

Peace Education: More than a utopic pedagogy?

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Abstract

The long list of wars reflects the dire need for a new violence prevention concept for addressing various ongoing conflicts and wars, including the war in Ukraine, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Sudanese civil war, political instability in Afghanistan and Lebanon, and the North Korean crisis. One question emerges; can peace be learned? This study addresses this question by questioning 95 respondents from diverse professional backgrounds worldwide as it attempts to learn what they think about peace education, what experiences they have in this regard, and what suggestions they may have for improving the delivery of peace-building programs at educational institutions. This study found that the majority of respondents welcomed the peace education approach although they have very different understandings of peace education.

Keywords: peace building, peacekeeping, violence and peace building, resolving conflicts



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1. Introduction

Violence is often preferred over dialogue to resolve conflicts. This decision to use violence happens every day. It should be noted that violence is complex and that many forms of violence exist: domestic and international terrorism, intimate partner violence, gun violence, online violence, ecocide, genocide, ethnic hatred, and racism, just to name a few (Peace Alliance, n.d.; Harris, 2004). In this context, peace education serves as one of the solutions to promote peacebuilding measures for countering those forms of violence. Harris (2004) emphasizes the five main postulates of peace education: declaring the root causes of violence, teaching alternatives to violence, addressing different forms of violence, understanding peace as a context-dependent process, and defining conflict as ever-present. In this context, peace education may serve as an opportunity to find constructive solutions to conflict-prone situations.

Peace education aims to reduce the likelihood and impacts of violence through inclusive activities. This approach has grown its significance over the years due to its capacity for facilitating communication amid the increasing social polarization among countries despite the decrease in inter-state conflicts. In this regard, this preventive measure is more cost-effective than resolving conflicts themselves. Every \$1 raised for peacebuilding measures may potentially lead to a \$16 reduction in the cost of armed conflict (Peace Alliance, n.d.). That said, this paper is structured as follows: chapter 2 shows the literature review findings, chapter 3 outlines this study's research methodology and findings and chapter 4 presents its summary and concluding remarks.

2. Literature review

Several studies discussed about peace education as they provided different conceptualization of the term. Karem et al. (2006a), Kerem et al. (2006b), and Demir (2011) differentiated the definition of peace for developing and developed countries (as shown in Figure 1). In this context, developed countries such as Germany, Sweden, Canada, the U.S., and the Netherlands defined peace as a state that promotes social justice, harmony, equality before the law, and the absence of war. Meanwhile, developing countries such as Mexico, Nigeria, India, and Guatemala defined peace as a state that promotes healthy progress, equal development opportunities, the absence of discrimination, and the absence of war. In this regard, Karem et al.'s peace definition resonates with other studies which associates peace with the absence of war (Demir, 2011).

