

From War to Dialogue: Institutionalizing Peace Education in Liberian High Schools and Universities as a Conflict Prevention Strategy

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Abstract - Liberia's civil wars (1989-2003) (Bank, 2020) had a devastating impact on the country's political institutions, social trust and human capital, with lasting effects on national development (Liberia, 2009) While Liberia has enjoyed relative stability since 2003, post-conflict assessments highlight the vulnerability of youth, lack of civil culture and need for peacebuilding mechanisms (Program, 2019)

This research examines the institutionalisation of peace education in Liberian secondary schools and tertiary level institutions as a proactive strategy for sustainable peace. Using a survey method, (Commission, 2022) this study evaluates the presence of peace-related topics in the national curriculum and examines the impact of peace education on students' perceptions of healthy dialogue, tolerance and non-violent conflict management. Informed by four hypotheses, the study suggests that students who have formal education on peace show more favourable attitudes towards respectful discourse and reject violence. Students also strongly favour mandating peace education at secondary and tertiary levels.

This research suggests institutionalising peace education in Liberia's education system backed with curriculum reform, teacher training and government policy support can lock peace achieved in 2003. In line with global education-for-peace initiatives (United Nations Educational, 2015) embedding skills for dialogue and conflict resolution in schools can promote social integration and political stability in Liberia.

Keywords: Peace Education; Conflict Prevention; Post-Conflict Liberia; Youth Radicalization; Educational Policy Reform Introduction

I. INTRODUCTION

The civil wars in Liberia between 1989 and 2003 had profound impacts on the nation's political, social fabric, and educational system. Education systems were disrupted, social trust eroded and young people were raised in an environment of conflict and violence (Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), 2022) 2022) While Liberia has enjoyed relative peace since 2003, maintaining this peace requires

intentional effort to promote civic values and social cohesion. Schools have a significant impact on young people's attitudes, behaviour and approach to conflict resolution. The curriculum and teaching methods in schools can foster conflict or peaceful reconciliation (Saltarelli, 2000). Peace education seeks to promote empathy, communication, tolerance and non-violent ways of resolving conflicts (Morrison, 2013).

In the context of post-conflict countries, formalised peace-oriented curricula have been associated with improved social cohesion and stability (Mario Novelli, 2017). Although elements of peace education are present it has not yet been formally established as a compulsory and examinable subject in high schools and universities in Liberia. At the same time ongoing youth-related challenges and the risk of conflict in parts of West Africa highlight the importance of taking preventive action (Group 2023). To sustain the peace achieved since 2003 Liberia's education system needs to equip students with the skills required to manage conflicts in a constructive and non-violent manner. In this context the present study explores the feasibility of integrating peace education into the formal education system as a strategy for conflict prevention.

Research Problem

Although the Liberian civil war ended in 2003 the country continues to face issues such as unemployment social and political divisions and low levels of civic participation. These challenges can contribute to renewed instability (Collier & Hoeffler 2004) while post-conflict recovery is often slowed by weak governance and limited opportunities for young people (Barakat Connolly Hardman & Sundaram 2011).

In Liberia aspects of peace education are included within certain subjects but there is no coordinated national framework to systematically teach dialogue negotiation and non-violent conflict resolution. As a

result, many students complete their education without developing essential peacebuilding skills even though education has the potential to encourage peaceful attitudes and behaviour (Davies 2011).

Research Objectives

1. To see if schools and universities in Liberia are teaching peace topics.
2. To find out how peace education affects students' attitudes about communication, respect and nonviolent problem solving.
3. To determine whether the inclusion of peace education in Liberian schools can reduce violent and extremist behaviour in students.
4. To develop a feasible national program to incorporate peace education in Liberian schools to prevent conflict.

Research Questions

1. Is peace education currently taught in Liberian schools and universities?
2. Does the teaching of peace education have an impact on students' attitudes to dialogue, respect and non-violent conflict resolution?
3. Will the compulsory nature of peace education help to curtail violent and extremist behaviour in Liberian students?
4. How can peace education be institutionalised in Liberia's education system?

