

Peace Education and its Impacts on Reduction of Youth Violence in Nigeria: A Study of Ogoni Communities in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Youth violence remains a major social challenge in Nigeria, particularly in conflict-prone regions such as the Ogoni communities of Rivers State, where prolonged socio-economic and environmental struggles have contributed to youth restiveness. Peace education has increasingly been recognized as a non-violent and sustainable approach to addressing youth-related conflicts and promoting social harmony. This study examined the impact of peace education on the reduction of youth violence in selected Ogoni communities of Rivers State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive research design, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Data were obtained from youths aged 15–35 years, community leaders, educators, and peace facilitators through questionnaires and structured interviews. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data collected. Findings revealed that peace education significantly influences youths' attitudes, values, and behaviours by promoting tolerance, dialogue, and non-violent conflict resolution skills. The study further found that communities with sustained peace education programmes recorded noticeable reductions in violent activities such as communal clashes, cultism, and political thuggery. However, challenges such as limited funding, inadequate community participation, and poor continuity of programmes were identified as factors constraining the effectiveness of peace education initiatives. The study concludes that peace education plays a vital role in reducing youth violence in Ogoni communities when effectively implemented and sustained. It therefore recommends increased government and stakeholder support, integration of peace education into school curricula and community programmes, and continuous engagement of youths to enhance sustainable peace and development in the region.

Keywords: Peace Education, Impacts on Reduction, Youth Violence, Ogoni Communities

1. Introduction

Peace remains a fundamental prerequisite for social stability, national development, and sustainable human progress. Societies characterised by peace are more likely to experience economic growth, political stability, and social cohesion, while those plagued by violence often suffer stagnation, insecurity, and underdevelopment. In recent decades, Nigeria has faced persistent challenges related to youth violence, manifesting in forms such as cultism, political thuggery, communal clashes, militancy, kidnapping, vandalism, and other criminal activities. These challenges have posed serious threats to national unity, public safety, and socio-economic development (Adebayo, 2021; Okafor & Alubo, 2020).

Youth violence in Nigeria is largely driven by a combination of factors, including unemployment, poverty, poor governance, political manipulation, social exclusion, environmental degradation, and weak educational and moral systems. Nigeria's youthful population, which constitutes a significant proportion of the country's demographic structure, has increasingly become both the victim and perpetrator of violence. When young people lack access to quality education, meaningful employment, and constructive social engagement, they often become susceptible to violent behaviour and manipulation by political actors and criminal networks (UNDP, 2022). This

reality underscores the urgent need for sustainable interventions that address the root causes of youth violence rather than merely its symptoms.

One such intervention that has gained increasing global recognition is peace education.

Peace education is broadly understood as a process of promoting the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes required to prevent conflict, resolve disputes peacefully, and foster harmonious coexistence at interpersonal, community, national, and international levels. According to Harris and Morrison (2013), peace education seeks to empower individuals with non-violent conflict resolution skills, tolerance, empathy, respect for diversity, and a commitment to justice and human rights. Rather than focusing solely on the absence of violence, peace education emphasizes the presence of positive social conditions that promote cooperation, dialogue, and mutual understanding.

In the Nigerian context, peace education has become increasingly relevant due to the country's multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and culturally diverse nature. These diversities, while offering opportunities for cultural enrichment, have also contributed to tensions and conflicts when poorly managed. Scholars argue that peace education can serve as a transformative tool capable of reshaping youth attitudes, reducing violent tendencies, and promoting a culture of peace within communities (Salomon & Nevo,

2019). Through both formal and informal educational processes, peace education equips young people with the capacity to critically analyse conflicts, understand their causes, and adopt peaceful means of addressing grievances.

The Niger Delta region, particularly the Ogoni communities in Rivers State, presents a compelling case for examining the impact of peace education on youth violence. The region has historically been marked by environmental degradation resulting from oil exploration, economic marginalisation, political neglect, and social injustice. These challenges have contributed to widespread youth restiveness and violence over the years (Watts, 2018). The Ogoni struggle, popularised by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), highlighted long-standing grievances related to environmental damage, lack of development, and exclusion from the benefits of oil wealth. While these struggles initially took non-violent forms, prolonged neglect and frustration have, at various times, led to violent expressions among sections of the youth population.

