Education for Peace and National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract- Education is fundamental for fostering peace and driving national progress in a developing nation like Nigeria. This qualitative paper examined the critical role of education in addressing the dual challenges of promoting social harmony and achieving sustainable development in the country. It also aimed to assess the contribution of educational policies and programs to peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria and their role in national development. It explores the work that in the Nigerian context, where historical, ethnic, and socio-political tensions abound, education is uniquely positioned to bridge communities and catalyze equitable development. The results found immense disarticulations in Nigeria's education, peace, and national development. Additionally, the results identify the key challenges facing the educational sector as policy gaps. The paper concludes that education must be crucial in Nigeria's peace and development agenda. It recommends a nationwide integration of peace education into the country's curriculum.

Keywords: Education; Education for Peace; Development; National Development; National Development in Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Early work, as well as recent research, indicated that education is crucial to national development (Zheng & Huang, 2025; Abdugani et al., 2021; Okeke, 2001, p.292). It is the foundation upon which nations are built. It is also a powerful tool for shaping individuals, fostering societal cohesion, and driving development (Hughes & Loader, 2023; Tariq, 2023). Muoghalu (2013, as cited in Okeke and Chukwudebelu, 2014, p. 182) states, "opines that education is a tool for empowerment, emancipation, and national development and that education constitutes one of the critical foundations for any meaningful socio-economic transformation of any country." Education it is further defined, "is is central to the progressive advancement of every civilization" (Okeke et al.; 2016). Recent researchdefines it as "education stands as a cornerstone in the development journey of any nation, acting as both a catalyst and a consequence of progress" (Okeke, & Chukwudebelu, 2024, p. 270). Then, in the context of Nigeria, a country marked by its diversity and complexity, education is highly likely to hold the potential to bridge divides, promote understanding, and pave the way for peace and sustainable progress. Hence, at its core, education is about imparting knowledge and instilling peaceful values in the learner (Ngwacho, 2024). Moreover, education is a key driver of national development. It equips individuals with the skills and innovation required to tackle economic, social, and political challenges.

Consequently, a well-educated populace can enhance productivity, reduce inequality, and contribute meaningfully to the progress of a nation (Zheng & Huang, 2025; Tariq, 2023; Walker, 2012). However, this potential can only be fully realized when education systems are designed to address the unique challenges of peacebuilding and inclusive development. This discourse, therefore, invites us to evaluate how education can be leveraged as a transformative force in Nigeria. This challenges us to explore integrating peace education into the curricula while fostering a culture of lifelong learning that aligns with national needs and situations.

Based on the short preview above, this qualitative study reviews the existing literature to obtain knowledge on the relationship between education, peace, and national development in the Nigerian context. It entailed the review of academic books, journal articles, government reports, and other documents on peace education and national development. The qualitative methodology further focused on evaluating historical and contemporary studies of education's role in fostering peace in Nigeria and other locations. The document analysis examined national policies, government reports, and sundry literature related to education for peace and national development. It focused on educational policies and development plans and on how education is positioned or not positioned as a tool for peace and development in Nigeria. Therefore, this study explores the dual role of education in cultivating national peace and propelling national growth.

2. THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION: A SPECIFIC FOCUS

Fafunwa (1974, as cited in Ali, 2015) perceived education as the aggregate of all the processes by which a child develops his abilities, attitudes, and other forms of behaviours that are of positive value to the society in which an individual lives. According to Moore (1982), as cited in Aghenta (2001), education is the total of a person's

experiences. Then, in his notable study of the Nigerian education system's past, present, and future. Early work by Taiwo (1980) emphasized the importance of education in societal development and individual empowerment. Furthermore, Ehiametalor (2003, p.43) has described education as an "organized system of learning." In a different dimension, education has also been described as a progressive discovery of our ignorance (Will Durant in Covey, 2004). This view essentially resonates with Socrates' idea that "the only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." Hence, Socrates believed that recognizing one's ignorance is the beginning of true wisdom. The problem with this depiction of education is that some otherwise educated persons hide under such erroneous canopies to manifest abject timidity and palpable cowardice. So they see nothing and say nothing under the guise of how educated individuals are to behave. Consequently, a counterpoise to this school of thought is that education should imbue the spirits of courage and boldness to the educated person.

2. EDUCATION CONCEIVED AS SOCIALIZATION

Under this conceptual framework, education is believed to shape the individual to integrate effectively into society. Through this socialization process, education imparts norms, values, behaviours, and knowledge necessary for individuals to thrive within their cultural and societal context. Education as socialization emphasizes the role of education in individual development, cultural transmission, and societal cohesion. Culture is about how people do their thing, whatever they do, how they do it. Are they peace lovers? How they propagate the imperatives of peace.