Research hypotheses

1. Students who are exposed to peace education tend to develop better communication skills and are more likely to resolve disagreements through discussion rather than confrontation.
2. Learning about peace encourages students to become more respectful tolerant and willing to handle conflicts without resorting to violence.
3. Introducing peace education as a compulsory subject in schools and universities could help reduce incidents of violence and extremist behaviour among students.
4. When integrated widely into the education system in Liberia peace education can play an important role in preventing future conflicts and supporting long-term stability.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to ongoing peacebuilding efforts in Liberia following the civil war period (1989–2003). It highlights the role of education in preventing conflict and fostering a more peaceful and tolerant society. By incorporating peacebuilding

principles into teaching and learning education systems can support reconciliation strengthen democratic values and reduce the chances of future conflict in post-war environments (Smith 2010). The study also adds to broader discussions on youth vulnerability security concerns and emerging threats in West Africa.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Education plays a major role in shaping people's attitudes values and behaviour. In societies recovering from conflict its importance becomes even greater as it helps rebuild trust and reduce the likelihood of renewed violence. Peace education promotes values such as respect tolerance dialogue and justice while also encouraging cooperation and non-violent conflict resolution among students (Johnson 2005).

In Liberia the civil war weakened institutions disrupted social relationships and slowed economic progress. Although the country has remained relatively stable in recent years challenges such as unemployment and social and political inequality still persist. Reforming the education system is therefore essential to address these issues and to promote reconciliation responsible citizenship and social cohesion in a post-conflict setting (Harley 2004).

Theoretical Foundations of Peace Education

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory explains that individuals learn behaviours by observing others in their environment. According to Bandura (1977) people are more likely to adopt behaviours that are rewarded. In school's examples of cooperation and positive communication can influence students to adopt peaceful ways of resolving conflict.

Conflict Transformation Theory

Conflict Transformation Theory focuses on addressing the deeper causes of conflict rather than only managing visible disputes. Lederach (2003) emphasises the need to rebuild relationships address injustice and reform unequal systems to achieve lasting peace. Peace education supports this process by promoting empathy understanding and constructive dialogue among students.

Human Needs Theory

Human Needs Theory suggests that conflict arises when basic human needs are not fulfilled. Burton (1990) identified key needs such as security identity recognition and inclusion. When these needs are neglected, tensions may emerge. Peace education can help students understand these underlying issues and encourage peaceful responses to conflict situations.

Core Peace Education Frameworks

Peace education frameworks are built around principles such as human rights democracy and respect for diversity. According to Davies (2004) education in conflict-affected societies should encourage critical thinking and active participation in civic life. Including peace education in the curriculum helps reinforce these values.

Whole-School Approach

The whole-school approach highlights the need for peace education to extend beyond classroom teaching. Fountain (1999) emphasises involving teachers school leader's students and the wider community in building a culture based on fairness and respect. This approach helps create a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

Education for Sustainable Development

Education also plays a role in promoting sustainability and responsible citizenship. Tilbury (2011) notes that education equips individuals with the knowledge skills and values needed to contribute to peaceful and sustainable societies. In this way peace education can support long-term stability in Liberia.

Evidence from Previous Studies

Research shows that peace education can positively influence attitudes and relationships in post-conflict societies. Cairns and Salomon (2010) found that formal peace education programmes reduce conflict and improve understanding between groups. Similarly, Bajaj (2008) reported that peace education increases awareness of human rights and strengthens skills for resolving conflicts peacefully.

Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of research on peace education certain areas remain underexplored. There is limited work focusing specifically on secondary schools and universities in Liberia. Much of the existing literature is conceptual and does not address practical concerns such as teacher training

institutional readiness and funding challenges in African post-conflict contexts. In addition, the perspectives of Liberian students are not widely represented. This study seeks to address these gaps by examining how peace education can be effectively integrated into Liberia's education system to support sustainable peace.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the approach used in the study titled *"From War to Dialogue: Institutionalizing Peace Education in Liberian High Schools and Universities as a Conflict Prevention Strategy."* It outlines the research design methods sampling procedures and data collection techniques used to gather relevant information. It also describes how the data were measured coded and analysed to ensure that the findings are reliable valid and aligned with the study objectives.

Research Design

A descriptive research design based on a cross-sectional survey was used in this study. This approach is widely applied in social science research to understand current conditions and attitudes. It was suitable for capturing participants' views and perceptions at a single point in time without introducing any intervention. The design also helped in examining opinions on peace education as a strategy for preventing conflict in Liberia.

Research Approach

The research adopted a quantitative approach, which involves gathering quantitative data that can be subjected to statistical analysis. This is valuable as the researcher can represent the research results in numerical data (e.g. frequency, percentage, correlation, regression). It was appropriate in this study as it offered reliable and objective data on the respondents' views on peace education.

