PEACE EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIAN WORK ORGANISATIONS

Akanji Rafiu BANKOLE•

Abstract

The study examined the concept of peace education in relation to conflict management in Nigerian work organizations. With the use of archival method, it was established that conflict is on the increase in Nigerian industries and it is largely due to the inability of employers and employees to handle conflict effectively. The inability of the two parties was traced to the wrong perception, which both parties have for each other especially during conflict situation. The need to change the orientation and perception of the two actors was therefore identified, thus peace education was offered as the antidote. It was specifically suggested that for peace education to have any chance of success in Nigerian industries, government at all levels, employers of labour in the organized private sector as well as higher institutions and training institutes in Nigeria must be involved in the peace education programme. It is believed that by so doing, the actors of industrial relations system in Nigeria would be able to acquire the knowledge, skill and attitudes required to have sustainable industrial peace in Nigerian work organizations.

Key Words: Peace Education, Industrial Conflict, Employers, Employees, Work Organizations.

Introduction

Conflict in Nigerian industries has become perennial and disturbing so much that it has hampered the growth of some organizations in Nigeria. In many organizations in Nigeria today, internal (intrapersonal) and interpersonal conflicts are consuming so much organizational time and attention that organizations are starting to look as though conflict is their primary business (Ojielo, 2002).

This development is largely due to the inability of leaders in Nigerian work organizations to view the management of conflict as systematically as they view information, human resources, and financial management systems. Instead, conflict is viewed and handled in piecemeal and is considered as local events.

The inability to view and manage workplace conflicts systematically has therefore rendered conflict dysfunctional in some organizations. This is evidenced by the high frequency of strike action, unhealthy rivalry between and among sub-units and individuals within an organization, sabotage at workplace, slow work, labour turnover, absenteeism, lack of productivity, general inefficiency, high rate of industrial accident, low moral, withholding of vital knowledge and a host of others that are being perpetrated by workers in workplaces.

With all these daunting contextual events, it is obvious that there is need for a systematic approach towards conflict management. This becomes necessary because the adoption of a systematic process of managing conflicts will accord an organization a wonderful opportunity to enhance its effectiveness and productivity.

• Dept. of Industrial Relations & Public Administrations Faculty of Management Science, Lagos State University.

However, it is noteworthy that the quality of conflict management at the personal level has a direct relationship with the quality of conflict management at organizational level. In other words, good conflict management begins with the individuals involved. If the individuals involved in conflicts are able to take charge and manage themselves in the conflict situation, the outcome will always be positive. Unfortunately, in most organizations in Nigeria, not enough people possess the knowledge neither the skills to exhibit such attitudes (Hammed, 2002; Ojeilo, 2002; Ogunyemi, 2004). It is against this backdrop that this study examined the concept of peace education as a tool for effective conflict management in Nigerian work organizations. Though peace education is yet to be fully exploited in managing organizational conflicts in Nigeria, it is envisaged that such a holistic education that moderates unwanted behaviour in a society will help to impact knowledge, skill, and attitudes essential for the maintenance of peace and development of people in our industries (Alimba 2010). Perhaps it is necessary to throw more light on the concept of conflict before delving into the details of peace education.

Concept of conflict and industrial conflict

Conflict by nature is a constant phenomenon in any human organization. It is so ubiquitous in social life that it has been isolated by some as the basic unit for understanding social existence (Ajala, 2003; Alimba, 2010). The endemic nature of conflict in human grouping has been traced to the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and/or groups in defined social and physical environment (Otite, 2001). Thus, conflict remains the most permanent feature that makes humanity convinced that growth and development are predicated on conflicts.

Though conflict is generally perceived as something devastating, abnormal, dysfunctional and detestable, yet it could be a precursor of positive change if constructively handled (Edwards, 2002; Hammed & Ayantunji, 2002). Thus, an important aspect of conflict is that it includes potential for change, and it is in this context that peace education addresses the issues of conflict and how to find different possibilities for the conflict resolution. Therefore what must be emphasized is not conflict parse but the way man responds to it.