In Ancient Greece, divisible into Athens and Sparta, Athens, often regarded as the cradle of Western civilization, greatly emphasized intellectual and artistic development. The Athenian education system, therefore, focused on nurturing free citizens who could actively participate in democratic governance (Acheampong et al., 2022). In contrast to Athens, Sparta's education system was heavily focused on military training and discipline (Halkos et al., 2022). The goal was to produce warriors capable of defending the state and maintaining its militaristic society. At the age of seven, boys were removed from their families and placed in state-run training schools. They underwent rigorous physical training, including endurance exercises, combat practice, and survival skills. Intellectual education was minimal and focused on practical skills, such as basic literacy and military tactics. Unlike in Athens, Spartan girls received formal education, though their training emphasized physical fitness and strength. They participated in sports like running and wrestling, preparing them to bear healthy children and support the state's militaristic ideals (Acheampong et al., 2022; Halkos et al., 2022; Parpiev, 2023; Sahibzada et al., 2021).

In other words, education in ancient Greece was all about socialization. It was the type of education that emerged out of the needs of society (Siddiqui, 2008). Beyond ancient Greece, Ehiemetalor (2003, p. 143) has argued that "every country establishes its system for the induction of the young to learn the morals and values of the society....through the imparting of new ideas and knowledge which is expected to remain relatively permanent". There is a palpable absence of peaceful tendencies in the morals and values that young Nigerians young Nigerians learn in the educational system established by the country.

3. CONCEPTUALIZING PEACE IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Peace and national development are two intertwined concepts that have significant implications for the progress and stability of any society (Amadei, 2021). Peace provides the foundation upon which development efforts can thrive, while development addresses the root causes of instability and conflict, thereby sustaining peace in a nation. Peace is often conceived as the absence of war or conflict, but in the context of national development, it is a more comprehensive concept that is reducible to positive and negative peace. Positive peace extends beyond the mere absence of violence to include conditions that promote justice, equity, and human flourishing (Ghafouri, 2024). Positive peace fosters an environment where individuals and communities can thrive without fear or deprivation, creating a solid foundation for development. In contrast, negative peace refers to the absence of direct violence or overt conflict but may coexist with structural violence such as poverty, discrimination, or social exclusion (Richmond, 2023; Watene, 2021). While negative peace is necessary to prevent immediate harm, it is insufficient for achieving long-term stability and development.

Peace and national development are, accordingly, mutually reinforcing. Peace creates the stability necessary for investments, innovation, and productive activities that drive economic growth. It enables governments to focus resources on developmental initiatives rather than on conflict resolution or military expenditures. Conversely, development addresses the root causes of conflict, such as poverty, inequality, and marginalization, thereby promoting peace. Conceptualizing peace in the context of national development thus reveals the profound interconnectedness of these two variables. Peace provides the stability and security needed for development efforts to succeed, while development addresses the structural inequities that undermine peace.

4. MEANING OF DEVELOPMENT / NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Development as a concept is subject to diverse interpretations. It is considered an essentially contested concept (Connelly, 2007; Gallie, 1956). However, it may fundamentally signify the enhancement of the material well-being of all citizens (not just the affluent and the most powerful) in a sustainable manner, ensuring that present consumption does not jeopardize the future. It also demands that poverty and inequality of access to the good things of life be removed or drastically reduced. Development aims to enhance personal and physical security, improve livelihoods, and expand opportunities for individuals. At its core, it involves growth and progressive transformation. A developed nation is characterized by minimal poverty, hardship, and insecurity among its population. Ideally, development should be a process that elevates people's material and living standards (Gboyega, 2003; Idike, 2014; Lawal & Oluwatoyin, 2011; Noyoo, 2000; Okeke, 2015; Ozigi & Canham, 1979). But at the end of the day, development is about freedom after all is said and done (Mbonu et al., 2024; Sen, 1999).

National Development, therefore, refers to nationwide development in a nation-state. It implies the well-being of a covert majority of the citizens in material terms. It implies

decreases in inequality levels and guarantees of security of lives and property in the nation-state. It is not denoted in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) paradigms that leave the average citizen bewildered and even neglected. The occurrence of national development should not be disputable. When debates arise over the progress of this process, it often signals underlying issues of underdevelopment. It entails an indisputably evolving process (Idike, 2014; Okeke & Ifeagwazi, 2018).

National development thus encompasses a nation's economic, social, political, and cultural progress. It involves improving citizens' quality of life through better access to education, healthcare, infrastructure, and opportunities for economic advancement. It also requires robust institutions that uphold justice, promote good governance, and foster accountability. A holistic approach to national development recognizes that economic growth alone is insufficient. Social equity, environmental Sustainability, and cultural inclusion are equally important for ensuring that development benefits all segments of society (Hariram et al., 2023). Development efforts may exacerbate inequality without these elements, leading to tension and unrest that undermine peace.

5. THE PLACE OF PEACE IN NIGERIA'S EDUCATIONAL AMBITIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Peace has no place in Nigeria's educational ambitions. The national policy on education references the nation's overall philosophy, including the promotion of world peace, but there is no reference to peace in Nigeria. Ironically, a nation whose national ambitions negate the propagation of peace is claiming readiness to champion the course of peace at the global level. But this has always been the attitude of the Nigerian state towards international affairs. Nigeria was at the forefront of the national independence struggle, championing the courses of self-determination and democracy in Southern Africa. However, at home, the country could not truly pride itself as a place where the notions of self-determination and robust democracy thrived. Hence, the same country that expended national fortunes leading military operations for the enthronement of democracy in the West African sub-region later became classified as the world's poverty capital. The government has always seen itself in highly delusional terms as its leaders and some of the citizens call the place the giant of Africa.

