

Influence of Peace Education Initiatives on the Behaviours of Community Members in Selected States of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Peace education initiatives play a crucial role in shaping community behaviours by fostering conflict resolution skills, tolerance, and social cohesion. This study examines the influence of peace education initiatives on the behaviours of community members in Nasarawa and Benue states of Nigeria. Anchored on conflict transformation theory and using a qualitative research design, data was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KII) from community leaders, security personnel, NGO representatives, and residents in Awe Local Government Area of Nasarawa State and Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. The study found that peace education initiatives positively impact community behaviours by promoting non-violent conflict resolution, enhancing intergroup relations, and reducing tendencies toward aggression. However, challenges such as limited reach, inadequate funding, and socio-political influences hinder the full realization of peace education's potential. The study recommends strengthening peace education programmes through increased government support, community participation, and integration into formal and informal education systems.

Keywords: Peace Education; Peacebuilding; Conflict resolution; and Community behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Peace remains a critical element for the stability and progress of any society, particularly in nations facing recurrent conflicts, communal disputes, and socio-political instability. In Nigeria, persistent conflicts arising from ethnic, religious, and political divisions have necessitated the adoption of peace education initiatives as a strategic approach to mitigating violence, fostering tolerance, and promoting social cohesion. Peace education is a structured process that seeks to equip individuals and communities with the knowledge, skills, and values required to prevent conflict and build a culture of peace [1]. Nigeria has experienced a range of conflicts, including ethno-religious violence, insurgency, farmer-herder clashes, and communal disputes, which have significantly disrupted social harmony and national development [2]. The rise of Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, the Niger Delta militancy, and the frequent communal clashes in the Middle Belt highlight the urgency of peacebuilding strategies. Scholars and policymakers have recognized peace education as a viable tool for addressing these issues, as it fosters understanding, dialogue, and non-violent conflict resolution [3].

The concept of peace education gained global recognition following the United Nations' emphasis on education for peace and sustainable development [4]. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines peace education as a process aimed at promoting knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours conducive to resolving conflicts non-violently and respecting human rights [4]. In Nigeria, peace education initiatives have been promoted by government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international development partners to enhance social cohesion and mitigate conflicts at the community level.

Given the multiplicity of conflicts in Nigeria, peace education programmes have been implemented at various levels, targeting schools, religious institutions, and community-based groups to influence behaviours and promote harmonious coexistence. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives in transforming attitudes and behaviours among community members remains an area of scholarly inquiry. Studies have shown that while

some communities have embraced peace education and adopted peaceful behaviours, others remain resistant, often due to deeply entrenched ethnic and religious tensions [5]. There is a need for empirical investigation into the effectiveness of these programmes in shaping community attitudes towards peace, fostering reconciliation, and reducing violent tendencies.

Furthermore, while existing literature has explored the role of peace education in schools and formal institutions [6], limited research has examined its direct influence on adult community members, particularly in conflict-prone areas of Nigeria, specifically the Middle-belt. Additionally, there is a paucity of studies that assess the long-term behavioural changes resulting from peace education interventions in local communities. This study aims to bridge these gaps by analyzing the effectiveness of peace education initiatives in selected Nigerian states, focusing on how they shape community attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours toward peace and conflict resolution.

This study, therefore, examines the influence of peace education initiatives on the behaviours of community members in Nasarawa and Benue state of Nigeria, focusing on their role in fostering peaceful relations, reducing conflict tendencies, and promoting civic engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This subsection of the paper reviews literature on the key concepts, including peace education, peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and community behaviour.

The concept of peace is often misunderstood, as its interpretation varies across cultures and contexts in the modern world. For some, peace simply means the absence of war, while for others, it encompasses much more. Scholars have highlighted that peace carries both negative and positive connotations [7]. Negatively, peace signifies the cessation of violence, whereas positively, it involves justice, respect for human rights, and equal political participation. [5], defined peace as a state in which neither overt war nor the hidden violence of unjust systems is used to advance the interests of a particular nation or group. They argued further that, peace exists when basic human needs are met, conflicts are resolved through non-violent means, and resources are equitably distributed for the benefit of all. In essence, peace is more than just the absence of violence; it embodies a just and harmonious social order.

