

PEACE EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF PLATEAU STATE

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Abstract

The absence of peace portends a danger to human existence and no nation or individual can move forward. Plateau State of Nigeria, with its strategic position in the 'middle belt' of the country and a home to indigenes and settlers from different parts of the country has been a battle ground for ethno political and religious violence since the late 1990s. This ugly situation has necessitated the clarion call for peace education from the early stage of individual's education which is primary education. This paper emphasizes that peace education at the primary school level will lay a foundation for future and lasting peace. The relevance of peace education for primary schools and peace education in Plateau State education are discussed. Recommendations were made to strengthen the need for peace education in Plateau State.

Keywords: Peace, Peace Education, Primary School, Plateau State.

Introduction

Peace education is the education that creates in human consciousness, a commitment to the ways of peace. In a school system, it includes the transmission of universal values, attitudes and development of competencies that would enable students to become active citizens by adhering to the practice of peaceful relations that would promote peace (Brooks & Hajir, 2020). The preamble of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria stated that Nigeria's constitution is aimed at unifying Nigerians to live in peace (FRN, 2004). This therefore means that peace education can be considered a valuable measure that would promote social integration, unity and ensure peaceful co-existence among the people. Without peace, human existence is threatened. Conflicts and wars can only lead to more retaliation and no nation and individual can move forward. Anger (2017) admits that there can be no peace without peace education. Where schools fail to teach peace education children maintain the same perspectives on peace with the adults in the community and this can lay the seeds for future violence. The occurrence of frequent conflicts and violence in Plateau State over a long period of time has created a need for peace education in the state.

Plateau State is one of the 36 States of Nigeria where peace education is imperative to human and societal survival as a result of the frequent occurrences of violence and conflicts which has disrupted peace and unity of its people. Geographically located in the Northern part of the country, specifically the 'middle belt' region, Jos the capital of Plateau State attracted foreigners and outsiders as early as 1940s due to its production of tin ore. Jos and its environs accounted for 80% of Nigeria's tin production (Danfulani & Fwatshak, 2002) which placed Nigeria on the world map and attracted outsiders from Europe including migrants from different parts of the region and country. These migrants are Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo,

Idoma and other groups around Plateau State. Jos was known for its relative peace which earned it the name 'Home of Peace and Tourism' until 1990s when occurrences of frequent conflicts and violence turned it into a battlefield of ethno, political and religious crisis. Between 1999 and 2021 the state witnessed series of crises which on few occasions resulted to large scale destruction of lives and properties worth millions of naira. The first crisis of 1999 was fought over the chairmanship of the Jos North Local Government Area (LGA) who was alleged to have been a non-indigene of Plateau State, followed by a reprisal attack in 2001 which led to the killing of over 1000 people in Jos North and its environs. Subsequent recurrent attacks between 2004 to 2010 took a religious nature between Christians and Muslims with more escalation of violence spreading to the southern parts of Plateau State like Yelwa town, Langtang and Wase LGAs. Young men including women and children were slaughtered, killed or burnt. Houses and buildings were set ablaze, communities were dislodged while victims of conflict migrated to other settlements (Danfulani&Fwatshak, 2002). Amidst this state of tumult was hostility and distrust among Muslims and Christians which resulted to settlement between these two groups along religious lines.

The peace of the state was further threatened by the coming of Boko Haram, a deadly and radical insurgent Islamic sect that condemns western education. Boko Haram in Plateau State targeted and bombed churches, killing of innocent citizens, maiming and kidnapping of innocent citizens. The most recent threat to peace in Plateau State is the activities of Fulani Herdsmen. These Herdsmen have been in constant clash with the indigenous farmers over grazing land, cattle rustling and land owning rights. This led to the most recent violence of August 2021 where 22 Fulani men were killed in Jos on their way to Ondo State. In a reprisal attack, the herdsmen burned down over 400 houses in Bassa and 150 in Riyom Local Government Areas with hundreds killed. This followed the destruction of farmlands and the large displacement of over 22,000 people from their homes in the two local government areas. Therefore, the rapid degeneration of Jos and Plateau State as the 'Home of Peace and Tourism' to a home of conflict and violence has called for a timely reconsideration of the approach to peace in the state through peace education to be imparted to the younger generation in order to save the future of the state and the country at large. The primary focus of this paper therefore is for peace education to take its roots at the primary school level. This is key to peaceful co-existence and a foundation for sustainable peace in the state. The primary school level is the formative and critical stage of development in the life of the individual. Nweze (2014) expressed that it is a stage where attitudes, knowledge and skills are being acquired therefore these qualities can be nurtured, developed and used as a springboard to promote the culture of peace. It is a stage to 'catch them young' by moulding them to inculcate the spirit of love, compassion, fairness, co-operation, empathy and adopt the spirit of non-violence. It is a period of socialization where children are at risk of exposure to the media like television, internet and other sources of media which exposed children to the violent nature of society.