Achebe (1983) further illustrates that "in June 1979 former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt of the then West Germany made this comment about his country: Germany is not a world power; it does not wish to become a world power. Then, in August of the same year, General Olusegun Obasanjo, as Head of State of Nigeria, declared that Nigeria would become one of the ten leading nations in the world by the end of the century". Under similar mentalities, the nation's putative national policy on education would allude to the promotion of world peace without any reference to domestic peace as a precondition. In the national policy on education, there are actually all those "unity and progress, unity in diversity," etc. However, there is no specific reference to peace in the nation as a goal of education or as an aspect of the philosophy that drives educational goals in the country.

In similar veins where Nigerian leaders currently talk about building Smart Schools as their flagship educational programs, it would appear as if they are saying something spectacular. In the current circumstances of monumental insecurity in the nation (with endless possibilities of multiplier effects), the introduction of peace studies into Nigerian schools at all levels is a loftier educational goal than the building of Smart schools. Under

an atmosphere of national peace and security, Nigerian children will create smart villages independently without being led by any putative Smart schools.

More fundamentally, therefore, as posited by Fafunwa (1974), education is the aggregate of all the processes by which a child (a citizen) develops his abilities, attitudes, and other forms of behaviours that are of positive value to the society in which an individual lives. A critical question for us is: How can our education promote peace and national development in Nigeria? The extent to which we are unable, as individuals, to respond positively to this question is the extent to which our education is needless.

The national policy on education acknowledges that education is an instrument for national development. It is, however, contradictory that the same document shies away from boldly announcing national peace as a goal of education or an aspect of its philosophical foundations. Invariably, national development has remained a mirage in Nigeria. In place of national development, national insecurity is currently generic in Nigeria. When we look at the Nigerian scenario, argues Okeke et al. (2016, p. 240), "the generic role of education as a catalyst for national progress appears cloudy." Okeke & Chukwudebelu (2024, pp. 270-271) further add that "in the case of Nigeria, a country rich in human and natural resources, the linkages between education and key indicators of national development such as human capital development, economic growth, social cohesion, and democratic governance are debatable."

From north to west, east, and south, insecurity has become a pandemic in Nigeria, and this widespread insecurity is highly attributable to the absence of peace as a core value in the nation's educational designs. From the butchery occasioned by the first military coup and subsequent counter-coups, the monumental killings attendant to the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970), the truth is that no spirited national attempt was made at education for social reconstruction through the incorporation of peace studies in the curricular at every strata of education. Because peace is lacking as a fundamental principle of education in Nigeria, products of the contradictory educational system (and the school dropouts among them) are the ones that engage in murder, arson, kidnapping, electoral campaign violence, election rigging, ballot snatching, occultism, petroleum pipelines vandalism, and terrorism. Okeke et al.'s (2016, p. 248) findings have consequently "led to the conclusion that the state of education in Nigeria has remained perilous."

6. CONCLUSION

Education is vital for promoting peace and driving national progress, especially in a diverse and developing nation like Nigeria. It is the bedrock of peace and national development, offering a pathway to a harmonious and prosperous society. The paper has accordingly highlighted the transformative potential of education in shaping a peaceful and progressive nation. It has explored the essential role of education in addressing the intertwined challenges of fostering social harmony and achieving sustainable development within Nigeria. It has highlighted how education can catalyze equitable growth in the Nigerian context. The work stresses the need to incorporate peace education into the national curriculum in Nigeria and identifies policy gaps as a key challenge facing the educational sector in the country. The study concludes that a reimagined education system centred on peace-oriented learning can lay the groundwork for a more progressive Nigeria. In this contribution, it is submitted that by leveraging the transformative power of education, Nigeria can work towards a more peaceful and sustainable future for the nation.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reduce the National Policy on Education to a one-page document. According to Okeke, 2014, p. 814) "a major problem of state policies in the Nigerian state is in their verbose documentation." Indeed, when national policies become long-winded, they appear like programs.

2. Hand over education from pre-nursery, nursery, and primary to post-primary levels to local governments. Make peace education compulsory at these levels of education (pre-nursery, nursery, primary to post-primary levels) as to be enforced by the Federal government. Incorporating peace education into curricula helps instil tolerance, empathy, and conflict resolution values in future generations.

3. Exclude the Federal and State governments from owning and operating educational institutions at this level (pre-nursery, nursery, primary to post-primary levels)

4. Hand over the so-called Unity Schools to the Local Governments of their domicile

5. At the post-secondary level, the national policy on education shall emphasize intellectual and scientific rigour and peace education while preparing the individuals for contribution to both national progress and global dialogue.

6. State and federal governments can continue to own and operate educational institutions at the post-secondary level, but the overarching philosophy of education must always be based on education for peace and national development.

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