

Higher Education: A Tool for Sustainable Peace in Sub Saharan Africa



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International Journal of
Educational Theory and Practice,
Vol 2, No 4, 2019
Pages 16-24

<http://www.ijetp.com>
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Abstract

Despite the fact that Africa is endowed with various natural resources, it is still home to almost half of the world's poor people. At the same it faces challenges of conflict that emanates from the rich diversity in form of ethnicity and culture. This paper investigates the role of ducation in promoting peace in Africa. It argues that beside The its development role, higher education can be a tool for promoting harmony on the continnt through peace education that seeks to build a culture of peace, values such as equality, respect, empathy, understanding and mutual appreciation among individuals, groups and nations.. It proposes that peace education should be mainstreamed in the curricula across the continent as either a stand alone subject or as a part of the curricula of the various disciplines of study in higher education institutions. For this to succeed there is need to assess the critical issues of capacity building for peace education, provision of educational resources and ongoing research in the area of conflict resolution and peace building.

Key words: Peace education; Africa; universities; Higher education institutions

Paper type: Literature review

Introduction

Despite the fact that Africa is endowed with various natural resources, it is still home to almost half of the world's poor people. According to the World Bank's Global Monitoring Report (2015), Africa is home to 41% of the world's poor. At the same, while the continent enjoys a rich diversity in terms of culture, ethnicity, geography and religion, often this diversity has led to tribal rivalries, politically instigated violence and armed conflicts. This is by means to underate the role played by factors such as poor governance, territorial disputes, as well as natural calamities such as locust invasion, storms, flooding long droughts that had negative impact on food and water security, ecosystems, health, infrastructure and migration causing instability across the continent (Solomon & Wart 2005).

This paper investigates the role of education in promoting peace in Africa. It argues that beside its development role, higher education can be a tool for promoting harmony on the continent through peace education that seeks to



build a culture of peace, values such as equality, respect, empathy, understanding and mutual appreciation among individuals, groups and nations.. It proposes that peace education should be mainstreamed in the curricula across the continent as either a stand alone subject or as a part of the curricula of the various disciplines of study in higher education institutions. For this to succeed there is need to assess the critical issues of capacity building for peace education, provision of educational resources and ongoing researce in the area of conflict resolution and peace building.

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) provides that education is a human right which ought to be accessed by all. Education thus has a crucial role to play in the society as it develops knowledge that would consequently lead to an understanding the differences and shared values; promotion of inclusion; tolerance and valuing diversity. Therefore, it is through education that social cohesion is built or used to restructure it. It is also an important tool in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and conflict transformation in the long run. Through both formal and non- formal education, learners are equipped with skills, knowledge and understanding necessary to develop their behaviors and attitudes to ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms are protected and promoted within the society.

Uyanga and Eman (2016) argue that education acts as a catalyst for economic development, democracy and good governance, social justice as well as for the care of the environment. To this end, universities and institutions of higher learning have the mandate to train professionals and future leaders that respond to these societal demands and challenges. They have a duty to develop curricular that will respond to the need of the society for peace al well as create new knowledge and innovations through research for sustainable peace.

The main role of education in building a culture of peace is by promoting non-violence and respect for all human rights; inter-cultural understanding, tolerance and solidarity; sharing and free flow of information; full participation and empowerment of women has been acclaimed. Specifically, university education is geared towards producing persons who are ready to influence society in all spheres, of life. If universities play this role well, they can enable governments and the international community to achieve Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals on Peace, Justice and strong institutions which seeks to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable anfd inclusive institutions at all levels” (Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, 2019) Given that the issue of peace, is now, more than ever being considered as a cross-cutting and an urgent issue on the continent there is need for well-trained professionals strong institutions to champion sustainable peace and development on the continent.

The Role of Peace Education in Higher Education Sub Saharan Africa

Peace education stems from the charter of the United Nations which was established in 1945 in order to spare successive generations from the scourges of war as is stated in the preamble of the charter; to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to reaffirm fundamental human rights in the dignity and with of a human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations



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Vol 2. No 4, 2019
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large and small; promote social progress (United Nations, 2019; Koji Nakamura n.d).

