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PEACE EDUCATION FOR CONFLICTS MANAGEMENT AMONGST NIGERIA'S TERTIARY INSTITUTION STUDENTS: A STUDY OF NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the extent to which peace education is effective in managing conflicts amongst Nigeria's tertiary education students, using Nasarawa State as its main focus. The objectives of the study were included to i. identify the major types and causes of conflicts among students in tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State; ii. determine the extent that peace education has been integrated into the curriculum of tertiary institutions in the state; and iii. analyse the effectiveness of peace education in conflict management among tertiary school students. The research design adopted for the study is descriptive survey. This study's target population consisted of 160 students from various tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State. Purposive sampling was used to select 137 respondents, with questionnaires as the instrument for data collection. The study found that the major causes of conflicts among students in tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State include ethnic, religious, and political conflicts, leadership conflicts, socio-economic conflicts, and academic conflicts. It was also discovered that peace education is an integral part of the students' institution's curriculum, especially in the general studies course, under the auspices of peacebuilding and conflict resolution departments/units. The study concludes that peace education can further enhance the capacity for peace, security, and social cohesion if significant efforts are made to properly integrate peace education in the school curriculum. Recommendations include enhancing capacity of instructors, and funding. Also, peace education curriculum should be developed to include sections in various courses offered across departments of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Peace education, Tertiary institution, Conflict management, Nasarawa State

Introduction

Human existence and interactions, especially in environments populated with diverse groups of people, inevitably involve conflict. The Nigerian tertiary educational institution (including universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education), is one of such environments. Due to the complex nature of our tertiary institutions, conflict is a recurring issue in tertiary education institutions across Nigeria. This impacts negatively on the core purpose of the environments, affecting significantly, student welfare, academic progress, and institutional stability. These conflicts can take various forms, such as political rivalry, cultism, ethnic conflict, religious intolerance, and student-management. At their most extreme, these conflicts can cause damage to public and institutional property, disrupt academic activities, and result in the loss of lives (Nwankwo, 2022).

These conflicts persist in spite of the best efforts by government security agencies and school authorities, posing questions about the effectiveness of current conflict management strategies that are usually adopted to deal with these challenges. Odeh (2021) alluded to the fact that the deficiency in effective mitigation of conflict in tertiary institutions is due to the conventional approaches to conflict resolution in tertiary institutions, which focus primarily on reactive and punitive measures. This is basically the suspension, expulsion, and enforcing levy on students from affected institutions. Also, security forces are called in to deal with the situation, often times, with brute force. In addition to not resolving conflicts in the long term, these strategies exacerbate tensions, and cause further mistrust and violence between institutional authorities and students.

In Nasarawa State, and elsewhere in the country, this diversity is a potential for peaceful development and also a challenge for peace itself. Such diversity can indeed enhance a student's learning experience, but if not properly managed, it can also serve as a potential source for violent conflict. Located in Nigeria's North-Central region, the state is home to several tertiary institutions, such as universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. It is

thus a good example of a locality characterised by an ethnically and religiously diverse population, displaying a microcosm of Nigeria's broader socio-cultural dynamics.

In light of these challenges, peace education has emerged as a potential solution for managing conflicts in educational settings. Peace education is a process that seeks to instill values, attitudes, and behaviours that foster peaceful coexistence. It involves teaching students about conflict resolution, tolerance, empathy, and mutual respect. Salomon & Cairns (2011) found that peace education can contribute significantly to conflict management through the transformation of students' attitudes and behaviors. Thus, they can approach conflicts constructively, through the development of problem-solving skills. However, a dearth of empirical studies on this phenomenon in Nigerian tertiary institutions, particularly within the context of Nasarawa State, leaves gaps to fill. In order to investigate the impact peace education has on peaceful resolutions of conflicts in Nasarawa State, the under-listed research questions are raised.

Research Questions

1. What are the causes of conflicts among students in tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State?
2. To what extent has peace education been integrated into the curriculum of tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State?
3. How effective is peace education in the management of conflict management among tertiary school students in Nasarawa State?
4. What are the factors militating against effective teaching of peace education in the study area?

Conceptual Review

To make for a better understanding of core subjects in this study, it is essential to examine key concepts that associated with the study. This is carried out below.