Building on the above, peace education involves teaching about the nature of peace and the strategies for achieving it. [8] identify education, research, and training as one of the nine essential tracks for successful peacemaking. The core objective of peace education is to generate and disseminate knowledge on peace and conflict issues while fostering understanding of peacemaking and conflict resolution strategies. This track highlights the policy and action implications derived from acquired knowledge, emphasizing that increased education enhances individuals' ability to address challenges at various levels. A detailed study of conflicts facilitates the development of alternative resolution strategies. It is often argued that meaningful global change begins with education. According to [8], the educational domain functions as a subsystem comprising two key structural components: think tanks and academic institutions. Think tanks focus on research, analysis, and specialized study programmes, while educational institutions—including primary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities—offer instruction on peace and conflict resolution [1].

Contributing to this discussion, Salomon [6] asserts that peace education is not a singular concept, primarily because peace itself has multiple interpretations and is influenced by the context in which it is taught. As previously noted, there is a distinction between positive and negative peace—where positive peace involves collaboration, integration, and cooperation, while negative peace simply refers to the absence of violence [7]. Another key differentiation lies in the sociopolitical context of peace education [9], which can take place in regions experiencing intractable conflicts, areas with ethnic or racial tensions, or settings marked by stability and cooperation. Additionally, peace education varies in scope, operating at both local and global levels. Moreover, distinctions can be drawn based on the political, economic, and social backgrounds of participants. Of all these distinctions, Salomon [6], emphasizes that the sociopolitical dimension is the most crucial, as it shapes the challenges, objectives, and strategies of peace education, particularly in addressing the needs of different participant groups. Peace education is an interdisciplinary field that integrates various academic

disciplines and is implemented in diverse settings, including daycare centres, primary and secondary schools, universities, and informal learning environments. [10] highlights that, the core objectives of peace education revolve around fostering a culture of peace and preventing social polarization, ultimately contributing to sustainable peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding has emerged as a critical framework for addressing conflicts and fostering sustainable peace in societies like Nigeria affected by violence and instability. Scholars and practitioners define peacebuilding as a comprehensive approach encompassing conflict prevention, conflict resolution, post-conflict recovery, and reconciliation [6]; [11].

According to [12] peacebuilding is understood as the opening move or the first task to consider in negotiating peace deal between individuals, groups, or society. It also refers to the first step, opening move, initiative, or the opening of the first of a series of actions towards forestalling situations that could otherwise lead to violent conflict. Galtung [6] cited in [12] also viewed peace-building as a concept that developed from interest in identifying the conditions that lead beyond a temporary cessation of violence to sustainable processes of conflict management and mutual cooperation between those who have previously been adversaries. More succinctly, the term “peace-building” can have two broad meaning according to [6]; first, it can refer to the direct work that intentionally focuses on addressing the factors driving and mitigating conflict. Second, it can also refer to efforts to coordinate or set up channels for communication to develop a comprehensive, multileveled, multi-sectoral strategy, including development, humanitarian assistance, governance, security, justice, and other sectors that may not use the term “peacebuilding” to describe themselves.

Conflict resolution is a fundamental aspect of social interactions, governance, and international relations. It involves processes and mechanisms designed to address and manage disputes, disagreements, and hostilities between individuals, groups, or nations. Conflict resolution aims to achieve peaceful and constructive outcomes, preventing the escalation of conflicts into violence or prolonged tensions (Burton, 1990). It refers to the methods and processes of facilitating the peaceful settlement of disputes and disagreements. According to Deutsch (1973), conflict resolution involves reducing the negative aspects of conflict while enhancing positive outcomes. [13] expands this definition by emphasizing the need for sustainable peace by transforming relationships and structures that foster conflict.

