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Education and Conflict Resolutions

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Abstract

This paper looks at the fundamental role of education in conflict resolution. The human person is a social animal, who interact/relate with one another, to be fully human. In interacting, there is conflict and education creates a conducive environment to meeting the emotional, social, and intellectual needs of diverse groups of individuals. The emphasis on education and conflict resolution is based on the fact that peace and education are inseparable aspects of civilization. In other words, no civilization is truly progressive without education and no education system is truly civilizing unless it is based on the universal principles of peace. Education enhances the acquisition of the worthwhile values, knowledge and development of attitudes, skills, and behaviors to live in harmony with oneself and with others. This paper provides a critical examination of educational systems, exploring its nature, strengths, weaknesses, and impact on global development. Being the most populous country in Africa, most populous black nation in the world and one with the largest market in West Africa, Nigeria is used as representative case study for the paper. The paper discusses the challenges facing the Nigerian educational system, including inadequate funding, policy summersaults, security concerns, and tensions along tribal and religious lines. Despite these challenges, Nigerian students have excelled in various fields of study both in Nigeria and abroad, contributing significantly to research, innovation, and global movements for change. By addressing the challenges facing the Nigerian educational system and implementing the recommended solutions, Nigeria (Africa) can continue to make significant contributions to the global community and drive national development.

Key Words: Education, Catalyst, Conflict, Resolution, Citizens

Introduction

From time immemorial, education is seen as the foundation of any successful society and also a vital part of the human experience. The importance of education to any nation cannot

be over emphasized. It is in recognition of this importance that many sects, international community and NGOs across the globe have made commitments for citizens to have access to education.

However, In English the term “Education” has been derived from two Latin words *educare* (*educere*) and *educatum*. “*educare*” means to train or mould. It again means to bring up or to lead out or to draw out, propulsion from inward to outward. The term “*educatum*” denotes the act of teaching. It throws light on the principles and practice of teaching. The term *educare* or *educere* mainly indicates development of the latent faculties of the child. But child does not know these possibilities. It is the educator or the teacher who can know these and take appropriate methods to develop those powers.¹

In the words of John Dewey;

Education is not a preparation for life, rather it is the living. Education is the process of living through a continuous reconstruction of experiences. It is the development of all those capacities in the individual which will enable him to control his environment and fulfil his possibilities.²

Education therefore can be considered as a process which enables people to understand the difference between good and bad attitude, right and wrong behaviour. In other words, education is meant to train the individual to

live a good life in the community. To acquire skills for meaningful living or to solve problems is vital in a hostile community which education aims to achieve in the individual. Hence, education is an instrument for developing an individual in social, mental, physical, emotional, moral and psychological aspects.

Nigeria is a heterogenous society and with this, there are many societal /tribal issues, hence, peace is severely threatened. As such, Ethnic sentiments, religion and cultural tensions are identified the major factors hampering the stability and development of Nigeria since independence.

Education for peace should be a participatory process which aims at changing society’s way of thinking and which promotes learning of peace. Education should be put on issues that may lead to conflict well such as gender studies, speaking the language of non-violence and creation of proper international relations.

Understanding Conflict

Conflict as a concept has many definitions based on perceived differences in interests, views, or goals. Conflict is as old as human existence, hence, remains part and parcel of human society. According to Gary Furlong:

Conflict is a universal human experience... We are all faced with conflict situations in many aspects of our lives, whether in our personal life, in the workplace, or with just about anyone we meet. Given how common conflict situations are and how frequently we deal with conflict, something that every single one of us works with and addresses in our lives far beyond the workplace. In that sense, we are all "practitioners" when it comes to working with conflict effectively...³

Joran Gal Tung sees conflict as creator and as destroyer, conflict is as indispensable for development studies as it is for peace studies. To develop is to create. Deep inside every conflict lies a contradiction, something standing in the way of something else.⁴

Ann Sanson and Di Bretherton, argue that conflict is usually seen from a negative perspective. Conflict itself is better seen as "value-neutral." Whether outcomes are positive or negative will depend on the way in which the conflict is handled. ⁵

Conflict can have damaging consequences. It can create or lead to suspicion and distrust, obstruct cooperative action and damage relationships, escalate differences in positions, and even lead to violent

confrontation and death (premature/unwanted death).

