

PERSPECTIVE PAPER

Education for peace building in conflict hit regions in Africa: perspectives from Cameroon and Sudan

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ABSTRACT

In a continent replete with conflicts of all types, creating hazardous consequences, the quest for lasting peace becomes a highly sought option. Cameroon (Anglophone Regions) and Sudan are two among many African countries that have been wrecked by conflict with untold suffering resulting in both internal and external displacements. Many children have dropped out of school in both countries and in worse cases recruited as fighters. Those in different educational establishments live with trauma and the strong desire to avenge the death of their loved ones when the opportunity shows up. Understanding that in such situations the parties concerned seek to transcend ephemeral to long lasting solutions, this perspective paper examines to what level peace education has been considered in the primary and secondary school programmes in Cameroon and Sudan as a tool both to prevent and ameliorate the effect of conflicts. This study examined the subjects taught in primary and secondary schools in both countries, highlighting the subjects related to peace education. The results indicated that in both countries, peace education is not intentional since there is no direct subject on peace education on the curriculum. The study recommends that the example of African countries, like Uganda, Ethiopia amongst others, where peace education is taught, should be emulated and adapted in Cameroon and Sudan, as well as all other African countries where peace education is not part of the school curriculum. Peace education, especially to children at a tender age may guarantee better communities.

KEYWORDS:

Africa, Cameroon, Conflict, Education, Peace building, Sudan

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INTRODUCTION

Education is essential for promoting peace, managing, and transforming conflict and conflict-inducing structures¹. In particular, it is suggested that education can have a powerful and positive contribution to building and sustaining peace as it supports security and political, economic, and social transition and transformation². Evidence that the more people complete schooling, the lower the chance of conflict is important to an extent, but it is not fully persuasive. Paulson³ shows that since the late 1990s, the levels of education have increased substantially but there has been no reduction in armed conflicts. Peace education should therefore emphasize living harmoniously with diverse backgrounds, balancing unity and diversity through multi-perspectivity and identity recognition⁴. Peace education must cultivate critical thinking and empathy to counteract extremist ideologies, thereby fostering unity and resilience against violence⁵. Peace education according to Niyitunga⁶ is “the process of acquiring values and knowledge, and developing the attitudes, skills and behaviour needed to live in harmony with oneself, with others and with the natural environment”. It is on the basis of this that this paper seeks to examine the role education can play in peace building in Cameroon and Sudan. This paper attempts to answer the following questions: what are the subjects taught in the primary and secondary schools in Cameroon and Sudan? What subjects directly deal with peace education? and how can peace education bring sustainable peace in Cameroon and Sudan and to African as a whole? This perspective paper therefore examines the current state of education in the primary and secondary schools in Cameroon and Sudan and suggest the inclusion of subject directly related to peace education.

Just prior to and following the independence of Sudan in 1956, the country has experienced a series of internal wars and conflicts which have caused massive suffering, loss of lives and resources, and worst of all, these wars have ripped the social fabric of the nation. “Sudan, considered to be as one of the countries of multi-cultural, multi ethnicity and multi tribal, there is about 570 tribes, 57 ethnical groups”⁷. These different tribes and groups have coexisted peacefully for

thousands of years before conflicts set in. Some of these conflicts include the conflict between Northern and Southern Sudan, aggravated by the closed district policy developed by the British administration in Sudan (1898-1956). In the western part of the Sudan, the conflict in Darfur that erupted in 2003 and has claimed 300,000 people and displaced more than two million is still ongoing despite peace efforts by many external actors⁸. In 2011, 2012 and 2013 armed conflicts erupted in Blue Nile state [southern east] and Kordofan state [southern west] which cost the country thousands of lives and significantly affected the economy”⁹. Most recently, during Ramadan on 15 April 2023, an arm conflict began between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and its allies (collectively the Janjaweed coalition). All these conflicts have affected education seriously as schools have been shut down, learners displaced both internally and externally.

As for Cameroon, a country with two major cultures, francophones and anglophones, the sociopolitical crisis started in 2016 and deteriorated over time leading to violent clashes between government armed forces and the Ambazonian fighters. This conflict, which has resulted in killings and displacements,¹⁰ can be traced back to the controversies surrounding the reunification process that saw the collapse of the federal system. The failure to harmonise or sustain the two parallel systems, economically and administratively as equal entities only worsened the problem. In late 2016, anglophone common law lawyers and teachers’ Trade Unions organised a peaceful strike across the two anglophone regions to denounce among others, the systematic assimilation process of the Anglo-Saxon legal and educational systems into the francophone system. Non-State Armed Groups fighting the government adopted a school boycott/disruption strategy since 2017 to apply pressure on government¹¹. This has continued to this day and has completely disrupted education in many areas in the two anglophone regions, causing some of the youths to drop out of school and join separatist fighters to carry arms.