There are multiple approaches to resolving conflicts according [6], which vary depending on the nature and context of the dispute. The major approaches include: **Negotiation**: A process in which parties involved in a conflict engages in dialogue to reach an agreement. **Mediation**: A neutral third party facilitates communication between disputants to help them reach a mutually acceptable solution. **Arbitration**: An impartial third party makes a binding decision based on the evidence and arguments presented by conflicting parties. **Conciliation**: Similar to mediation, but involves an intermediary who actively suggests solutions to ease tensions. **Adjudication**: Legal processes in which a court or tribunal resolves disputes through formal judgment. Despite these various conflict resolution strategies, challenges persist. These include power imbalances, cultural differences, lack of trust, and external influences that exacerbate conflicts. Additionally, deeply entrenched grievances and historical animosities may hinder effective resolution.

Conflict resolution is therefore a critical process for fostering peace and stability in societies. It requires a multifaceted approach that incorporates negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and peacebuilding initiatives. To address the underlying causes of conflicts and promoting dialogue, effective conflict resolution strategies can lead to sustainable peace and improved relationships among individuals, groups, and nations.

Community behaviour plays a crucial role in fostering peace, resolving conflicts, and sustaining long-term stability. Understanding how communities respond to peace education, engage in peacebuilding activities, and participate in conflict resolution mechanisms helps in designing effective interventions for sustainable peace [13]. Peace education, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution collectively shape community attitudes, perceptions, and social norms, influencing how individuals and groups interact within a society [6].

behaviour in the peacebuilding process is largely influenced by the level of inclusivity and ownership of peace initiatives. When community members actively participate in peacebuilding, they are more likely to take

responsibility for maintaining peace and preventing the recurrence of conflicts (Paffenholz, 2014). Grassroots engagement in dialogue sessions, reconciliation programmes, and local governance structures fosters trust and collaboration, essential for long-term stability. In contrast, exclusion from peace processes can lead to apathy, resistance, or even renewed hostilities. Marginalized groups, if not given a voice in peacebuilding efforts, may resort to alternative means of addressing grievances, sometimes through violent means. Therefore, peacebuilding efforts must be inclusive, participatory, and context-specific to encourage positive community behaviour and long-term peace.

Furthermore, the way a community responds to conflict resolution efforts is shaped by its historical experiences, cultural beliefs, and the perceived legitimacy of conflict resolution actors. In societies with strong traditions of dialogue and mediation, community members are more likely to adopt non-violent dispute-resolution methods [15]. For example, in African communities, elders and religious leaders often serve as mediators, leveraging cultural wisdom to resolve conflicts.

Conversely, when communities lack trust in formal conflict resolution mechanisms, they may resort to alternative justice systems, vigilantism, or even violent confrontations [4]. Efforts to improve community behaviour in conflict resolution should focus on building trust, enhancing local capacity for mediation, and ensuring that justice is accessible and equitable [12] .

Review of Empirical Studies

Peace education has gained significant global recognition as a vital tool for fostering social harmony, reducing conflicts, and promoting behavioural change among community members. Numerous empirical studies have explored the nature and types of peace education, the various methods employed, and the impact of these initiatives on individuals and communities. This section reviews existing literature to provide insights into how peace education initiatives influence community behaviour, with a focus on Nigeria.

Peace education encompasses a wide range of programmes designed to instill values, attitudes, and skills necessary for conflict prevention, resolution, and transformation [1] Empirical studies have categorized peace education into different types based on their focus areas and implementation strategies; formal Peace Education implemented in schools, universities, and formal institutions as part of the curriculum. Studies by [6] found that incorporating peace education into school programmes in conflict-prone areas significantly reduced aggression and improved intergroup relationships. A study by Danesh [7] in post-conflict societies also revealed that informal peace education, particularly through radio programs, improved community cohesion.