There are many/ different causes of conflict. The course of any conflict, be it between individuals, groups, or nations, are usually shaped by the social context in which it takes place. In other words, conflict in society arises from a complex interplay of social, economic, political, and psychological factors. Here are some of the key causes:

Economic Inequality and Poverty. This has to do with availability of resources and wealth. When resources like jobs, land, or basic necessities are scarce, competition intensifies, leading to conflict. Also, the extreme economic inequality often creates resentment and tension between different socioeconomic classes, sparking social unrest.

Political Oppression and Corruption can lead to conflict in the society. When people feel excluded from decision-making processes, they may resort to protests or violence to make their voices heard.

Corruption and Abuse of Power. Political corruption undermines trust in institutions, leading to instability as people lose faith in fair governance.

Ethnic, Religious, and Cultural Differences. Prejudice and Stereotyping, Misunderstandings and biases against other ethnic, religious, or cultural groups can lead to discrimination, resentment, and, eventually, open conflict.

Competing Values and Beliefs: Deeply held cultural or religious values can clash, especially when one group tries to impose its beliefs on others or sees itself as superior.

Social Inequality and Discrimination. When certain groups are consistently marginalized, it creates resentment and can lead to conflict as they struggle for equal rights and opportunities. Also, discrimination based on gender can lead to gender-based violence, protests, and broader social conflicts aimed at achieving gender equality.

Historical Grievances and Unresolved Injustice. Unresolved Historical Conflicts: Past injustices, especially those related to colonization, wars, or discrimination, can lead to lingering tensions that erupt over time. **Desire for Revenge or Retribution:** When groups or individuals feel wronged by historical or recent events, they may seek revenge, creating cycles of retaliation and conflict.

Ideological Differences. Differences in political ideologies—such as democracy

versus authoritarianism or capitalism versus socialism—can lead to intense societal divisions and conflict.

Extremism and Radicalization: Extreme ideological beliefs, whether religious, political, or social, can fuel conflict as some individuals may resort to violence to impose their views.

Scarcity of Resources and Environmental Stress. Scarcity of resources like water, arable land, or energy due to climate change, environmental degradation, or overpopulation can increase competition and lead to conflict. Climate-induced displacement or resource shortages can lead to population movement, which may create tensions in host communities.

Breakdown of Social Institutions and Norms. When legal systems fail to provide justice, equity and protect rights, people may seek alternative means to resolve disputes, sometimes through violence. Social instability can also increase when traditional structures, such as families or communities, weaken, making individuals more susceptible to conflict.

Influence of Media and Misinformation such as Spread of Propaganda and Misinformation on various platforms can amplify biases or spread misinformation, fueling hatred, fear,

and conflict between groups. Even When media sensationalizes conflict, it can escalate tensions by focusing on negative narratives or fueling divisions.

Psychological Factors such as unaddressed trauma and mental Health Issues can contribute to a culture of violence and conflict recurrence. The Fear of the "other" or a perceived threat can lead individuals and groups to adopt defensive or aggressive postures, leading to conflict.

Each of these factors can individually or collectively contribute to conflict in society. Effective conflict prevention and resolution typically involve addressing these root causes to build more equitable, just, and stable societies.

Conflict Resolution

In conflict resolution, the aim is not to avoid conflict but rather to deal with it in a way which minimizes the negative impact and maximizes the positive potential inherent in conflict within the framework of the values of peace. That is, both the solutions which are sought, and the means by which they are sought, are judged against the criteria of being against violence, dominance, oppression, and exploitation.

According to Peter Wallensteen conflict resolution is a situation where the conflicting parties enter into an agreement that solves their central incompatibilities, accept each other's continued existence as parties and cease all violent action against each other. This means, of course, that conflict resolution is something that necessarily comes after conflict. It means that we first need to have concepts and tools for the analysis of conflict.⁶

The definition talks about the parties accepting each other's continued existence as parties. This is an important element as it is meant to distinguish a peace agreement from an agreement of capitulation. An agreement of capitulation is the strongest agreed expression of victory and defeat. It means that one side lays down its struggle, dissolves its organization, departs from the disputed territory and, in short, ceases to be an actor of influence and significance.

