Critical Literacy: The Role of Peace Education in Sustainable National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The thrust of this paper is to x-ray the meaning of critical literacy and examine the role of peace education as a catalyst for sustainable national development in Nigeria. Literacy is the ability to actively reflect on texts, better understand power, inequality and justice in human relationships. The current ugly spate of conflicts and social injustice in the Nigerian society places or demands for peace education programme that will bring about sustainable national development. The height of social injustice in Nigeria has increased militancy, kidnapping, banditry, farmers'/herdsmen crisis, youth restiveness and terrorism. Peace education is a process of peace building that teaches people how to settle differences. Any nation that is bedeviled with conflicts and crisis cannot sustain her national development. Peace education is, therefore, a type of literacy education that educates children and adults in the dynamics of conflicts and the promotion of peace making skills in homes, schools and communities through channels of socialization. This paper therefore takes the position that critical literacy and peace education are crucial in achieving sustainable national development. Some recommendations are made as way forward.

Keywords: Critical literacy, social justice, peace education, and sustainable national development.

Introduction

Literacy as a concept is multifaceted. Literacy has to do with the ability to encode messages correctly using acceptable symbols with the corresponding power to decode the message meaningfully (Otagburuagu, 2007). Fundamentally, literacy is synonymous with reading and writing. According to Otagburuagu (2000), literacy the functionalism movement in the 19th century with its emphasis on significance and purposefulness brought a new thrust in the meaning of literacy with the inclusion of numeracy as a third component. Literacy therefore comprises ability to read, write, count and use numbers for problem solving.

Literacy is one of the major anchor pins which the world needs for stability and development. Literacy is therefore evolving and multidimensional when critical to human development process. In a broad conceptual meaning, literacy is both a process skills acquisition for productive and purposeful living. It is man's total empowerment. Literacy has therefore become the indices for capacity building and development. This is why international agencies and world bodies like United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and the World Bank use literacy index in policy formulation and in the classification of societies. In spite of the multidimensional nature of literacy, it can be classified into three types: text-based literacy which has to do with ability to learn to read, read to learn, locate, cycle and interpret information from charts, graphs, and visual displays. It also entails the interpretation and application of information. The second type is representational literacy which involves the ability to understand how meaning is created by analyzing information. The third type of literacy is called tool literacy which involves the ability to use technology and computers to learn.

The state of literacy in Nigeria has become the major defining factor of her economic advancement. Nigeria as one of the developing nations falls within the pitiable high illiteracy index where the World Bank Report of 2002 shows that 50% of the World's illiterate population lives in Africa.

The definition of literacy that captures all spheres of human lives for a sustainable development is the one captured by Omoruyi and Omage (2013) that literacy is a tool for personal empowerment and a means for social development. The authors further expatiate that literacy is the heart of basic education for Education for All (EFA) and essential for eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy.

Every good quality literacy programme is aimed at equipping learners with literacy skills for life and further learning. The recent spate of conflicts, violence, kidnapping, banditry and terrorism call for a kind of literacy that will imbibe in Nigerian citizenry the correct and positive attitude to fostering and promoting peace that will enable Nigeria take her rightful place in the advancement of technology in the global economy. The spate of violence in Nigeria across all the geo-political zones has denied many Nigerians of peace as well as slowed down economic activities. The school curriculum should therefore be able to provide the type of literacy that can make

learners think critically and understand universal values that will transform into peaceful co-existence (Ukume, Ochogwu & Chen, 2013).

Critical literacy

In order to imbibe the right attitudes, skills and values that will transform into peaceful co-existence, there is need to inculcate critical literacy in the Nigeria school system. Literacy is a continuum, that is why Onukuogu (2002) notes that the highest point of literacy is critical and functional literacy which involves complicated skills that empower one to react and to respond appropriately to the voices of the written text. Critical literacy is a central thinking skill that is developed continuously through the questioning and examination of ideas, as well as seek one to synthesise, analyse, interpret, evaluate and respond to texts, read or listen to. Critical literacy can also be referred to as the process of one's awareness of his/her experience realized through reading and writing. According to Topchat.com 2021, critical literacy is a learning approach where students are expected to examine diverse texts to understand the relationship of language and the power it holds. In critical literacy, students can critically analyse and evaluate the meaning of texts as they relate to diverse issues and topics such as equity, power, peace and conflict as well as social justice. The contents found is various texts are used to equip students with a critical stance, where they can respond or take action towards an issue in the society. The implication of critical literacy is that when students read or listen to texts, they are expected to interpret, analyze and evaluate the context as they relate them to their daily experiences. Students' comprehension and interpretation of texts will guide them to relate to issues responsibly.

Critical literacy encourages readers to question, explore, or challenge issues raised in texts, be it written or spoken. Critical literacy helps learners to examine general issues in the society and reflect on them for transformative action that could lead to a positive change.