At this stage of development, their mindset can be transformed to imbibe the spirit of peace and harmonious living (Ogunyemi&Adetoro, 2013). In other words, children's skills and competences that can help them to avoid conflict can be developed. Also, positive attitude to handling daily interaction and activities that promote peace can be built. Omenma et al., (2011) admit that at the primary school level, children can develop the skills of being human in nature, value the inherent dignity of others and uphold values that go with positive relationships. This could change the negative attitudes they learned from their parents and

the neighbourhood towards violence to resolve issues. Empirical studies have shown that peace intervention among children have been proven to result in improved attitudes cooperation among children which is practically important in peace building process.

Omenma et al., (2021) also discovered that through peace education, pupils had awareness of what constitute peaceful living. This will lay a foundation in curbing the spirit of aggressiveness and violent behaviour among the children as they mature to adulthood. Studies have shown that the ongoing crises and violence in Plateau State and Nigeria is credited to participation of youths. Youths have been used by adult members of society to engage in violence and destruction of properties during crises (Ogundele, Oparinde, Ariya & Oke, 2014). Therefore, to build a foundation for long lasting peace in Plateau State and curtail the use of young minds as key actors in the escalation of violence, peace education is necessary for the future adults. This can help them inculcate the right type of attitudes and values to peaceful conflict resolution. Children will also learn from cradle to have respect for life, sanctity of blood, unity and co-operation among members of society (Omemna et al., 2021).

All past efforts at building peace in Plateau State have only superficially addressed the problem of peace. This is evident from the conflicts that have remained unresolved since the late 1990s till date. Most studies that have aimed at peace education have concentrated mostly at the secondary, tertiary levels and among groups of people in Plateau State like gender and youths with less emphasis at the primary school level. This paper therefore seeks to address the need for peace education from a basic level (primary education) point of view for future sustenance of peace in the state.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the sociological perspective of structural functionalist theory of Emile Durkheim (1961) which sees society in relation to its constituent elements that sustain it like the educational system; family, economy and polity. Like the other constituent elements, the educational system has a positive contribution to the maintenance of the social system and social solidarity. Durkheim sees education as serving a major function in the transmission of societal norms and values of society. It is also a means of fostering appropriate values and personal qualities from one generation to another. Durkheim believes that education produces consensus, harmony and social solidarity. He maintains that without these essential co-operations, social life itself will be impossible.

Relating this perspective to the study, the primary school which is the lower arm of the educational system provides an enabling environment for the foundation of peace education in Plateau State. Peace education can easily be imbibed at this level because the primary school functions to impart knowledge, skills attitudes and values of society. That means that these qualities can be directed at building a peace culture and the children can easily be moulded to adopt the attitude and disposition towards peace at this level of education. Through the teaching of norms and values by schools, as rightly pointed out by Durkheim (1961), the young children can also embrace norms that can build positive relationship towards peace. He further noted that by having children from diverse social, religious and ethnic backgrounds together in school, children become socialized into a commitment to society as a whole and in the school they learn to interact with one another according to fixed set of

rules. That means that the school should be considered as a testing ground for teaching students the rules of social skills for peaceful co-existence and harmonious living as they go through the process of socialization. This implies raising a generation of children with the spirit of tolerance, understanding, feeling for the well being of others through the school system and this can guarantee a non violent attitude as they move to further level of growth. Peace then can be built at this foundation.

Concept of Peace Education

Peace is defined as the absence of war, conflict, disturbance and freedom from aggression. It is a state characterized by tranquillity, harmony and absence of violence among people (Dimkpa 2014). On the other hand, education is a process of systematic institutionalization and transmission of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and norms accepted by society. Peace education therefore is the education which creates in the consciousness of people a commitment to the ways of peace, inoculates them against the effects of violence and how to manage conflict without resorting to violence. Haris (2002) admits that peace education among people draws out their instinct to live peacefully among themselves and emphasize peaceful values upon which society should be based. In an environment, peace education can promote peaceful atmosphere where individuals and communities can relate with one another in a respectful and courteous manner.