The Concepts of Conflict and Conflict management

Conflict is the natural phenomenon that occurs when there are human interactions. This can occur within individuals, groups, or whole communities of people with differences in values, goals, interests, or even motivations, thereby leading to tensions and disagreements (Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus, 2014). Conflicts can be interpersonal (between individuals), intragroup (within a group), and intergroup (between groups). Within the context of tertiary institutions, conflicts usually arise from contestations over resources, leadership struggles, identity issues, or religious/ideological differences (Folarin, 2018). Akinwale (2020) explains common triggers for conflict in Nigerian tertiary institutions to include ethnic, religious, and socio-political divides. He also noted that such conflicts are exacerbated by poor communication, inadequate conflict resolution mechanisms, and deep-seated mistrust.

Conflict management is the process and strategy used to handle disputes so as to mitigate their negative outcomes for potential benefits (Rahim, 2017). Conflict management differs from conflict resolution because it acknowledges that while not all conflicts can be resolved, they can be successfully managed to reduce their impact and prevent escalation. This is unlike the latter, which aims to eliminate the root causes of conflicts. For the purposes of this study, conflict management includes institutional mechanisms put in place for handling disputes among students and also, potential established for the integration of peace education as a long-term strategy for reducing conflicts. However, as Akinwale (2020) notes, effective conflict management in tertiary institutions involves preventive measures (fostering inclusive and participatory governance), and reactive measures (mediation, arbitration, and dialogue).

Peace Education

Peace education is an interdisciplinary field that involves educating the general public on the values of tolerance, love, empathy, cooperation, and respect for cultural and diversity. It is founded on problem-solving, critical thinking, openness, and communication skills, all of which will enable individuals to deal with conflicts constructively. It also aims to equip individuals with the skills, knowledge, and attributes needed to build a culture of peace and

resolve conflicts non-violently. It draws from diverse fields such as education, psychology, sociology, and conflict resolution (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016). This definition holds significance in our study area, given its diversity and susceptibility to ethnic, cultural, and religious conflicts. Therefore, the need to focus education on the promotion of reconciliation, dialogue, and national cohesion is key in approaches to peace education that could play crucial roles in the peaceful transformation of conflict among students from different backgrounds.

Literature review

The literature review below explored an existing body of knowledge on peace education, conflict management, and student unrest in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. It also examined their impact and challenges for peace, highlighting the effectiveness of peace education programs in managing conflicts among students, with a focus on Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Bajaj and Hantzopoulos (2016), noted that peace education is an essential tool in conflict-prone areas, due to the fact that it addresses root causes of conflicts as well as the behaviours that fuel them. This is beneficial in societies that are rife with ethno-religious tensions, such as Nigeria. As a result, integrating peace education into tertiary institutions' curricula can help students develop a peace culture. Bajaj & Hantzopoulos (2016) found that peace education can serve as a preventive solution by equipping students with much needed skills and values necessary to resolve conflicts peacefully. They also found that institutions with adequate peace education curriculum teach students about tolerance, dialogue, empathy, and respect for diversity. These are of course key societal components for promoting peaceful coexistence, even in some conflict-prone regions. Nwankwo (2022) examined the impact of conflict on tertiary institutions and found that they can have far-reaching consequences, affecting students' academic performance, well-being, and even the overall institutional environment.

Rahim (2017) noted that conflict management in tertiary institutions involves both proactive and reactive measures aimed at addressing conflicts and preventing escalation. Nwankwo (2022) adjudged that in many Nigerian tertiary institutions, conflict management is

usually reactive rather than preventive. This, according to him, often leads to student unrest and violence. Adedeji and Oluwasegun (2018) opined that peace education is essential for the prevention and correction of student unrest. This is because it fosters a culture of dialogue and understanding. The dialogue process also reduces the sense of alienation and frustration that students feel by being shut out of the decision-making processes, which often fuels unrest.

A study found that poor communication, a lack of trust between students and management, and ineffective leadership typically undermine conflict management approaches in many tertiary institutions in Nigeria (Odeh, 2021). This, according to Odeh (2021), results in challenges that make it difficult to resolve conflicts satisfactorily and in manners agreeable to all parties involved. The study recommended the integration of peace education into the curriculum as a long-term strategy for conflict prevention. The benefits of implementing peace education programs into school curriculum were applauded by Obasi (2015), who found that this results in a decline in student conflicts and a general improvement in the overall campus atmosphere.