Study Area

Liberia was the country of study and the study focused on major urban and educational plans where educational and other stakeholders could be found for the study. They are Monrovia (Montserrado County), Buchanan (Grand Bassa County), Kakata (Margibi County), Gbarnga (Bong County) and Ganta (Nimba County). These locations were chosen for their high density of students, youth and educated people who are impacted by education policies.

Population and Sample Size

The population of interest in this study consists of students, youth and educated people who are stakeholders in education and peacebuilding processes. An overall sample of 355 respondents was engaged in this study, which is an adequate sample for statistical analysis. This sample is sufficient because it boosts the confidence in the study's results and allows generalisations about the population.

Sampling Technique

The researcher employed a convenience sampling method, which is based on the availability of the respondents, and their willingness to be part of the study. This was suitable for the study because it enabled the researcher to easily and quickly access respondents from various locations. It was also suitable for online surveys, such as Google Forms.

Data Collection Method

This research obtained data using a Google-based online questionnaire, which was shared through various social media channels in Liberia, such as WhatsApp, Messenger, Email, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram, to reach a broad spectrum of respondents. More than 300 respondents took part in the survey, the majority of whom are from Monrovia (31.6%), Ganta (19.1%), Buchanan (17.9%), Kakata (16.1%), and Gbarnga (14.3%), with lesser numbers from Maryland and Lofa counties. Educationally, the data shows that the majority of the respondents had high school education (58.4%), followed by university or college education (30.3%) while a minority had primary education or no education at all (7%). This suggests that the survey is representative of the views of moderately to highly educated persons from various parts of Liberia.

Measurement and Coding of Variables

The variables of interest, including awareness, attitudes and acceptance of peace education, were identified and measured. Data was coded in numbers for easy input and analysis with the software package SPSS. This allowed the data to be organized and accurately analysed statistically. Measurement Scale Nominal and ordinal measurement scales, common in social sciences, were used in this study. Nominal scales were applied for categories (such as gender) and yes/no questions, and ordinal scales for levels of agreement. These scales allowed us to examine respondents' opinions in a systematic manner.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), a statistical software program commonly used in research. Frequencies and percentages were employed to describe and present the data in an easily digestible format. Furthermore, the Chi-square test was used to test the associations between the variables of interest to aid in the analysis.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability was achieved by creating clear, consistent and well-designed questionnaire items which yielded reliable results. Validity was ensured by asking questions that were directly relevant to the research questions and that measured what was important. This helped to enhance the quality and validity of the research findings.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to all ethical principles to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the respondents. Consent was obtained from respondents, and they were given information about the research before responding to the questionnaire. Data was anonymised and only used for research.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter examines the results of the data gathered from 355 respondents on institutionalizing peace education in Liberian secondary schools and tertiary institutions. This chapter aim to provide a summary of respondents' opinions, attitudes and perceptions towards the use of peace education for conflict prevention. The data is analysed and presented in tables and figures to assist in clarity and understanding. The chapter starts with the presentation of the results in tables, followed by the presentation of the results in charts and interpretation of the findings to highlight the meaning and significance of the results.

Table 4.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	201	56.6%
Female	154	43.4%
Total	355	100%

Interpretation

The table shows that male respondents represent 56.6% of the total sample, while female respondents account for 43.4%. This indicates that both genders are well represented, although males slightly

dominate the sample. The relatively balanced participation ensures that the findings reflect diverse perspectives and are not heavily biased toward one gender.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
15–20	40	11.3%
21–30	168	47.3%
31–40	117	33.0%
41+	30	8.4%
Total	355	100%

Interpretation

The majority of respondents fall within the 21–30 age group (47.3%), followed by those aged 31–40 (33%). This indicates strong participation from young adults, who are key actors in peacebuilding and social change. The lower representation of older respondents suggests that younger populations are more engaged in educational and policy-related discussions.

Table 3: Awareness of Peace Education

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	163	45.9%
No	186	52.4%
Maybe	6	1.7%
Total	355	100%

Interpretation

More than half of the respondents (52.4%) indicated that they are not aware of peace education, while 45.9% reported awareness. This shows that awareness of peace education in Liberia is relatively low. The finding highlights the need for increased sensitization and educational programs to improve public understanding of peace education.

