

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

TITLE: Celebrating the Roles of Youths in and through Education towards Inclusive and Peaceful Societies.

KEYWORDS: Youth, Peacebuilding, Innovative Education, Perception.

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INTRODUCTION:

In an increasingly interconnected world, fostering peace in diverse and inclusive communities is paramount. With 70% of sub-Saharan Africa under the age of 30, according to the United Nations, Nigeria stands out as one of the central African countries with a large youth population. In South West Nigeria alone, over 30 million youths comprise about 31% of the country's total youth demographic. Despite this demographic advantage, Nigerian youths face significant challenges, including high levels of unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion (Osabuohien et al., 2020). This research aims to investigate the pivotal role of youths as agents of peace within Nigerian communities. Specifically, it will examine the effectiveness of innovative educational approaches in empowering youths to contribute meaningfully to inclusive and peaceful societies. Through this study, we seek to address the pressing need for understanding youth perceptions and involvement in peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria. The study seeks to address the following main objectives:

OBJECTIVES:

- Explore youths' perceptions regarding their role in peacebuilding and their meaningful roles in creating inclusive and peaceful communities.
- Examine the extent of youths' involvement in projects focused on peacebuilding and their perceived effectiveness in fostering positive change.
- Identify key challenges and barriers encountered by youths in South West Nigeria in their efforts to engage in peacebuilding activities.

SIGNIFICANCE:

This research is vital for policymakers, educators, community leaders, and youth advocates. Insights gained can inform targeted strategies and policies supporting youth-led initiatives for sustainable peace in Nigeria. Educators can use findings to enhance curriculum development for engaging youths in peacebuilding. Additionally, community leaders and advocates can leverage findings to advocate for increased investment in youth-focused peacebuilding initiatives and foster partnerships empowering youths as agents of positive change.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

This research aligns with the theoretical framework of the Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding, supported by UNICEF. Emphasizing youth agency in conflict-affected contexts, it explores conflict and peace dynamics through educational interventions. The framework identifies four dimensions of youth engagement in peacebuilding: reconciliation, redistribution, recognition, and representation (the four R's).

METHODOLOGY:

This research employed a quantitative approach to study youth involvement in peacebuilding in Nigeria. A diverse sample of 150 youths aged 15-29 from urban, semi-urban, and rural areas participated in online surveys. Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Ethical considerations were observed, though limitations include potential biases in self-reported data and reliance on online surveys.

RESULTS: Expressed in variables and percentages where applicable.

Research Question 1:

The majority of respondents (63.33%) were aged 19-24, indicating a significant representation of young adults. A considerable portion (35.33%) resided in semi-urban areas, with 53.33% holding a Bachelor's degree. Females constituted a significant majority (75.33%), and Ogun and Oyo states had the highest representation (30.00% and 35.33%, respectively). These findings highlight the diverse demographic characteristics influencing youths' perceptions of their role in peacebuilding.

Research Question 2:

Nearly half of the respondents (47.33%) were involved in peacebuilding projects, with the majority (86.67%) being students. SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) had the highest representation (55.33%). This underscores the emphasis on aligning peacebuilding efforts with global development goals.

DISCUSSION:

Overall, the findings suggest that youths in South West Nigeria, particularly young adults with higher education levels, are actively engaged in peacebuilding efforts. Education plays a crucial role in shaping their perceptions, while gender dynamics and regional differences also influence their involvement. Policymakers and educators should prioritize incorporating peacebuilding teachings into the curriculum and develop targeted programs to address challenges faced by youths, especially in semi-urban and rural areas. Recognizing and valuing youths' contributions, particularly through project involvement aligned with SDG 16, can enhance their sense of agency and commitment to creating inclusive and peaceful societies..

IMPLICATIONS

Policymakers and educators should prioritize incorporating teachings related to peacebuilding into the curriculum, particularly in regions with high youth representation like Ogun and Oyo states.

Targeted programs should be developed to address the challenges and barriers faced by youths, especially in semi-urban and rural areas, to empower them as effective agents of peace within their communities.

Recognizing and valuing the contributions of youths in peacebuilding efforts, particularly through project involvement aligned with global development goals like SDG 16, can further enhance their sense of agency and commitment to creating inclusive and peaceful societies

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the data underscores the active engagement of youths in South West Nigeria in peacebuilding efforts. Higher education levels correlate with increased involvement, while gender dynamics and regional variations influence perceptions. Youth initiatives align with global development goals, emphasizing the importance of integrating peacebuilding into broader agendas. Policymakers and educators should prioritize empowering youths through innovative educational approaches and targeted programs, recognizing their pivotal role in creating inclusive and peaceful societies in the region.

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