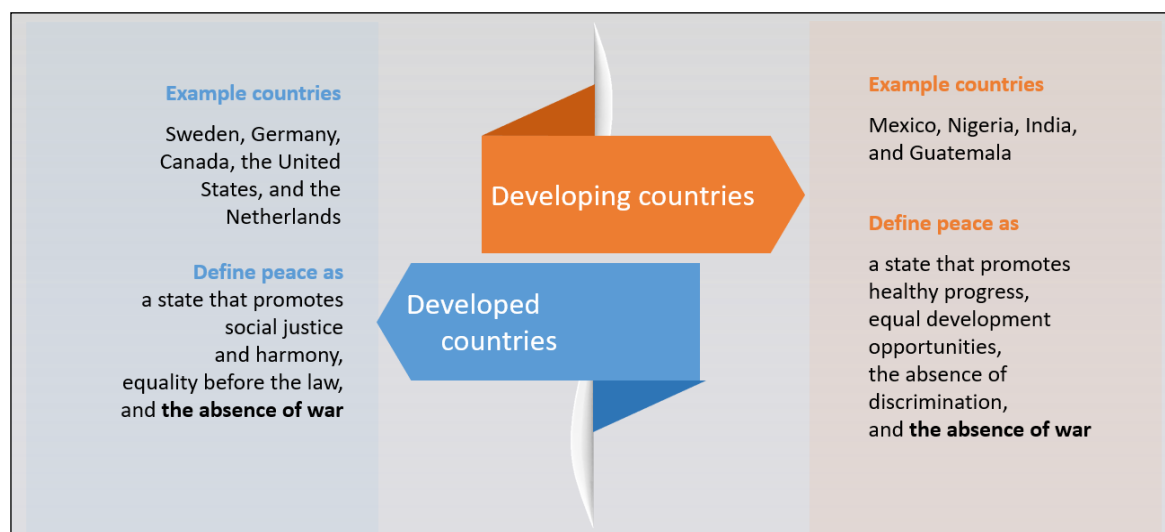


Figure 1. What is peace?

Source: own representation

The Institute for Economics & Peace's 17th edition of the global peace index ranked 163 independent states and territories by their level of peacefulness. This report discovered three factors for measuring the state of peace: societal security, the dimension of continuing domestic and international conflict, and the degree of militarizing security (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023). These factors confirmed that wars play a decisive role in determining the level of peacefulness in the global peace index. The findings of this report were alarming since they suggest that the level of global peacefulness dropped by 0.42 percent in 2023.

In this context, the report crowned Iceland as the most peaceful country in the world, followed by the likes of Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand, and Austria. Unfortunately, Afghanistan retained its status as the least peaceful country in the world for the eighth time in a row, along with Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Ukraine, Russia, Haiti, Mali, and Israel were among the countries with the most significant deterioration in peacefulness (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023).

The report implicitly based its investigation on the negative peace conception as it associated peace with the absence of war, just like the majority of peace-building initiatives (Nzahabwanayo, 2021). Positive peace means a higher peace level that goes beyond the mere absence of war and is, therefore, considered a complementary concept to negative peace. According to the Institute for Economics & Peace (2023), eight key factors define positive peace, including the presence of free and independent media, equal access to education and health, reduced corruption, good relations with neighboring countries, and the extent to which the citizens of a society are educated and forwarded in their knowledge development. These factors imply that education is one of the key enablers of peace, leading to the next question about the importance and power of education in general.

To comprehend the peace education concept, a prominent understanding of the power of education should be established (Adada, 2016; Genelza, 2022; Iredrain Asari, 2020).

Education is the key to managing various societal issues and fighting poverty to foster social change, equality, and (long-term) well-being. Education represents the foundation for social and economic progress. Education may facilitate a safer, brighter, and more sustainable world, promoting the power of education. Moreover, education may function as a means of social reform depending on the agents of change, the substance of transition, and the socioeconomic background of the transition subject. These agents of change are those with the capacity to inspire others to embrace the change and facilitate the transition process. That said, education plays a crucial role in creating sustainable peace (Novelli et al., 2017).

Measuring peace quality is not that simple because scientists cannot solely focus on measuring professional comprehension, skills, and productivity targets of subjects. Dispositions, beliefs, and social and communication skills should also be considered when determining the quality of education (Genelza, 2022). As shown, the quality of education should be measured not only by technical factors but also by non-technical factors such as communication skills. Communication is essential for facilitating dialogue between international stakeholders. The more positive this communication is, the more likely it would be for the peacebuilding measures to succeed.

Various violence conceptualizations (i.e. structural, direct, and cultural violence) may lead to peace education characterization (Nzahabwanayo, 2021). According to the presented approach, only the confrontation with different forms of violence enables an understanding of peace and peace education. Structural violence refers to inequalities in access to education, health, or natural resources, while direct violence includes armed conflicts, genocide, and terrorism. Cultural violence emerges from norms, values, self-perceptions, beliefs, and ideologies (see figure 2). One thing to note is that not all violence forms address direct relationships between perpetrators and victims. In this context, peace education should accommodate both negative (i.e. absence of physical violence) and positive peace.