The understanding of peace education has evolved over the last few decades. One enduring definition of it is that provided by the United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF, 2016) which defines peace education as the process of promoting knowledge, skills attitudes and values to bring about behavior change that would enable individuals to prevent conflict and violence. Harris Morrison (2003) defines peace education as a process that involves empowering people with the skills, attitudes and knowledge to build a safe sustainable world. Castro and Galace (2010) provide a broader and transformative understanding and use of the term of peace education:-

It is an education which: ... firstly cultivates knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that seek to transform people's mindsets, attitudes and behaviors that have either created or exacerbated violent conflicts and secondly, education that attains this kind of transformation by building awareness and understanding, developing concern and challenging personal and social actions that would otherwise enable people to live, relate and create conditions and systems that actualize nonviolence, justice, environmental care and other peace values (p. 27-28).

From the various definitions, it is evident that peace education is both a 'philosophy and a process'. The philosophical aspects is embedded in values such as trust, caring, empathy, love and a belief in the transformative power of nonviolence while the process elements involve the skills of problem-solving, and its inherent components of listening, dialoguing and seeking a mutually beneficial solution (Harris & Morrison, 2003). The notions of peace education are embedded in African cultural values is telling on how close these issues are to Africa. It is a matter of concern, that although the African culture embraces the tenets of a culture of peace, the continent has experienced a lot of conflicts either fueled by resources, ethnicity, religion or cultural backgrounds.

According to Reardon (1988) the general purpose of peace education.... is to promote the development of an authentic universal consciousness that will enable us to function as global citizens and to transform the present human condition by changing the social structures and the patterns of thought that have created it. She further states that:-

“[the] transformational imperative must, in my view, be at the center of peace education. It is important to emphasize that transformation, in this context, means a profound global cultural change that affects ways of thinking, world views, values, behaviors, relationships, and the structures that make up our public order. It implies a change in the human consciousness and in human society of a dimension far greater than any other that has taken place since the emergence of the nation-state system, and perhaps since the emergence of human settlements” (Reardon, B., p.30)

Therefore, if peace education must be what it is, higher education institutions must take it upon themselves to develop programmes that not only focus on the intellectual development of the person but education that is integral in nature which takes all the aspects of the human person into consideration. The skills that are imparted must help all to maintain a harmonious living.



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Freire (2006) views peace education as a mechanism for transformation from a culture of violence to a culture of peace through a process of conscientization. It is as well an attempt to respond to problems of conflict and violence of scale ranging from a global and national to the local and personal (Laing., 1998). In essence educational curricula, particularly at the higher education level has to be grounded in ensuring that the learners in higher education are empowered to understand the importance of embracing diversity, resolving conflicts through non-violent methods and promoting a culture of peace. University-level education should ensure that learners understand the dignity of the human person and the need to respect human rights. It is also crucial that Higher education instil in the learners the importance of democracy and the need to effectively participate in democratic processes.

At the international level, Peace Education has also been acknowledged as an important tool for achieving world peace. UNESCO in the 1990s promoted a program for a culture of peace and declared the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace while 2001-2010 was the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (UNESCO, 2002).

In 1999, the UN General Assembly (United Nations, 2019) further endorsed the program of Action for a Culture of Peace and defined it as a program comprising “values, attitudes and behaviors that reflect and inspire social interaction and sharing based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, all human rights, tolerance and solidarity, that reject violence and endeavor to prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation and that guarantee the full exercise of all rights and the means to participate fully in the development process of their society”.

The Case for Peace Education in Sub Saharan Africa

A survey carried out by UNESCO (2012), showed that about half of the world's children who are out of school lived in conflict-affected countries. The survey further revealed that over 175 million children are affected each year by the impact of conflict-related disasters. Africa, particularly Sub Saharan Africa countries are unstable due to a mix of insecurity and conflict, factors that have destabilized the continent and led to a large number of children to drop from school. The development of these countries has severely been affected. During their mapping of initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa, UNESCO (2013) also revealed that, although education for peace is increasingly included in policy statements, translation to a practical level remained but still a challenge. Perhaps this is because the concept of Peace Education, though rooted in African culture remained abstract and therefore got a very slow uptake and an even slower implementation rate.

