LITERACY EDUCATION AND PEACE PROMOTION IN NIGERIA

BY

DR ANGELA EBELE OKPALA
(Principal Librarian)
National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)

ABSTRACT

The challenge of peace building in Nigeria is increasing, as tribal groups continue to attack each other. Many stakeholders have come together in an attempt to resolve these conflicts to no avail. There is a high correlation between peace and national development. An atmosphere of peace gives room for creativity and development. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country with over 400 ethnic groups. There has been a challenge of fostering peace among these ethnic groups. Since many stakeholders have come together in an attempt to resolve these conflicts without much success, Nigeria may be faced with possible disintegration at this rate. This situation calls for more peace building efforts by all stakeholders. Since some strategies adopted in the past didn't yield expected results, literacy education for peace building should be explored. This is aimed at transforming the minds, attitudes and behaviours of groups and communities. The problem of violence and conflicts in Nigeria is compounded by high rate of poverty and illiteracy. About 85% of the population in Nigeria are illiterates and majority fall within the age bracket of 15years and 35 years. Literacy education has a strong capacity to build positive social attitudes in people which is required for communal solidarity and spirit of mutual development in communities. It is in this light that this study seeks to promote literacy education for peace building in our communities and nation.

Key Words: Conflict; Peace building; literacy education; Violence; literacy

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country with over 400 ethnic groups. There has been a challenge of fostering peace among these ethnic groups. There are several reasons for conflicts in the nation such as religious intolerance, tribalism, corruption, unequal distribution of resources and marginalisation amongst others (Adelore &Majero-Majesty, 2008).The country has witnessed a lot of very devastating religious and political crisis. International organisations such as UNESCO and UNICEF have recognised the vital role of peace education for sustainable peace in the nations. The focus of this education should be on children, youths, and adults in formal and informal school system.

The aim of peace education is to act as catalyst in the transformation of minds, attitudes and behaviours of groups and communities through formal or non-formal education. The focus on literacy education for peace building is important for Nigeria and the entire African nations in general. The promotion of culture of peace and non-violence through education is core to UNESCO's mission and mandate. Africa is a priority region for UNESCO as it is the region with the highest incidence of violent conflict globally. This is why UNESCO is seeking to strengthen the systematic promotion of education for peace and conflict prevention in the region.

Nigeria's Need for Literacy and Peace Building

Nigeria is faced with the peculiar problem of ethnicity. Over 50 different violent conflicts were recorded between 1990 and 2000 and at this alarming rate Nigeria may be faced with possible disintegration (The Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution in Abuja, 2003). This situation calls for peace building efforts by all stakeholders. Several transformation strategies to curb conflict have been adopted. It was reported that a single effort is not as effective as a combination of strategies as recorded in Ijaw/Ilaje, Itsekiri/Urhobo and Tiv/Jukun conflicts (Majero-Majesty, 2006). This researcher indicated that there is a need for an intensified effort towards building the

nation by first restoring peace in all warring communities and to stop all spill-over effects of violence on national issues and communities. For example, the violence and extra-judicial killing of Igbo and Christians in Kano by Hausa-Fulani Muslims in 2013 resulted in the killing of Hausas in the Eastern part of the nation. Compounding the problems of violence and conflict are also the problems of poverty and illiteracy. The illiteracy rate in South-West is 55%; South-east is 60%; North-east is 21% for females and 40% for males.

The high rate of illiteracy has implications for the peace building of any nation and is directly linked to the ethnic violence among multi-ethnic communities in Nigeria. According to the report of The Federal Ministry of Education (2003), 85% of Nigeria population are illiterate and most fall within the ages of 15years and 35years. Although education alone may not be able to terminate violence and conflict in the nation but it has strong capacity to build positive social attitudes in people, required for communal solidarity and spirit of mutual development in communities. When this role is played by non-formal education, is called "functional literacy education" which entails the acquisition of literacy with a skill for a purpose. We learn to work with "our enemies" by educating ourselves about their environment, psychology, politics, their history and their hopes for the future. And we do so with humility, acknowledging just how much we do not know. It is through understanding and education that the most effective resolutions can be brought to bear. How can we develop solutions to conflicts when we do not know about the needs and the hopes of those we oppose?

