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## Refocusing Peace Education: As a Strategy for Managing Conflict in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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By

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### Abstract

*Tertiary institutions in Nigeria like many developing countries have witnessed series of conflicts; the chaotic situation has undermined so many programmes aimed at enhancing the impartation of knowledge and skills. The paper advocates the use of peace education as a strategy for managing conflict in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Some of the root causes of conflicts in tertiary institutions includes; delay in meeting the demands of student, poor communication and staff unionism. While the consequence of conflict includes: Closure of affected schools, strike by the staff of the institutions, loss of life and destruction of properties. Some of the peace education strategies for managing conflict in tertiary institutions includes: Mediation programmes, integration of the peace education principles and skills into multiple subject areas as part of the curriculum content, inculcating in students the right values and attitudes on how to manage anger and fostering the spirit of unity. The challenges of implementing peace education includes: inadequate knowledge and skills of peace education, poor communication channels and leadership style of the school administrators. Some of the suggestions made includes: Capacity building on peace education, good communication channels and use of appropriate leadership styles.*

**Keywords:** Peace, Peace education, Conflict and Conflict Management strategies.

Conflict is an evitable element that occurs throughout the world on a daily basis in both formal and informal settings including institutions of learning. In Nigeria conflict is found to be one of the leading factors accountable for deterioration of standard in education. This is because when conflict occurs unmitigated in a school setting it has the potential to hinder productivity. Tertiary institutions being formal organizations were school administrators, teachers, students, school community and parents coming from diverse social-cultural background, ethnicity, social status, with different values, attitude, interests and beliefs interact and such interaction can lead to misunderstanding that may result to conflict among them.

Over the years, tertiary institutions like any other institutions have witnessed series of conflict. The chaotic situation has undermined many programmes aimed at enhancing the impartation of knowledge and skills needed for human resource development in the country (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2011). They asserted further that, the severity of institutional conflict has and continues to destroy the basic environmental conditions required to provide good climate for developing human resources for Nigeria. This is because, the quality of education cannot be guaranteed in conflict ridden society since its consequences will have a far reaching effect on the system (Alimbe, 2013). Similarly, Makaye and Ndofirefi (2012) stressed that, school conflict often disturb the tone and climates of the school and ultimately impact negatively on the performance of both staff and students.

Conflict happens for different reasons. According to Udo, Blessing & Ubana (2013), conflict may arise from the largest affairs of international politics to everyday matters of work and family life. It consists of stages such as initiation, escalation, controlled maintenance, abatement and termination or resolution. Ignace (2014) posited that, conflict consist of actions that we take to express our feelings, articulate our perceptions and get our need met in a way that has potential for interfering with someone else ability to get his or her needs met. This behaviour may involve a direct attempt to make something happen at the expense of someone else and it can take the form of disagreement, destruction of life and property or other acts of violence.

The menace of conflict on the performance and productivity of tertiary institution cannot be underestimated. This is because the consequence of conflict includes closure of effected schools, strike by lecturers, loss of lives and properties, disruption of academic calendar, academic stress, anxiety, and deviant behavior by student among others. This calls for the need for effective management of conflict to curtail the menace. It is in the light of these that, this paper advocates the use of peace education as a strategy for effective management of conflict in tertiary institution in Nigeria. According to Mbonu (2012) conflicting issues in higher education that hinder the efficiency, effectiveness and productivity in management can be handled using peace education. He asserted further, through peace education there will be promotion of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will allow people of all ages and at all levels to

develop the behaviour changes that can prevent the occurrence of conflict, resolve conflict peacefully and create the social conditions conducive to peace.

Peace education inculcate values, skills and attitudes that enable individuals to live in harmony with others and as responsible citizens reject violence and prevent conflict by tackling its root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiations among individual and groups which in turns ensure peaceful and harmonious peaceful co-existence. UNICEF in Bashir and Mera (2016) defined peace education as a process of promoting the knowledge skills, attitude and values needed to bring about behavioural changes that will enable children, youth and adult to prevent conflicts peacefully; and to create the conditions for peace whether through an interpersonal, Intergroup, national or international level.

