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**TOWARDS UTILIZING NEW DIGITAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES FOR THE
PROMOTION OF PEACE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

James Okolie-Osemene

Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

Recent events in Nigeria have shown that the country cannot move forward without considering peace education in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. To make this realistic, it is crucial, if a wider audience is to be reached, that new digital media technologies are utilized in the processes of peace education teaching and learning. This article examines the possibilities of utilizing digital media technologies in promoting peace education in Nigeria based on primary and secondary sources of literature relevant to the issues. With the help of new digital media technologies, peace education will improve public sense of security in Nigeria. The study advocates for immediate use of new digital media in peace education teaching and learning. The argument this article presents is that peace education using new digital media must be seen as a core national project and therefore taken seriously by stakeholders because peace is synonymous with development.

Keywords: peace education, development, new digital media, education, Nigeria

Introduction

Peace education is the process of acquiring the skills, values and knowledge that promote harmonious relationships among people in the society. Peace education could be formal or informal. Prasad (2012) asserts that peace education views the world as one whole, a single community, a fellowship of human beings who have the same instincts of hunger and sex, the same aspirations of generosity and fellow-feeling, and helps people to feel more for other people, enable them to change the exploitative and oppressive society, and to create a non-violent and just society.

The new wave of threats to national peace and stability in Nigeria has taken an unusual dimension to the extent that people who were rarely frightened are now forced to abandon their places of work and business in the name of bomb scares. The spate of kidnapping and other forms of criminal activities including festering ethno-religious and identity-based conflicts in various parts of the country make it very necessary for stakeholders to give adequate attention to peace education. New digital media technologies have become significant in addressing the increasing wave of internal security threat which undermines flow of economic activities. New digital technology refers to computer mediated systems which are enhanced by the internet and satellite technology.

Recent events in the country have made it crucial for Nigeria to move towards utilizing the great benefits of new digital media in peace education considering the increased threat to peace and security in the country. According to UNESCO, “greater access to information and improved communication among different sectors of the population are vital for building a culture of peace in Africa” (Akibu, 2010, p. 108). An important tool for business growth, social activities and research in Nigeria is the internet, including the use of new digital media. This interest is well integrated into education, business, and social activities in developed countries, so Nigeria, it may be said, is attempting giant strides in embracing its usefulness and applications (Achimugu, et al, 2009, p. 40). An area that is yet to explore the use of new media technology is peace education. The level of interest in the use of new digital media technologies in peace education has not yet increased, because the opportunities to maximize the advantages of these new media technologies are yet to percolate into various institutions in Nigeria.

The internet has revolutionized access to information for the business world, libraries, education and individuals. Small or large, a computer network exists in these areas to provide computer users with the means of communicating and transferring information electronically (Ogunsola, 2005). Utilizing new digital media in peace education offers great opportunities for sustainable peace in Nigeria because through this media it becomes easier to reshape the mindset of youth. In recent studies for instance, as part of its mission to educate key audiences about peacebuilding and conflict management, the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) in February 2012 activated a virtual Global Peacebuilding Center that provided younger audiences and educators with substantial peacebuilding resources and activities, including educational materials, a virtual passport experience, and many ways for young people to learn about the importance of peacebuilding (USIP, 2012). The three tiers of government in Nigeria have the resources to take such steps to ensure that institutions are empowered to make peace education effective with new digital media. In this article, the benefits of utilizing new digital media to promote peace education in Nigeria are examined, as well as institutional responsibility for using new digital media to promote peace education.

The Concept of Education

Okolo (2009, p. 374) sees the link between education and development in contemporary society as essential in the preparation of everyone (children, youth, adults, women and men) both for their self sustenance and for functional participation in grappling effectively with the challenges of social, economic, political, scientific and technological development of their respective societies. Accordingly, education is the “articulation of informal opportunities for self-improvement, non-formal structures for the inoculation and sustenance of basic and post basic life skills, and formal systems for the awakening and continuous development of the human potential” (Obanya, 2004 as cited in Okolo 2009, p. 374). The use of new digital media technologies in peace education is also crucial for both development and stability which are synonymous with peace in the society.