Youth violence in Ogoni communities has manifested through cult activities, communal conflicts, pipeline vandalism, political violence, and other forms of social unrest. These activities have disrupted community life, undermined economic activities, and threatened peace and security in Rivers State and the wider Niger Delta region (Aghalino, 2017). Despite government interventions such as amnesty programmes, security operations, and development agencies, violence persists, suggesting that coercive and economic approaches alone may be insufficient. This has prompted growing interest in educational and psychosocial approaches, particularly peace education, as a sustainable means of addressing youth violence.

Peace education aims to transform the mindset of young people by fostering values such as tolerance, dialogue, respect for human life, and social responsibility. According to Danesh (2011), peace education contributes to behavioural change by addressing the psychological, social, and structural dimensions of violence. By promoting critical thinking, empathy, and non-violent communication, peace education enables youths to channel frustrations into constructive civic engagement rather than destructive behaviour. In communities affected by historical injustices, peace education can also facilitate reconciliation, healing, and trust-building among conflicting groups.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Youth violence has become a persistent and deeply rooted challenge in Nigeria, posing serious threats to peace, security, and sustainable development. Across many parts of the country, young people are increasingly involved in violent activities such as cultism, political thuggery, communal clashes, kidnapping, vandalism, and other criminal behaviours. These activities not only endanger lives and property but also undermine social cohesion, economic growth, and democratic governance. Despite the implementation of various government policies and security interventions, youth violence continues to escalate, suggesting that existing strategies have been largely reactive and insufficient in addressing the underlying causes of the problem.

In the Niger Delta region, and particularly within the Ogoni communities of Rivers State, youth violence has been exacerbated by long-standing issues such as environmental degradation, unemployment, poverty, political marginalisation, and perceived injustice arising from oil exploration activities. These conditions have created widespread frustration among youths, making them vulnerable to manipulation by political elites, militant groups, and criminal networks. Although Ogoni struggles were historically rooted in non-violent activism, contemporary realities reveal increasing involvement of youths in violent confrontations that disrupt community life and perpetuate cycles of insecurity. This persistent violence has weakened traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms and strained relationships among community members.

Several interventions have been introduced to curb youth violence in the region, including security operations, amnesty programmes, and youth empowerment schemes. However, these approaches have largely focused on economic incentives and coercive control, with limited emphasis on transforming youth attitudes, values, and behavioural patterns that sustain violence. Scholars argue that without addressing the psychological, social, and educational dimensions of violence, such interventions are unlikely to produce lasting peace. This gap highlights the need for alternative and complementary approaches that emphasise prevention, value reorientation, and non-violent conflict resolution.

Peace education has been widely recognised as a viable tool for reducing violence by equipping young people with knowledge, skills, and values that promote tolerance, dialogue, empathy, and peaceful coexistence. The absence of context-specific data limits the ability of policymakers, educators, and community leaders to effectively integrate peace education into local peacebuilding strategies.

Therefore, the problem this study seeks to address is the continued prevalence of youth violence in Ogoni communities despite existing interventions, coupled with the limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of peace education as a tool for reducing such violence. By investigating the impact of peace education on youth violence in Ogoni communities, this study aims to fill a critical gap in knowledge and provide evidence-based insights that can inform sustainable peacebuilding initiatives in Rivers State and Nigeria at large.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of peace education on the reduction of youth violence in Ogoni communities of Rivers State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the study are to

- i. Examine the nature and forms of youth violence prevalent in Ogoni communities of Rivers State.
- ii. Assess the level of awareness and exposure of youths to peace education programmes in the study area.
- iii. Determine the impact of peace education on youths' attitudes and behaviours toward violence and conflict resolution.
- iv. Evaluate the role of peace education in promoting peaceful coexistence among youths in Ogoni communities.

- v. Identify challenges affecting the implementation of peace education in reducing youth violence in the study area.
- vi. Propose strategies for strengthening peace education programmes as a tool for sustainable youth violence reduction in Ogoni communities.