Structural and cultural violence, in particular, require positive peace which promotes justice, equality, and well-being and, therefore, relies on critical peace education (Nzahabwanayo, 2021). Many peace researchers agree that it is not enough to strive for negative peace as they need to pursue positive peace. In this context, they should not only focus on providing a positive and non-violent learning environment in the classroom but also manifesting a commitment to peace principles in their students (Harris, 2004).

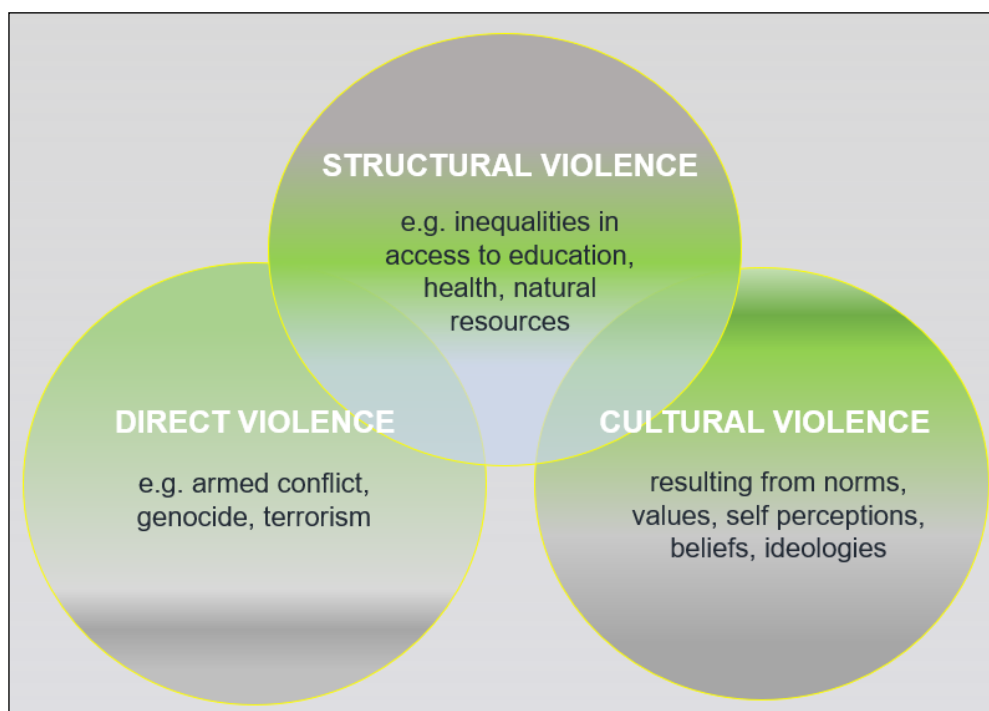


Figure 2. Characterizing peace education

Source: own representation

Furthermore, it is necessary to deal with the dynamics of conflict to better understand peace and peacebuilding. Therefore, when dealing with peace education, one should also understand conflicts and the dynamics of conflicts (United States Institute of Peace, n.d.). As shown in Figure 3, historical occurrences show that conflicts may reach their peak before de-escalating. The curve of conflict precisely visualizes the development of conflicts over time as well as the interplay between different stages of conflict. This curve helps deconstruct the dynamics of conflicts and enables better and more effective conflict management. Stages along the curve show three possible options that individuals may consider when resolving conflicts: prevention, management, and resolution (see figure 3). Determining the best timing for these strategies is considered part of the peacebuilding process.