In the contemporary Nigerian society, there are so many societal issues and challenges going on. Many educators, authors and public analysts leave both the electronic and social media. The spate of economic, political and religious crisis happening in Nigeria calls for a kind of critical literacy that will help the citizenry inculcate some levels of harmony and tolerance among themselves. Some of these social vices have actually caused some social injustice in the society. There is therefore the need to embrace peace education in schools and the society generally.

Critical literacy and social justice

The term social justice refers to the distribution of wealth, opportunities and privileges within society. Individuality gives way to the struggle of social justice. Social justice in the real sense should promote fairness and equity across many aspects of society. Social justice, for instance promotes equal economic, educational and workplace opportunities. When there is social justice, it ensures and guarantees safety, peace and security of individuals and communities in the larger society.

Maiese and Burgess (2020) explain that social justice is when members of a society receive fair treatment. These authors note that lack of social justice causes conflict among the different groups in a society. Comber (2015) observes that one of the major problems confronting most nations is poverty which is often caused by unequal distribution of sources. Given the global escalation of gaps between the rich and poor, educators all over the world need to put poverty on the agenda in policy making and practices. Even though poverty is relative, most of the world populations including Nigeria have large groups of people living in poverty as a result of social injustice. It has been observed that all the unemployed, under employed and working class are living in poverty.

Piketty (2014) notes that the unequal wealth distribution on a global scale is mostly affected by the young and low-skilled workers. Social injustice has become prevalent in almost every facet of the Nigerian society. This has brought about social vices that have eluded the country of peace which has threatened the peaceful co-existence among individuals and groups. This of course, has also created insecurity in the face of economic down turn. These have created crises and conflicts in the country. These conflicts cut across ethnic, tribal, class, political and religious lines. The recent spate of banditry, kidnapping, farmers'/herdsmen crisis and terrorism cannot be unconnected to the height of social injustice in Nigeria. Insecurity has become a cog in the wheel of Nigeria's economic development, technological advancement as well as quality service delivery. All these challenges have denied the nation of sustainable National development.

The current spate of violence and civil unrest in Nigeria caused by social injustice calls for a kind of literacy for the youths that will make them shun unethical acts and imbibe peace and the right skills in conflict management and resolution that will bring about social and economic progress for sustainable national developmental (Ukume, Ochugwu & Chen, 2013). Critical literacy and social justice have to be merged to better understand inequality and injustice in human relationships. This is because, the development of critical literacy skills enables people to interpret messages in the modern world through a critical literacy lens (Ogenyi & Nwokolo, 2013). These authors list the following acts to achieve peace through critical literacy;

- Learn what kind of people to become and what kind of society to make;
- To understand and question socially constructed concepts, such as power,

inequality, and injustice in human relationships;
- Question the attitudes, beliefs, issues of power relations and interrogate such other societal issues like poverty, education and lack of equity.
- Become thoughtful, active and peaceful citizens.

These can principally be achieved through peace education. Peace education, therefore becomes a vital aspect of critical literacy to achieve sustainable national development. The researchers of this paper believe that the contents of peace education have the capacity to address most of the social challenges that have bedeviled Nigeria as a nation and curb violent acts as well as promote peaceful co-existence.

Concept of peace Education and Sustainable National Development

Peace education is a process of peace building that teaches people to settle differences in non-violent way. It is also the process of acquiring values, knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours to live in harmony with oneself, others and the natural environment (en.wikipedia.org).

According to Ukume, Ochogwu and Chen (2013), the spate of maiming and killing of innocent citizens in Nigeria in their productive years, calls for a kind of education that will forestall long lasting peace. Many vibrant persons whose roles are critical in the socio-economic progress of Nigeria have been forced to abandon their homes and places of legitimate business for fear of being kidnapped or killed. Peace education has therefore become a necessity for developing critical literacy. As noted, peace is a key ingredient for sustainable development (Okohe-Osemene (2012).

Peace refers to a political situation that ensures justice and social stability through formal and informal institutions, practices and norms. Peace does not necessarily mean the absence of war or conflict; rather it is learning how to deal with conflict in a way that does not put the rights and needs of one person over the other. Peace is all about conflict resolution skills that have respect for the individual. Montessori notes that "averting war is the work of politicians but establishing peace is the work of education".

Peace education is therefore a deliberate attempt to educate children and adults in the dynamics of conflicts and the promotion of peace making skills in homes, schools and communities, using all the necessary channels of instruments of socialization (Gamut, 2012). The importance of peace education cannot be over-emphasized as it is one of the major keys or approaches in conflicts and violence. Peace education has been given an international recognition as a legal instrument within critical literacy. The charter of UN has since served as inspiration for the development of peace as educators aspire to help in the global effort to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war".