Furthermore, in realization of the importance of peace education in conflict management, UNESCO in Mbonu (2012) called for an approach to education that is directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human right and fundamental freedom, promotion of understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations or religious groups. Bekerman in Mbonu (2012) equally posited that, peace education should be used in resolving conflict since it focused on building maturity among all citizens and teaching them the competencies, attitudes and values needed to build and maintain peace in the society. It is in realization of these and many more that this paper thus, emphasized for the use of peace education as a strategy for the management of conflict in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Frame Work of the Study.**

Some concepts that are used in the study are defined from different scholarly perspective. Aselebe (2013) defined Peace as the absence of fear, conflict, anxiety, exhaustion, deprivation or suffering and violence. The author asserted further that, it is the breach of peace that causes civic disorder, rioting and other forms of disharmony or conflict. There are two dimensions of conflicts. According to Euginia (2013) the first dimension of peace is the absence of direct violence, war and fear of the individual, nation, region at international level. The second dimension is positive peace which is the absence of unjust structures, unequal relationship, justice and inner peace and national development, Olokobo, Abdullahi, Tijjani, Balogun and Hayia Balgore (2013) defined peace education as a process of inculcating in the learner those attributes, attitudes, values and belief that are capable of promoting peace. Julius, Ngao, David and Paul (2012) stressed that, peace education promotes respect for oneself and respect for others at individual's level and as prerequisite for the prevention of violence and conflict at societal level. This therefore reduces conflicts not only at the individual level but also at societal and national levels in general. Hence, it goes a long way in enhancing harmonious peaceful co-existence. Peace education is indeed a strategy that is aimed at preventing all forms of conflicts, resolving conflict and curtailing its menace.

Cream in Bashir & Mera (2016) defined peace education as a global term that emphasizes all educational endeavors and activities which takes as their focus the promotion of knowledge of peace and of peace building which promote in the learners attitudes of tolerance and empathy as well as skills in cooperation, conflict avoidance and conflict resolution so that learners will have the capacity and motivation individually and collectively to live in peace with others.

### **Aims of Peace Education**

UNICEF in Bashir & Mera (2016) categorized the aims of peace education into the three (3) aspects of knowledge, skills and attitudinal aims:-

1. **Knowledge:** The aim of peace education under knowledge involved inculcating in children and youth the awareness of their own needs (self- awareness), understanding nature of conflict and peace, ability to identify causes of conflicts and non-violent means of resolution, conflict analysis, enhancing knowledge of community mechanism for peace building and resolving conflicts, mediation process, understanding of rights and responsibilities, understanding of interdependence between individuals and societies, awareness of cultural heritage and recognition of prejudice.
2. **Skills:** The aim of peace education under skill involve affective communication in active listening, self expression, paraphrasing and reframing awareness, ability to deal with stereotype, dealing with emotions, problem solving skills, ability to generate alternative solutions, constructive conflict resolution, to employ conflict prevention mechanism, participation in society on behalf of peace and ability to live with change.
3. **Attitudinal Aims:** These inculcate in the learners the culture of self - respect, positive self image and strong self - concept, tolerance acceptance of others, respect for social difference respect for the right and responsibilities of children and parents, bias awareness, gender equality, empathy, reconciliation, solidarity, social responsibility, sense of justice and equality. Peace education curriculum content includes: Negative and positive peace, peace makers, peace movement, direct and indirect violence, peace as an active process, human right and responsibilities, world views and dialogues, non-violent communication, community and dialogue.

Conflict is inevitable and eminent from interactions among people. Manafa (2019) defined conflict as state of disharmony, discord, discontent and disagreement

between individuals or among people in an organization. Conflict is therefore a product of incompatibility of goals and it arises from misunderstanding. Ignace (2014) described conflict as actions or inactions we take in order to express our feeling, articulate our perception and get our need met in a way that has the potential for interfering with someone else ability to get his/her needs met. He asserted further that, this conflict behaviour may involve a direct attempt to make something happen at someone else expense. Auwal (2010) was of the view that conflict is perceived largely as something devastating, abnormal, a dysfunctional process in social systems. However some researches perceived conflicts in a positive way for instance, Ponds in Alimba (2013) indicated that, conflict can produce positive outcomes by introducing different perspective that indicates that the absence of conflict does not necessarily signal meaningful interaction because conflict by itself is neither good nor bad. However, the manner through which conflict is managed determines whether it is constructive or destructive.