The firm position of UNESCO (2012) is that education can play an important role in promoting a culture of peace in the 21st Century. The need therefore for systematic promotion of education for peace and conflict prevention was emphasized. IF this is to be realized then there is an urgent need for curriculum developers to ensure that such peace education is included in regular curricular and that it is. Particularly, institutions of higher education need to take this challenge not only to integrate peace education in the curriculum but also



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ensure that the universities have staff with the capacity to inculcate the ideals of peace education and a culture of peace so that the learners are encouraged to live these values. It might be necessary that universities teach peace education as a general subject to all students to encourage better understanding and culture of peace among the population. Since the goal of peace education is to socialize the people and 'create a world where men and women live in harmony and respect cultural diversity (Harris, 1998), the curriculum developers need to be guided forthwith to consider concepts that capture this broad goal through African perspectives and more especially through African values.

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When peace education is done in a time as people are recovering from conflict, it effectively helps people gain the skills of empathy to be able to look from the perspective of the other and develop an understanding (Salomon, 2002). The effect of this is that the conflict gets a human face and it, in essence, becomes easy to transform. The goals of peace education are transformative in nature, by changing social structures and patterns of thought that initially exacerbated or caused the conflict. According to Castro and Galace, (2010), Sub Saharan Africa and indeed the world, there is in need of professionals and leaders capable of changing the mindset in communities especially in regards to conflict, from ambivalence towards the negative effects of conflicts to view conflicts as transformative opportunities that can steer the communities affected by conflicts to peacefully resolve those conflicts, heal from the conflicts and embrace a culture of peace.

The above discussion brings to the fore, the question of the place of universities and other institutions, in regards to the formation, education and mentoring of this new crop of professionals and leaders who are ambassadors of peace. Through teaching, research and appropriate service-learning activities, institutions of higher education can indeed play a role in transforming conflicts because such kind of education integrated into young minds enables them to work towards social structures and other issues of structural violence that trigger conflicts.

The ultimate goal of peace education for the continent is to create a critical mass of people empowered to advocate for social justice, reject violence and abolish the culture of war and death. These mass of people are trained to have a critical mind capable of demanding and occasioning change where needed, especially in terms of addressing matters of structural violence. This way they transform the causative factors of conflict that escalate to overt violence.

The Role of Universities in a Sustainable Culture of Peace: An Overview

The role universities can play in educating for a sustainable culture of peace cannot be overemphasized. As opposed to the past role of institutions of higher education have been in the forefront in the development of knowledge



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Educational Theory and Practice,
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that proposed war by conducting researches related to military, they have in the recent decades been party to the promotion of peace through teaching about peace and for peace. There have been many institutions of higher education most of them university departments, institutes or centres that either teach, research or disseminate information related to transformative and international education (Eudora P. et al n.d).

Sustainable peace can be achieved if all stakeholders get fully involved and play their roles to ensure attainment of development. Consequently, universities are stakeholders in creating knowledgeable and skilled personnel or professionals who are in turn empowered as promoters of peace. The most important steps towards sustainable peace according to Pearce (1997) are those that foster and strengthen local capacity in order to deal with the past conflicts and engage present challenges and shape a future that can deal with conflict situations and risks thereof. Universities must take this as one among their key responsibilities so that they can impart knowledge and skills that would strengthen the aforementioned capabilities. Thereafter, these abilities would be in a position to help deconstruct structures, situations and relationships that engineer conflict at the same time builds up structures situations and relationships that support peace. The emphasis ought to be drawn from an aspect of positive peace and not the negative concept of peace where the former depicts conditions chosen by people in relation with one another, at any level in the society who are working together to generate peaceful structures. The later on the other hand portrays an imagination of a state where there is no overt expression of physical violence (Galtung, 1969).