Sociologically speaking, peace education could be considered as an instrument used in schools to help children develop knowledge, attitudes, values and skills to promote peaceful conditions for co-existence and a just society. Ferrans (2015) maintains that through the promotion of empathy, perspective taking, critical thinking, cultural awareness, peace education can empower children and youths with competences they need to transform the entire social structure that systematically serves the interest of some at the expense of the rights and well being of others and prepare them to have a positive and meaningful impact on their communities.

According to Akinyemi as cited in Osondu (2019), the goals of peace education in Nigeria are to:

- i. educate the students in both primary and secondary schools on the issue of peace, non violence and tolerance and enable them to develop the skills of active listening and critical thinking
- ii. help the students to change the attitudes they have been taught by their parents towards the use of violence to resolve issues.
- iii. develop mediating and anger management skills in students so that they can resolve issues.
- iv. present the consequences of violence on people and society and non violence approaches to resolve the issues
- v. help students that improve skills to build their confidence and constructive attitude towards peace
- vi. present to students constructive elements, and to have occasion to put their positive behaviours in practice through different exercises.
- vii. encourage students to see themselves as citizens of one single nation than to divide themselves along ethnic lines.

Relevance of Peace Education for Primary Schools

Primary education is the education given to children after nursery education. According to the National Policy on Education (2004), it is the education given to children from the age of six to the age of eleven. Primary education is the foundation of any education that is secondary and tertiary. The rest of the other educational systems are built on it, therefore this has made it to be universally termed as the foundation education on which other levels of education stand.

As a fundamental level of education, this formative stage is critical in the development of attitudes, values and culture that would promote peace as well as serve as the springboard for the culture of peace in the future. The saying goes that prevention is better than cure, therefore peace education is very necessary to “catch them young” and curtail the spirit of non tolerance and violence. According to Nweze (2014), peace education at the primary level should be characterized by attitudes, knowledge which includes insight into conditions of violence, wars and factors that prevent peace and values that promote it.

An individual’s education begins with the family through the primary level of education to the tertiary level. The process of socialization continues through exposure to the media like the television, internet, radio, books and other sources of literature which exposes the violent and chaotic nature of society. At present the acts of violence, conflict and wars affecting both adults and children are the news that make the frontline in our media houses. Therefore, through all the process of socialization, the knowledge acquired about the violence, conflict and the social ills in society indirectly influence the viewpoints, attitudes and values related to the world in which the children live. The acquisition of peace education in everyday learning step of the child’s process serves as a considerable potential for future peace for the child, today and tomorrow. This means that as children receive peace education, it will help them to form their own unique view of the world as well as learn how to interact with the people around them as noted by Brooks and Hajir (2020). They believe that if children are taught about peace, it is a wonderful opportunity for them to build peaceful perspectives of the world around them. They contend further that when kids are equipped with the skills they need to be human in nature, they would build healthy relationships and values that go with positive relationship and the creation of safe learning environments that will benefit now and the future.

According to Omenma et al. (2021), peace education intervention have been proven to result in improved attitudes of co-operation and tolerance among children. They discovered from their study that through peace education, pupils had high awareness of what constitute peaceful living. Peace education is essential to the growth and development of Nigerian children and Plateau State children in particular. What is important for them at this stage is that for their daily interaction with one another either at school, neighbourhood or public place, they need to be groomed with refined words necessary for maintaining good relations. They need also to demonstrate the attitude of love, compassion, fairness, co-operation and reverence for the human family. Primary school children in Plateau State like their counterparts in the ‘middle belt’ and other northern states of Nigeria have been exposed to conflicts and violence resulting to loss of lives and destruction of properties. Yaks (2014) reported instance of children living in troubled zones of Jos and have been exposed to various levels of confrontation with their parents either as victims or participants; many reports by

Human Rights Watch (2005) exposed evidences of children being used to perpetuate violence during elections or religious crisis. Besides Ismail (2005) reported military sophistication of Muslim and Christian youths during crises and their readiness to battle with one another at the slightest provocation.

Unfortunately, peace education at the primary level of education has received very little attention. In Nigerian schools from the post primary education level, peace education is emphasized but taught under civic or social studies. Nigerian primary schools including primary schools in Plateau are also yet to have peace education as a subject taught on its own. Peace education at this level is rather embedded into subjects like social studies and civic education. In the words of Akubue (2011), infusing peace education curriculum into other subjects does not give it the deserved attention considering the frequency of conflicts and violence in the society.