Implementing peace education in schools is directly impacting the lives of youths who, according to Georgi, a former senior official in UNFPA Burundi, “represent the biggest danger to peace consolidation, and who possess the energy and naturally optimism and innovative mind set”¹². Peacebuilding and education projects have been implemented in several countries in Africa, focusing on integrating life skills, peace education, and conflict-sensitive approaches into their education systems. The following African countries carry out peace education in their schools- Uganda (training for teachers and the development of peace clubs in schools), Ethiopia (focusing on conflict resolution, tolerance, and social cohesion), Somalia (integrating peace education and life skills into the curriculum to promote social cohesion and resilience), Kenya (focuses on promoting tolerance, conflict resolution, and social cohesion among students) and South Sudan (focuses on equity, social cohesion, and resilience among conflict-affected communities). From the cases mentioned here, it is clear that peace education is attainable and should be priority for conflict-hit regions. A better understanding of the notion of peace education will give clarity to our perspectives.

Peace Education

While peacekeeping and peace-making have played an important role in UN activities since its foundation, it was not until 1992 that the language of peacebuilding entered the institution’s lexicon, when the UN Secretary-General published an Agenda for Peace¹³. Given that the search for peace is a constant quest by many bodies, national and international, due to raging conflicts in many countries in the world today, peace education has become a common vocabulary in educational settings. Considering the opinion of Yaro and Longi¹⁴ that focusing on comprehensive development, promoting cultural understanding and respect, upholding justice, and embracing truth, African nations can work towards lasting peace and stability, one can only say that this is achievable through peace education. Peace education is an elusive concept defined differently in different works with the common idea being harmonious living. Gursel-Bilgin¹⁵ defines peace as tranquility and a state in which

there is no war. This definition simply means that the presence of peace signals the absence of war. The term ‘peace building’ emerged over 30 years ago “through the work of Johan Galtung, who called for the creation of peace building structures to promote sustainable peace by addressing the ‘root causes’ of violent conflict and supporting indigenous capacities for peace management and conflict resolution”¹³. Peace building is therefore a form of education because building here constitutes concepts, structures, mentalities amongst others. From a more authoritative point of view, peacebuilding is defined as “an action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict,”¹³. Peace education emerged as an academic field around the time the Peace Education Commission of the International Research Association was formed in 1973¹⁵. UNESCO further points out that the social and political purposes of peace education are directed towards the elimination of violence in all its various forms and manifestations¹⁵.

Education is a major vector in achieving a culture of peace. Yaro and Longi¹⁶ posit that “by bringing people together and encouraging discussions on topics that impact their well-being, it lays the foundation for development, strengthens governance, and eradicates ignorance and dictatorship”. It is the process of empowering people with the skills, dispositions, and knowledge to create a more peaceful social order¹⁷. The subfields of this group of approaches to peace education include nonviolent conflict resolution training, human rights education, and peace studies¹⁸. If these subfields and more that directly relate to peace education are consciously included in the primary and secondary school programmes in Cameroon and Sudan and other African countries, sustainable peace will be achieved. This is because peace education draws out from people their instincts to live peacefully with others and emphasizes peaceful values upon which society should be based¹⁹. While informal education is also essential, we are focused on formal education because according to UNESCO, “including peace education into formal schools is an essential strategy of peacebuilding”¹⁵.

METHODS

This study used qualitative data collection method, specifically documentation study. Document review and data from World Bank and UNESCO provided available data for this study. For document review, official policy documents, curriculum frameworks, textbooks, and reports from government and non-governmental organizations related to education in Cameroon and Sudan were reviewed while data from World Bank and UNESCO data bases were equally got from published documents from the organisations concerned. The research questions for this paper aimed at demonstrating to what extent the different educational policies and practices in Cameroon and Sudan have been purposefully implemented to promote peacebuilding efforts at the primary and secondary school levels through their school programmes. By so doing, our focus was to bring out the subjects taught in primary and secondary schools in Cameroon and Sudan and to examine if there are subjects that deal with peace education. This perspective paper ends by suggesting that there is a need to copy best practices from countries already carrying out peace education for more accommodating future communities not only for Cameroon and Sudan, but for African countries in General. It also points out the limitation of peace education in the absence of other measures that guarantee peace.

