

Promoting Peaceful Co-Existence and Religious Tolerance through Supplementary Readers and Reading Comprehension Passages in Basic Education Curriculum

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Abstract

The paper discusses ways of promoting peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance through literacy in Basic Education. The paper also highlights ways the tenets of peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance can be included in titles of supplementary reading materials and reading comprehension passages of the reading component of the English Language Curriculum for Basic Education. The paper suggests that schools should adopt a holistic and integral approach in promoting peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance by encouraging students to engage in meaningful activities such as dramatization, miming, singing, poetry, projects and exchanges to heighten local, national and global awareness of individual, cultural and religious differences. The more children are exposed to reading materials that promote positive images of other people's culture, religion, uniqueness, social identity etc, the less they are likely to find faults with one another and the more they are able to live and work together (as future adults) for the benefits of mankind and for the good of the society.

Introduction

Peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance to many scholars such as Burns, (2005), Afidal, (2006), Bar-Tal (2002), Adams (2000), Odejebi (2009), Peterson (2012) is essentially about understanding the nature of conflict at various levels from personal to global, studying the causes of war and human aggression, exploring a range of awareness of the rights and responsibilities of individuals and groups in the world.

National curricula for religious tolerance and religious education do not spring from nowhere. They evolve over time as a reflection of the needs, perceptions and historical development for the societies concerned. Nigeria is a country with a population believed to be over 150 million, of various ethnic groups. Religion often coincides with the ethnic groups, but not always. Basically, most Hausa-Fulanis in the north are Muslims, and most Ibos in the South-West are Christians.

However, Yorubas in the South-West are both Muslims and Christians with Muslims slightly in the majority and there is fair amount of inter-marriage. Furthermore, the National Policy on Education (2009) expressed concern over “the erosion of essential values and an increasing cynicism in society”. It advocated turning education into “a forceful tool for the cultivation of social and moral values”. Education should “foster universal and external values, oriented towards the unity and integration of our people”. The programme of Action of 1992 tried to integrate the various components of value education into the curriculum at all stages of school education including the secondary stage.

Literacy in Basic Education

Basic Education refers to the whole range of educational activities taking place in various settings (formal, non formal and informal), that aim to meet basic learning needs. According to international standard classification of education (ISCED), basic education comprises primary education (first stage of basic education) and lower secondary education (second stage). In countries (developing countries in particular) basic education often includes also pre-primary education and/or adult and literacy programmes.

Basic Education in Nigeria according to the National Policy on education (2009) is the education provided for children at the primary and Junior Secondary levels of Education including adults and out-of-school youths. The duration is 9 years comprising 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education.

Universal Basic Education is regarded as a priority for developing countries and is the focus of the education for all movement led by UNESCO. It is also included in the millennium development goals as goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education by 2015. Education is fundamental to peace-building. Education for peace, human rights and democracy is inseparable from a style of teaching that imparts to the young, attitudes of dialogue and non-violence in other words, the value of tolerance, openness to others and sharing.

McCombs 1991 defines learning as a social process where learners construct knowledge together. Literacy has to do with the ability to read, write and compute in a given language. In this context, Oxenham (1980) technically describes literacy as ‘a code of visual representation of an aural/oral communication in a particular language’. Learning, success in literacy, especially reading, is certainly among the most important achievements for all students due to its key role in academic learning. (Marx and Engels, 1968, Stevart, 1987, Nnoli, 1978)

Literacy is a prerequisite for peace because it carries multiple benefits, cutting across the human, cultural, social, political and economical spheres. In today’s knowledge driven societies, lack of literacy is more than ever synonymous with exclusion and marginalization. According to the most recent figures 793 million adults lack basic literacy skills, the majority are girls and women. A further 67 million children of primary school age are also missing out their rights to an education, running the risk of creating a new generation of illiterates (Wen, 2004, Igwe, 2003, Okoli, 2001, Adejobi and Adesina 2009,). This unacceptable situation is holding back all efforts to reduce poverty and advance human development. It is an infringement of human right and fundamental freedoms and a threat to peace and security. Furthermore, literacy in basic education is a development acceleration and a force for peace. Literacy in Basic Education empowers individuals, equipping them with the skills and confidence to seek out vital information to make informed choices that has a direct impact on their families and communities.