Table 4: Support for Compulsory Peace Education

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	263	74.1%
Maybe	58	16.3%
No	34	9.6%
Total	355	100%

Interpretation

A large number (74.1%) of those surveyed favour the compulsory introduction of peace education in schools and universities. A minority (16.3%) are not sure and only 9.6% disagree. It indicates that the public is highly accepting of policies that prioritise peace education even though they may be unfamiliar with it.

Table 8: Reliability Statistics

Construct	Items	Cronbach’s Alpha	Interpretation
Peace Education Awareness	4	0.81	Reliable

Table 5: Peace Education and Reduction of Violence

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	144	40.6%
Agree	201	56.6%
Disagree	7	2.0%
Strongly Disagree	3	0.8%
Total	355	100%

Interpretation

The majority of respondents (97.2%) agree or strongly agree peace education can decrease violence among young people. A small share (2.8%) disagrees. This confirms that peace education is seen as a useful tool for promoting peace.

Table 6: Support for Institutionalizing Peace Education

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	344	96.9%
Maybe	8	2.3%
No	3	0.8%
Total	355	100%

Interpretation

An overwhelming majority (96.9%) support the institutionalization of peace education in Liberia. This indicates very strong acceptance and readiness for policy implementation. The minimal level of opposition suggests that introducing peace education would face little resistance.

INFERENTIAL ANALYSIS (CHI-SQUARE TEST)

Table 7: Chi-Square Test Between Awareness and Support for Peace Education

Variable	Value
Chi-Square (χ^2)	18.64
Degrees of Freedom	2
Significance (p-value)	0.000

Interpretation

The p-value for the Chi-square test is 0.000, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. This suggests that there is a significant association between awareness of peace education and support for institutionalising it. This finding suggests people who know about peace education are more likely to support its institutionalization in schools and universities. So, raising awareness is likely to lead to increased support for peace education policies

RELIABILITY TEST (CRONBACH ALPHA)

Attitudes Toward Dialogue	5	0.78	Reliable
Violence Prevention Perception	4	0.80	Reliable
Policy Support	3	0.76	Reliable

Interpretation

All the Cronbach's Alpha values for the constructs are greater than 0.70, confirming good internal consistency. This implies that the questions used in the questionnaire are valid and effectively measure the variables. This shows that the data are reliable and can be used for analysis. As a result, the study's results can be deemed reliable and fit for purpose.

