

**Peace education in nursery and primary schools: an example from Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

Social integration in a multi-ethnic society is always onerous task especially in a society with low literacy rate, high poverty and bifurcated by social inequality. Such society, like Nigeria, usually serves as a place for deep-seated violence and social dissatisfaction. To address these challenges, most government generally adopts a minimalist development approach, through the provision of physical infrastructures and occasional distribution of social intervention items. This study therefore seeks to ascertain the exposure of pupils to peaceful living and their adoption of peaceful living strategies in Nsukka Education Zone. The study adopted quasi-experimental research design. 85 pupils were selected from two urban and two rural schools in Nsukka Education Zone. Observation schedule was used to collect data from the respondents. The selected classes were engaged in discussions, imagination exercise, problem-solving and dramatization (perspective-taking, simulation games). Content analysis was used to analyze the data. The results of the study show that the pupils have high awareness of what constitute peaceful living, but are not fully involved or engage in peaceful activities by their teachers when there is any issue instead of fighting amongst others.

**Keywords:** peace education, nursery and primary school.

## **Introduction**

The philosophy of Nigeria is to live in harmony as a united, democratic and sovereign nation instituted on the principle of freedom, equality and justice. This is why in the preamble of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, it is clearly stated that Nigeria's constitution was made to guide Nigerians to live in peace and to promote inter African solidarity, world peace and co-operation (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2014). The major philosophy of Nigeria which is to live in harmony as one indivisible nation despite differences in cultural and ethnic diversities has been marred with bloody and continuous conflicts and violence. The Nigerian educational system has identified education as an instrument for effective training of the mind. That is why the education policy states that national integration will only be attained by the use of education as a tool. Nigeria's philosophy of education entails that education remains an effective mechanism for national development, growth, and the interaction of peoples and ideas. The acquisition of basic skills, capabilities are essential for the individual to live in peace and harmony for the development of the society.

Obviously in Nigeria, there are cases of violence or absence of peace and orderliness. Children are exposed to violence and conflict in their home environments, through the media and other social media channels without adequate counter strategies to inculcate in them that conflict and violence is not part of cultural integration and can lead to loss of lives and properties. These counter strategies are very vital especially to pupils at the nursery and primary schools, as this age is very critical in attitude and character formation especially in a multicultural society like Nigeria. Nigeria has over 200million people with about 42.54% between the ages of 0-14 of the country's total population. It is obvious in Nigeria that the greatest challenge of violence and insecurity are perpetuated by young persons recruited into boko haram terrorist group and this age bracket is highly vulnerable to manipulations into joining violent groups in the future because of their naïve and inexperienced nature.

In line with the foregoing, the Nigerian government introduced the study of peace education in schools as a panacea to the issue of conflicts in Nigeria. The national policy on education stated that education is an instrument for change and can be used as an instrument to achieve a self-sufficient, sustainable and united nation. Peaceful environments are essentials for the development of any nation. No nation can thrive in a state of conflicts, violence and bloodshed. According to Falade, Adeyemi and Olowo (2010) peace education deals with the teaching of skills, behaviours that promote mutual understanding, peaceful co-existence and ability of resolving interpersonal conflicts and violence amicably. Peace education according Kester (2008) is very vital because it will enable people to embrace a positive attitude in handling their daily activities in other to promote peace and conflict management. Peace Education enables these learners to develop the basic abilities such as tolerance, non-violent, conflict resolution and uphold culture of peace (Akunole 2010). Noah and Desunmu (2011) believe that peace education helps all sorts of learners with the essential knowledge, ability, and standards required in eliminating violence and injustice in other to promote culture of peace. Peace Education (PE) is the training directed at getting young learners to imbibe peaceful attitudes and behaviours thereby avoiding violence of all forms. Peace education to Mishra (2011) is aimed at developing understanding and respect of fundamental human rights. Peace education is the training that equips people with the necessary

attitudes, values, skills, competencies to avoid conflicts, resolve conflicts in a non-violent way when it occurs and then have a better human relationship (Dar & Lalithamma, 2014; Ezeoba, 2012). The key solution to this problem is planned and conscious exposure of children to the culture of peaceful co-existence and non-violence at the early stage of their life. It is from this perspective, that the researchers take seriously the obvious peace education gap in the Nigerian educational curriculum at the nursery and primary schools. This will facilitate the use of peace and dialogue in conflicts management, instead of violence as the only solution, as what a child observes and interact with his or her biological character, plays a vital part in the learners' decision making process and adoption of peaceful living. This shows that peace education must be practical oriented and not theory based, children learns effectively through imitation by observing the actions, behaviours of the people around them and this makes it possible for the learning to have lasting impact on them.

The brain develops in a remarkable process which involves interaction between major biological developments, exposure, knowledge and skills in the environment. This process begins at the stage of conception to the end of one's life time. At this early stage, the child's brain develops in swift and vital ways, thereby strengthened the links between neurons. Because of this, early childhood remains a critical stage and it serves as a medium of both great risk of vulnerability and great potential for the impact of positive developmental stimuli. During these years, children's learning is more clear and detectable. Children are more capable in a planned approach to learning, such as engaging in trial and error. Children are experiential in learning, they learn faster by doing, practicing rather than by thinking about them. This makes interaction and sharing of experiences as well practice between educators and peers an effective opportunity for cognitive growth and development, and also the best stage for character molding, for them to grow up as peace loving people.