The United Nation Children Education Fund (UNICEF) sees peace education as the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behaviour charge that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence. Fundamentally, peace education is aimed at countering a culture of war by promoting a culture of peace. It also challenges the assumption that violence is innate to the human condition and seeks to equip students with the capacity to resolve conflict without violence (www.swisspeace.ch>apropos-Richard Wayman/2021).

According to Wayman (2021), peace education aspires to train students to become responsible citizens who are open to differences, capable of empathy and solidarity. This can occur both within and across borders and social groups. Persons exposed to peace education can deconstruct the foundations of violence and take action and responsibility to advance the prospects of peace.

Wayman (2021) further explains that peace education involves a wide range of approaches that focus on promoting individual and interpersonal skills; these include emotional awareness, anger management, empathy, cooperation and kindness. Other areas of peace education are social, cultural and political aspects of peace that focus an environmental education, development education, cross cultural studies and social justice. Nwauzi (2019) notes that the ugly trends of increased conflicts, militancy, kidnaping and youth restrictiveness have placed demand for peace education as a critical catalyst for sustainable development in Nigeria. Olowo (2016) recommends that there is need to introduce peace education programme in the Nigerian school system since there are many unresolved issues that need urgent attention. The author further explains that peace education will enable people adopt a positive attitude regarding the different issues they face through their lives and to develop the necessary skills to peaceful resolution of conflicts. This obviously will in turn impact positively on the society. There is urgent need therefore to develop a peace education programme in the national curriculum at all levels of education.

In citing, the report of Hawke Research Institute (2010), Olowo (2016) identifies the following keys as basic for peace education curriculum;

- Respect all life: respecting the rights and dignity of each human being.
- Non-violence: rejection of violence, obtaining justice by convincing and understanding.
- Sharing: developing attitudes and skills for living together in harmony, putting an end to exclusion and oppression.

- Listen to understand: giving everyone a chance to learn and share through the free flow of information.
- Preservation of the planet: making sure that progress and development are good for everyone and for the environment.
- Tolerance and solidarity: appreciating that people are different and that everyone has something to contribute on the community.
- Equality of man and woman: ensuring an equal place for men and women in building the society.
- Democracy: making decisions by having a say and giving others theirs.

Peace education and sustainable national development are symbiotic in nature. This is because, without peace which can be achieved through the principles of peace education, is the anchor point on which sustainable national development can be achieved. This is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development is also referred to as the idea that human beings should sustain by meeting their basic needs, while also making sure the future generations are able to meet their basic needs.

The relationship between peace education and sustainable development is imperative in every nation. When peace education thrives, the recipients or the learners are able to take proactive measures against conflicts and crisis that could be a bane of socio-economic development and political climate needed for a sustainable national development.

Ezenya and Mama-Joe (2019) note that no nation can achieve development in an atmosphere full of crisis and unrest. It is against this backdrop that it becomes imperative to include peace education in the education and literacy development system to inculcate strategies and skills in learners at all levels to engage in constructive means of solving or settling disputes.

Ezeanya and Mama-Joe (2019) further assert that the indispensability of peace in the process of nation building and development of a nation cannot continue to be debated. This is because, no nation can achieve development, not to talk of sustaining it in the face conflicts, crisis, unrest and insurgency. Business, industries, organizations and institutions cannot thrive where crisis and conflicts prevail. Developmental projects will be put on hold in any environment full of violence. It is therefore a common knowledge that no meaningful development can be achieved in a society devoid of peace.

Peace education as a critical literacy is therefore crucial in ensuring the development of any nation. This is obvious in the sense that peace education impacts in the citizenry the values and skills in handling conflicts and crisis for peaceful co-existence which creates an atmosphere for sustainable development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The spate of conflicts, kidnapping, militancy and insurgency in Nigeria have been a bane to her social, political and economic development. These conflicts and crisis are usually caused by social injustice in the society. Social injustice has become a clog in the wheel of sustainable national development. Critical literacy and social justice have to be merged for Nigerians to have a better understanding of inequality and injustice in human relationships. This situation therefore places demands on peace education that will enable people acquire the skills, attitudes and values in managing and settling conflicts. Peace education will help in the global effort to prevent the scourge of violence and sustain national development in Nigeria. The following recommendations are therefore made;

1. Peace education must be carefully incorporated into the school curriculum at all levels.
2. Teachers should be trained and retrained to enable them acquire the knowledge and skills as well as use appropriate teaching methods in teaching peace education
3. Arts and social studies curriculum contents should be reviewed to capture the contents of peace education in subjects like English language (reading comprehension) Literature-in English, History, Religious Studies, Social Studies, Government etc.
4. Grants should be made available for researchers in peace and conflict studies.
5. Peace education should be introduced as a course of discipline in the tertiary institutions.
6. Governance at all levels should avoid any acts that lend to social injustice.
7. Good governance should operate powerful process for social transformation that can sustain national development.

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