Sources of conflict in Nigeria's tertiary institutions were found to be ethnic and religious tensions, especially in diverse states like Nasarawa, (Adebayo, 2018). He also noted that these tensions often result from identity politics, historical grievances, and competition for political power and scarce resources. The consequences of not managing these tensions properly often can lead to violent clashes between student groups, disrupting academic activities, and threatening institutional stability. Folarin (2018) found that ethnic diversity can be beneficial where peace education plays a crucial role in mitigating tensions through the promotion of intergroup dialogue and mutual respect. This, according to the study, must be combined with inclusive policies that recognise and accommodate the religious and cultural diversity of the student populations.

Challenges to the successful implementation of peace education were found to include lack of trained educators (Bajaj and Hantzopoulos, 2016), funding (Nwankwo, 2022), and resistance from stakeholders, administrators, and students (who may not immediately see the

relevance of peace education) (Odeh, 2021). In spite of these challenges, successful implementation of peace education in Nigeria is possible with the suggestion of Akinwale (2020). He noted that the integration of peace education into existing courses, such as citizenship education and ethics, will be cost-effective. Similarly, partnerships between educational institutions, government agencies, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), have been suggested as good and effective means for peace education initiatives in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Methodology

Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study, while the target population for this study consisted of students in tertiary education institutions in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. This population set was sampled using purposive sampling technique. This was ideal as the purposive sampling focusses on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest to the study, which were all students enrolled in tertiary education institutions in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

According to Cochran (1977), purposive sampling is used when a researcher is interested in a particular characteristic segment or stratum of the population, e.g., classification according to age, sex, education, level of income, and so on. Thus, instead of selecting a sample from the population at large, the researcher identifies a significant variable, selects subjects who have these traits, and chooses a subset from the group. There are four tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State, which include the Federal University Lafia, Nasarawa State University Keffi, the Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa, and the College of Education Akwanga.

Since the researcher does not have control of the population, which are students enrolled in tertiary education institutions in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, the study sampled 40 students from each of these tertiary institutions to represent the population of the study. The sample size selected for the study is 160 students. The various data collection instruments in research are questionnaires, interviews, content analyses, and observation.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data obtained from the above were presented, analysed, and interpreted below in tabular form, showing the frequency distribution of the variables and percentage. A total of one hundred and sixty (160) questionnaires were administered to the respondents, but 137 were correctly filled out and returned. However, 13 questionnaires were not answered, while the remaining 10 questionnaires were not recovered by the researcher. Therefore, the 137 returned questionnaires served as the basis for the data analyses.

Research Questions

4.2 Research Question 1

What are the causes of conflicts among students in tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State?

Table 1: **Major causes of conflicts among students in tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State?**

	Causes of conflicts	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Sd	Decision
1.	Ethnic, religious and political conflicts.	55	58	21	3	2.90	0.910	Agree
2.	Leadership, socio-economic and academic conflicts	40	69	24	4	2.82	0.884	Agree
3.	Ethnic, religious polarization and leadership struggles	51	49	32	5	2.70	0.739	Agree
4.	Power dynamics, economic hardships and poor conflict management mechanisms	35	48	37	17	2.62	0.501	Agree
						2.73	**0.720**	**Accept**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 shows mean scores of 2.90, 2.82, 2.70, and 2.62 in support of the major types and causes of conflicts among students in tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State for items 5, 6, 7, and 8, respectively. The overall mean scores of 2.73 and a standard deviation of 0.720 around the mean indicate that the major types and causes of conflicts among students in tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State include ethnic, religious, and political conflicts, leadership,

socio-economic, and academic conflicts. The nature of conflicts is ethnic, religious polarisation and leadership struggles, power dynamics, economic hardships, and poor conflict management mechanisms.

Research Question 2

To what extent has peace education been integrated into the curriculum of tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State?

Table 2: Extent that peace education been integrated into the curriculum of tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State

	Extent of peace education	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Sd	Decision
1.	Peace education is an integral part of my institution's curriculum	70	41	20	6	2.75	0.753	Agree
2.	My coursework regularly includes topics related to conflict resolution and peace-building	38	65	20	14	2.73	0.728	Agree
3.	My institution offers specific courses or modules focused on peace education.	63	58	8	3	2.88	0.821	Agree
4.	Peace education concepts are integrated into various subjects across different disciplines in my institution	37	63	29	8	2.66	0.631	Agree
						2.82	**0.851**	**Accept**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 indicates the mean scores of 2.75, 2.73, 2.88, and 2.66 to support the extent that peace education has been integrated into the curriculum of tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State for items 9, 10, 11, and 12, respectively. The overall mean scores of 2.82 and a standard deviation of 0.851, respectively, indicate that peace education is an integral part of the students' institution's curriculum, their coursework regularly includes topics related to conflict resolution and peacebuilding; some of the institutions offer specific courses or modules

focused on peace education; and peace education concepts are integrated into various subjects across different disciplines in their various institutions to a large extent.