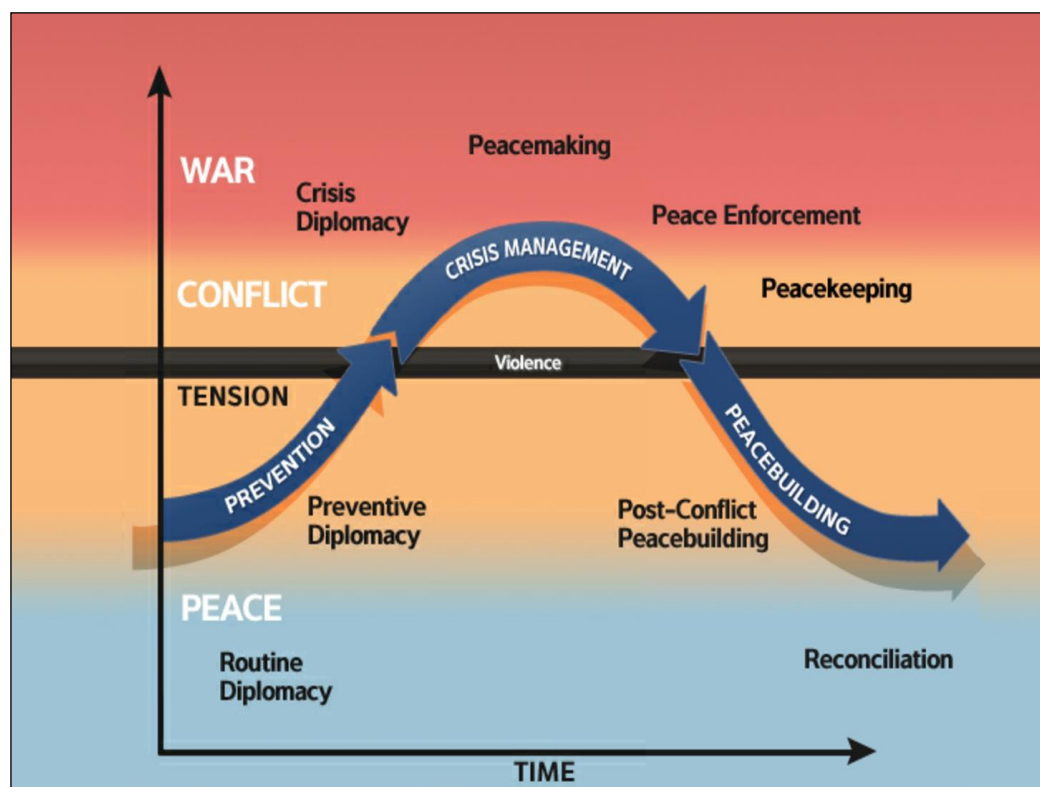


Figure 3. The curve of conflict

Source: United States Institute of Peace (n.d.)

The next question would be to investigate the possible role that peace education may play in defining a school's success. For instance, whether or not schools view peace education as an enabler of their success. Some schools may consider student achievement as their success measure, while others may view graduation rate for that matter. Accordingly, educational purpose achievement seems decisive for a school's success. Winton (2013) further proposed students' happiness as a key indicator of a school's success. Intriguingly, many schools did not consider the state of peacebuilding initiatives as their indicator of success. Moreover, there seems to be a lack of peace education integration into the national curriculum (Harber et al., 2009).

Schools' poor comprehension of peace education is the main obstacle to such integration, with authorities considering peace education as a potential threat as it provides constant questioning and idea generation. Not only is the concept of peacebuilding often unclear and associated with a certain level of distrust for many agencies and practitioners in the education sector, but also the relationship between peacebuilding to education is underdeveloped (Novelli et al., 2017).

According to UNICEF (2016), the following list outlines possible outcomes of peace-building initiatives:

- Reinforced social cohesion

- Reduced violent conflict
- Strengthened conflict de-escalation capacity
- Improved perception of safety and security
- Enhanced ability to peaceful conflict resolutions
- Increase in peace promotional measures
- Tendency to support or launch peace-oriented initiatives
- Heightened mutual trust and understanding between individuals and communities
- Increase of confidence in the legitimacy and reactivity of state and local authorities
- Unbiased curriculum content and teaching practices reflecting positive social norms and worldviews which disregard stereotypes based on gender, region, age and identity

Peacebuilding outcomes can be promising, but it requires a capable educator as an active actor in peacebuilding. In the literature, teachers occupied various roles, including technocrats where they were responsible for achieving educational achievements. As peace agents, these teachers were expected to convey the values of maintaining peace. Unfortunately, they may impede the success of peacebuilding and ruin education, such as when they reproduce unequal gender relations or manipulate the curriculum and convey their own prejudices and views of history (Horner et al., 2015).