Literacy in basic education is a condition for individuals to effectively participate in democratic processes to claim a voice in community organizations, gain political knowledge and thereby contribute to shaping the quality of public policies. Literacy programmes strengthen mutual understanding by enabling people to share ideas and to express, preserve and develop their cultural identity and diversity. No country can hope to establish lasting conditions for peace unless it finds ways through inclusive education system, that promote mutual understanding, respect, tolerance and dialogue. It is crucial to integrate literacy in peace-building process in order to plant the seeds of peace, foster dialogue and reconciliation, and give youths and adults the skills they need to seek decent employment.

Literacy for peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance in Basic education

Peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance imply the capacity to live together in harmony. This calls for non-violent ways of resolving conflict. Adejobi and Adesina (2009), Burns and White (2011) viewed peace education as a type of study that essentially inculcates discipline in people. It is that course of study that teaches people the past and present causes of conflict or wars noting the effects, and recommending ways of averting such social ills.

Ajala (2003) defines peace and tolerance education as the type of education that impacts in learners all norms, values and attitudes that can bring about a conducive environment for human living. Peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance begins with the individual and spreads to the family, school, community, nation, and to the global village.

The members of a society need to be oriented toward peace and tolerance rather than towards violence. At the same time, social, economic, and political systems have to be re-oriented to peace and tolerance. Inclusively, the discipline of peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance must shape our way of life. Education is vital for the effectiveness of both strategies. For this to happen, the Basic Education level should be the starting point. Basic Education has to go beyond the warehousing of information to a celebration of awareness, which is best facilitated through peace and tolerance education. Basic Education is fundamental to peace-building and religious tolerance.

Therefore, basic education schools should adopt a style of teaching that imparts to the young, attitudes of dialogue and non-violence in others words, the values of tolerance, peace, openness to others, caring and sharing, human rights and democracy.

Individuals in the society must be literate to enjoy their human right of basic education and the adventure of learning. Illiterate people cannot benefit from the power of education to transform the lives of people. Education allows them to broaden critical thinking, make informed choices and become agents of change and actors of peace and tolerance. Literacy is not merely the skill to read and write, it is a transformational process that empowers individuals.

Literacy facilitates intercultural understanding, respect, conflict resolution, social cohesion, religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence. It is evident to note that countries with patterns of violence have some of the lowest literacy rates in the world. No country can hope to establish lasting conditions for peace and tolerance unless it finds ways of building mutual trust between its citizens. Inclusive education promotes mutual understanding, respect, tolerance and dialogue. Literacy opens new opportunities and skills for all.

Promoting Peaceful Co-existence and Religious Tolerance through Supplementary Reading Materials

Simon Barron (1998), is of the view that literacy plays a significant role in shaping our world in the religious and non-religious worldviews and in influencing the relations between people and culture. It is also crucial to promoting peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance in a mixed society. Bigotry and violent extremism breed on isolation and ignorance. A culture of peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance encourages and fosters values, attitudes, traditions, behaviours and life style that rest on principles of human rights tolerance and non violence.

The following are tenets of peaceful co-existence and Religious tolerance that can be included in the titles of supplementary reading materials of the reading component of the English Language Curriculum for Basic Education.

- Living in peace
- Loving and caring
- Caring and sharing
- Good neighbourliness
- Be your brother or sister's keeper
- Respect other people's religion/beliefs
- Equality and mutual benefit
- Competition without war
- Benefits of dialogue
- Mutual non-aggression
- Tolerance for ethnic diversity
- Tolerate one another
- Say "No" to any form of violence
- Say "No" to any form of inhuman behaviour
- Accommodate individual differences

When children are constantly and regularly exposed to good reading materials with the above titles, the chances are that they will be more positively disposed towards other members of their class, school and individuals in their communities.

Promoting Peaceful Co-existence and religious tolerance through reading comprehension passages

English Language is a subject that cuts across the curriculum. It is a compulsory subject for all students in all classes at the primary and secondary levels of education in Nigeria. Reading comprehension is one of the fundamental language skills children are expected to be exposed to all through their schooling (Yusuf, 2011). In view of this, young children need to be constantly inspired through meaningful reading comprehension lessons. This will make students to develop positive mental attitude that will ultimately help them in life.