Another empirical research by [15] demonstrated that experiential peace education programmes helped individuals develop empathy, emotional intelligence, and constructive conflict resolution skills. [9] study in divided societies found that mediation training increased community members' ability to handle disputes peacefully, reducing incidences of violent conflict.

Different methodologies have equally been employed to deliver peace education programmes, each with varying levels of effectiveness. Some of the most commonly studied methods include workshops and training sessions which Johnson & Johnson (2005) studies indicate that workshops on cooperative learning and nonviolent communication significantly improve interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution skills among participants. Another research by Lederach [15] demonstrated that such programmes foster trust and understanding, reducing ethnic and religious tensions.

Furthermore, studies by [16] show that peace messaging through radio, television, and social media effectively counters hate speech and propaganda, influencing public perception towards peaceful coexistence. Another empirical finding by [16] suggests that early exposure to peace concepts in educational institutions fosters long-term behavioural change among youth. [10] study also shows that training students as peer mediators helps in conflict de-escalation and encourages positive communication among young people.

Furthermore, several empirical researches highlight several key impacts of peace education initiatives on community behaviour, particularly in conflict-prone areas; multiple studies, including that of [6], show that individuals exposed to peace education programmes exhibit lower tendencies towards aggression and violence. Another study by [15] in Rwanda and other post-genocide societies demonstrates that community-based peace education initiatives contribute to rebuilding trust and promoting reconciliation. [9] findings also indicate that participants in peace education programmes are more likely to engage in constructive dialogue rather than resorting to violence. In the same vein, findings from [15] study show that individuals who undergo peace education training are more likely to participate in community service and governance, fostering democratic values. While Bratic & Schirch (2007) study found that media-based peace education programmes led to significant shifts in public attitudes towards opposing ethnic or religious groups.

Flowing from the above, several studies have examined the effectiveness of peace education in mitigating conflicts, particularly in regions affected by ethnic, religious, and communal violence. A study by [17] on peace education programmes in schools in Kaduna and Kano states found that students who are exposed to peace education demonstrated increased tolerance towards peers from different ethnic backgrounds. Again, a research by [18] also found that grassroots peace education initiatives in the Niger Delta significantly reduced hostility between militant groups and local communities, fostering economic cooperation. A study by Adamu [17] assessed the impact of interfaith peace dialogues in Plateau and Benue states, revealed that participants were more inclined to engage in peaceful religious discourse rather than sectarian violence.

The empirical studies reviewed provide strong evidence that peace education initiatives play a crucial role in shaping the behaviour of community members. Whether through formal education; community-based programmes, media campaigns, or experiential learning, these initiatives contribute to conflict prevention, social cohesion, and peaceful coexistence.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted, reviewed and applied the Conflict Transformation Theory to the phenomenon under study. The Conflict Transformation Theory emerged as an alternative to traditional conflict resolution and conflict management approaches. While conflict resolution aims to end disputes and conflict management seeks to control them, conflict transformation goes beyond immediate solutions and focuses on long-term social change. The theory was pioneered by John Paul Lederach, a prominent scholar in peace and conflict studies, in the late 20th century.

that conflicts are not just problems to be solved but opportunities for growth and positive change. He emphasized that conflicts are deeply embedded in relationships, structures, and historical contexts. Therefore, addressing them requires a holistic approach that involves transforming attitudes, relationships, institutions, and cultural norms.

Furthermore, [15] argued that, conflict is not inherently negative but rather a natural part of human interaction. It can serve as a catalyst for constructive change if managed appropriately. Unlike conflict resolution, which seeks immediate settlement, conflict transformation focuses on long-term engagement with underlying causes and consequences of conflict. [7] added that, Conflict transformation operates at personal, relational, structural, and cultural levels, addressing both direct and indirect forms of violence.