Peace education taught at the primary school level is key to sustainable peace in the state, where children's attitudes and dispositions toward violence can be shaped. According to Nweke (2014), a more positive relationship towards one another can be embraced which from this foundation, the culture of peace for the future can be developed.

Plateau State and Peace Education

Plateau State is located in the middle belt of Nigeria. Geographically it occupies the central part of the county with over 42 different ethnic groups. The city of Jos, the capital of Plateau State was renowned for its tin production which earned the name 'tin city' during the 1940s. This state placed Nigeria on the world map as one of the sixth largest producer of tin ore in the world. Jos remains one of the cosmopolitan cities in the middle belt that serves as the nexus in the northern and southern parts of the country. This makes it a commercial center to which influx of immigrants from different parts of the country have been attracted.

Like other parts of the country, Jos the capital of Plateau State has been involved in series of conflicts, both ethnic and religious in nature. The increase in population in Jos escalated economic and demographic pressures leading to scarcity of resources and competition between the indigenes and the settlers. This situation laid foundation for divisions and violent clashes which centered on the politics of participation in government between indigenes and settlers who were mostly Hausa/Fulani. From 1999 to 2021, Jos and its environs including other parts of Plateau state continued to witness violence culminating in the loss of lives and properties worth millions of naira. The conflict took the nature of religious crises between the two major religious groups, Christians and Muslims.

The insurgent activities of Boko Haram sect, a radical Islamic group whose mission is to stamp out Western education and propagate the teachings of Islam including the activities of Fulani Herdsmen in Jos escalated the rate of conflicts and violence in the state. The Boko Haram sect resorted to bombing of places of worship, killing of young men, women and children, destroying lives and property and kidnapping. In Plateau State of recent the farmer/herder's clash which started from ethno religious wars and indigene-settler dichotomy has led to the outbreak of violence on a more regular basis. This has no doubt worsened the state of peace and tranquillity the people of Plateau State. Often times when crisis erupted, the government imposed a curfew to restore order but this attempt to restore peace did not often last for long.

This has created concern over Jos from the public from being a 'Home of Peace and Tourism' to a conflict prone zone in Nigeria.

Since 2001, when full scale crisis erupted in Jos, full peace is yet to return. Families are either slaughtered, houses destroyed while reprisal attacks have been the norm. Efforts made by the government, NGOs including stakeholders at building peace failed to yield positive results as old and unresolved conflicts precipitate new ones. Most times ineffective measures or unresolved conflicts rendered peace efforts wasteful as they could not stop the escalation of new violence.

Pupils from public primary schools in Jos North Local Government Area at a forum organized by the centre for the Advocacy of Justice and Rights (CAJR) in collaboration with the local government education admitted that the crisis was adversely affecting their education. They equally admitted to the killing of pupils and teachers during conflicts (Obaleru, 2012). Against the recurrence of conflict and violence the deputy governor of Plateau State, Professor Sonny Tyoden in 2020 expressed the need for peace education from the primary school level to curb the menace of radicalism among children (Udodion, 2017).

In Plateau State, where the atmosphere of violence have overshadowed the peace enjoyed by the people, peace education from the primary school level is key to sustainable peace in the state. In Plateau State with over 42 ethnic groups and a multi-religious society, virtues like tolerance, respect for one another, forgiveness, helping one another can be taught to children through peace education to change their mindset and thinking. Like adults, children are the products of society that nurtures and groom them. They react to the negative attitudes from adults around them, from their homes to neighbourhood and knowledge and experiences about violence, aggression and conflict around them. Peace education can help them imbibe the spirit of understanding, empathy and hatred for violence in place of peace. This is instrumental to sustainable peace on the Plateau.

Conclusion

Peace education is a veritable instrument for promoting peaceful co-existence and ensuring a conflict and violent free society. In this regard, Plateau State with its experience of ethno political and religious conflicts for so long requires the type of peace education that can guarantee future peace and the lost glory once enjoyed by the people. If peace education takes its root from the primary school level, it will mould and transform the future minds for a better and peaceful tomorrow. Through the younger generation, a foundation for peace and a free conflict society will be laid.

Recommendations

- The government should ensure the teaching of peace education as a separate subject at the primary school level.
- Schools from time to time should invite role models to sensitize parents and pupils to the need to promote peace from the family level to neighbourhood and community for the sake of the younger generation.
- Schools should use opportunities provided on the time table for clubs and societies to stage dramas and peace talks to pupils
- Teachers should encourage peace among students from the diverse social background by playing the role model of peace in the classroom.

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