The principle objective for higher education institutions in peace education should not just be the education of the individual but also to provide future generations with the skills and knowledge necessary to address both global and local challenges to peace such as poverty, conflicts and climate change (UNESCO, 2012). It is therefore within the scope and mandate of universities to continuously renew and review their curriculum to ensure that peace education is incorporated in the subjects taught. UNESCO has emphasizes the need for higher education institutions to focus on the promotion of peace, justice and human rights as well as support public health and sustainable development by ensuring that educational offers, academic research and teacher training to respond to societal needs in these domains. They should not just consider the intellectual sphere but also on developing positive attitudes and value system among the students that respect and embrace diversity.

Universities who work within the threefold mission of teaching, research and community service can manage to train both intellectually and transformed (positive attitude) learners if they factored in peace education in their curriculum. Peace education should be mainstreamed in all subjects so that whoever gets into the institutions of higher learning has the basics of peace education. This type of education will promote peaceful co-existence and enable the students to attain skills that can enable them to deal with conflicts that confront them. It is important to note that conflicts in Africa are caused by different things ranging from cultural differences, different political ideologies and religious beliefs, resource-based conflicts among others. This varying sources of conflict implies



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Educational Theory and Practice,
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the many disciplines of learning in which elements of peace education can be phased in the curricula of higher education institutions.



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Challenges to Peace Education in higher education institutions

Peace educators in many countries within sub-Saharan Africa continue to face myriad challenges of teaching peace education as most of them focus on human rights, ignoring other phenomenological issues like disarmament and structural inequalities which are likely to stir up animosity among communities (Mwaura, 2013). The challenges arise from the fact that not many people are trained in peace and and those available lack peace-related pedagogical skills to teach in institutions of higher education.

Peace education is a relatively young field of study in Africa and many subjects carrying elements of peace education are often taught in isolation from each other. Current peace education courses lack proper focus and have been dogged by the use of inappropriate methodologies. It has been observed in some cases peace curricula are distorted to serve the interest of the government of the day. (Nyawalo et al, 2006). Some of the notable materials for peace education are those developed by writers from the global north hence may not relevant to the nature of conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. Besides, information resources on peace education are also scarce especially in developing countries (Mwaura, 2013). There is such a lack of local resources which have an African perspective addressing the local challenges.

In most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the curricular are banking system oriented with capitalization on examination (Freire, 1997). This is opposed to the methodology advanced by peace educators which employ critical pedagogy that is participatory- reflective oriented. Any effort to change the banking approach pattern is met with resistance and misunderstanding as teachers are expected to meet a certain numeric target.

Peace education could have positive results as a transformative education model, but unfortunately, the socio-political forces and events in the governments of countries in sub-Saharan Africa suppress the previously attained values. Still, the transformation achieved by the learners may be eroded with time owing to the environs they find themselves in or being that they are few, they might not impact similar changes on a larger social scale other than learners (Salomon, 2010). Peace education is an umbrella term encompassing many dimensions. This poses a challenge to institutes of higher education to advance it unless when versed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the light of the above discussion a number of conclusions and recommendations can be made. First, the importance of eace education has been reaffirmed time and again.It is an essential tool for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities as well as for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance among peoples. Secondly, peace is a foundational component of human development hence institutions of higher learning should endeavor to incorporate peace education in their curricula. They need to ensure that their curriculum is revised in order to factor in peace education not in fragments but in a comprehensive way. Thirdly, higher

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Educational Theory and Practice,
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education institutions are key drivers of societal transformation and therefore can play a critical role in peace education. Therefore they need embrace inclusive peace education. are involved. Inclusive education is known for its nature as it ensures that all learners have access to the whole range of educational and social opportunities offered by the institution without discrimination or 'isolation'. In other words, inclusive educational philosophy entails, "being part of the whole, that children are entitled to fully participate in their school and community. Finally, higher education institutions can promote a sustainable culture of peace in sub-Saharan Africa through conferences, workshops, seminars and public lectures organized by the universities. They can also organize short courses of for instance, a few days on various topics pertaining to the promotion of a culture of peace and management of conflict, human right and other relevant topics.



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Educational Theory and Practice,
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