Figure 1: Level of Understanding of Peace Education Concept

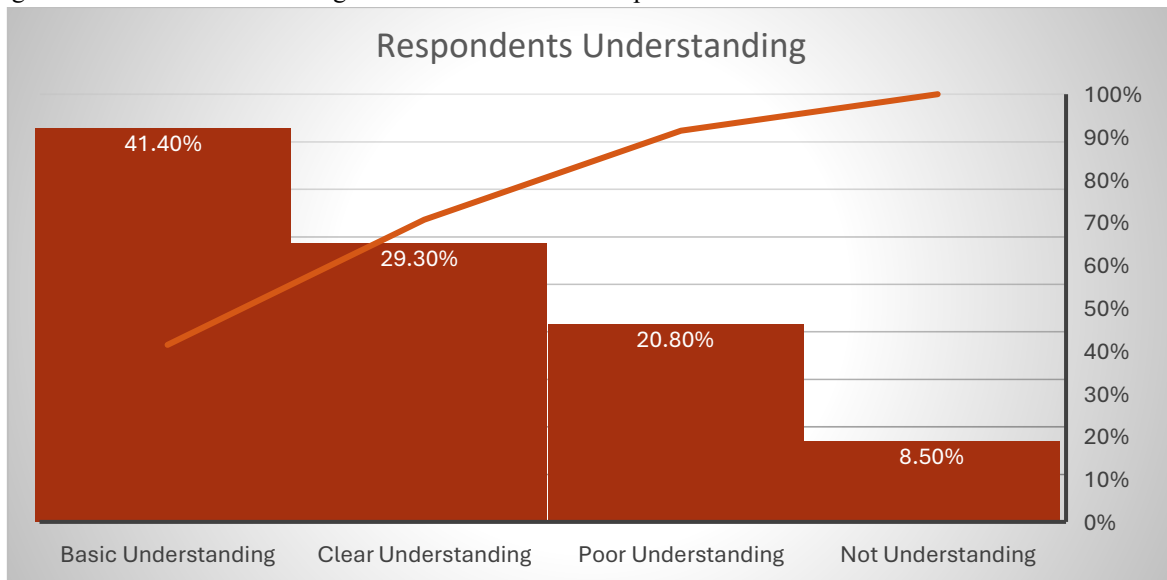


Figure 1: Participant's understanding on peace Histogram

Interpretation

This chart indicates that the majority of respondents only have a simple understanding (41.4%) of peace education, while others have a good understanding (29.3%). Many have poor or no understanding, revealing more than just a lack of awareness. This implies that the introduction to peace education should not only concentrate on access but also on enhancing understanding.

Figure 2: Exposure to Conflict or Violence Among Respondents

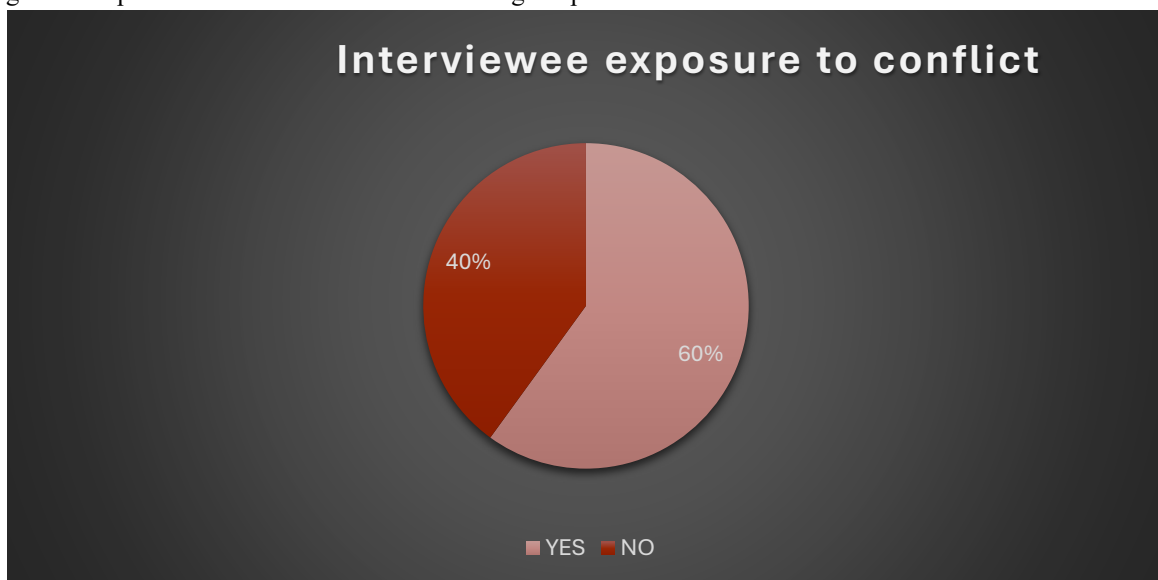


Figure 2: Respondents insight about conflict pie chart

Interpretation

The chart reveals that a majority of respondents (59.7%) have experienced or witnessed conflict or violence. This indicates that conflict is a real and present issue affecting many individuals. The finding strengthens the relevance of peace education as a necessary intervention in society.