RESULTS

In this section, we present data on subjects taught in primary and secondary schools in Cameroon and Sudan, at what level peace education related subjects are taught, if at all they are being taught, and lastly, the importance of peace education at the basic education level in a country.

Subjects in primary schools

According to the World Bank²⁰, the Sudanese curriculum has remained unreformed and unquestioned over at least the last three decades. This statement implies that even subjects designed for this educational system have remained unchanged for the past three decades. In examining the role of education in the transformation of post conflict societies,

UNICEF¹⁴ posits that the transformative process “must recognize that the primary agency for managing the transformative process rests with the conflict-affected society itself”. With the understanding that education plays a huge role in peace building, the need to examine the subjects taught and whether or not they are related to peace education contents is crucial for countries in prolonged conflicts (Table 1).

The subjects are not arranged in this paper according to the different levels because the intention is to examine the subjects holistically as taught in the primary and secondary schools. The intention is to see which subjects directly deal with peace education since the two countries have been and are currently going through crises. Arora²¹ holds that the basic education curriculum in Sudan is designed to realize the following objectives:

- Strengthening of religious spirit among children
- Acquisition of language skills by children
- Complete development of the child
- Development of sense of belongingness to the mother country
- Protection and conservation of environment

It can only be judged from the fourth objective that issues related to peace are probably elements to be taught in relation to developing the sense of belongingness. The objectives do not explicitly project issues of peace building. The Sudanese primary education subjects present almost the same scenario as those of Cameroon where nothing about peace building is explicitly expressed. Sudanese primary schools as well as the Cameroon Anglophone primary schools have 12 subjects.

From the core skills and competences expected to be acquired by each learner, the only subject in the primary school in Cameroon that comes near peace education is Citizenship because it has the following objectives: “Practise social and citizenship values (morality, good governance and budgetary transparency)”²². As for primary school subjects in South Sudan, the replacement of Military education with Civic education is an important step towards peace education. It should be noted that in 2020-2021,

some significant changes were made in the primary and secondary school programmes in South Sudan²³. These changes included the inclusion and exclusion of some subjects. Very significant is the inclusion of Peace Education. This, however, is not the case with Sudan,

which is the focus of our study. From the subjects on table 1 for Sudan and Cameroon, it will not be an overstatement to claim that peace education is not outrightly taught in Cameroonian and Sudanese Primary schools.

Table 1. Juxtaposition of subjects taught in primary schools in Cameroon and Sudan

Cameroon	Sudan
1. English Language	1. Quran Islamic Religious Education Or Christian Religious Education
2. Mathematics	2. Arabic
3. Science and Technology (Health Education, Environmental Science and Technology.)	3. Mathematics
4. Français	4. Applied and Expressive Arts
5. Social Studies (Citizenship)	5. School Environment
6. (History and Geography)	6. Physical Education
7. Vocational Studies (Agro pastoral farming, Arts and Crafts)	7. English
8. (Home Economics)	8. History and Geography
9. Arts (Visual arts, literary arts and performing arts)	9. Science
10. Physical Education and Sports	10. Health and Nutrition
11. National Languages and Cultures	11. Music
12. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	12. Arts and Crafts
Alemnge ²¹	Arora ²⁰
12 subjects	12 subjects

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Subjects in Secondary Schools

Secondary education is the second stage of formal education after primary school, usually about age 11 to 13²⁴. Since the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) states that political violence starts in the minds of people²⁵, sustainable peace depends on changing people’s mindsets, consciousness and worldviews. This can be properly done when the mind is still young and ready to accept change. Peace education through peace subjects will mold the minds of the younger generations

towards peace. Table 2 captures the subjects taught in secondary schools across Cameroon and Sudan.