The types of conflict that are experienced in educational institution are quite diverse. These include: inter-personal, inter-group and intra-group. Ignace (2014) saw inter-person conflicts as conflict between persons. This may include conflict between specific staff members and student, specific teachers and parents. Similarly, inter-group conflict may include conflict between various groups; this could be between staff and students, and or other groups or stakeholders. Intrapersonal conflict involved conflict between school management and specific member or any specific individual. However, the type of conflict and how it is handled can have a positive or negative impact on the institution. This therefore indicates the needs for appropriate strategy for effective conflict management in institutions of learning. Strategies for Conflict Management refers to methodologies designed to develop peaceful means of preventing or finally ending a state of conflict (Ignace, 2014).

### **Causes of Conflict in Tertiary Institution in Nigeria**

Various conflict that occur in tertiary institution happens for various reasons. Some of these conflict are attributed to stress, poor communication and motivation (Aguba, 2009) while Adeyemi, Ekundayo and Alonge (2010) attributed school conflict to insufficient school facilities, delay in meeting students demands, academic stress, increase in tuition fees, abnoxious rules and regulations, wide communication gap between students and the school authority, delay in meeting students demand among others. According to schofield in Ignace, (2014) conflict occurs in schools due to lack of proper communication with teachers, imposition of strict deadlines for various activities, differences in perceptions on management of certain issues in the school, dictatorial tendencies on the part of administration, physical working condition, lack of administrative support and provision of learning materials as well as physio-social support when needed. Mislal (2012) identifying sources of conflict as: goal incompatibility, unavailability of resources, performance expectations and

organizational structures. Bankonskaya (2012) confirmed structural aspects of an organization that are recognized as the causes of conflict: specialization, common resources, goal differences, interdependence, authority relationships, status differences, jurisdictional ambiguities and roles & expectations.

Hence, from the foregoing, the major causes of conflict in tertiary institutions eminent as a result of:

1. **Poor Communication:** This may be contradictory information dissemination, it can also be as a result of incomplete information, misinformation, it can occur due to dissemination of new information, it can also occur due to dissemination of new information for instance: announcement of new salary structure for staff, increase in tuition fee, information on disciplinary measures etc.
2. **Insufficient Resources:** This has to do with provision of inadequate or limited resources which are needed to satisfy needs of staff and students.
3. **Disciplinary Problems:** Staff and student who are facing disciplinary action can trigger, initiate or act as conflict incubators.
4. **Conflict of Interest:** This may take the form of a direct confrontation between individual staff or between staff and leadership, between staff and students or between students or individuals students.
5. **Competition:** This happens between persons or groups whose aims is to gain advantage in area of power, resources, interest or needs.
6. **Individual Personality Clashes:** This occurs as a result of expression of hostile attitudes.
7. **Poor Leadership Style:** Some of the school administrators are yet to master the basic principles of school management or face problem understanding it.

### **Consequences of Conflict**

When conflict occurs in institutions of learning, it has the potential to obstruct the achievement of the goals of the institution. Makaye and Ndofirefi (2012) noted that, institutional conflict often disturb the tune and climate of the school and ultimately impact negatively on the performance of both teachers and students. Some of the consequences of conflict in tertiary institution in Nigeria includes: closure of affected schools, strike by lecturers, loss of lives and properties (Aluede in Fatile & Adejuwa, 2011). Similarly, Opeyemi (2017) equally indicated that when conflict are not properly managed, it will lead to closure of schools, elongation of period of study, lost of lives and properties, penalty to all students such as payment of caution fees and low productivity of graduates. The disruption of academic session can also lead to student's engagement in deviant behavior such as turgery, drug abuse, and robbery among other acts of misconducts. Torngee (2013) also stated that, the consequences of conflicts in tertiary institutions to include: disruption of academic calendar and programmes, hostility, suspicion. Withdrawal from school activity, Heavy financial losses or revenue

incurred by government from closure of schools, and students and their parents suffer unquantifiable losses.