Olarinde and Onifade (2010, p. 82) on the other hand see education as “a dynamic instrument of social change that can bring about rapid development of a nation’s total resources, hence the need for constant evaluation of the educational system to ensure its adequacy and continued relevance to national needs and objectives.” Even (Urevbu, 1984, p. 1) is of the view that education “describes the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, faculties trained and skills developed.” Leadership and the quality of education have significant implications for sustainable development in the country.

Peace

When we talk of peace we mean a political condition that ensures justice and social stability through formal and informal institutions, practices, and norms. Several conditions must be met for peace to be reached and maintained:

- balance of political power among the various groups within a society, region, or, most ambitiously, the world;
- legitimacy for decision makers and implementers of decisions in the eyes of their respective group, as well as those of external parties, duly supported through transparency and accountability;
- recognised and valued interdependent relationships among groups fostering long-term cooperation during periods of agreement, disagreement, normality, and crisis;
- reliable and trusted institutions for resolving conflicts;
- sense of equality and respect, in sentiment and in practice, within and without groups and in accordance with international standards;
- mutual understanding of rights, interests, intents, and flexibility despite incompatibilities (Miller, 2005, p. 55).

In addition, Nwodo (2010, p. 117) admirably points out that, “the alluring nature of peace that makes investors establish businesses in peaceful environments thereby contributing immensely towards the development of such country.” This means that peace education is the medium through which sustainable peace and development are connected; considering the fact that tranquility attracts foreign investors and development partnerships.

Conceptualizing Peace Education

Peace is very important in every community or society. It is a key ingredient for sustainable development. According to the Coalition of Nigerian NGOs on Health, Population and Development (CONNOHPD), “the lack of intellectual development as well as the lack of trust and respect for one another also contribute to the distabilisation of the peace in a community”

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(1997, p. 34). Therefore, utilizing new digital media in peace education will further promote intellectual development, trust, and mutual respect for one another as it embraces a wider audience. Peace education is the cultivation of proper conflict resolution knowledge and skill applications that promote peace and social justice. Peace education creates awareness and enlightens people on the right attitudes towards handling situations that could lead to conflict. It also helps individuals to be conflict sensitive, know the ingredients of conflict and avoid them.

Gumut (2006, p. 165) sees peace education as, “the deliberate attempt to educate children and adults in the dynamics of conflict and the promotion of peacemaking skills in homes, schools, and communities throughout the world, using all the channels and instruments of socialization.” He maintains that it provides education for global security and focuses on direct, organized violence, especially the institutions of war and armed conflicts, while employing a framework based on recent theories of human security. Peace education also includes human and social dimensions of peace.

The concept stands for all processes involved in inculcating the culture of peaceful co-existence in individual or groups formally or informally (Lawal, 2005). On the other hand, Akpuru-Aja (2007, p. 26) posits that peace education is “the process of proactive enlightenment on the knowledge and skills of observing and responding to early warning indicators.” New digital media is very relevant here especially when its early warning indicators are involved.

Peace education stimulates attitudinal and behavioral changes. It also promotes transformational leadership. It is right to point out here that peace education makes it possible for individuals and groups to appreciate peace and get to know that peace is synonymous with development. Knowing this truism motivates groups to adopt principles of conflict resolution and properly manage conflicts so that they do not escalate. Peace education makes it possible for people from all walks of life to be enlightened on issues that concern peace, conflict, violence and even crisis as well as their connection. This will make it possible for them to appreciate peace which connotes more than a mere absence of hostilities, but rather an absence of conflict as possible. With the help of new digital media technologies, the state of peace would be distinguished from various techniques that simply avoid conflicts or employ violent or coercive approaches to engage in, manage, or resolve conflict.