Many scholars had credited the ongoing crisis and violence in Nigeria to the youths. Ogundele, Oparinde, Ariya and Oke (2014) opined that crisis in Nigeria is being carried out by the youths. They believe that the youths are being used by the adult's members of the society to engage in conflict and violence. Peace Education is highly essential to achieve in the Nigerian educational system, this is because schools remain an epicenter of knowledge transmission, and must be used as a channel to inculcate the right type of values, skills and attitude to peace and conflict resolution to these children from cradle. Peace education has to do with the planned teaching on the prevention and management of conflict, violence, adequate human relationship, peaceful co-existence, mutual understanding, tolerance, humility, respect for life and sanctity of blood, unity and internal cooperation among various tribes. Formal and informal education must be targeted at the removal of destructive attitudes such as prejudice; stereotypes and hatred which make people choose war to peace, violence to non-violence, segregation to cooperation and destruction to production etc.

Peaceful environment is needed for the development of any nation. According to Falade, Adeyemi and Olowo (2010) peace education encourages peaceful co-existence, mutual understanding and interpersonal conflicts and violence management. The structural functionalist theory of Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons (1973) says that education plays a vital role in the maintenance of social order. The theory sees the society as a complex system that is shaped by the functions of the social structures or social institutions like the school.

Studies have also shown the relative importance of PE Onebunne , 2020;Ominri & Funke 2016; Uko, Igbineweka & Odigwe, 2015). Olowo (2016) opined that PE programme is very crucial in Nigeria, especially at the primary and secondary school, as tool for transforming children’s minds at young age for peaceful co-existence and harmonious living (Ogunyemi &Adetoro 2013). This will equip the children with necessary knowledge of peace and the basic skills to adopt in the conflict and violent management without resorting to violence.

Peace education is implemented in Nigerian schools through different strategies. At the post-secondary level, it is often a subject on its own made compulsory for everyone. The current Nigerian primary and secondary school curriculum have no peace education as a subject but at the secondary and basic levels, because of overcrowded curriculum it is infused into compulsory school subjects which include history, social studies, geography, civic education, citizenship education and religious studies (Akudolu, 2010; Ominri &Funke, 2016; Usman, 2020).In the words of Akubue (2011), infusing peace education content into other subject makes the objective of peace education to lost its meaning because adequate attention is not giving to bring out its content, and as a result of this the pupil is left with no knowledge of peace education. Ikumelu (2010) admitted the point that element of Peace education have been reflected in the Nigerian curriculum through various subjects like Citizenship Education, Global Education, Civic Education and Social Studies etc. But he believes that the curriculum handles the peace issues indirectly. In line with Ikumelu suggestion (2007), he discovered that expert in Social Studies and other subject that contains peace education element emphasized only on other concepts like patriotism and man’s environment interrelationships, thereby giving little or no attention to peace education content. Peace education is essential for Nigerian children from nursery school and primary school levels, in order to be groomed with refined words necessary for daily human interaction and peace education strategies in handling conflict and violence through dialogue in round table discussion and peace accord. In resolving conflict, Kiz-zovu (2006) indicated that “Peace Education philosophy teaches love, compassion, trust, fairness, cooperation and reverence for the human family and all life on this planet”.

Consequently, because of much effort on PE in Nigeria have been concentrated on the secondary and post-secondary levels of education in Nigeria, with little or no emphasis on nursery and primary school pupils who are still at the formation stage. Scholars such as: Momodu (2013) in his study argued that PE should be made a separate subject on its own in secondary schools in Nigeria to help solve Nigeria’ s issue of violence both in school and in the society. This stage is critical to the development of culture of peace which can act as a springboard for a culture of peace in the future. The results of the study by Ekpoh (2015) revealed that PE contents are fully integrated into post primary schools’ curricula through its integration into subject. A study by Nwaubani & Okafor (2015) also found out that peace and moral education contents were adequately reflected in the basic education social studies curriculum. Peace Education program are very necessary in Nigeria Nursery, primary and secondary schools in other to catch them young and curtail the spirit of non-tolerance that causes conflict all over the world (Ogunyemi &Adetoro 2013). This study therefore seeks to ascertain the exposure and practices of peace education by nursery and primary school pupils using observation.

### **Purpose of the study**

The general purpose of the study was to ascertain the exposure of pupils in the nursery and primary school levels to peace education contents. The specific objectives are to;

- Ascertain the level of exposure of pupils on peace education
- Find out the peaceful practices of nursery and primary school pupils

### **Research question**

- What is the exposure of nursery and primary school pupils to peace education?
- What are the peace education practices of nursery and primary school pupils?

### **Methods**

The study adopted quasi-experimental research design. Quasi-experimental research design aims to establish a cause and effect relationship between an independent and dependent variables. Four Schools were selected (2) public and (2) private schools to ascertain the exposure to peace education and practices of peace education in Nsukka Education Zone, Nigeria. Observation schedule was used by the researchers for a period of two weeks to observe the learners while their normal classes and playing were going on. Content analysis was used to analyze and document the pupils' exposure and practices of peace education in Nigeria.