It should be noted that Cameroon operates two different systems of education, the Anglo-Saxon system and the French system and the subjects taught in the different systems are different. Table 2 in each country focuses on the anglophone Cameroon where the Anglo-Saxon system of education is highly practiced and where the anglophone crisis has raged on from 2017. It should, however, be noted that anglophone schools are all over the national territory and the subjects taught are the same everywhere because all

secondary schools follow the national curriculum. The 22 subjects are not done by every student at once. Each student chooses at most 11 courses from the list. However, in the first two years of secondary school, most of the essential Arts and Science subjects are done by every child and they are permitted to choose only at the third year. From the list of courses for Cameroon secondary schools, like in the primary school where no subject directly handles the issue of peace education, two subjects - Citizenship Education and Moral Education may handle a few issues about peace, but not peace education because the scopes are not the same.

Table 2. Juxtaposition of subjects taught in Secondary Schools in Cameroon and Sudan

Cameroon	Sudan
English	Biology
French	Rhetoric and Expression
Literature	Geography and Environmental Studies
Mathematics	Chemistry
History	Mathematics
Geography	Arabic Grammar
Citizenship Education	Reading and Literature
Moral Education/ Religion	Islamic Education
Home Economics	Arts and Design
Sports and Physical Education	Military Sciences
Health Education	Citizenship
ICT	Physics
Chemistry	Engineering Sciences
Physics	Computer Science
Geology	Family Sciences
Additional Maths	English Language
Biology	History
Human biology	French Language
Commerce	Literary and Linguistic Studies
Food and Nutrition	Basic Mathematics
Accounting	Specialized Mathematics
Economics	Agricultural and Animal Production
	Commercial Sciences
22 Subjects	23 Subjects

From the list of subjects taught in Sudanese secondary school, it is equally seen that like in Cameroon, there is really no subject that directly handles peace education. Of the 23 subjects taught in secondary school subjects are generally geared towards achieving specific skills, but none targets peace education. Like in Cameroon where citizenship education and moral education can

be considered to treat issues related to peace and respects for one another, Citizenship is found in Sudan's curriculum. We can say Islamic education remotely handles aspects of peace, but not intentionally.

In a nutshell, peace education as a subject is not officially taught in the secondary schools in Cameroon

and Sudan and this has negative implications because the two countries do not lay emphasis on the roles that youths play in peace education. This observation agrees with the United Nations Development Programme Regional Service Center for Africa's (2023, p. 6)²⁶ claim that "although there is a growing recognition of the crucial role that youths play as peacebuilders in Africa, their inclusion has been relatively minimal, ineffective and largely not directly linked to national and formal peacebuilding infrastructures". formal peacebuilding infrastructures should begin with primary and secondary school curricula where young minds are made to understand the concepts of peace.

Suggested courses for peace education in Cameroon and Sudan

We have already established that peace education should be embraced by the education ministries in Cameroon and Sudan and by extension to other African nations, not only those in conflict situations, but even those with relative peace.

Subjects needed for peace education

A transformative cosmopolitan peace education empowers educators and students in the face of challenges to become proactive agents of change who advocate for and labour to achieve equity, social justice and peaceful coexistence in their pluralistic (multicultural) local communities and global society²⁷. There is a need for peace education to provide the needed empowerment. In South Sudan, maybe due to the bitter experiences of war, their curriculum, both for primary and secondary schools begin by stating the following values:

- Human rights and gender equity
- Respect and integrity
- Peace and tolerance
- Compassion and social justice

These values, nonetheless, are not directly taught as a full discipline as the same curriculum indicates that "There are certain matters that young people should learn about, but which do not fall entirely within one subject. These cross-cutting issues apply from P1 to S4, and are: Environmental Awareness and Sustainability,

Peace Education and Life Skills²⁸. Moreover, The Peacebuilding Education and Advocacy (PBEA) programme was launched in 2012- in South Sudan- funded by the Government of the Netherlands (GoN), the programme aims to strengthen resilience, social cohesion and human security in conflict affected contexts by improving policies and practices for education and peacebuilding²⁹. Also South Sudan integrates relevant values to social cohesion within formal curriculum. For instance, secondary school curriculum includes civiness theme in subjects as History, Geography and Citizenship which in turns foster respect, tolerance and social concerns among students³⁰. Furthermore, UNICEF supported the integration of life skills and peacebuilding educational items into the national curriculum which has reached large number of primary and secondary school students³¹.

Based on what mentioned previously, the following can be consciously taught as subjects at different levels of both primary and secondary schools in Cameroon and Sudan in particular and other African countries where peace education is not taught:

1. Conflict resolution
2. Forgiveness
3. Violence prevention
4. Ecological sustainability

Once implemented, the authorities should also make sure that "teachers have the skills to teach this new curriculum"³². With this in our schools, the level of violence in the event of conflict, which are largely unavoidable, will drastically be reduced. These four areas can also be incorporated into existing subjects by reviewing the curriculum.