The Benefits of New Digital Media to Promote Peace Education

The applications of new digital media to communication, facilitated by transmission hardware, are very significant to information sharing and circulation (Osazee-Odia, 2008, p. 347) especially in peace education. Examples of new media technologies include digital satellite television, global satellite telephones, internet websites, mobile telephony, short message service facilities, and multimedia equipment, such as video, audio, and pod cast facilities, among others. Some of these products consist of user-generated content, while others depend on service providers. New digital media technologies are veritable tools in improving the effectiveness of peace education. Akpan-Ita (2008, p. 44) posited that, “modern conflict no longer respects the line between the military and the civilians.” This is why policy makers in Nigeria need to consider giving peace education adequate attention and embark on peace advocacy projects through new digital media to serve as a preventive measure.

Peace education need not always be formal; it can be carried out in an informal manner in most communities. Using new digital media in evaluating peace education is an imminent need in Nigeria as continuing to improve it, wherever it is available, is important. To predict the likely results of utilizing new digital media in peace education there are few areas to address. These

include, but are not limited to the following: visible reduction in social conflict, shaping perceptions, promoting integration, sharing case studies, peace and conflict awareness, as well as a wider reach to different groups in the society. This expanded reach would make it easier to learn from conflict indicators and trends in other parts of the world, train students and lecturers to acquire skills in the use of new digital media, reduce campus and societal violence, increase in societal harmony and cooperation, and increase positive activities in the society.

New digital media technologies offer great opportunities to make the teaching and learning of peace more effective. Effective use of new digital media in teaching and learning of peace education will provide adequate information which according to Umunadi (2009, p. 117) is recognized as a catalyst for both personal and national development. The essence of using new digital media is to communicate peace. It will be relevant in the monitoring and evaluation of peace education projects especially among youth in rural areas of the country.

The rationale for utilizing new digital media technologies in promoting peace education considering the benefits of globalisation, is building in people the universal values and behaviors on which a culture of peace is predicated, including the development of non-violent conflict resolution skills and a commitment to working together to realize a shared and preferred future (Kester, 2009). Though it is gradually becoming part of the people, this should be highly encouraged considering the percentage of Nigerians that have access to new digital media technologies. It could be formal or informal in terms of delivery. Formal terms of delivery are concerned with direct teaching and making training materials available, while informal involves peace building at the community level through the advocacy of various markets and groups.

Strategies to Adopt New Digital Media in Primary and Secondary Schools

In an attempt to utilize digital media technologies for peace education, it is important that the enlightenment of people on the relevance of peace education is carried out. It is pertinent for stakeholders to adopt a holistic strategy to ensure that new digital media becomes effective in shaping the mindsets of youth and adults on issues of peace, especially conflict management, conflict transformation, peacemaking, and negotiation skills. The focus should be on primary and secondary schools.

There is a need for peace education evaluation with new digital media, especially among youth, to monitor and evaluate peace projects. Schools could partner with non-governmental organizations (NGO) and other institutions that carry out advocacy projects. With the help of new digital media, Nigerians may improve on the following peace education skills, knowledge, and attitudes, including: skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, assertiveness, reading, self-control, sensitivity, cooperation; knowledge content, such as self-awareness, peace and conflict issues, human rights, justice and power, gender issues, and social justice; and appropriate attitude dispositions regarding self-respect, honesty, obedience, open-mindedness, gender equity, tolerance, and adaptation to change, (Alimba, 2010, p. 190). Some ways of utilizing new digital media in schools are as follows: bringing different digital technologies into peace and conflict studies teaching and learning, capacity building and training of trainers, using digital technology to source information on peace studies, and also creating peace blogs accessible through digital mediums.

Institutional Responsibility Regarding New Digital Media

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It is the responsibility of the federal governments, including the Ministries of Education, Information, Internal Affairs, and Commerce, and their associated state government level agencies, as well as NGOs, research institutions, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), Women in Peace Building Program (WIPNET), multi-national corporations (especially those engaged in business in the Niger Delta) to initiate programs that include peace education.