This author has created and developed a few reading comprehension passages with tenets of peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance that can be included in the reading component of the English Language curriculum for Basic Education. This author strongly believes that students should be made to be agents of change. One way of making this to happen is by exposing students to reading more stuff about mutual co-existence, religious tolerance, respect for the human race, good neighborliness and so on. When students learn positive things about the world, they will grow to become peace loving and tolerant citizens that would ultimately change the world for good.

A Sample lesson Guide (For JS1 – 3)

Tolerance

Tolerance is the appreciation of diversity and the ability to live and let others live. It is the ability to exercise a fair and objective attitude towards those whose opinion, practices, religion, nationality and so on differ from one's own. Tolerance is not just agreeing with one another or remaining indifferent in the face of injustice but rather showing respect for the essential humanity in every person.

Intolerance is the failure to appreciate and respect the practices, opinions and beliefs of another group. Being tolerant remains key to easing hostile tensions between groups and to helping communities move past intractable conflict.

Tolerance is integral to different groups relating to one another in a respectful and understanding way. In cases where individuals or communities have been deeply entrenched in violent conflicts, being tolerant helps the affected groups endure the pain of the past and resolve their differences.

Intolerance will drive groups apart, creating a sense of permanent separation before them. Intolerance between individuals is perpetuated when individuals base their impressions and opinions of one another on assumptions. These assumptions can be influenced by the positive or negative beliefs most influential in their lives including parents or other family members, colleagues, educators or role models.

Education or schooling based on myths can demonize and dehumanize other cultures rather than promote cultural understanding and tolerance for diversity and differences. Parties to a conflict and third parties must remind themselves that tolerance is preferable to tolerating intolerance.

Questions

- (1) *What does "tolerance" mean?*
- (2) *Why should we tolerate one another?*
- (3) *How would you show tolerance in your class/school?*

Introduction

Teacher should introduce the passage above by asking some pre-reading questions such as

- a) What does it mean to tolerate people?
- b) Why do we need to be tolerant?
- c) What are the benefits of tolerating our classmates, schoolmates and neighbours?
- d) What does the title of the passage suggest?

Presentation

- Step 1** Teacher should stimulate meaningful discussion on the passage through the above questions.
- Step 2** Teacher should read the first sentence and ask the students what they think the passage is about.
- Step 3** Teacher should read the first paragraph together with the students to confirm their predictions.
- Step 4** Teacher should make students demonstrate and act a short playlet on the content of the passage (i.e tolerance).
- Step 5** Teacher should discuss answers to the comprehension questions.

Evaluation: Teacher should discuss ways of tolerating people and what students can do to tolerate and accommodate one another. In addition, students should answer the questions after the comprehension passage.

Conclusion: Teacher should give students homework to list ways they can tolerate and accommodate their classmates or school mates.

Additional comprehension passages developed by the researcher in appendix 1-7 can be taught to JS 1-3 students following the above format.

The way forward

Peace is no doubt a sine-qua-non to progress and development. No society can really attain its economic and political heights when the ingredients of peace, harmony social development are lacking. It has therefore become imperative that all nations of the world that aspire to be great must as a matter of necessity toe the path of peace among its people whether multi-religious or multi-ethnic. Literacy should be considered central to the development of a tolerant society. It is also a pre-requisite for peace because it carries multiple benefits, cutting across the human, cultural, social, political and economic spheres. In today's knowledge-driven societies, literacy and the right to basic education empowers individuals, equipping them with the skills and confidence to seek out vital information choices that have a direct impact on their families and communities. There is need for schools to adopt a holistic and integrated approach in promoting peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance in our educational system. Government should institutionalize policies on peaceful coexistence and tolerance. For instance, an integration of the tenets of peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance is advocated for the reading component of the English Language Curriculum for Basic Education. The curriculum should promote a holistic approach to learning. Students should be encouraged to engage on projects and exchanges to heighten local and global awareness of cultural and religious differences.

Workshops/Seminars on religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence should be organised periodically to acquaint teachers and the school community on knowledge of how to have peaceful co-habitation and tolerance with people irrespective of culture, religion, gender and social status.

