

Peace Education Policy: A Synergy to Mitigating Violent Conflict Risk and Peacebuilding in Nigeria

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Abstract

Mitigating the risk of violent conflict and building peace in Nigeria involves established principles that promote peace through formal and informal institutions of learning. Peace education policy contains the key principles of reducing the risk of violent conflict and building a culture of peace. This paper aims at promoting peace education policy as a solution to mitigate the risk of violent conflict

and peacebuilding in Nigeria. Qualitative research and content analysis of publications were carried out for this research. This paper affirms that one of the causes of violent conflict in Nigeria was found to be associated with violent education acquired and accepted by aggrieved individuals and groups as a means to achieve their social, political and economic goals. Ignorance of these victimized groups on how to wage conflict through nonviolent methods caused them to see violence as a means of fighting injustices in the society. This paper also supports that peace education plays several roles in alleviating violence and building peace in Nigeria. The analysis further suggests that the formulation and implementation of peace education policy is key in supporting efforts from the government, non-governmental organizations, and peacebuilders in alleviating risks to human security and building peace in Nigeria for sustainable development.

Introduction

Nigeria is faced with multiple violent conflicts: terrorism, kidnapping, separatist agitation, farmer-herder conflict, communal clashes, rises in cult violence, and others. These recurrent incidents are in part a result of postcolonial conflict since the 1960s, conflicts between ethnic groups, socio-economic inequalities, and government failure to serve social needs. Between 2015 and 2020, the government has spent at least 6 trillion, budgeted to the Ministry of Defense, intending to curb violence such as terrorism and banditry to work towards

the end goal of promoting national security. However, this expenditure has not had a positive impact in the last decade, adversely affecting the economic status of people living in the nation.¹ The ineffectiveness of money disbursed by the government to curb insecurity can be attributed to the absence of public policy that encouraged the inculcation of peace through formal and informal learning.

Formal institutions of learning, such as primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, have a huge role to play in preventing violence. Students have long been vulnerable to becoming tools for violent conflict in the country due to their lack of enlightenment on the principles of achieving justice through peaceful means. It is opined that children's inability to access formal education—or more generally activities that emphasize critical thinking, life skills, family, and community—makes them vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization.² Furthermore, formal education without the inclusion of a peace education curriculum still poses several challenges.

Informal institutions such as religious organizations, community groups, and traditional settings use the Bible, Quran, and cultural opinions to educate. For example, the Boko Haram insurgency is a product of radical Islamic education and institution. A special report published by the United States Institute of Peace states that there is unanimity that initial ignorance of religious teaching is the leading factor influencing the adoption of extreme religious views, especially among youth.³ Violent extremism and extremist movements, kidnapping and banditry, community clashes, and rises in cultism are often functions of the education received by aggrieved individuals who belong to one or more violent groups in a bid to advance their social, political and economic agenda.

Greater knowledge of the role and the positive implication of establishing peace

education would help policymakers and peacebuilders foster the making of a peace education policy. Therefore, this paper aims at promoting peace education policy to promote peacebuilding in Nigeria. The objectives of this article are: (i) to examine violent education as a cause of violent conflict; (ii) to reveal the roles of peace education in peacebuilding; and (iii) to suggest relevant policy solutions to mitigate violent conflict risk and peacebuilding. This article is significant in that it gives policy insights and solutions to the legislative arm of the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, policymakers and stakeholders in peacebuilding on how to alleviate violent conflict situations and build a culture of peace nationwide through the formulation and implementation of peace education policy.

The policy entails established principles that legitimize the teaching of peace education in formal and informal institutions of learning to tackle the scourge of violence affecting people living in the Nigerian communities. The implementation of this policy in the next two decades would enhance the knowledge of citizens that are vulnerable to violence on how to live peaceably with others. It will also build a generation of peace actors that would continue to impact the knowledge of peace and transfer such knowledge from one generation to another to ameliorate the risk of violence and sustain development in Nigeria.

