

Peace Education and National Development: A Critical Appraisal

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Abstract

One of the burning and bristling issues in Nigeria at the moment is the constant recurrence of violence in various forms in different parts of the country, and the need for urgent remedial measures to avoid stagnating or retarding national development. The paper examined the concepts of peace education and development. It also highlighted the imperatives of peace education and the implications of peace education for national development.

Keywords: peace education, national development, violence, conflict

Introduction

In virtually all parts of the world, there is no section that is conflict free: the intractable Middle East crises, the Arab uprising in North Africa, the Shaaba insurgency in Somalia, pockets of conflicts in Democratic Republic of Congo, the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, among many others. It has been observed that with the exception of a few, most conflicts since the end of World War II are mainly intra-state in nature, and that about 36 million children are denied primary education as a result (Dupuy, 2010). The global trends of conflicts differ in magnitude and dimension, hence some are revolutionary/ideological in nature, others are either factional conflicts or identity/secessionist conflicts. No conflict, no matter its type, has ever left its victims without indelible scars and tales of socio-economic and political woes.

The Nigerian nation has for over four decades been caught in the web of conflicts of different dimensions since the first military coup d' *etat* in 1966, followed closely by the Nigerian civil. The intermittent military interruptions, the sectional or tribal militant groups, and the current Islamic sect insurgency – all have adversely affected the psyche of the nation: slowed down its developmental strides, and rendered many a citizen socially and economically hopeless and helpless. In such a situation, development in all its ramifications becomes an elusive dream, while most citizens become victims of circumstance, especially children of school age.

As a result of this unhealthy climate, apathy and anarchy permeate the entire national fabric. This attitude may likely stem from lack of confidence in government because of its inability to show palpable concern for the welfare of its citizens. Hence, the aggrieved individuals or groups vent their anger or express their displeasure in different ways and forms; some of which metamorphose into violence of far-reaching consequences, while others erupt volcanically once in a while, leaving their monumental effects on the psyche of the nation and its citizens. In such volatile scenarios, incalculable lives and property are lost; infrastructural facilities are destroyed, while social services such as medical care and education are disrupted. It is against this background that the introduction of Peace Education as a subject of its own into the curriculum of our educational system is being considered.

In this paper, attempt is made to conceptualise peace education and development, in relation to the imperatives of peace education, and the implications of peace education for national development.

Conceptual Clarification

The critical concepts mentioned above that are central to this discourse need to be clarified vis-à-vis the context of their usage.

Peace and Peace Education

The concept of peace lends itself to several interpretations and definitions, which cannot be exhaustively discussed here. Ordinarily, peace means the absence of conflict or violence at a particular time and place. It evokes the climate of freedom from fear, intimidation and harassment, oppression and brutalisation by external forces or agents. Ibeanu (2006), observed that philosophers are not in agreement as to a universally acceptable view of peace. Rousseau's position that peace implies the original state of existence in which man was born as "a free gentle savage" – "a state of nature", is synonymous with a state of ignorance. For Thomas Hobbes, this "state of nature" was marred by frequent conflict and violence, which rendered life "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". In order to avoid this ugly situation, men decided to surrender their rights to an over-riding force, and thereby created a "social contract" for a more peaceful and orderly life (Sabine and Thorson, 1973). Plato, from the social context perspective, argues that justice is the fulcrum of ordered social life (Ibeanu, 2006). It is in this regard that Iwe (1978) states that "justice stands erect like a tree planted on the fertile ground of truth and liberty with all other virtues as its branches, rights and duties its fruits; and order and peace its harvest". In other words, where justice reigns, social order and harmony will prevail, while conflict and violence will be minimal, thereby giving room for both human and material resources development through

formal educational activities. Hence, the presence of conflict and violence in any society necessitates peace education.

Peace education, in essence, implies efforts to promote peace, especially in conflict or violence – ridden areas through educational activities. There is no consensus among scholars as to what peace education means. As a result, the lack of conceptual clarity impedes educational attempts to promote peace (Porath, 2003). It is in this connection that Dupuy (2011) states that: “There is no uniform concept of peace education and the international discourse on this topic is still in its infancy.” He further posits that for a shared and clearer understanding to be achieved, the various socio-economic and political, historical and cultural contexts must be taken into account. This is because since after World War II, many educators have made spirited efforts to establish a humanistic theory and practice of peace education, but without success (Porath, 2003). This stems from the fact that different regions of the world place different emphasis on peace education programme. According to Salomon (2002), regions of relative tranquility stress education for cooperation and harmony, thereby promoting the idea of a general “culture of peace”, whereas regions of conflict emphasise “education for violence prevention”. Violence here implies the direct and the structural aspects. For example, direct violence includes personal assault, rape, brutality, terrorism, murder, ethnic cleansing, institutional war, state sponsored terror, institutional war, industrial destruction of plants and animals (Dupuy, 2011). Indirect violence, on the other hand, is characterized by sexism, racism, discrimination, poverty, lack of education and health services (Ibeanu, 2006, Dupuy, 2011).

Peace education therefore aims at ameliorating the escalating level of violence in various forms so that individuals can live and work in a relatively peaceful atmosphere that could ultimately engender “a global culture of peace”. Peace education therefore primarily intends to develop in the individual skills, attitudes, and knowledge with cooperative and participatory learning methods and an environment of tolerance, care and respects. Where the contents of peace education are inculcated in and imbibed as well as are practised by the individuals, there will be appreciable level of development. In other words, a situation where there is social justice, equity, gender equality, and amelioration of poverty, development would be facilitated. In this connection, peace education is premised on the popular maxim: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed” (UNESCO Constitution, 1945). Hence the need for the effective implementation of global policy on “Education For All” (EFA), so that injustice, inequality, discrimination, etc., and all that give rise to conflict and violence can be banished from or minimized in society to usher in an atmosphere of peace and development.