As a concept, conflict has been subjected to diverse definitions by various scholars based on the context and their understanding of the concept. For example, Lederach (1995) described conflict as an on-going situation that is based on deep seated differences of values, ideologies, and goals. In support of this definition, Fisher et al (2004) defined conflict as a relationship between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who have or think they have incompatible goals. It therefore implies that conflict is a continuous interaction that span through lifetime of man and not just a one-off relationship.

Also, one of the most quoted traditional definitions of conflict describes it as 'struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals (Coser, 1956:8). This description of conflict explains the reasons why workers are often ready to ground all economic or productive activities via strike in a bid to get their demands met.

In corroboration with Coser's definition of conflict, Constantino et'al (1995) described conflict as the process of expressing dissatisfaction, disagreement or unmet expectations with any organizational interchange. But in his contribution, Otite (2001) conceptualized conflict as a way of settling problems originating from opposing interests and from the continuity of society. Ajala (2003) succinctly summarises the discourse on conflict when he said conflict is the mechanism which keeps society going.

Industrial conflicts, on the other hand are viewed as the clash of interest and resulting disputes of varying intensity between individuals, groups and organizations in the industrial relations system (Akanji, 2005). Another definition that seems to be the most acceptable sociological definition of industrial conflict is that of Kornhauser, Dulin and Ross(1954:7), which viewed conflict as 'the total range of behaviour and attitudes that express opposition and divergent orientations between individual owners and managers on the one hand, and working people and their organizations on the other'.

Related to the above definition is that of Onyeonoru (2005) who holistically defined industrial conflict as all expressions of dissatisfaction within the employment relationships especially those pertaining to the employment contract and effort bargain. He expatiated further that it includes formal expressions of conflict, organized along the lines of trade unions and employers associations as well as the informal conflict

that lack systematic organizations such as covert grievances that may be expressed in the form of industrial sabotage, absenteeism, or lateness.

The explanation of Onyeouwu) 2005) on the meaning of industrial conflict. Hinds support in the analysis of Otobo (2000) who said that the fact that there is no sign of overt conflict in a given period does not mean other forms of industrial conflicts are not occurring. This implies that conflict as a phenomenon can manifest in diverse ways such as strike, absenteeism sabotage, labors turnover, pilfering, restriction of output, lockout and a host of others.

The views of various writers on the concept of conflict and industrial conflicts have established that conflict is inevitable and that it is not inherently dysfunctional rather its outcome depends on how it is handled or responded to by the parties involved. Though there are mechanisms provided for conflict resolution yet the experience in the past years and the available records had shown that both the internal and statutory mechanisms for conflict resolution in Nigeria had failed to curb effectively the incidence of industrial conflict. This is so because in spite of the operation of the two mechanisms, the incidence of industrial conflicts in Nigeria is persistently and consistently on the increase (Emiola, 1982; Ajala, 2008, Bankole, 2009). For instance, between 1999 and 2004 in Nigeria, there were 502 reported cases of trade disputes, resulting into 1,130 work stoppages, which involved 1,777,406 workers with 27,494,485 man-days lost (CBN, 2005).

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that applying statutory machinery to manage industrial conflict in Nigeria is tantamount to addressing the issue on the mere surface level or peripherally because the orientation or perception of the two social actors (employers and employees) to each other is grossly defective. Therefore, it will take a re-orientation of the two parties (employers and employees) to effectively nip in the bud the problem of high frequency of industrial conflict in Nigeria.

One of the major ways by which this goal can be achieved is peace education. This is so because without the employers and employees acquiring the knowledge and developing the skills that will enable them to exhibit the required attitude (the culture of peace) the problem of industrial conflict may remain insurmountable in Nigeria. This argument finds support in the preamble of the UNESCO constitution which declares that "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed'' (Gumut, 2007). Also, since UNESCO has acknowledged that education is the gateway to the minds of men and a crucial instrument for achieving world peace, it becomes necessary to make deliberate efforts towards ensuring that every actor in the industrial relations system in Nigeria is educated and well enlightened about peace. It is by so doing that sustainable industrial peace can be engendered in both the public and private sectors of Nigerian economy.