Peter Wallensteen further explains that the agreement is normally a formal understanding, a document signed under more or less solemn conditions. However, there can be more informal, implicit understandings worked out between the parties. Such agreements may exist in secret documents, for instance, a crucial promise

made as a precondition for the formal arrangements, or as deals about which the parties have been more or less explicit. Many cases are likely to see as much dispute around such informal understandings as over the formalized documents. Furthermore, such informal pacts require considerable trust between the parties. They are, most likely, not made without there being a formal arrangement. Thus, the formal document is important for any peace process.⁷

Conflict resolution is not necessarily identical with peace. There is considerable overlap, however, as most notions of peace are based on the absence or ending of war. A conflict, we have just made clear, is not resolved if it does not include an end to armed struggle. At the same time, it is not sufficient that it only contains the ending of fighting. Conflict resolution is more than the limited definition of peace. It is more than the absence of war. The parties are agreeing to respect each other and prepare for living together with one another. However, there are broader understandings of what peace is, such as the presence of cooperation, justice and integration. Conflict resolution may or may not include such larger values. It will depend on the situation. The preferred definition does not, a priori, include such elements.

Conflict resolution is synonymous with the culture of peace. Johan Galtung explains:

A culture of peace is a culture that promotes peace and peace can be understood in a number of ways, as it impacts so many aspects of life. First, peace is to violence what health is to disease, it can exist within a person or group. A person can be healthy in the same way that a person, a group, a state, a nation, a region, a civilization can be peaceful. Peace also exists between persons, groups and so on, so peace is a form of love...Peace, as pointed out using the love metaphor, is a positive relation between parties, of union, togetherness. The condition for peace is mutual respect, dignity, equality, and reciprocity; in all three areas, spirit, or culture, mind, or polity, and body, or economy.⁸

Ann Samson, et al state the four basic principles of conflict resolution:

(1) conflict resolution is a cooperative endeavor, (2) the solutions sought are integrative ones, (3) the foundation is an understanding of all parties' interests, and (4) both the process and its outcome are nonviolent.⁹

They further made an illustration using both the principles and the practice of conflict

resolution, using the following scenario: Mark, Tran, Saida, and Jane are students who share a house. They each have their own room, which includes a desk and study area, but have a communal lounge room, kitchen, and bathroom. One evening Mark asks his new girlfriend, Tracy, whom he wants to impress, home for an evening meal. Unfortunately, the kitchen is very untidy. There are unwashed dishes piled high in the sink. A distasteful fishy odor emanates from the trash, which has not been emptied for some time. The refrigerator needs defrosting and is stuffed full of food which is past its recommended use by date. Mark is embarrassed, and Tracy suggests they go out to eat.... Cooperation is a key feature of conflict resolution and it focuses on cooperation rather than competition. The parties see the problem facing them as one on which they can collaborate to find a solution that suits them both. In our scenario, it is apparent that to make their living arrangements work, the students will need to cooperate. If in his anger Mark uses hostile strategies, he may well evoke hostility from the others. Integrative Solution is another. Integrative solutions meet the interests and needs of all parties, by offering a personal anecdote. Integrative bargaining most commonly occurs either as a direct

negotiation between the parties in conflict, or through mediation where a neutral third party is brought in to facilitate the process. Of course negotiators are often motivated to achieve a solution where they "win" and the other party "loses" (win-lose, zero sum, or distributive negotiations), but the term conflict resolution normally covers only negotiations where the goal is an integrative (or win-win) solution. While it is possible to think of other strategies for conflict resolution, mediation and integrative negotiation are the most often used and will be the main foci of discussion here.¹⁰

The Role of Education in Resolving Conflict

Education plays a significant role in conflict resolution through various mechanisms, impacting individuals, communities, and societies. They include the following:

The main aim of education according to John Dewey is not preparation for life, but that education is life itself. This means that education is the foundation of any successful society and a vital part of the human experience. Education enlightens, prepares and qualifies the members of the society. In other words, education in society prepares youngsters for adulthood so that they may form the next generation of leaders, thereby,

making them to understand the causes of injustice and violence in past history and in present situations through a careful study of history and related courses.