The Concept of Development

The term “development” has been variously construed and applied by theorists and scholars at different times and places, and in different contexts, especially with regard to ideological inclinations. For most people, development is always measured in terms of economic growth. In this context, Iheoma (1981) argues that “development is understood principally in terms of economic progress – the presence of copious infrastructural facilities, super highways, impressive buildings...” This narrow conception does not take other important variables into account. Economic development must of necessity, according to Okowa (2005), include growth, income distribution, poverty alleviation and provision of basic needs of food, shelter, health and education for the masses. From a broader spectrum, Todaro (1981) posits that:

Development, in its essence must represent the entire gamut of change by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory towards a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually “better” (p.70).

In other words, development embraces change that would improve the human elements, who in turn would improve their society – environment, social institutions, and per capita income.

On the other hand, Rodney (1972) views development from a different perspective because for him, “development” is used in an exclusive economic sense – the justification being that the type of economy is itself an index of other social features. Hence, any form of development that does not equip the individual member of the society with the needed capacity and capability to understand and manipulate his environment, using the necessary technological tools and knowledge cannot be regarded as such. This results in some societies being viewed as “developed” and others “underdeveloped”. In essence, the most important barometer for measuring development is the level of the intellectual and moral development of the citizens, who should use the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired through education to transform their lives and their environment. This can only be feasible in a peaceful and stable atmosphere.

Imperatives of Peace Education

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

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

In order to ensure equality and equity, which can forestall direct or indirect violence, educational provisions and resources should be equitably distributed in terms of locations and numbers. Where educational provisions are available to all, it will offer citizens ample opportunities to actively participate in the process of national development. This is because if educational opportunity in any country is not equal, invariably it will create both immediate and long-term disparities that can metamorphose into conflict or violence that could be of high magnitude and dimension, or even result in full scale war. For this reason, peace education cannot be divorced from moral re-orientation, which inclines everyone to do what is right and shun what is wrong. The individual’s sense of what is right and appropriate must not be based on religious imperatives. For Iheoma (1983), the individual’s

“... education must enable him to develop the power of critical thinking and moral insight. Such educational programme must take full account of the complexity of social life, the diversity in temperaments, and the variety of perspectives. It must also recognise the necessity for continuous evaluation in moral standards” (p.125).

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

Implications of Peace Education for National Development

The introduction of peace education into the curriculum of our educational system at all levels at this critical period of our nationhood is quite imperative. It should not be just a one-semester course tagged “Peace and Conflict Resolution”, as it is presently offered in our universities. If properly designed and developed, it will meet the near-explosive situations which have been compounded by the challenging security problems and armed conflicts in some parts of Nigeria. First, peace education will, to a reasonable extent, address the problems of structural and cultural violence. Structural violence consists of deliberate policies and structures put in place by government that cause human suffering, death and harm, while cultural violence includes cultural norms and practices that create discrimination, injustice, etc. (Ibeanu, 2006). Peace education, if introduced, will create an awareness that could minimize the degree of poverty and social inequalities – the bases of social restiveness in many parts of the country.

In addition, peace education would have far-reaching effects on the national economy. This is so because the curriculum contents, which should include among others; rights, civics and citizenship education, would frontally confront corruption – the endemic disease in our national fabric. Igwe (2010) observes that although corruption is viewed as illegal everywhere, “but everywhere it is woven deep into the fabric of everyday life”. To Achebe (1983), “Corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage; Nigeria will die if we keep pretending that she is slightly indisposed”. The war against corruption and other social vices will not end until it is fought in the sub-conscious minds of the individual citizens through peace education. Furthermore, peace education, when introduced and properly adopted, could minimize, if not eradicate, the incidents of school violence resulting from cult-related activities, and the attitudes or behaviours of some over-bearing teachers and unruly students. The result of these anti-social behaviours have in many cases

disrupted educational programmes and activities, and also maimed and/or untimely terminated the lives of both students and teachers alike.

Moreover, the Nigeria's twin problems – ethnicity and religious extremism, make the introduction of peace education inevitable. Many conflicts in Nigeria stem from tribal sentiments and religious intolerance. A well-conceived and articulated peace education programme that takes the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria into consideration, and implemented by dedicated and concerned cream of teachers, will facilitate national integration of the various ethnic and religious groups, and thereby promote mutual relationships that can foster national development in all its ramifications.

In the political arena, politicians in this country have thrown morality, decorum, decency and probity to the winds, hence a needed panacea could be found in peace education so that future generations could save Nigeria from disintegration and economic collapse. The political leadership have encouraged many social vices such as tribalism (i.e., discrimination against a citizen because of his place of birth), corruption, nepotism, assassination of political opponents, among others. These can be checked or drastically reduced through a comprehensive peace education programme, designed for our leaders, who should be given periodic orientation courses while in office to ensure that those in the echelon of power can speak and flow in the stream of peace education.

Conclusion

There are and there have been many methods and ways of preventing and resolving conflicts at various levels in Nigeria: the traditional and judicial methods, but none has adequately checked the upsurge of conflicts and violence. Instead, it appears that violence is increasing at an alarming rate and proportion in such a manner that it has not only threatened our national unity, but also our national development. It is for this reason that peace education should be a veritable tool to promote mutual relationships among Nigerians. The school therefore should be seen as a place where students learn how to communicate freely without inhibitions and prejudices against people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Indeed, if peace education is incorporated in our curriculum, “schools would be able to play the critical role of teaching students how to manage and resolve conflict; how to manage and form interpersonal relationships; and how to enforce authority; as well as for communicating the value and the skill of peace building” (Dupuy, 2011), which are essential prerequisites for national development and stable society.

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