That said, peace education teachers are expected to have specific non-technical qualities, such as being at peace with himself/ herself and the society, respectful, fair, self-confident, patient, and tolerant (Polat et al., 2016). Furthermore, it is expected that peace education teachers are forgiving, cooperative, solution-oriented, integrative, understanding, empathetic and unprejudiced. According to a study regarding the effectiveness of peace education programs in secondary schools in Kenya, teachers play a central role as they foster democracy in the classroom (Adada, 2016). They encourage dialogue between students and impart life skills (e.g. negotiation, communication, problem-solving, emotion management, empathy, peer pressure management, and risk awareness) through cooperative, problem-based, and transformative learning approaches. In addition, teachers trigger students' lateral, creative, and critical-thinking qualities. Moreover, these teachers also taught multiple aspects of democracy based on the training and development opportunities provided by the authorities. They promote basic peace education principles, including inclusivity, diversity, and equality.

These schools further demonstrated the positive outcomes of peacebuilding, including the accommodation of students' diversity, recognition of students' unity, students' eligibility as agents of social change and promotion of positive communication among stakeholders. An adequate number of teachers who are trained and enthusiastic with peace-related topics is necessary to ensure a successful peace education, along with the availability of respective support mechanisms at the community level, recognition of peace education as a valuable use of time, adequate life skill-based program measurement despite the absence of quantifiable

benchmarks and positive development and integration of peace education into the curriculum (Harber et al., 2009).

3. Research Methodology & Findings

This study's questionnaire consists of open questions (as shown in Table 1) as they intend to elicit and elaborate the knowledge of teachers, trainers, and others with a background in peace education worldwide. These participants were sourced via LinkedIn through several queries, such as "teacher", "peace education", and specific settings such as "USA" and "UK".

Table 1. Questionnaire design

Construct	Question item	Choices
demographic question	1. Which country do you work in?	open question
	2. Which country do you live in?	
	3. What is your occupation?	
knowledge question	4. What do you know about Peace Education?	
opinion question	5. What do you think about Peace Education?	
behavior question	6. Do you have any experience contributing to the Peace Education program (e.g. as a teacher or a student)?	
opinion question	7. What skills do you think teachers need to deliver "effective" peace education sessions?	
	8. What do students need to learn in terms of Peace Education?	
	9. Which age group benefits the most from Peace Education?	
	10. How can we create awareness of Peace Education among schools, educational institutions, families, societies, and communities?	
	11. What teaching materials and approaches should teachers employ to deliver Peace Education?	
	12. What would be the effects of Peace Education on involved stakeholders (e.g. students, schools, educational institutions, families, communities, politics, and societies)?	
	13. Can Peace Education be a viable option in your country? Please elaborate on your answer.	
	14. What are the possible challenges to effective Peace Education delivery in your country?	
	15. Do you have any suggestions for improving the delivery of peace-building programs at educational institutions in your country?	

Source: own representation

A total of 95 respondents participated in the survey. In most cases, these respondents work and live in the same country, with only 18 respondents working abroad. Their occupations were diverse, from digital marketers to certified financial planners, consultants (e.g., humanitarian and security consultant, biodiversity consultant, international consultant, senior peace and security consultant, strategic foresight, and management consultant), Executive Director, Transitional Justice Specialist, Student, Project Assistant, Teacher, Financial Advisor, Peace activist, web developer, researcher, professor of sustainability and social entrepreneurship, country director, team coach and business owner, collection specialist, geopolitical risk analyst, preacher, academic, retired university teacher, Peace Research Institute member, peacebuilding and organizational change expert, just to name a few.

20 of the 95 participants either knew nothing or little about peace education. Many respondents said they had a fairly good understanding of peace education because either they teach it at their school, do research on it, write a peace education handbook, participate as a Rotary Peace Fellow, are graduates in Peace and Conflict Studies, have self learned about peace, or manage education policy reforms for peace, just to name a few.