Violent Education as the Cause of Violent Conflict in Nigeria

Since 2009, the Boko Haram religious terrorist group has killed thousands of innocent citizens and displaced millions from their homes in the northeastern region of Nigeria. A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report shows that the Islamist insurgency has killed nearly 350,000 people in Northeastern Nigeria as of the end of 2020.⁴ The Nigerian government's war with

Boko Haram and Islamic State's West Africa Province has created one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees operational data portal shows that about 3 million people have been displaced from their homes, and more than 310,000 Nigerians have become refugees because of the insurgency.⁵ The displaced depend on aid. This dependency tends to continue as the conflict shows little sign of ending. It is estimated that 9 out of 10 killed are children younger than five-years-old, with an average of 170 people dying every day. More than 1.1 million people may die if the conflict continues to 2030.⁶ These data show that religious terrorism in the country today seems to have become an interminable plague due to radical religious knowledge impacted on vulnerable people.⁷

The report released by Global Terrorism Index (GTI) in 2019 shows that herders killed more Nigerians than Boko Haram in 2018.⁶ Fulani herdsmen conducted 654 attacks, killed 2,539 people, and kidnapped 253 more in Nigeria between 2017 and 2020.⁸ Most herdsmen push the communities out of states, directly impacting their socio-economic lifestyles. This results in banditry and kidnapping and causes a human security concern for local farmers, villages, communities, interstate travelers, security agents, policymakers, peacebuilders, civil society organizations, and local, state and the federal government. In their quest to possess lands for their cattle, the Fulani herders are known to have been inspired by the *jihād* of Usman dan Fodio and violently take over communities. Thus, such knowledge is violently impacting the nation.

Additionally, secessionist movements in Nigeria are increasingly becoming violent. A key example is the killings perpetrated by some violent members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a separatist organization in the Southeast region of Nigeria. Between

January 2019 and June 2021, separatist disturbances and targeted violence caused over 220 fatalities in Imo State, Nigeria indicating a resurgence of criminal victimization. Weekly "sit-at-home" orders were issued by IPOB members as support for the Republic of Biafra has increased insecurity in the State. In August 2021, gunmen killed two persons, burned two commercial buses for not having complied with the IPOB "sit-at-home" order in Ngwogwu town, Aboh Mbaise Local Government Area (LGA). In the same month, five people were killed, twenty shops and twenty vehicles destroyed in a series of attacks by gunmen in Okporo town, Orlu LGA. A bus driver was reportedly killed on October 1, 2021 by gunmen who were imposing the "sit-at-home" order in Nguru town, Aboh Mbaise LGA.⁹ The genesis of this increased violent agitation has been attributed to violent knowledge promoted through radio Biafra.¹⁰

As the 2023 general election approaches, various regions of the country have aligned with the presidency's position because political power has long been the determinant of the flow and distribution of economic resources in Nigeria. Should either states with predominantly Hausas or Fulanis groups win elections, additional economic resources are likely to flow towards the northern region. Similar outcome is possible under a Yoruba or Igbo reign. As election day approaches, political campaigns are likely to influence the reoccurrence and intensity of violence. As violent extremism is damaging the northern economy and other regions faced with violent conflicts, it threatens the development across the whole of Nigeria.

These circumstances make it imperative for Nigerian lawmakers, policymakers, and other stakeholders in peacebuilding to be strategic in the formulation and implementation of a public policy that supports peacebuilding.

The Role of Peace Education in Mitigating Violent Conflict and Peacebuilding

At the heart of UNESCO's mission is the promotion of peace through education. It is responsible for the coordination and implementation of activities that promote the idea that when a generation is well informed, it helps in violent conflict prevention and peacebuilding.¹¹

Violent conflict involves the use of physical force in resolving competing claims or achieving goals and objectives. Peacebuilding is the development of positive relationships across various types of groups— ethnic, racial, religious, class, and national.¹² Education is simply the process of gaining knowledge, skills and values. Education can take place in formal (primary, secondary and tertiary institutions) or informal settings (religious organizations, communities, traditional settings).

Peace education promotes the knowledge, skills and attitudes to help people prevent conflict from occurring, to resolve conflicts peacefully, and to create conditions for peace.¹³ It challenges the assumption that violence is inherent and proposes to transform the structure of education to curb violence in a given society.¹⁴ Peace education activities are intended to prevent violence and build a culture of peace with a focus on the following knowledge areas: Access to Justice System, Preventing Violent Extremism, Nonviolent Resistance, Tolerance, Dialogue, Conflict Negotiations, Conflict Mediation, Arbitration, and Conflict Adjudication.