1.3 Research Questions

- i. What are the common forms and nature of youth violence in Ogoni communities of Rivers State?
- ii. What is the level of awareness and exposure of youths to peace education programmes in the Ogoni communities?
- iii. To what extent does peace education influence youths' attitudes and behaviours toward violence and conflict resolution in the study area?
- iv. How does peace education contribute to the promotion of peaceful coexistence among youths in Ogoni communities?
- v. What are the challenges affecting the effective implementation of peace education in reducing youth violence in Ogoni communities?
- vi. What strategies can enhance the effectiveness of peace education programmes in reducing youth violence in the study area?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study made important contributions both practically and theoretically.

This study is significant in several ways, as it contributes to academic knowledge, policy formulation, educational practice, and community development concerning peacebuilding and youth violence reduction in Nigeria. By examining the impact of peace education on youth violence in Ogoni communities of Rivers State, the study provides valuable insights for various stakeholders.

The findings of this study will assist federal, state, and local government authorities in understanding the role of peace education as a sustainable approach to addressing youth violence. The study will provide empirical evidence that can inform the formulation and implementation of policies aimed at integrating peace education into national and state educational curricula and youth development programmes. It will also guide policymakers in designing non-violent, preventive strategies for managing youth restiveness, particularly in conflict-prone regions such as the Niger Delta.

The study will be beneficial to schools, colleges, and curriculum development bodies by highlighting the importance of incorporating peace education into formal education at various levels. It will demonstrate how peace education can shape youths' attitudes, values, and behaviours toward peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution. Curriculum planners can use the findings to strengthen civic education, social studies, and related subjects to include practical peacebuilding skills.

For community leaders, traditional rulers, and grassroots peacebuilders in Ogoni communities, the study will offer insights into how peace education can be used to reduce youth violence and promote harmony. It will provide a framework for community-based peace education programmes that encourage dialogue, tolerance, and

mutual respect among youths. The findings may also help restore trust and cooperation between youths and community leadership structures.

The study will benefit youths and youth-based organizations by increasing awareness of the value of peace education in addressing conflicts constructively. It will empower young people with knowledge and skills for non-violent conflict resolution, critical thinking, and responsible civic participation. By highlighting positive behavioural outcomes associated with peace education, the study encourages youths to become active agents of peace and development in their communities.

Non-governmental organizations, civil society groups, and peacebuilding agencies operating in the Niger Delta and beyond will find the study useful for programme planning and evaluation. The findings will help these organizations design more effective peace education and youth engagement initiatives aimed at reducing violence and fostering social cohesion.

Academically, this study contributes to existing literature on peace education, youth violence, and conflict transformation in Nigeria. It fills a gap in empirical research focusing specifically on Ogoni communities, thereby serving as a reference point for future studies. Researchers and students can build upon the findings to further explore peace education as a tool for sustainable peace and development.

Ultimately, the study is significant to Nigerian society, as reducing youth violence contributes to improved security, economic growth, and social stability. By promoting peace education, the study supports the broader goal of building a culture of peace, tolerance, and unity necessary for national development.

Overall, the scope of the study is designed to provide a focused and realistic assessment of how peace education has contributed to the reduction of youth violence in Ogoni communities, while acknowledging the social, cultural and environmental realities of the area.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design within a quantitative research framework. The descriptive survey design is appropriate because it enables the systematic collection of data from a representative sample of respondents to describe existing conditions, attitudes, perceptions, and experiences related to peace education and youth violence in the study area. The quantitative approach facilitates the use of numerical data to examine relationships between peace education and the reduction of youth violence, thereby allowing for objective measurement and statistical analysis of variables.

According to Hirose and Creswell (2023), quantitative research emphasizes objectivity, measurement, and statistical testing, making it suitable for studies that seek to determine the extent and direction of relationships among variables. The descriptive survey design further allows the researcher to generalize findings from the sample to the larger population of youths in Ogoni communities.

2.2 Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Ogoni communities of Rivers State, Nigeria. Ogoniland comprises four Local Government Areas, namely Khana, Gokana, Tai, and Eleme. The area is predominantly inhabited by youths and has experienced various forms of social unrest, youth restiveness, and communal conflicts over the years. These challenges have made Ogoni communities a suitable setting for examining the role of peace education in addressing youth violence.