A participant responded to the question, "What do you know about Peace Education?" by defining it as "a combination of values, knowledge, attitude, behavior, and skills used to learn to do better in conflict resolution." Another participant wrote, "Peace education is a process that fosters the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to create a culture of peace both within oneself and in the broader society. It aims to equip individuals with the tools to resolve conflicts peacefully, promote social justice, and encourage mutual understanding and respect among diverse groups." Other responses to the question are, "The modality of disseminating or acquiring skills, norms/values, knowledge, and behaviors to live in harmony with others, and the environment at large", "It deal about peace that how peace will be exist, how peace will be sustained and will be built, protected and prevented by communities. It is one of the way that Peace is the natural gift of the God to be kept, protected, prevented & built by humans", and "Peace education is all about teaching people how to be peaceful, resolve conflicts without violence, and make the world a better, more just place. It helps us understand global issues, human rights, and social justice. It's also about being kind, caring, and thinking critically. The goal? To create a world where people get along, help each other, and take care of our planet. So, peace education is about learning how to be a better, more compassionate human being and making our world a happier, safer place for everyone."

When asked what people think about peace education, respondents' answers were as follow: "All world needs it", "Should be taught in all schools around the world", "Should be compulsory in schools and universities as study and education offer and Peace Worker should become an occupation in the future", "Extremely important", "Great initiative", "very valuable", "crucial", "It is one of the most essential things for education at all levels and for all people", "vital", "essential", "I think there is need for more advocacy on peace education."

Little is being done presently", and "It is something essential and productive, especially for the countries in conflict."

The responses to the question, "What skills do you think teachers need to deliver "effective" peace education sessions?" are summarized in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Skills needed to deliver "effective" peace education sessions

Source: own representation

According to the Global Peace Index, countries are divided based on their state of peace. In this regard, five indicator levels were defined: very high, high, medium, low, and very low (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023). This study only considered responses from those who work and live in the same country (as shown in Table 2). That said, the countries listed on the table only those with multiple respondents coming from them (i.e. the US, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Cameroon, South Africa, Kenya, India, the UK, Spain, and Switzerland).

Table 2. Classification of respondents' answers

State of peace	Possible challenges to effective Peace Education delivery in own country	
Low	United States of America	<p>Different communities have different views on what is good or bad. So, it may take a concerted effort to implement rules.</p> <p>Ignorance</p> <p>For Peace Education delivery to be successful, it should run through the formal education system, and not online, although education in general has moved online for reaching the masses.</p> <p>Christian nationalism, fascism</p> <p>Leaders prefer a state of war, fear, and hatred.</p>
Low	Pakistan	<p>Acceptance is slow</p> <p>Societal norms and standards coupled with belief systems</p> <p>Uncertain political security conditions</p> <p>Challenges in any country can include resistance to change in educational systems, lack of suitable curriculum and resources, cultural or political obstacles, and the need for teacher training and support in delivering the program effectively.</p> <p>As student opt for subjects with more scope and unfortunately there is not much scope in sense of job here</p>
Low	Ethiopia	<p>Integrate peace-building into all education levels. Train teachers on peace-building pedagogy. Engage students through interactive learning. Create supportive environments for peace discussions.</p> <p>Encourage student participation in community initiatives. Partner with NGOs and government agencies for program effectiveness.</p> <p>Funding peace building programmes</p> <p>More training needed for teachers</p>
Low	Nigeria	<p>Political will, human resources and capital</p> <p>Structural patriarchy, transgenerational trauma, historical injustices, poverty</p> <p>The diverse cultural and religious landscape may sometimes lead to misunderstandings and tensions among different groups. Limited access to education in certain regions, inadequate resources, and infrastructural deficiencies can pose obstacles to the effective implementation of peace education initiatives. Furthermore, political instability, social inequalities, and historical conflicts may hinder the acceptance and integration of peace education into mainstream educational systems.</p> <p>In northern Nigeria, several challenges hinder the effective delivery of peace education: Ongoing conflict and insecurity in the region create an environment where educational institutions struggle to operate consistently.</p> <p>The region faces issues of limited access to quality education due to factors like poverty, lack of infrastructure, and cultural barriers, which affect the reach and implementation of peace education initiatives.</p> <p>Northern Nigeria has diverse cultural and religious dynamics that</p>