Peace

Like most concepts in social discourse, there is no universal definition of peace. However, peace has been generally defined as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence (Edikpa, 2006). This conception has however, been criticized by many scholars for being inadequate for understanding the meaning and nature of peace (Gumut, 2007). The Norwegian peace theorist, Johan Galtung

distinguishes three types of violence that can help to understand the concept of peace namely:

i.   Direct violence manifested by physical, emotional and psychological violence.

ii.   Structural violence which comes in the form of deliberate policies and structures that cause human suffering, death and harm, and

iii.   Cultural violence which involves cultural norms and practices that creates discrimination, injustice and human suffering (Edikpa, 2006).

For development to take place in any society, sustainable peace is required. Scholars are in agreement that for there to be sustainable peace, society must evolve ways of addressing the root causes of conflicts. The critical factors for sustainable peace in any society are:

(a) Justice

(b) Just and accountable governance

(c) Protection of human rights

(d) Equitable distribution of resources

(e) Peace and security education/culture of peace.

The absence of any or all of the above factors will lead to violence and absence of sustainable peace. In Nigeria, we can say that there is clear absence of sustainable peace.

Peace is such a prime value in the world that the International Day of Peace was established by a United Nations Resolution in 1981 and is celebrated every September 21. By creating the International Day of Peace, the United Nations (UN) devoted itself to world peace and encourages everyone to work for this goal of ensuring peace all over the world.

For the United Nations to declare an International Day of Peace is an indication

of the priceless nature of peace. Peace is crucial to attaining unprecedented heights in development. This is common through bonds, agreement and co-operation among diverse peoples and nations when there is no conflict, hostility or mutual suspicion.

At the family level, peace is imperative; here referred to, when there is mutual union between husband and wife, father and his children and also the mother and her children. Family peace is characterized by a state of harmonious existence devoid of rancour and dissent; a state where there are avenues for family discussions. It is a state whereby even in the face of crisis, argument or misunderstanding between one member of the family with another, or amongst all members of the family, there is always an outlet towards an amicable resolution. This dispels the notion that peace invariably implies total absence of disagreement or conflict. It encourages it though, but most importantly seeks to create an avenue whereby in the presence of conflict, there should be a way out. It is in this regard that the United Nations, aware of this imperative, sets up agencies for the negation of conflicts to strive at attaining world peace.

In the family, the most important instrument with which peace could be sustained is through communication. This provides an avenue where all members of the family come together and brainstorm on an important subject matter in their family life. Peace and order is an essential ingredient in maintaining economic development, social order and political stability. A condition of peace and order facilitates the growth of investments, generates more employment opportunities and attracts more tourists. Economic development generally refers to the sustained, concerted actions of policymakers and communities that promote the standard of living and economic health of a specific area (Umoren, 2014). Peace refers to absence of hostility. It refers to an environment that is characterized by healthy interpersonal and international relationships, acknowledgment of equality and fairness.

Re-defining Education for Peace Building

Peace and education are both necessary factors for the development of communities and nation building. According to UNICEF (1996 p.13) peace education is seen as "The process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behaviour change that will enable children, youths and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an interpersonal, inter-group, national or international level"

Peace education according to UNICEF is a long-term one and not short-term for the society to tap into its full benefits. UNICEF prefers to work with children directly while they reach youths and adults through the media. Peace education cannot be restricted to the classroom alone as formal and non formal mode should be employed. Through peace education, two ethnic groups in conflict can be helped to:

(a)   Identify the common enemy of their co-existence and developments

(b)   Recognize the strength existing in diversity and in mutuality

©   Acquire through education, the skills and knowledge to tackle the human and inhuman problems that pose as development problems which in turn promote the need and desire for peace.

There are three approaches to literacy education for peace. The first approach focuses on:

The social-behavioural symptoms of conflict, training individuals to resolve interpersonal disputes through techniques of negotiation and (peer) mediation.

Learning to manage anger, "fight fair," and improve communication through skills such as listening, turn taking, identifying needs, and separating facts from emotions constitute the main elements of these programs (Uribe, 2002).