The theory emphasizes empowering individuals and communities to become active agents of peace while fostering healthy relationships among conflicting parties. Sustainable peace cannot be achieved without addressing deep-seated social injustices, inequalities, and structural violence. Transformation prioritizes nonviolent approaches to change, including dialogue, education, reconciliation, and policy reforms.

Despite its contributions to peacebuilding, Conflict Transformation Theory has faced several criticisms:

Critics argue that the theory is overly idealistic and difficult to implement in deeply polarized societies where hostilities run high. And that, the long-term focus of the theory may not be suitable for urgent and escalating conflicts that require quick interventions; while community participation is crucial, external support (from

governments or international bodies) is often needed, which can create dependency. It is therefore difficult to measure the success of conflict transformation initiatives, as change occurs over extended periods.

Unlike conflict resolution, which often deals with symptoms, this theory tackles the structural and relational roots of conflicts. Focusing on long-term social change, conflict transformation fosters enduring peace rather than temporary ceasefires. The theory acknowledges the importance of local cultures and traditions in peacebuilding efforts. It empowers local communities to be actively involved in peace processes, making interventions more effective and relevant.

The Conflict Transformation Theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for studying how peace education initiatives influence community members' behaviors in Nigeria. Its application can be seen in several ways: First, peace education initiatives teach conflict resolution skills, tolerance, and nonviolent communication, helping individuals and groups shift from adversarial to cooperative mindsets. Again, training and sensitization programs encourage individuals to take ownership of peace efforts, fostering self-reliance in managing disputes. Peace education can highlight systemic issues (such as ethnic discrimination, economic disparities, and social injustices) that contribute to conflict, pushing for policy changes. Fostering dialogue and reconciliation which is one of the core tenets of this theory, peace education helps transform hostile intergroup relations into positive, cooperative engagements. Educating community members on nonviolent ways of resolving disputes can reduce the likelihood of violent confrontations and cycles of revenge. While challenges exist in its practical implementation, its strengths make it a valuable framework for addressing conflicts in Nigeria and beyond, hence its relevance for this study.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study was collected primarily through qualitative methods. A survey research design was adopted, utilizing Key Informant Interviews (KII) as the primary data collection instrument. A total of fourteen (14) individuals were interviewed across Awe Local Government Area in Nasarawa State and Guma Local Government Area in Benue State. The key informants included one NGO worker, one traditional leader, two security personnel, one religious leader, one youth leader, and two residents each from Awe and Guma Local Government Area respectively. Key informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on specific criteria, including age, residency status, duration of stay in the area, experience, and knowledge relevant to the study. The information generated was analyzed qualitatively using content analysis, allowing for an in-depth exploration of themes and patterns related to the study's focus.

Presentation and Interpretation of Data

This section presents the qualitative findings on the nature, types, methods, and influence of peace education initiatives on community members' behaviours in conflict-prone areas in Benue and Nasarawa states. The data was obtained using the Key Informant Interviews (KII). The findings are categorized thematically for clarity.

On the nature and types of peace education initiatives in the study areas, the data gathered from Awe and Guma Local Government Area suggests that peace education initiatives vary based on the socio-political context of the communities. The main types identified by most of the interviewed key informant include: Formal Peace Education which includes peace-related curricula introduced in schools. Informal Peace Education is delivered through community-based programmes, workshops, and training sessions. Most of the informants highlighted faith-based organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and traditional institutions as key actors in providing informal peace education.

Another type identified by the key informants is Mass media, including radio, television, and social media, were frequently mentioned as platforms promoting peace awareness. One of the interviewed Key Informants emphasized the role thus:

Radio jingles, television campaigns, and online discussions are all shaping attitudes toward peaceful coexistence. Traditional rulers and community elders also play a pivotal role in peace education through

customary mediation and conflict resolution practices. Storytelling, folk songs, and cultural festivals all serve as informal means of instilling peace values in younger generations as well.