		<p>might influence the acceptance and integration of peace education. Sensitivity and adaptation to these cultural nuances are essential for successful implementation.</p> <p>Insufficient funding, inadequate educational materials, and a shortage of trained educators hinder the effective teaching of peace education in schools.</p> <p>Political tensions and issues of governance in the region can affect the stability of educational institutions and impede the consistent delivery of peace education. The diverse linguistic landscape of northern Nigeria might present challenges in disseminating peace education materials in local languages, impacting the effectiveness of the teaching. Resistance or skepticism from certain segments of society towards new educational paradigms, especially those that may challenge traditional or established norms, can impede the adoption of peace education initiatives.</p> <p>Lack of human resources and non human resources Lack of access to quality education Communication and religious Funds Lack of politics will as the politicians feed off of the violence and divides amongst the people; poor educational and vocational systems and opportunities;</p>
Low	Cameroon	<p>Education and going to school are an issue in general. Accessibility to remote areas and poor internet connections to pass out information.</p> <p>Lack of Media support and lack of support systems from governments and lack of resources and skills by the civil society.</p> <p>Many people just talk to call peace but don't even know where to start.</p> <p>Working in a domain with focus on peacebuilding does not give money and doesn't have a good image.</p>
Low	South Africa	<p>There is a prevalent misconception that any methods to mitigate crime and violence are essentially the responsibility of law enforcement. Despite the fact that no government official or politician may openly acknowledge this, the bureaucratic obstacles that impede practitioners from implementing Peace Education are clearly evident. The second barrier is the limitation of resources, which is likely the cause of interventions such as Peace Education being limited to specific regions rather than across the entire country.</p> <p>To get it recognised as part of the school curriculum Lack of buy-in from our leaders in education, shortage of resources.</p>
Medium	Kenya	<p>Inadequate resources lack of political good will from the leaders to support peace initiatives one of the biggest challenges is language barriers as two groups in conflicts speaks two different languages and call them for a dialogue is not an easy work Language barrier, cultural differences, community ego etc ignorance and poor governance</p>

Medium	India	Narrow minded mindset of people Teachers need training Convincing educational and political leaders for their active support Willingness to pay would be low, may doubt the intent, resistance from radical Islamists at particular locations as they would prefer to follow holy book, et cetera.
High	United Kingdom	Prejudice and intolerance of different beliefs people are too busy, they don't understand the essential nature of peace No capacities, no government, no teacher , no curriculum and lack of expertise
High	Spain	Lack of awareness.
Very high	Switzerland	It could be seen as too vague. In Switzerland and in so many countries, most of young people do not believe in peace anymore, given the current crisis in the Middle East, and the positioning of the governments. Switzerland is supposed to be neutral, and is called the heart of humanitarian affairs. Apparently, a cease fire in the Middle east is not what the swiss governement would like. So the hypocrisy and double standards are the biggest challenges. A strong political willingness (e.g. in France you can study NonViolent Communication at the university). Lack of awareness of its need.

Source: own representation

Furthermore, respondents answered the question, “Which age group benefits the most from Peace Education?” diversely, with 26 participants believing all age groups benefit from peace education. One questionnaire participant said, "Peace education should be a lifelong journey, and it's never too early or too late to start learning about peace and conflict resolution." Other participants indicated specific age groups: “5 to 25”; “6 to 12”; “20 to 30”; “3 to 18”; “7 to 18”; “35 to 80”; “18 to 35”; “12 to 25”; “7 to 80”; “13 to 39”; “15 to 30”; “12 to 25”; “16 to 45”; “13 to 24”; “15 to 35”, and; “10 to 18”. One respondent who chose "13 to 24" mentioned that, "Because this age group is vulnerable to seeking violence. You learn and digest new, different information every day and are exposed to new activities and trends, some of which have negative consequences. I personally believe that people with lived experience or a practical understanding of a topic are better able to engage with the concept in a more theoretical or even educational way. Peace education will be part of their transition and development at this age.”