According to Uribe (2002), the second approach to peace education suggests that an increase in democratic participation decreases the likelihood of societies resolving conflict through violence and war. Although this approach requires that citizens accept the inevitability of conflict, it also relies on the view of it as a positive opportunity for tolerance, growth and creativity. The objective of this approach is to produce responsible citizens who will demand governments which are accountable to the standards of peace.

The third approach to peace education, based upon human rights awareness training, is focused "at the level of policies that humanity ought to adopt in order to move closer to a peaceful global community." Thus there will be committed participation in which all persons "can exercise their personal freedoms and be legally protected from violence, oppression and indignity". In this approach, peace is not defined simply as the absence of war or open conflict. Peace is defined in terms of conditions that ensure positive and lasting social conditions for justice, equity and respect for human rights based on values of non-violence, social justice, freedom, trust, equality, responsibility and solidarity.

Principles of Living in Peace

Peace is a way of building a future on the enduring foundations of trust, respect, cooperation, and the recognition of life's intrinsic value. Cogent reasons for conflict is always prevalent, particularly as resources of the Earth become depleted, and countries and regions struggle over rights to food, water, and energy, conflicts will become more pressing and complex. We must therefore not underscore the importance of practicing peace now. Peace is a power within us and the world .It is activated and lived when we free ourselves from narrow defence strategies and choose instead to listen and open ourselves to others. In this process shared interests are discovered and resources are invested in values and practices that safe-guard all life.

As a nation we must prepare and invest in peace. Both our inner resources such as our attention and our ingenuity and our outer resources, namely finances and human labour must be employed. Today, nations including Nigeria spend so much money in seeking to establish peace in an already conflict redden regions. If half of that money was invested in funding libraries, schools, health centres, and micro-lending to entrepreneurs, nations would have been closer to attaining enduring peace.

Investing in poverty alleviation is one of the potent ways of maintaining peace in the society (Browne, 2002). Poverty is perhaps the most serious threat to world peace, even more dangerous than terrorism, religious fundamentalism, ethnic hatred or political rivalries. Poverty leads to hopelessness, which provokes people to desperate acts. By lifting people out of poverty, a long-term force for peace is created.

In the last decade, unemployment has become a major problem bedevilling the lives of Nigerian Youths, causing frustration, dejection and dependency on family members and friends, who also have their own problems to contend with. In the last few years, there has been a notable adverse social, economic and political development in Nigeria, a consequent of youth unemployment and underemployment, particularly exemplified by increasing militancy, violent crimes, kidnapping, restiveness, and socially delinquent behaviours, particularly among young graduates. The Nigeria situation is further compounded by the global financial crisis, which has crippled businesses and the prospect of securing jobs for young people. (Famimo and Olayinka, 2009)

To prevent violence therefore, we need to fight poverty in all ramifications. One of the effective ways of achieving this is by increasing the income capacity of the poor through empowering the poor to become employers of labour (Abubakar, 2013). This is where wealth creation comes into play. Through effective wealth creation programmes, poverty will be alleviated and eventually eradicated. Once poverty is eradicated, conflict will be drastically reduced.

Peacemaking Skills

Listening

Some researchers believe that communication and conflict are in an interdependent relationship such that communication can engender conflicts by escalating it and it can also be useful in conflict prevention (Hener, 2010; Hoffmann, 2013). According to Bocos (2008) communication is important and plays three roles in any conflict. The first role of communication is for understanding of both sides engaged in conflict. They need to understand themselves, know what to expect and how to handle it. Secondly, communication helps to develop a consistent relationship and significance to reality. Thirdly, communication helps to influence and persuade, bringing about common efforts and collaboration.

The ability to listen to a different perspective and to choose a new response is at the heart of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Empathy and listening are interrelated, as deep listening fosters empathy and understanding, and empathy requires the capacity to receive the communication from others in order to be active. Theorists and practitioners in psychology, peace studies, organizational development, and conflict resolution have explored these capacities and emphasized the need to develop the requisite self- and other-awareness in order to enact them (Encyclopedia of Peace Psychology,2011)

Investing in peace also means learning and practicing skills that aren't easy when in conflict. Often people are threatened by "difference." When someone has a different colour skin, a different agenda, a different way of expressing him or herself, we feel uneasy and afraid. We turn away from the "other," build walls between us, and use all sorts of tactics to protect our resources. But whether we are relating to a new idea, a neighbour, or a foreign country, opportunity arises when we keep our reactive fear in check and instead create a space of openness, curiosity, and a willingness to learn.