- *Access to Justice System:* This refers to the functional mechanisms existing in any particular society aimed to ensure that ordinary people or citizens have the right and opportunity to seek redress when their fundamental human rights have been violated.¹⁵
- *Preventing Violent Extremism:* Violent

extremism refers to the use of violence based on an ideological commitment to achieve social, political, economic, and religious goals.¹⁶ The international community is keen on preventing violent extremism among youth through the use of education. In 2015, education was identified as a crucial tool in preventing violent extremism among youth. In this spirit, the Federal Ministry of Education and UNODC launched the Education for Justice (E4J) Initiative in Nigeria. The initiative seeks to prevent crime and promote a culture of lawfulness through education activities and materials designed for primary, secondary and tertiary levels.¹⁷

- *Nonviolent Resistance:* Nonviolent resistance refers to resorting to protest and other nonviolent methods of action in achieving social, political and economic goals. It is a method commonly used by marginalized and oppressed individuals and groups to campaign for justice and peace in an oppressive society. Research has shown nonviolent campaigns to be more successful than violent campaigns. Chenoweth and Stephan collected data comparing the successes recorded on all violent and non-violent campaigns around the world from 1900 to 2006 which led to the overthrow of a government or territorial freedom. A data set of 323 mass action campaigns was created and analyzed, demonstrating that nonviolent civil resistance was far more effective in producing change than violent civil resistance.¹⁸ Educating Nigerians on how to achieve justice through nonviolent resistance will help to mitigate the risk of violent conflict and build a peaceful country.
- *Tolerance:* Tolerance is the appreciation of others' diversity and the ability to exercise a fair and objective attitude towards those whose opinions, culture, religion are dif-

ferent than one's own.¹⁹ With a population estimate at 203.5 million, Nigeria is shaped by multiple ethnic groups and cultures, with over 521 languages and over 1150 dialects and ethnic groups.²⁰ 49.3% of the country's population is Christian and 48.8% is Muslim, while the remaining 2% belong to other or no religions, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life in 2012.²¹ Ethnic and religious diversity prompted violent conflict on several occasions in Nigeria. Teaching tolerance towards others' cultures, religions and political views is a preventive measure to promote peace and dissuade violent conflict.

- *Dialogue*: Dialogue is a discussion that enhances relationships between or among conflicting parties for peaceful co-existence.
- *Conflict Negotiations*: It is a process of resolving conflict by providing for each conflicting party's needs, and adequately addressing their interests so that they are satisfied with the outcome.²²
- *Conflict Mediation*: Mediation is a conflict resolution process in which a neutral mediator assists the parties through constructive discussion and negotiation of their issues to reach a mutually acceptable resolution.²³
- *Arbitration*: Arbitration is a process of resolving conflict by agreement of the parties to submit a dispute to one or more arbitrators who make a binding decision on the dispute. In choosing arbitration, the parties opt for a private dispute resolution procedure instead of going to court.²⁴
- *Conflict Adjudication*: Adjudication may be carried out in various forms, most commonly, it occurs in the court system.²⁵

Peace education in the schools and communities does not imply the people would be taught how to keep quiet in the face of injustice. It is about teaching strategies and tactics of nonviolent resistance for achieving

political goals.

Peace Education Policy as a Synergy to Mitigating Violent Conflict Risk and Peacebuilding in Nigeria

Considering the roles of peace education in violent conflict risk and building peace in Nigeria, the government needs to make a public policy that proliferates the teaching of peace in various institutions of learning.

Public policy is the guide or framework which the government has designed for directions and practices in certain problem areas. Public policy is intended to address a particular problem at any point in time and not to solve all the problems in society. It is a course of action by political actors to solve a particular problem.²⁶ Peace education policy should be made in response to the increased level of violence in Nigerian states.

Peace education policy is a public policy that a government has designed to address and solve the problem of violent conflicts, promote justice, and foster peaceful co-existence in society. The policy encourages a curriculum that fosters peace through formal and informal learning institutions. It establishes qualitative learning principles, ways to engage in a peaceful relationship, resolve conflicts, and practice peace culture in schools and the greater community.

Peace education policy will trigger the impactful roles of peace education in formal institutions of learning, making it an instrument of change in their environment. Communities in various impacted states would benefit from this initiative when students in the institutions of formal learning are groomed in the knowledge, skills, and attitude of how to prevent violent conflicts, build peace and achieve social justice for sustainable development. Furthermore, informal institutions of learning such as churches, mosques, and traditional settings would also be guided by

peace education policy in building a culture of peace among individuals and groups in Nigerian communities.

Peace Education Policy Making Process in Nigeria.

