resources. Those in the highland areas like Jukun, Chamba, etc., tended to worship at the foot of the hills and mountains and the cultural differences should be tolerated by all so as not to endanger the process of peace education. Apart from the above challenges, cultural intolerance on symbols such as hair styles, tribal marks and body marks among different ethnic background is a threat to peace education in the society and schools in particular. The ethnic and cultural composition of Nigeria with about two hundred and fifty ethnic groups as well as different languages, required cultural tolerance for smooth running of peace education in schools and the society in general (Ukaegbu, 2010).

Inordinate name-calling such as Igbos calling the Yorubas, “onye ofe mmanu” even among the Igbos, an Anambra person will call the rest of Igbo people; “Nwa onye Igbo”. The Owerri people of Imo State refer to other people outside Owerri as “Onye Isoma” which they consider as an abusive words and most times lead to violence.

HOW TO ACHIEVE PEACE IN THE SOCIETY

Peace could easily be achieved when one admits his mistakes and openly say “I am sorry”. This is true because, the highest point of human development is the ability for one to admit or accept his mistakes. There is a proverb among the Igbos of Nigeria which says, “okwu di nro n’eme ka onuma juo oyi”. Meaning that, when one feel sorry of his offence, the anger of the person offended will calm down. There is a popular aphorism which says “to err is human and to forgive is divine”. Therefore, always say I am sorry when you perceived that what you did was wrong. Never allow your ego to supersede your sense of reasoning.

CONCLUSION

Peace education activities promote the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help people either to prevent the occurrence of conflict, resolve conflicts peacefully or create social conditions conducive to peace. It is an essential component of quality basic education that aims to build value and skills that will enable young and adults to prevent violence, resolve conflict peacefully and promote social conditions for peace and justice.

The paper advocates for school managements and education authorities to introduce not just on a cursory basis, peace education as a compulsory subject to all cadre of nursery, primary and secondary education in Nigeria. The tendency to tailor and catch them young towards peace education is in its ramification, the solution to the problem of education in Nigeria and by extension, the problem of other sectors of the economy.

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