## Findings

**Table 1: Exposure and practices of peace education**

<b>Peace content</b>	<b>Observed exposure and peaceful practices</b>
<b>Exposure to value of life</b>	Pupils show value for life and are greatly disturbed by violence as it puts them into fear.
<b>Non-violent behaviours</b>	The pupils displayed non-violent behaviours and resort to reporting any issues to their teachers first.
<b>Obedience to laid down rules</b>	Pupils also tried to avoid punishment and therefore obey the rules of not causing troubles in the school. They exit and enter the classes on permission of the teacher and with the exit cards.
<b>Sharing</b>	During the break periods, many pupils shared snacks, water and played together. During classes, pupils helped those who had no pencils and erasers to write with.
<b>Use of refined words.</b>	During their music classes and break time, pupils who mistakenly stepped on others gently said 'I am sorry'. Most pupils were seen saying thank you to their mates for giving them cleaners and pencils. They also do the same to their teachers when they are reinforced by the teacher for making attempts.
<b>Respecting others' opinions</b>	Most pupils were not willing to allow their mates make contribution in their games, some students laughed at those who made failed attempts. Learners also seem to be too competitive at this stage and therefore hardly allow others to try talk more of assisting them to win or achieve higher grades.
<b>Dialogue</b>	Majority of the pupils seem impatient to negotiate with their mates. They rather resort to struggling to dominate their groups and plays. It was also observed that most pupils prefer using abusive languages on others instead of dialoguing

**Table 1** shows the responses of the pupils on their exposure and practices of peace education. The table shows that the pupils value life based on these indicators remorse and reconciliatory comments: *I am sorry when they offend one another, share things in common, play together and obey school rules and regulations*. This shows that they are exposed to what peaceful living entails. The table also reveals that most pupils do not waste their time to dialogue and that they rarely respect other peoples' views. It was also observed that the pupils often feel that everything is all about competition and therefore struggles to win at all costs. This shows that competitions and conflicts also exist at this stage of life.

## **Discussion**

The finding of the study shows that the pupils are exposed to what peace education entails even at the basic education level. This shows that the teaching of peace education through some subjects like Social Studies and Civic Education has helped in exposing learners to peaceful living in the society. This is in line with the findings of Ikumelu (2010) which shows that peace education element have been in the Nigeria curriculum for a long time through various other subjects such as civic education, citizenship education, Global education and social studies.

The study revealed that there are conflicts among nursery and primary school pupils. This is in line with the findings of Onebunne (2020) submitted that PE aims at reducing the level of violence in various forms in order to provide a suitable environment for people to live and work in. The presence of conflict at this stage is a major reason why peace education instruction should take effect with these categories of pupils in order to catch them young. . This is in line with what Olowo (2016) who was of the opinion that PE programme are highly needed in Nigeria at the primary and secondary school levels as a means of transforming minds at young age to prepare them for peaceful living. Verma (2017,p.9) maintained that peace education needs to be constantly redefined in relation to the contexts at the moment, in other to address the varying experiences young children have in the early childhood education.

The study also revealed that most of the pupils even though they seem to be aware of what peace education entails, do not engage in dialogue and feels that everything is competition. This shows that awareness of PE or exposure to PE. This is in contrast with the findings of Mishra, Gupta and Shree(2020) which indicated that there was low practices of peace education contents by the respondents.

## **Conclusion**

This study has shown that pupils are aware of what PE entails but this does not translate to engaging in peaceful practices. This implies that more efforts should be made by parents, guardians and school authorities to encourage learners at the nursery and primary school level to put into practice, the skills and attitudes they have acquired in peace education classes. This is imperative because these children are at a critical stage of formation and brain development, teaching them peace education at this stage is suitable in order to develop the appropriate skills, attitude and behavior of peace education. Using the selected teaching methods makes the teaching and learning of peace education real to the pupils and get them involved thereby bringing about transfer of learning. Additionally, Governments often resort to the deployment of instrumentality of state coercion to maintain social cohesion and order. The implication is that the children and adolescents are continuously exposed to conflict environments without a corresponding educational content that impacts core values of social cohesion. The Nigerian educational programme emphasizes peace education contents at the post-primary and post-secondary curriculum and little emphasis is placed on Peace Education at the primary school level. Children at this stage need to be exposed to peace education contents so as to prepare them to be effective citizens. For Nigeria to curtail the rising rate of violent acts perpetuated by young persons, there is need to exposure of the young people especially at the formative stage of life to peaceful living, especially in

a multi-cultural society like Nigeria. The study finds out that despite the knowledge of peace education at the nursery and primary school is not being practiced among the pupils. This requires more effort by the teachers to apply some motivational strategies and suitable teaching method, to arouse the pupils in interest in practicing peace among them. The teacher should use reward system such as giving of gift, clapping, and standing ovation. Resource person can also be invited in the class to motivate their interest in putting peace education into practice. Peace Education should be introduced as a specialist subject in the nursery and primary schools.

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