2.3 Population of the Study

The population of this study consists of youths and peace education stakeholders within the Ogoni communities of Rivers State. The primary focus is on youths aged 15–35 years, as this age group represents the most active and vulnerable segment with respect to youth violence and participation in peace-related activities. In addition, the population includes community leaders, traditional rulers, educators, religious leaders, and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in peace education and youth development programmes.

Based on available population projections and local government records, the estimated youth population across the selected Ogoni communities is approximately 4,800 individuals. Clearly defining the population ensures that the findings of the study are applicable to the target group and prevent overgeneralisation beyond the scope of the research (Willie, 2024).

2.4 Sample Size Determination

The sample size for the study was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$
 where n = sample size, N = population size (4,800), e = level of precision (0.05)

$$n = \frac{4800}{1 + 4800(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = 369$$

Thus, a total of 369 respondents constituted the sample size for the study.

2.5 Sampling Technique

A multistage sampling technique was employed in selecting respondents for the study. In the first stage, the four Local Government Areas in Ogoniland (Khana, Gokana, Tai, and Eleme) were purposively selected due to their relevance to the study. In the second stage, selected communities within each Local Government Area were chosen using simple random sampling. In the third stage, stratified random sampling was used to ensure proportional representation of youths across the communities.

In addition, purposive sampling was used to select key stakeholders such as community leaders, educators, and NGO representatives based on their involvement in peace education initiatives.

2.6 Instrument for Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaire was divided into sections covering

demographic information of respondents, exposure to peace education programmes, perceptions of peace education, incidence and forms of youth violence, and perceived impact of peace education on youth violence reduction

The use of structured questionnaires ensured uniformity in responses and enhanced the reliability and accuracy of the data collected (Taherdoost, 2021).

2.7 Method of Data Collection

The researcher administered the questionnaires personally with the assistance of trained research assistants. This approach helped to improve the response rate and ensured that respondents clearly understood the questionnaire items. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality.

2.8 Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using Descriptive statistics such as **frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations** were used to summarise respondents' characteristics and responses.

3. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

In this section, the analysis and interpretation of data collected for the field was analyzed.

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section presents demographic information of respondents, including gender, age, educational level, and community of residence.

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	214	60.8
Female	138	39.2
Total	352	100

The table above shows that out of 352 respondents, males (60.8%) outnumber females (39.2%), indicating a male-dominated sample in this study. This distribution is important for understanding the demographic characteristics of the respondents and may influence the interpretation of gender-related findings.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Range (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
15–20	76	21.6
21–25	104	29.5
26–30	98	27.8
31–35	74	21.1
Total	352	100

The age distribution of respondents shows that most participants are young adults between 21 and 30 years (57.3%), with the 21–25 years group being the largest at 29.5%. The 15–20 and 31–35 age groups have nearly equal representation at around 21%. This indicates that the study's findings are likely to reflect the views and experiences of youthful respondents.

Table 3: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Primary	62	17.6
Secondary	158	44.9
Tertiary	132	37.5
Total	352	100

The total number of respondents is 352, consistent with previous demographic tables.

Distribution by Educational Level

Primary education: 62 respondents (17.6%) → The smallest group.

Secondary education: 158 respondents (44.9%) → The largest group, representing nearly half of all respondents.

Tertiary education: 132 respondents (37.5%) → The second largest group.

Most respondents have secondary education, accounting for 44.9% of the sample. Combined, respondents with secondary and tertiary education make up 82.4% of the sample, indicating that most participants have at least some formal educations beyond primary level.

3.2 Implication for the Study

The educational profile suggests that respondents are relatively literate and capable of understanding survey questions, which enhances the reliability of the data. It also indicates that the study may reflect the views of individuals who have formal education, making their responses informed by academic and social experiences.

The educational distribution shows that most respondents have secondary education (44.9%), followed by tertiary education (37.5%), while only a small proportion have primary education (17.6%). This indicates that the majority of participants are formally educated, suggesting that the responses in this study are likely informed and reliable.