Research Question 3

How effective is peace education in the management of conflict management among tertiary school students in Nasarawa State?

Table 3 Effectiveness of peace education in conflict management among tertiary school students in Nasarawa State

	Effectiveness of Peace education	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Sd	Decision
1.	Peace education has significantly reduced conflicts among students in my institution	56	49	24	8	2.75	0.754	Agree
2.	I have successfully applied conflict resolution skills learned through peace education in real-life situations	58	54	11	14	2.73	0.729	Agree
3.	Peace education has improved communication and understanding between diverse student groups on campus.	54	48	26	9	2.88	0.821	Agree
4.	The conflict management techniques taught in peace education courses are relevant to the types of conflicts we face as students.	63	42	21	11	2.86	0.834	Agree
						2.73	**0.758**	**Accept**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3 shows mean scores of 2.75, 2.73, 2.88, and 2.86 to support the effectiveness of peace education in conflict management among tertiary school students in Nasarawa State for items 13, 14, 15, and 16, respectively. The overall mean scores of 2.73 and a standard deviation of 0.758, respectively, agree that peace education has significantly reduced conflicts among students in various institutions in the state, some of the students have successfully applied conflict resolution skills learnt through peace education in real-life situations, and the development has improved communication and understanding between diverse student groups

on their campus. The conflict management techniques taught in peace education courses are relevant to the types of conflicts that students are facing.

Research Question 4

What are the factors militating against effective teaching of peace education in the study area?

Table 4: Factors militating against effective teaching of peace education in the study area

	Factors militating against peace education	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Sd	Decision
1.	Lack of qualified instructors is a significant barrier to effective peace education in my institution.	60	58	16	3	2.95	0.911	Agree
2.	Inadequate funding and resources hinder the implementation of comprehensive peace education programs	55	44	34	4	2.84	0.684	Agree
3.	Cultural and religious differences among students make it challenging to teach peace education effectively	57	49	17	14	2.70	0.539	Agree
4.	The current curriculum does not allocate sufficient time for peace education courses	59	48	23	7	2.54	0.402	Agree
						2.78	**0.729**	**Accept**

Source: Field Survey 2024

Table 9 shows mean scores of 2.95, 2.84, 2.70, and 2.54 in support of the factors militating against effective teaching of peace education in the study area for items 17, 18, 19, and 20, respectively. The overall mean scores of 2.78 and a standard deviation of 0.729 around the mean show that the factors militating against effective teaching of peace education in the study area include a lack of qualified instructors, which is a significant barrier to effective peace education in their various institutions, paucity of funds and resources to implement peace

education programmes, cultural and religious differences, as well as a lack of sufficient time for peace education courses.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that the major causes of conflicts among students in tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State include ethnic, religious, and political conflicts; leadership; and socio-economic and academic conflicts. The nature of conflicts is ethnic, religious polarisation and leadership struggles, power dynamics, economic hardships, and poor conflict management mechanisms. This is relevant to the submission of Adebayo, (2018) that ethnic and religious diversity in Nasarawa State often creates divides among students. Historical animosities, identity politics, and a lack of intergroup understanding contribute to conflicts. This is supported by Nwankwo (2022) that competition for leadership positions in student unions or associations often leads to conflicts. Power struggles, election disputes, and perceived biases can result in violent clashes among students. Obasi (2015) also found that socio-economic issues, rising school fees, poor infrastructure, and inadequate access to essential services, are major causes of unrest. Students may resort to protests, which can escalate into larger conflicts, when they perceive that the institution's management is not addressing their financial burdens. Again, Odeh, (2021) supported that the lack of effective conflict resolution mechanisms within tertiary institutions contributes to the escalation of conflicts. If dialogue or mediation fail to adequately address grievances, students may resort to self-resolution, resulting in confrontations with each other or the authorities.