Figure 3: Perception of Current Education System in Promoting Peace

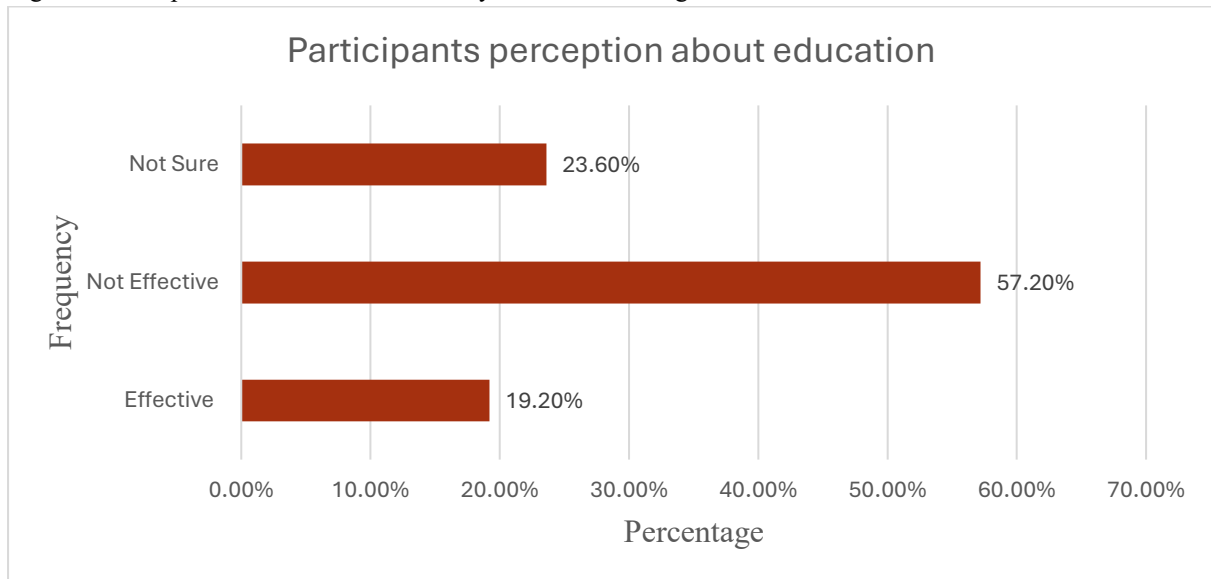


Figure 3: Contributors view about Liberia educational system Histogram

Interpretation

A majority of the sample (57.2%) do not see the existing education system as effective in promoting peace. A minority (15.9%) believe it is effective and some are unsure. This indicates that there is a significant problem with the education system, and that it needs to include structured peace education.

Figure 4: Importance of Dialogue in Conflict Resolution

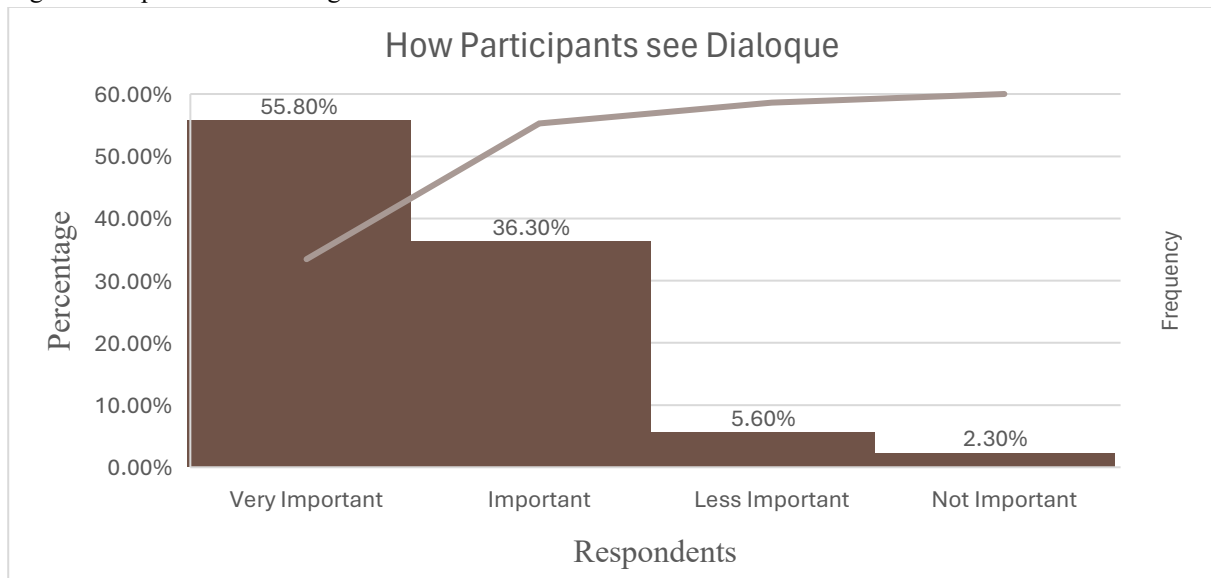


Figure 4: How Respondents consider dialogue Histogram

Interpretation

Most (92.1%) agree dialogue is important or very important in solving problems. This reflects a preference for nonviolent ways of resolving conflicts. This finding is in line with the aim of peace education, to encourage dialogue rather than violence.