Recommendations

- Curriculum planners should ensure that the tenets of promoting peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance such as kindness, loyalty, honesty, love, optimism, compassion, peace etc are included in reading comprehension passages and in the titles of supplementary reading materials of the reading component of the English Language curriculum.
- Students should be encouraged to read supplementary reading materials with titles such as religious tolerance, living in peace, respect for human dignity, cooperation, reconciliation, appreciation of diversity, compassion, caring and sharing. The supplementary reading materials should aim at promoting positive images to promote understanding and cultural sensitivity. The more groups and individuals are exposed to reading materials about other cultures/religions, the less they are likely to find faults with one another. Particularly those communities who have little access to the outside world and are susceptible to what the literature tells them.
- Curriculum planners should suggest activities that teachers can expose their students to in order to achieve some of the goals of peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance.
- Supplementary reading materials about other cultures, religions, war and its aftermath, religious mayhem and its consequences should be provided for pupils/students to read in schools.
- Students should be taught values such as tolerance, harmony, peace, interdependence, acceptance or respect for diversity and cultural identity. Students should be encouraged to maintain a balance between egocentric and ecocentric considerations in learning to live together and in working for the betterment of the country and the world in general.
- Students should be given opportunity to dramatise, mime or sing songs that convey messages on peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance.
- Students should be encouraged to participate in creative writing (i.e writing their own story books). Teachers can ask students to create titles and write stories on religious mayhem and its aftermath effect, peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance. These stories can be called "My Big Story Book" students can exchange their story books within themselves to provide variety of reading opportunities.
- Students should be taught and encouraged to constantly focus on being tolerant of others in their daily lives. This involves consciously challenging the stereotypes and assumptions that they typically encounter in making decisions about others and or working with others in the school environment.

- Students need to be trained to make them responsible citizens through the teaching and reading of relevant portions of the holy books. Through these teachings, students will be aware of the implication of contravening the teaching enshrined in the holy books.

Conclusion

No country can hope to establish lasting conditions for peace unless it finds ways of building mutual trust between its citizens through its educational system by promoting mutual understanding, respect, tolerance and dialogue. It is therefore, crucial to integrate the tenets of peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance in the reading component of the English Language Curriculum for Basic education.

The seeds of peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance should be planted early in the hearts of children at the basic education level in order to raise a new generation of peace loving citizens of this great country. Teachers should always strive to “catch them young” as the saying goes so that when they (children) grow they will not depart from doing it right all the time. Schools in this regard, are very instrumental in promoting peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance. Schools that create peaceful and tolerant environment help the young ones to grow to respect and understand different cultures, religions and beliefs. There is the need for schools to adopt a holistic and integrated approach in promoting peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance in our educational system. Each school should establish social systems and norms which are democratic, respectful of human rights, politically and economically just, sustainably positive and nationally, internationally and globally acceptable in promoting peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance for the development and progress of the nation.

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Appendices

Samples of Reading Comprehension Passages With Tenets of Peaceful Co-Existence and Religious Tolerance Developed by this Researcher.

Appendix 1

Learning to live together in Peace

Learning to live together in peace and harmony is a dynamic, holistic and life long process through which mutual respect, understanding, caring and sharing, compassion, social responsibility, solidarity, acceptance and tolerance of diversity among individuals and groups (ethnic, regional) are internalized and practised together to solve problems and to work towards a just and free, peaceful and democratic society.

This process begins with the development of inner peace in the minds and hearts of individuals engaged in the search for truth, knowledge and understanding of each other’s cultures, and the appreciation of shared common values to achieve a better future. Learning to live together in peace and harmony requires that quality of relationships at all levels is committed to peace, human rights, democracy and social justice in an ecological sustainable environment.

Questions

- (1) What does it mean to live together in peace?
- (2) What are the benefits of living together in peace?
- (3) What can you do to live in peace with your neighbour?

Appendix 2

Working for the common good of all

One day, it occurred to the members of the body that they were doing all the work and the belly was getting all the food. They held a meeting, and after a long discussion, decided to go on strike until the belly did its proper share of the work for a day or two, the hands refused to take the food, the mouth refused to receive it, and the teeth had no work to do. After a while, the members began to find that they themselves were not in good condition. The hands could hardly move, the mouth was parched and dry, while the legs were unable to support the rest. So, they found that even the belly, in its quiet way, was doing necessary work for the body, and that all must work together or the body will not be well.