Other respondents claimed that peace education should start very early. One respondent believed that small children in kindergarten should engage in peace education and benefit from Peace Education, another thought it should start at the age of zero to optimize its benefits.

The suggestions for improving the delivery of peace-building programs at educational institutions range from organizing international thematic student conferences, talking to the

Ministry of Education of each county, promoting better governance and political harmony, promoting peace education activities in diverse media, involving youths in curriculum design, re-evaluating course contents, including peace education in basic education curriculum, training teachers, starting from early education, and integrating peace-building into all education levels.

Some other suggestions included, "understanding that Peace-building is not a five-year project. It is multigenerational and needs to consider the ancestors, present generation, and future generations. Peace-building programs are still driven by Western-oriented mindsets and paradigms", and "Keep it non-religious absolutely, make it affordable if the model demands money from stakeholders, ensure that the programs align with the demographic dividend and showing tangible results for all the group of people, et al."

Respondents' answers to the question, "What teaching materials and approaches should teachers employ to deliver Peace Education?" were as follows:

- Case studies
- Electronic materials
- Watching films and videos that tell stories about peace (e.g. reports from humanitarian organizations, interviews with refugees, affected persons from war areas)
- Roleplaying (e.g. Simulating conflict scenarios and encouraging students to find peaceful resolutions)
- Games
- Peace-themed art and music projects
- Cooperative learning: Students work together in groups to complete tasks and achieve common goals. This helps to develop students' teamwork and collaboration skills, which are essential for peacebuilding.
- Inquiry-based learning: Students ask questions and explore topics in a hands-on way. This helps to develop students' critical thinking skills and their ability to think critically about issues related to peace and conflict.
- Reflective learning: Students are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and learning. This helps to develop students' self-awareness and their ability to learn from their mistakes.
- Problem-based learning: Students are presented with real-world problems and challenges related to peace and conflict. They are then asked to work together to develop solutions. This helps to develop students' problem-solving skills and their ability to apply their knowledge to real-world situations.
- Discussions
- Sitting in a circle with 16 - 26 people processing and experiences like cooperation tasks
- games
- Experience sharing,

- peer to peer approaches.
- Guest Speakers with Lived Experience of War
- Photos
- Sketching
- All aspects of culture for example - music, art, food, traditions, religion are crucial part of peace education tools.
- Exercises in negotiation, facilitation, and mediation.
- Interdisciplinary Approach: Integrate peace education into various subjects, such as history, social studies, language arts, and ethics. Show how peace-related concepts can be relevant and beneficial in multiple academic areas.
- Service Learning: Engage students in service-learning projects related to peace and social justice, such as volunteering at local community organizations. Encourage students to apply their learning to make a positive impact on their communities.
- Organize simulations of international negotiations and peacebuilding processes, similar to a Model United Nations program. Allow students to represent different countries and work together to find peaceful solutions to global challenges.
- Encourage students to create artwork, poetry, music, and multimedia presentations that express their thoughts on peace and conflict.
- excursions to genocide locations

4. Summary and concluding remarks

This study investigated the effectiveness of peace education in promoting a peaceful world by surveying 95 respondents using open-ended questions, such as “What do you think about Peace Education?”, “Which age group benefits the most from Peace Education?”, and “Do you have any suggestions for improving the delivery of peace-building programs at educational institutions in your country?”. This study found that international stakeholders should consider paying more attention to peace education adoption due to the absence of common understanding of peace education and how it should be addressed at schools. Participants' responses showed diverse opinions on how to optimize peace education promotion, including organizing multi-religious meetings, initiating social media blasts, starting a pilot social media campaign, hiring children peace ambassadors to promote peace, and making peace education an essential element in all curricula. Consequently, further studies are required to elaborate on the strategies for optimizing peace education.

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