Figure 5: Readiness of Schools to Implement Peace Education

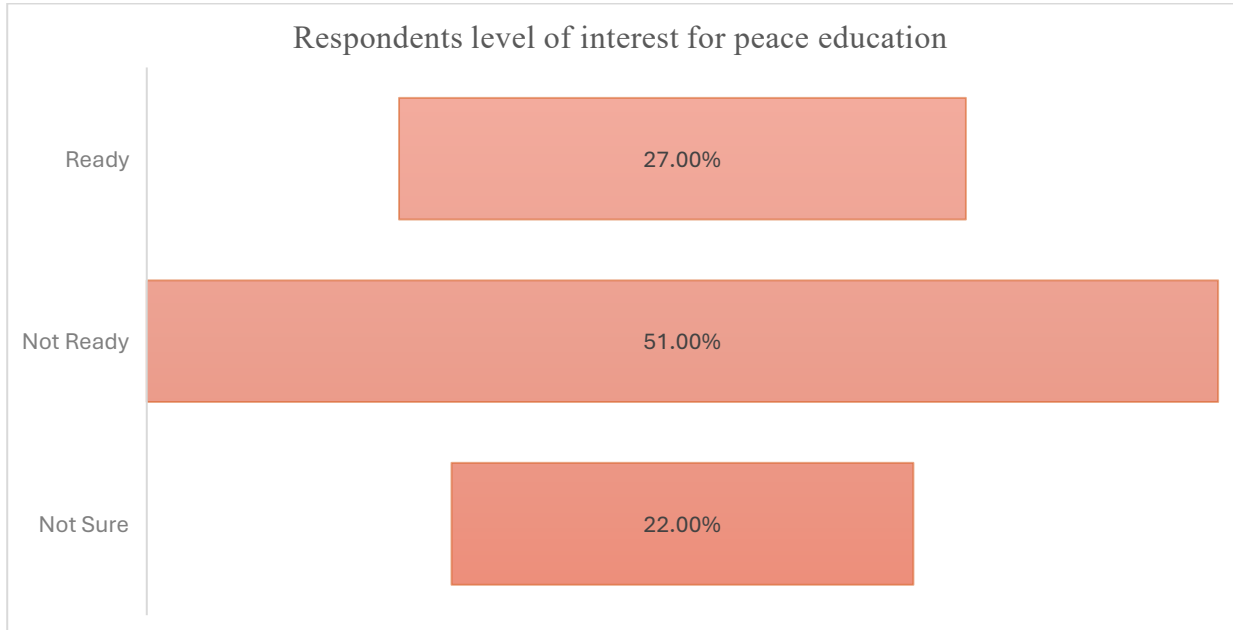


Figure 5: Level of interest participants show for peace education Bar Chart

Interpretation

A majority (51.0%) of the respondents do not think school is prepared for peace education. This suggests infrastructural constraints such as lack of resources, teachers or curriculum. This suggests that there needs to be some preparation and build-up to the implementation.