Questions

- (1) The members of the body thought that belly wasn't doing its fair share. What happened when the members of the body stopped doing their fair share?
- (2) For each job, everyone must do their fair share by completing their part of the job. What does a job entail?
- (3) What job would you like to do in future?
- (4) How do you intend to play your own part of the job?

Appendix 3

Co-operation

The United Nations is a group of people, called representatives, who come from many of the countries of the world and meet in New York City. They agree to work together and to cooperate for peace and make the world a better place. In 1979 these representatives elected Kofi Annan, from Ghana, to be the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The job of the Secretary-General is to be the spokesperson for the United Nations. Kofi Annan must make sure the countries that are members of the United Nations cooperate in the values and ideas of the United Nations.

Questions

- (1) Who in your community works for cooperation?
- (2) How have you seen people in your community cooperate?
- (3) If you were a representative in your community, what would you like to see done in your community?

Appendix 4

The Bundle of Sticks (Working Together)

An old man gathered his children around him to give them some good advice. He pointed to a bundle of sticks and said to his eldest son, "Break it." The son strained and strained, but with all his efforts, he was not able to break the bundle. The other sons and daughters also tried, but none of them were successful. "Untie the bundle," said the father, "and each of you take a stick." When they had done so, he called out to them. "Now break," and each stick was easily broken. "You see my meaning," said their father, "Union gives strength". None of the children could break the whole bundle of sticks. But, if each child broke one stick, the entire bundle could be broken.

Questions

- (1) Why do you think the children couldn't break the bundle?
- (2) What do you think "Union gives strength" means?
- (3) How have you worked together with others to get something done?

Appendix 5

Role Model

Maya Angelou is an extra ordinary poet, writer, speaker, and performer. Ms Angelou's childhood was difficult, but she became a great writer, singer, and civil rights activist. Some of Ms Angelou's poems and writings are about respect. She says to value others for who they are and to respect yourself, too. She appreciates the differences in all people. She worked hard to become the great success she is today and to become a good role model.

Questions

- (1) Maya Angelou respects those things that make one person different from another. Why is this important?
- (2) A role model is someone you can admire and respect. Who is a role model for you?
- (3) Who do you know who shows respect for themselves and others? Why do you think they do this?

Appendix 6

Respect All Human Race

A lion spotted a little mouse running by. Looking for a little snack, the lion grabbed the tiny mouse and prepared to eat it. “Pardon me, Oh, king of the forest,” cried the mouse. “If you let me go, I will never forget it. Who knows, I may be able to help you one of these days!”

The lion looked at the mouse. “No, little mouse. I can see how tiny you are. You could never help me,” laughed the lion. “But, I will let you go anyway,” and the lion lifted up a paw and let the mouse escape.

Days and weeks passed, and one day, the lion was caught in a trap! The hunters had tied the lion to a tree while they searched for a wagon to carry their catch. Just then, the little mouse happened to pass by. Seeing the lion’s sad plight, it quickly gnawed away the ropes that bound the king of the forest. “Was I not right?” said the little mouse. “I may appear small and useless, but I was able to help you!”

Questions

- (1) After the lion let the mouse go, why did the lion think the mouse would be unable to return the favour?
- (2) The lion judged the mouse by how the mouse looked. Why do you think the lion was wrong about that?
- (3) It is best to treat everyone with respect. Do you think the lion now respects the mouse? Why?

Appendix 7

Showing Respect

Respect means to value and appreciate others and treat them with consideration. It also means to be respectful of others, listen, have good manners, be kind and value other people’s choices. Be respectful of property, whether they are things belonging to others or to you. Respect the earth by using less water, picking up litter, decreasing pollution and valuing plants and animals. We can show respect to people by using polite words such as “please”, “thank you”. “I am sorry” other ways we can show respect include, “addressing adults as Mr, Ms, Mrs, etc. ask before using other people’s things. Accept other people’s idea and listen carefully to others. Consider other people’s privacy.

Questions

- (1) What does it mean to respect someone?
- (2) How can we show respect to individual?
- (3) Mention three ways you can show respect to others.