3.3 Analysis of Data

A total of 369 questionnaires were administered to respondents across the selected Ogoni communities. Out of this number, 352 questionnaires were correctly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 95.4%, while 17 questionnaires (4.6%) were not returned or were improperly filled and therefore discarded. The high response rate was considered adequate for data analysis.

Table 4. Questionnaire Distribution and Retrieval

Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Returned and valid	352	95.4
Not returned/invalid	17	4.6
Total	369	100

Table 5: Availability of Peace Education Programmes

Programme Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
School-based peace education	112	31.8
Community workshops/seminars	96	27.3
NGO-led peace campaigns	84	23.9
Religious peace teachings	60	17.0
Total	352	100

The table shows that peace education in Ogoni communities is delivered through multiple channels, with school-based programmes being the most prominent.

Table 6: Influence of Peace Education on Attitude to Violence

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very high extent	146	41.5
High extent	118	33.5
Low extent	56	15.9
Very low extent	32	9.1
Total	352	100

Most respondents indicated that peace education has a high or very high influence on reducing violent attitudes among youths.

4. Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study indicate that peace education plays a significant role in reducing youth violence in Ogoni communities. The results show that exposure to peace education programmes positively influences youths' attitudes toward non-violence, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. These findings are consistent with earlier studies which suggest that peace education promotes conflict resolution skills and discourages violent behaviour among young people.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the presence of multiple peace education platforms, including schools, NGOs, and religious institutions, strengthens community-level peacebuilding efforts.

This chapter presented and analysed the data obtained from respondents using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings demonstrated that peace education has a significant and positive impact on the reduction of youth violence in Ogoni communities. The next chapter presents a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

5. Summary, Conclusion, And Recommendations

5.1 Summary

The study was undertaken to assess the impact of peace education on the reduction of youth violence in Ogoni communities of Rivers State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to identify the forms of peace education programmes available in the study area, examine youths' perceptions and attitudes towards peace education, and determine the extent to which peace education contributes to reducing youth violence.

A descriptive survey research design within a quantitative framework was adopted for the study. The population comprised youths aged 15–35 years and selected peace education stakeholders across Ogoni communities. A sample size of 369 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula, out of which 352 valid questionnaires were retrieved and analysed. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS.

The findings revealed that various peace education programmes exist in Ogoni communities, including school-based peace education, community workshops, NGO-led initiatives, and religious peace teachings. The results further showed that peace education has a significant

influence on youths' attitudes towards non-violence, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. Hypothesis testing using chi-square analysis confirmed that peace education has a statistically significant impact on the reduction of youth violence in the study area.

5.2 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that peace education plays a vital role in reducing youth violence in Ogoni communities of Rivers State. Exposure to peace education programmes equips youths with conflict resolution skills, promotes dialogue, tolerance, and mutual understanding, and discourages violent behaviours. The presence of peace education initiatives through schools, community organisations, religious institutions, and non-governmental organisations contributes significantly to fostering a culture of peace among youths.

The study further concludes that strengthening and expanding peace education programmes can serve as a sustainable strategy for addressing youth violence and promoting long-term peace and social stability in Nigeria, particularly in conflict-prone communities.

5.3 Recommendations

In view of the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Integration of Peace Education into School Curricula: Government and educational authorities should integrate peace education as a compulsory subject at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels to instill non-violent values in youths from an early age.
2. Community-Based Peace Education Programmes: Community leaders and local governments should organise regular peace education workshops, seminars, and town hall meetings targeted at youths, especially in conflict-prone areas.
3. Support for NGOs and Civil Society Organisations: Government and development partners should provide adequate funding and institutional support to NGOs involved in peace education and youth development programmes.
4. Youth Engagement and Empowerment: Youths should be actively involved in the design and implementation of peace education initiatives to enhance ownership, relevance, and effectiveness.
5. Use of Media and Technology: Peace education messages should be disseminated through radio, television, and social media platforms to reach a wider youth audience and reinforce peaceful values.
6. Collaboration among Stakeholders: There should be stronger collaboration between government agencies, traditional institutions, religious bodies, schools, and NGOs to ensure coordinated and sustained peace education efforts.

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