To show how peace education works, an evaluation of peace education programme in Palm Beach County in Florida presents remarkable improvements. For three years of the its implementation, it was observed that **disobedience data** moved from 1675 (1996-1997) to 1286 (1997-1998), **disruptive behaviour** declined from 852 (1996-1997) to 574 (1988-1999), **disrespectful language** within the same period declined from 542 to 336. This same pattern repeated itself in different schools in which the peace education programme was

carried out³³. The results in the above evaluation indicates that peace education can provide similar results if implemented in primary and secondary schools in Africa.

Steps to Implementing Peace Education in Cameroon and Sudan

Implementing peace education in crisis situation requires a multifaceted approach that warrants addressing immediate needs, while laying a solid foundation for sustainable peace. To begin with, although the two countries are faced with a similar problem of war and displacements, the local contexts are different. This means peace education will not be implemented in the same way in the two contexts. We are therefore proposing the following measures for practical implementation- understanding the context, engaging stakeholders, developing relevant curriculum, training educators and fostering peaceful educational environment.

- i) Understanding the context- this has to do with a systematic examination of the causes of the conflicts, the actors and the impacts on the communities. The specific needs of the affected populations should be acknowledged to enable curriculum designers come up with subjects that meet those needs.
- ii) Engaging stakeholders- it is also important to engage local leaders, parents, teachers and students in planning the implementing the established programme to ensure it meets community needs.
- iii) Developing relevant curriculum: this study suggests two possibilities- Development of peace education subjects that deal directly with issues of living together and the incorporation of peace education and concepts into existing subjects such as history, social studies and language arts. The two possibilities will equip students with practical skill in conflict resolution, negotiation, mediation and non-violent communication.
- iv) Training educators: the two countries should equip teachers with the knowledge, skills and resources to effectively teach peace education. Good programmes without the man power to implement them rightly comes to nothing. The training will also

take of challenges faced by teachers in conflict affected areas. It will provide psychosocial support to address their own trauma so that they can be able to address that of learners.

- v) Fostering peaceful educational environment: to practical implement peace education, a peaceful educational environment which fosters inclusive and respectful positive relationship among staff and students needs to be created. This can be done by creating safe spaces where students can discuss their experiences and express their emotions and receive psychosocial support.

With these steps observed, peace education can be a reality in Cameroon and Sudan.

CONCLUSION

To live and own a peaceful continent, which for now stands very fragile with many conflicts, the authorities must consciously invest in peace education because other forms of development greatly rely on peace. When countries invest in infrastructural development without developing the minds of the people, the uncultivated minds will pull down the structures without any remorse. This paper does not claim that peace education will completely eliminates conflicts in Cameroon and Sudan or in African as a whole; it however argues that the rate of conflict will reduce as seen in the cases in Florida³³. Even if another crisis begins, the rate of carnage will be reduced because the educated minds will instruct the architects of the need for peace. When children are not consciously given peace education, they are indirectly given the education of violence and the consequences can only be a war-torn Africa. In a more accommodating manner, as UNESCO puts it, peace education seeks transformation by building awareness and understanding, developing concerns and challenging personal and social actions that will enable people to live, relate and create conditions and systems that actualize nonviolence, justice, environmental care and other peace values¹⁵. This is the picture we see in Sudan and Cameroon if they can intentionally and formally introduce peace education in their primary and secondary schools. Peace education alone is not a panacea for resolving conflicts in a country. If

provocative conditions like wanton violation of human rights are not handled, peace education may still not be able to bring the desired peace. Further research can examine the content of peace education subjects.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We express our deep appreciation to ASFI leadership and all our instructors during the Art of Scientific Writing and Publishing course.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed to the realisation of this work and approved the final manuscript. Hans Fonka, the team leader, steered the discussions, served as the direct correspondent with ASFIRJ editorial team and responded to review comments that did not need the intervention of the whole team; Hussein Sulafa, the assistant team leader took part in designing and writing this paper and also responded to some of the comments from reviewers; Elkamel Manasik, Salma Alam and Isra Ali, dedicated team members, also participated in designing and writing this paper, provided data from the chosen data bases and also responded to comments from reviewers.

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