### **Peace Education: Strategies for Conflict Management in Tertiary Institution in Nigeria**

Conflict management strategies implies a methodology designed to develop peaceful alternative of ending a state of conflict. These Includes:-

1. Educating people on the need for dialogue: This involve creating awareness about the fact that conflict cannot be dissolved through chaos and destruction of properties but rather through dialogue. This means that when conflict occur the two parties involved should try to resolve their differences through dialogue which will lead to peaceful resolution of the conflict. It will help curtail or at least reduce the scope, intensity and effect of conflict.
2. Team work: Here the opponents are encouraged to work together as a team in order to proffer solution to the problem. This provides an opportunity for the two parties to interact with the hope of at least bringing an end to the matter.
3. Mediation Programmes:- This involve equipping some staff and students with the knowledge and skills on how to provide neutral third party facilitation services to others so that the skills learnt empowers the trainees to continue to serve as mediators within and outside the institution.
4. Mainstreaming peace education content into the school curriculum: This entails integrating peace education principles and skills into multiple subject area so that students study it in various departmental courses.
5. Teaching peace education curriculum: This implies designing a distant curriculum on the principles and skills of non-violence and offering the content as a separate course of study to be registered by students in addition to their existing courses.
6. Inculcating the right values and attitude: This involves creating awareness on the right attitude to manage anger, encouraging use of proper communication skills such as listening, positive feedback, identifying needs and separating fact from emotion, changing the existing belief system which is using conflict to settle disputes among people.
7. Promoting peaceful harmonious co-existence: This Involve inculcating the spirit of unity in diversity by making them see each other as integral part of one family.
8. Effective Communication: communication skills that encourage positive interaction and feedback are promoted. This is because peace education does not only communicate knowledge but also develop skills and attitudes.

**Challenges of Implementing Peace Education Strategies in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria** Some of those challengers includes:

1. Lack of adequate knowledge and skills of conflict management: Most of the staff and students of tertiary institutions have insufficient knowledge and skills concerning the theoretical and practical underpinning of issues relating to peace.
2. Poor leadership style: this emanate as a result of insufficient knowledge of school administration and management.
3. Insufficient human and material resource: This entails the lack of adequate material and human resources for the proper implementation of peace education programmes and activities aimed at promoting peace.
4. Lack of support from the management: Lack of support from the management can greatly undermine the effort of the stake holders to implement peace education in the institution
5. Funding: Funding is a critical aspect of any meaningful project and the issue here is that, funds allocated to peace education programmes and activities are quite insufficient. This problem hinders the ability of the institutions to mobilize adequate human and material resources necessary for successful implementation of peace education programmes.
6. Poor capacity building on peace education: This is as a result of inadequate opportunities for staff development in the area of peace education.

**Way Forward:**

1. Capacity building in the area of peace education. This will help to equip lecturers and school administrators with theoretical and practical knowledge and skills on issue relating to peace and how to use it as a strategy for conflict management.
2. School leadership should be encourage to employ leadership styles that favour the attainment of positive school climate, because conflict thrive in an atmosphere of violence, intolerance, disengagement, mistrust, misconception among others. This can have adverse effect on staff morale and the overall productivity of the institutions
3. Resources related to peace should be made available both in quantity and quality in order to ensure proper implementation of peace education programmes.
4. Management support is a critical variable to the attainment of institutional goals and objectives. This is because no programme can be successfully implemented without sufficient support from the management. Thus, school managers should give their total support to peace education programmes in tertiary institutions of learning so that peace thrives and conflict is minimized both within and outside the institutions.

## **Conclusion**

Indeed conflict is inevitable and it emanates as a result of human interaction. Conflict will always be part of the happenings in both formal and non formal organization but a well managed conflict will not be a disruptive occurrence since violence and other destructive behaviour will not erupt without conflict as the root cause. Indeed it is generally believed that many conflict that erupts degenerate because of the fact that their root cause were not properly managed. Thus, it is very critical to ensure that effective strategies are employed to properly manage the situations. Many scholars advocate the use of peace education as a strategy to help manage conflict. This is because peace education is one of the most effective instrument that can be use to prevent or manage conflict this is because, peace education if well taught will instill in the learner the right kind of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that address all form of conflict and violence whether overt or structural from the inter-personal to the society and global levels.

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***Refocusing Peace Education: As a Strategy for Managing Conflict in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria***

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