Peace is rarely possible without listening. In January 2009, the newly appointed US envoy to the Middle East, George Mitchell, made his first trip to that region.

President Barack Obama said to a Dubai-based network, "What I told him is start by listening, because all too often the United States starts by dictating." Listening provides a fertile ground between two parties where real meeting and collaboration takes root. Without this meeting place, they are just two people or two nations on different sides of a dividing line. Listening is like a neutral zone through which they can safely come and go, try on new ideas, learn about themselves and create solutions that serve everyone.

When we listen deeply to the concerns of others, without trying to justify, defend, etc, we rise beyond our own needs, even if just for a moment, and can be available to the relationship in a new way. And when we listen very deeply, we often hear our own needs and values expressed by the "other." How can we deny the needs of others when they seem so similar to our own?

When Nelsa Curbelo first arrived in Guayaquil to work with violent gang members, she walked the streets for almost two years, listening to the youth whom almost everyone had abandoned out of fear and lack of understanding. She wanted to learn about them, what they wanted, what they needed, what inspired them. It was through listening that she built trust and discovered effective ways to engage with these young people, and encouraged them to engage with each other, building businesses where rival gangs could work together. Through her initiatives, peace has come to these previously violent and dangerous streets. After only six months, crime had decreased nearly 60 percent in one neighbourhood, and the murder rate dropped from 30 a month to zero, all because she trusted the power of collaboration.

Trust
We might fear that by listening and opening to those with whom we are in conflict, we will lose ground and lose what we are fighting for, as though in an instant all we have could be taken from us. Not just our possessions or our lives, but our dignity and self-respect. But the space we create through listening is not weakness; it is a creative space that allows for possibility. We rarely lose ground through listening,

but we can gain so much trust, mutual appreciation, admiration, and solutions. Cooperation is built on trust, and there cannot be lasting peace without cooperation. In order to realize peace, both sides of a conflict must treat the other with honesty and integrity and in doing so, nurture trust. Post-conflict, parties need to maintain that trust so it becomes the foundation of future enterprise and creative engagement.

Respect

Respect, for the value of every individual human life and for continuance of life, is a key component in practicing peace. Respect allows us to feel everything we feel when we are in conflict, need, anger, sadness, fear, and desperation, while we contain and direct those feelings. Like the "golden rule" that says "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," respect is an imperative that guides our actions and protects the integrity of our relationships.

Respect can arise naturally when we open our eyes and our hearts to another human being, and recognize that he or she is much more like us than we had thought. Recognizing our shared humanity compels us to treat others as we would be treated, ensuring the continuance of life. But respect is also a powerful tool that can be developed and practiced even when it does not come naturally. In his acceptance speech for his 2008 Nobel Peace Prize, Martti Ahtisaari, who has been instrumental in peace negotiations in Kosovo and Namibia as well as other countries said, "Peace is a question of will," emphasizing our responsibilities to respect the peace process regardless of our inner feelings or outer circumstances.

Conclusion

Nigeria can explore literacy education in peace building in our communities. What is needed is a change of minds, attitudes and behaviours of people for sustainable peace. Literacy education which serves as catalyst to transformation of attitudes should be at the fore front of all transformation strategies to curb conflicts in Nigeria. This strategy is better with children since it is a long -term strategy. It takes time to change attitudes. A combination of strategies however, has been said to be more

effective (Majero-Majesty,2006) but whatever set of strategies that is employed, literacy education should be one of them.

Peace is not easy. But it is a creative, sustainable, and powerful way to live. We can strengthen peace within ourselves and in the world through practicing the core attitudes and values of listening, trust, respect, and willingness to learn. By breathing life into peace and peace into life in the present, we will later be empowered with choice when the insecure cries of war arise and try to call us forward.

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