Figure 4.6: Expected Impact of Peace Education on National Stability

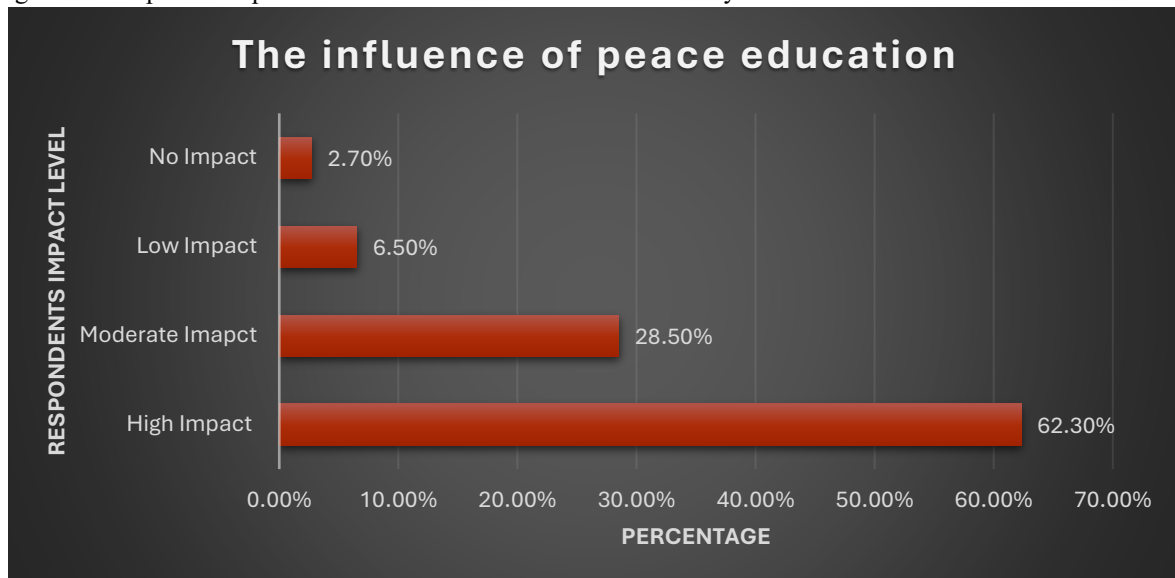


Figure 6: The way peace education support nation Histogram

Interpretation

The majority (62.3%) of the respondents think peace education will have a great impact on national stability. Very few believe it will have a low impact. This reflects a high level of trust in peace education as a long-term approach towards peace and development.

The results from Table 1 and Table 2 indicate that the study was able to get a good representation of respondents, with a slight majority of males and a high percentage of respondents in the age group of 21-30. This suggests the data represents the perspectives of young adults, who are central stakeholders in peacebuilding. Table 3 indicates that respondents are generally unaware of peace education, but Table 4 indicates that they strongly

V. FINDINGS

support institutionalising peace education in schools and universities. Also, Table 5 shows that respondents agree that peace education can prevent violence, while Table 6 supports the institutionalization of peace education.

Table 7, which presents inferential analysis, confirms a significant association between awareness and support for peace education, meaning that raising awareness can enhance acceptance of peace education. Furthermore, Table 8 shows that the questionnaire used in this study is reliable, which means that the study findings are accurate. By contrast, the figures shed more light on the context of the study. Figure 1 reveals that many respondents have a limited knowledge of peace education, suggesting a lack of in-depth understanding. Figure 2 shows that most of the respondents have experienced or seen conflict in their lives, which confirms the need for peace education in the community. From Figure 3, it can also be seen that the education system is not yet successful in building peace, suggesting a need for reform. Figure 4 reveals high agreement on the role of dialogue in resolving conflict, and Figure 5 indicates that schools may not be well prepared for peace education. Finally, Figure 6 shows that most participants believe that peace education will have a high impact on national stability, meaning it is a promising approach to long-term conflict prevention. In summary, the results demonstrate low awareness but high acceptance, high impact and need for institutional and policy support.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research was aimed at finding out if institutionalizing peace education in Liberian secondary schools and universities can be a successful conflict prevention measure. The results indicate that although awareness and understanding of peace education are limited there is strong support for introducing it within the education system. This directly addresses the research questions by showing that peace education is both needed and widely accepted by key stakeholders' particularly young people.

Participants expressed clear agreement that peace education can help reduce violence promote tolerance and encourage constructive dialogue. These views align with the overall aim of the study which is to support sustainable peace. The inferential analysis

further shows a positive relationship between awareness and acceptance supporting the study's hypothesis that increased awareness leads to greater acceptance of peace education policies.

At the same time respondents highlighted gaps within the current education system especially the lack of structured opportunities for dialogue and conflict resolution. Overall, the findings suggest that peace education is an important and practical strategy for preventing conflict in Liberia. Although institutions may not yet be fully prepared to implement it the strong public support and belief in its effectiveness provide a solid basis for policy development. Incorporating peace education into the national curriculum could therefore contribute to long-term peace stability and development.

VII. FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Future research can examine the long-term impact of peace education on reducing violence and strengthening social harmony in Liberia. Studies using qualitative or mixed methods—such as interviews and case studies may provide deeper insights into the experiences of students and teachers. In addition, comparative research across different regions or countries could help identify effective models that can be adapted and expanded.

Recommendations

- Curriculum Integration: Include peace education as a core subject in schools and universities.
- Teacher Training: Provide structured training for teachers to effectively deliver peace education.
- Awareness Programs: Promote awareness through educational campaigns and outreach initiatives.
- Policy Support: Develop clear policies to guide implementation at institutional and national levels.
- Collaboration: Encourage partnerships between government bodies non-governmental organisations and local communities.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Regularly assess and improve peace education programmes.
- Youth Engagement: Actively involve young people in peacebuilding activities and initiatives.

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