One common method identified by most of the key informants was organizing training sessions for youth leaders, religious leaders, and community elders. These training programmes according to them have equipped participants with skills in mediation, dialogue facilitation, and nonviolent communication. Other informants highlighted community peace forums as effective methods for resolving disputes and fostering understanding.

One of the key informants opined as follow:

Our community peace forums bring together conflicting groups to discuss grievances and seek amicable resolutions. We also have peace clubs in schools and tertiary institutions here; and they are also significant platforms for promoting tolerance and understanding among students. Teachers and facilitators in our schools here are also guiding students in discussions on conflict resolution and coexistence.

Finally, on the influence of Peace Education Initiatives on Community Behaviour, most of the informants noted a decrease in communal clashes, particularly in areas where peace education initiatives have been consistently implemented. This impact was especially observed in communities where youth were actively engaged in peacebuilding. Respondents from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds reported an increase in mutual respect and understanding. They attributed this shift to interfaith dialogues and sensitization programmes.

One key informant acknowledged the influence of peace education in their community thus:

Exposure to peace education has led to a decline in violent confrontations in our community. Instead, dialogue, negotiation, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms are increasingly being used. Communities like ours that have implemented peace education initiatives have stronger social bonds and improved communal trust today. I can confidently tell you that ongoing dialogue and educational efforts have mitigated long-standing animosities in my area, all thanks to our exposure to peace education.

DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal significant insights into the nature, methods, and influence of peace education initiatives on the behaviours of community members in Nasarawa and Benue states of Nigeria. Analyzing qualitative data obtained from community members, peace education facilitators, and stakeholders, the study establishes patterns of behavioural transformation and the effectiveness of peace education programmes. These findings are situated within existing literature on peace education, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution.

One of the primary findings is that peace education initiatives in Nigeria take diverse forms, ranging from formal educational curricula in schools to informal community-based training and media campaigns which is consistent with Salomon (2002) and Harris & Morrison (2003) assertion that, peace education programmes are not monolithic but vary based on sociopolitical contexts. In regions with histories of violent conflict, peace education often adopts a transformative approach focused on reconciliation, trauma healing, and inter-group dialogue. Conversely, in relatively stable communities, peace education is primarily preventative, aiming to instill values of tolerance, cooperation, and active citizenship.

Empirical studies by [9] emphasize the role of context in shaping peace education strategies, a theme that resonates with this study's findings. For instance, in communities with ethnic and religious tensions, peace education focuses on deconstructing stereotypes and fostering cross-cultural understanding. Similarly, UNESCO (2018) highlights the integration of peace education into school curricula, a model also observed in Nigeria, particularly in schools where conflict-sensitive education is promoted.

The study identifies multiple methods used in delivering peace education, reflecting findings from previous research. The common methods include workshops and training; align with the participatory learning model described by [19]. Participants engage in role-playing, storytelling, and problem-solving exercises that promote non-violent conflict resolution. The second methods identified by this study is community dialogue and mediation programmes; these are key in fostering reconciliation in post-conflict settings. The finding aligns with Lederach's [15] theory of conflict transformation, which underscores the importance of sustained dialogue for building trust and social cohesion.

Further Findings from this study indicate that radio programs, social media campaigns, and community theatre performances play significant roles in disseminating peace messages. And this is consistent with empirical work by [16], who found that media can positively influence peacebuilding when used to promote narratives of coexistence rather than division. The study also found the school-based peace Education in the areas of study. Some schools incorporate peace education into civic education and social studies curricula, reflecting UNESCO's [4] best practices on fostering a culture of peace through early education.