The study revealed that peace education is an integral part of the students' institution's curriculum, particularly in the general studies courses relating to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Similarly, Adebayo (2018) found that peace education is formally integrated into the curriculum in some tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State, though it is primarily offered as part of specific programs or courses related to social sciences, education, and the humanities. For example, courses in conflict resolution, ethics, and citizenship education often include peace education topics. Some institutions introduce peace education through general

studies courses (GST), mandatory for all students, irrespective of their major. These courses usually cover topics such as conflict management, peacebuilding, and intergroup relations.

This is also supported by Nwankwo (2022), who says that in addition to formal coursework, peace education is often integrated into extracurricular activities such as workshops, seminars, and student associations. These activities provide opportunities for students to engage in discussions on peacebuilding, human rights, and conflict resolution outside the traditional classroom setting. NGOs and civil society organisations also collaborate with institutions to organise peace education programs aimed at building students' capacities for conflict management and leadership. This is however, not a general occurrence in all tertiary institution.

The study indicates that peace education has significantly reduced conflicts among students in various institutions in the state, some of the students have successfully applied conflict resolution skills learnt through peace education in real-life situations, and the development has improved communication and understanding between diverse student groups on their campus. The conflict management techniques taught in peace education courses are relevant to the types of conflicts that students are facing. This goes in line with the submission made by Ajala (2003) that peace education will impact in learners all norms, values, and attitudes that could bring about an environment for human living. Salomon & Cairns (2011) also found that students who have participated in peace education programs demonstrated a higher propensity for resolving disputes through non-violent means.

The study revealed that the factors militating against effective teaching of peace education in the study area include a lack of qualified instructors, which is a significant barrier to effective peace education in their various institutions, a paucity of funds and resources to implement peace education programmes, cultural and religious differences, as well as a lack of sufficient time for peace education courses. The findings are supported by Odeh (2021) that some institutions do not prioritise peace education as part of their core academic offerings.

Without strong institutional backing, the integration of peace education remains fragmented and inconsistent.

Obasi (2015) also supported that effective peace education requires instructors who are specifically trained in conflict resolution, peace studies, and related fields. The shortage of trained educators limits the quality and depth of peace education provided in these institutions. Again, Bajaj and Hantzopoulos, (2016) affirmed that many institutions face curriculum overload, where adding new courses or topics becomes challenging. Peace education competes with other academic requirements, making it difficult to allocate sufficient time and resources to its teaching. Peace education programmes require adequate funding to develop relevant teaching materials, train educators, and organise related activities. Limited funding often hampers the expansion and sustainability of these programmes. Rahim, (2017). Adedeji and Oluwasegun (2018), suggested that for peace education to be most effective, it should be embedded in courses that emphasise critical thinking and ethics.

Conclusion

Peace education plays some role in the management of conflicts amongst Nigeria's tertiary education institution students in tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The curriculum's limited integration of peace education directly correlates with its impact. Ethnic, religious, political, socio-economic, and institutional factors typically drive identifiable conflicts among students in tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State. Significantly, such conflicts can disrupt academic activities, with a hinderance of peaceful coexistence amongst students and largely undermine the learning environment. Indeed, there are some levels of integration of peace education into the curriculum, and this is primarily domiciled to specific courses and majorly optional extracurricular activities.

In view of the challenges that impede successful integration of peace education into tertiary schools' curriculum, such as lack of trained educators, inadequate institutional support, insufficient funding, and so on, the underlisted are recommended.

i. Tertiary institutions curricula should be mainstreamed in such a manner that peace education becomes an integral part across disciplines.

ii. Educators from different fields should be trained in peace studies and conflict resolution so as to be able to effectively teach peace education.

iii. There is the need to strengthen tertiary institutions and ensure commitment to the need to prioritise peace education as part of their mission to foster a peaceful academic environment. This can be carried out by providing institutional backing, resources, and even incentives for educators in line with the development and delivery of peace education content;

iv. Channels of communication between students' bodies and institutional management should be opened and viable in order to address grievances before they escalate into conflicts. This can be through feedback mechanisms, town hall meetings, feedback mechanisms, and student representation in decision-making processes;

v. Government bodies, NGOs, and the organised private sector should get involved and provide financial support for the development and expansion of peace education initiatives.

vi. There is the need to enhance extracurricular engagement in peace education through peace education programmes, dramatisations, workshops, seminars, and dialogue sessions. This must be made a mandatory aspect of student life.

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