The purpose of peace education concerns education that facilitates achievement of peace and related sets of social values, through learning to recognize, confront, and practice alternatives to the multiple forms of violence (Gumut, 2006, p. 166). Government agencies should ensure that this purpose is actualised because peace is a process that has to be developed. Rather than being part of the problem as observed by Best (2006, p. 111), governments should reinvigorate the teaching and learning of peace education by providing an enabling environment and resources through the various ministries. To make this achievable there is a need for collaboration between the ministries of education, information, communications, and defense with police departments, science and technology institutions, youth and social development organizations, as well as with culture and tourism government and business representatives. Proper use of new digital media in peace education keeps people engaged and is proven to be a useful tool for academic activities in peace education. It also serves to increase positive social interactions. With the help of churches, mosques, and other religious institutions, schools may embark on public peace campaigns utilizing new digital media technologies in the country.

Disaster and conflict prevention and management may be made possible at the grassroots through the adoption of new digital technology. When such technology is available, it is possible to put effective early warning systems in place against natural disasters such as flooding, erosions, crop failures, epidemic diseases, landslides and other natural or manmade disasters. This technology may positively impact the lives of the people at the grassroots. With the help of new digital media, people may easily assess the level of success in rural and urban areas.

Challenges of Utilizing New Digital Media

Some of the challenges that face the utilization of new media in peace education are worth mentioning. For instance, some financial and institutional constraints hinder the progress of using new digital media in peace education, political education, and democratic participation. These areas could be expanded with increased availability and accessibility to new digital media at the grassroots level. Since access to information and information exchange is enhanced through the technology, it is expected that political participation also increases.

One of the major problems militating against the adoption of new digital media in teaching and learning peace education is power supply problem. Umeadi (2009, p.121) sees electricity as a major problem in Nigeria. Therefore, stakeholders should be able to harness these energy resources to ensure that the problem of inadequate power supply is resolved.

The Way Forward

To implement the use of new digital media technologies, there should be immediate training for teachers and lecturers in the promotion of peace education in Nigerian institutions. The curricular should be updated so that the teaching of peace education is part of mainstream teaching and learning, including how to use new digital media. For example, they need training on peace education presentation skills and computer projector uses for peace advocates or

practitioners. Institutions should embark on teaching of peace education with an up-to-date peace education curriculum that is mainstreamed.

One of the most dramatic advances in communication potential is that of computer data communications systems. Computers are available in many formats for use in industries, businesses, hospitals, schools, universities, transport networks, and individual homes. With new digital media, the gap between the rich and poor should be addressed through peace education. This will ensure attitudinal change and transformation. New digital media technologies are relevant to improved peace education teaching and learning in the country. This author's opinion is that peace education which must start at the family level to promote harmony in the society. With the help of new digital media in the schools and communities, peace education will have a positive impact.

Conclusion

With the support of new digital media, peace education may be promoted to address social justice, conflict drivers in Nigeria may be redirected toward peace, and restless youth may be transformed. The issue of attitudinal change in governance and leadership electoral processes may benefit the war against corruption, reduce ethnic conflict, maintain constructive social controls, promote interpersonal relations, and encourage joint problem solving. Through peace education, people may envision commitment to leadership based on the core values of peace and integrity, and respect for diversity.

Peace education has demonstrated that it contributes to the social growth of all children, especially as it helps them develop characteristics essential for the attainment of peace, that includes a sense of dignity and self-worth, a confidence to question their values, improve their communication skills, acquire an ethical awareness, and practice empathy for others (Harris as cited in Chertok 2007, p. 35).

Only paying lip service to the adoption of new digital media technologies in schools undermines the successful teaching and learning of peace education in Nigerian schools. Utilizing new digital media is necessary because utilizing the benefits of the new media is one of the most effective channels to reach and teach the public. Finally, making use of new digital media in peace education should be a national project that is taken seriously by stakeholders because peace is synonymous with development.

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