The study also finds that peace education has profound impacts on individual and communal behaviours. Three major dimensions of behavioural change were identified: Reduction in Violent Conflicts: Respondents reported that exposure to peace education led to decreased involvement in violent disputes. This aligns with studies by [9], which argue that peace education can reduce aggression by reshaping individuals' perceptions of adversaries. Participants in mediation programs demonstrated a higher likelihood of resolving disputes through dialogue rather than confrontation. Increased Inter-Ethnic and Inter-Religious Tolerance: The study supports findings by [9] that peace education fosters mutual respect among diverse groups. Informants expressed a greater willingness to collaborate across ethnic and religious lines, citing personal transformations in how they perceive "the other." Empowerment and Active Citizenship: Community members who underwent peace education training reported increased participation in local governance and peacebuilding initiatives. This finding is in line with [7] argument that positive peace entails structural changes that promote social justice and active engagement in community affairs.

Despite their positive impacts, peace education initiatives face notable challenges. The study finds that peace education programmes are often donor-dependent, making their sustainability uncertain. This echoes the concerns raised by [7] who note that peace education programmes in conflict-affected societies often suffer from funding shortages and lack of government buy-in.

Some key informants, especially those in deeply divided communities, initially resisted peace education messages due to entrenched historical grievances. Studies by [9] suggest that transformative peace education requires prolonged engagement to overcome resistance and internalized prejudices. Peace education efforts are often concentrated in urban and semi-urban areas, leaving many rural communities underserved. This finding corresponds with the work of [19], who argue that accessibility is a key determinant of peace education effectiveness.

Finally, findings from this study establish that peace education initiatives significantly influence community behaviours by reducing violent conflicts, fostering tolerance, and promoting active citizenship. However, challenges such as limited institutional support, resistance to change, and accessibility gaps must be addressed for peace education to achieve its full potential. The findings reinforce existing literature while offering new insights into the localized impacts of peace education in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the influence of peace education initiatives on the behaviors of community members in Nasarawa and Benue states of Nigeria. The findings highlight that peace education plays a crucial role in fostering behavioural transformation by promoting conflict resolution skills, tolerance, and active citizenship. The study identified various peace education approaches, including workshops, community dialogues, school-based programmes, and media campaigns, each contributing uniquely to peacebuilding efforts. The study also found that peace education significantly reduces violent conflicts by equipping individuals with non-violent

dispute resolution techniques. It also enhances inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance, fostering social cohesion in communities with historical tensions.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study identified several challenges, including inadequate institutional support, resistance to change, and limited reach in rural areas. These barriers hinder the sustainability and effectiveness of peace education programmes. To maximize the benefits of peace education and ensure long-term societal impact, targeted interventions must be implemented at policy, institutional, and community levels.

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Nigerian government should integrate peace education into national education policies to ensure its sustainability and formal adoption in schools and community programmes. Universities and teacher training institutes should also develop specialized courses on peace education to build a skilled workforce dedicated to peacebuilding efforts. Ministries of Education and relevant agencies should collaborate with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to expand peace education programmes across all states in Nigeria.
2. Government and NGOs should prioritize extending peace education initiatives to underserved rural areas where conflict prevention measures are often lacking. Mobile peace education units and community-based trainers should be deployed to reach remote regions, ensuring inclusivity in peace education efforts. The use of local languages and culturally relevant content should be emphasized to enhance community engagement and understanding.
3. Community leaders, religious institutions, and youth organizations should be actively involved in peace education design and implementation to ensure grassroots participation. Peace education programmes should include community-driven peacebuilding initiatives, allowing members to take ownership of the conflict resolution process.
4. National and community radio stations should air regular peace education programmes to reinforce positive behavioural change at the grassroots level. Social media platforms should also be utilized to promote peace narratives, counter misinformation, and facilitate intergroup dialogue among young people. The development of digital peace education materials, including e-learning modules and mobile applications, should be encouraged as well to reach a wider audience.
5. Long-term engagement strategies should be adopted to address resistance among individuals and groups with deep-seated prejudices. Testimonies and success stories from individuals who have benefited from peace education should be widely shared to inspire broader acceptance; as well as conflict-sensitive approaches should be employed to navigate sensitive historical grievances and promote reconciliation.

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