Policy making is the process developed by the government to formulate and implement strategies to address a problem and meet desired goals and objectives. Peace education policy making is the process of formulating and implementing the strategy to address the scourge of violent conflict in society. For a successful peace education policy making it must pass through the following five phases of policy making also known as policy cycle: policy formation, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, policy evaluation.

Policy Formation Phase.

The policy formation phase is where we have a condition that needs to change. It is the stage of identifying the challenges people think something must be done about it. Nations are faced with different challenges that imply conditions that need to be changed for good. Examples are poverty, inequality, violent conflict, political marginalization etc. It is generally opined that every problem needs the government attention. Unfortunately, the government does not address all the problems through policy making; most times they prioritized challenges to address based on their urgency. The problem that is of high priority gets to the stage of policy agenda-setting.

For the challenge of insecurity to attract government attention, concern actors such as civil society organizations, policymakers, researcher, affected states and leaders of local communities needs to collaborate and draw the attention of the government to the need for peace education policy in formal and informal institutions of learning.

Policy Formulation Phase.

Formulation of policy consists of policymakers discussing and suggesting approaches to correcting problems that have been raised as part of the agenda. The ultimate policy that is chosen to solve the issue at hand is dependent on two factors. First, the policy must be a valid way of solving the issue most efficiently and feasibly possible. Effective formulation involves analysis and identification of alternatives to solving issues. Secondly, policies must be politically feasible. This is usually accomplished through majority building in a bargaining process. Policy formulation is, therefore, comprised of analysis that identifies the most effective policies and political authorization.²⁷

The policy formulation phase involves the following: Conception or identification of policy issues; specification of objectives; development of option/strategy; selection of preferred option/strategy; policy decision-making; implementation strategy design; policy review and reformulation. Formulating peace education policy in Nigeria is the responsibility of the president and his immediate advisers, other members of the executive branch, career and appointed administrative officials, specially appointed committees and commissions, and legislators who introduce bills for consideration by the National Assembly.²⁸ Formulation of the policy is done after the government is convicted of its need or persuaded by concerned actors working in the peacebuilding endeavor to include peace education policy as a priority agenda.

Policy Adoption Phase.

The third phase of the policy process is the policy adoption phase where policies are adopted by government bodies for forthcoming implementation or execution. Relevant institutions of government have to adopt formulated policies to be put into effect. Powerful interest

groups in peacebuilding works can use their political influence to determine the adoption of the peace education policy in Nigeria. The media can play a major role in peace education policy adoption. When media reporting and commentary is impartial, it provides a medium where the argument over various cases for policy adoption takes place. The media can boost a policy proposal's likelihood of adoption when it displays a favorable bias and vice versa.²⁹

Policy Implementation Phase.

Policy implementation is the fourth phase of the policy cycle in which formal policies that have been adopted by formal political office-holders are carried out by administrators. It involves the application of an adopted policy, of which the administrative agencies are the primary implementers. In the case of Nigeria, the courts and the national assembly are also involved. Where there is a question of a specific application of policy, the courts interpret statutes and administrative rules and regulations. Substantial power is delegated to the agencies to allow them to use their discretion when implementing policy.³⁰

Implementing peace education policy in Nigeria is a coordinated effort of the national assembly, courts and administrators charged to carry out the implementation. In Nigeria, public policies are implemented with the assistance of public servants.³¹ Therefore, a well-functioning public platform such as a ministry for effectual implementation of peace education policy could be suggested. This platform will create a viable platform for the government of Nigeria to implement a peace education policy in formal and informal institutions of learning.

Policy Evaluation Phase.

This policy evaluation phase consists of assessing the changes that happened due to the pol-

icy. It is an evaluation of the effect of the policy or whether the policy has been instrumental to cause the expected change. The evaluation can take place during the policy design i.e before implementation of policy, to compare the cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness of alternative policy options. Evaluation can also be conducted during policy implementation to monitor the outcomes of the policy in short and medium terms. This is known as outcome evaluation. Evaluation can come at the end of policy implementation to evaluate long term indicators of how the policy has caused the expected changes. This is known as impact evaluation.³²

After peace education policy has been implemented and executed, it is important to evaluate the impact of the policy. This peace education policy should be evaluated to know if it has achieved the expected result, which is alleviating human security risks in Nigeria.

In this context, a clear indicator needed to know whether peace education policy has achieved its expected goals and objectives is to collect and analyze data on the recent rate of killings through violent conflict has reduced in Nigeria.

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