Promotion of Understanding and Tolerance. Education promotes understanding and tolerance, through teaching conflict resolution skills, and structured curricula; where students learn about non-violent communication, negotiation, and problem-solving techniques, which help them manage disputes peacefully. C.Ejiogu et al explain: “There is evidence to the view that when equitably available, of good quality, relevant and conflict sensitive, education can help promote peace and provide safe environments”.¹¹

It also fosters empathy and understanding. Education exposes students to diverse perspectives, helping them understand different backgrounds and individual differences, thereby reducing biases. This understanding builds tolerance and discourages stereotyping, which can reduce conflict.

Builds Critical Thinking and Analysis Skills. Education helps individuals think critically, question biases, and avoid misinformation. This is crucial in conflict zones where propaganda and misinformation can fuel

hostilities. Educated individuals are more equipped to evaluate situations, understand the consequences of actions, and make decisions that promote peace rather than conflict.

Encourages Economic and Social Development. By providing skills and knowledge, education increases employment opportunities, reducing poverty—a significant cause of conflict. According to C. Ejiogu et al;

Education may be perceived politically as a powerful tool for ideological development. This can take many forms, ranging from the use of education in the development of liberal ideas, to nation building and, in extreme cases, political indoctrination. Secondly, education may be perceived as an instrument for providing the knowledge and skills necessary for economic development and societal mobility. However, this may or may not include equity concerns, thus further excluding certain groups from economic and social benefits that education can provide. Thirdly, education is a means by which social and cultural values are transmitted from generation to generation and, depending on the values concerned, these may convey negative stereotypes or encourage attitudes that explicitly or implicitly

condone violence or generate conflict.¹²

Also, access to education enables individuals to move beyond socio-economic barriers, reducing feelings of disenfranchisement that may lead to resentment and conflict.

Strengthening of Democratic Values. Education fosters a sense of responsibility and engagement in community affairs, encouraging participation in democratic processes rather than resorting to violence. It also **Teaches Rights and Responsibilities.** Understanding legal rights and responsibilities allows individuals to seek justice through lawful means rather than conflict.

Education fosters a culture of peace through developing peace education programs (teaching students the principles of human rights, social justice, and peaceful co-existence) and encourages **Cross-Cultural Interactions** by bringing together students from different backgrounds, helping break down barriers and fostering peaceful coexistence.

It empowers marginalized groups, especially for women and girls, ensuring that their voices are heard, which can lead to more inclusive and peaceful societies and thereby reducing **Gender-Based Inequality.**

Education also allows societies to confront historical grievances and work towards reconciliation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions from the studies on the Nigerian educational system, the following recommendations can be made to improve the quality of education and address the identified challenges:

1. **Increase funding for education:** The Nigerian government should prioritize allocating a larger portion of the national budget to education. Adequate funding is essential for improving infrastructure, providing necessary resources, and enhancing the overall learning environment.
2. **Enhance teacher quality:** Implement comprehensive measures to improve the quality of teaching staff. This can be achieved through ongoing professional development programs, recruitment of highly qualified teachers, and the establishment of rigorous standards for teacher certification and evaluation.
3. **Strengthen entrepreneurship education:** Incorporate entrepreneurship education at all levels of the Nigerian educational system. This should include curriculum development, teacher training, and partnerships with the

private sector to provide practical skills and knowledge needed for entrepreneurship and self-employment.

4. Promote technical and vocational education: Give greater emphasis to technical and vocational education to equip students with practical skills that match the needs of the job market. This will help address youth unemployment and contribute to the country's economic growth.

5. Improve governance and policy stability: Establish a stable and coherent educational policy framework that promotes consistency and continuity in policies and frameworks. This will provide clarity to stakeholders and ensure the effective implementation of educational initiatives.

Conclusion

From the above explanation, it evident that, education is not only foundational for personal and societal growth but also serves as a critical tool in preventing and resolving conflicts by fostering understanding, promoting justice, and empowering individuals and communities toward peaceful coexistence.

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