Peace education and industrial conflict management

Peace education is the process of acquiring the *values*, the *knowledge* and developing the *attitudes*, *skills*, and *behaviours* to live in harmony with oneself, with others, and with the natural environment (Wikipedia, 2010). In other words, peace education is the deliberate attempt to educate children and adults in the dynamics of conflict and the promotion of peacemaking skills in homes, schools, work organizations and communities throughout the world, using all the channels and instruments of socialization (Gumut, 2007). It implies therefore that education for peace is an attempt to respond to problems of conflict and violence of different scales ranging from the global, regional, national, local, industrial and personal levels.

Thus, peace education is a global phenomenon that pervades all the regions and countries of the world. Peace education is influenced by differing pedagogical traditions in different regions of the world. This is evidenced by the diversity in the focus and terminology, which peace education is given in the different regions and countries of the world (Alimba, 2010). For instance, in Japan, peace education is referred to as "anti-nuclear bomb education", in Ireland, it is known as "education for mutual understanding", in Korea it is viewed as "re-unification education", while in countries of the southern hemisphere, the title adopted is "development education". In North America and Europe, peace education is called "conflict resolution education" and in Nigeria it is considered as "education for tolerance and mutual understanding" (Seitz, 2004; Alimba, 2010).

The above claim of diversity in focus as well as in terminology used for peace education across the globe finds support in the study of Groff and Smoker(1996) who noted that since the early decades of the 20th century, peace education programmes around the world have represented a spectrum of focal themes, including anti-nuclearism, international understanding, environmental responsibility, communication skills, non-violence, conflict resolution techniques, democracy, human rights awareness, tolerance of diversity, coexistence and gender equality, among others.

The diversity in the focus and terminology of peace education across the different regions and countries of the world is probably due to the political, social and economic situations prevalent in each country, which apparently direct and validate the model of peace education that is in vogue in the country (Ajala, 2003). Nevertheless, the goal of peace education in the various countries of the world where it is embraced is the same, which is to promote the culture of peace in industries and societies at large with a view to ensuring social, political, and economic stability.

Perhaps it is important to mention that though academic discourse on the subject matter of peace education has increasingly recognized the need for a broader, more holistic approach to peace education, a review of field-based projects reveals that three variations of peace education are most common: conflict resolution training (which is the focus of this paper), democracy education, and human rights education. The conflict resolution training version of peace education typically focuses on the social-behavioral symptoms of conflict, training individuals to resolve inter-personal disputes through techniques of negotiation and (peer) mediation, learning to manage anger, fight fair and improve communication through skills such as listening, turn-taking, identifying needs and separating facts from emotions.

As a concept, peace education has been variously defined by many scholars. For example, Quisumbing (2000) described peace education as a fact of holistic education, which takes into consideration the whole body and soul, mind, heart and will. In essence, peace education is meant to develop the total human person's power and potentials such as cognitive, affection, volitional and behavioural traits. In their contribution, Harris and Synott (2002) described peace education as a series of 'teaching encounters' that draw from people: their desire for peace, nonviolent alternatives for managing conflict, and skills for critical analysis of structural arrangements that produce and legitimate injustice and inequality.

In his view, Gumut (2007) considered peace education as one means of bringing about rational awakening of humanistic, aesthetic and ethical values, which are the preconditions for peace in individuals, family, society, national, and international life. It implies therefore that peace education has the tendency to change the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual abilities of people within the context of their cultural, political and social milieus for peaceful and harmonious living.

In line with the position of Quisumbing(2000) and Gumut (2007) on peace education, Fasokun(2004) asserts that peace education in its best form is an attempt to change individuals' perception of others collective narrative, and consequently about one's own social self, as well as come to practically relate less hatefully and more trustingly towards that collective 'others'. The inference can be made that since the wrong perception of employers and employees to each other is what is found to be responsible for high rate of industrial conflict in Nigeria, it is reasonable to conclude that peace education if adopted will help to correct the perception and bring about lasting peace in Nigerian industrial environment.

In his opinion, Alimba (2010) sees peace education as a social mechanism that radiates skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that are essential for the development of people and their societies. In other words, peace education is meant to help people acquire skills for nonviolent conflict resolution and to reinforce these skills for active and responsible action in the society for the promotion of the values of peace. Therefore, unlike the concept of conflict resolution, which can be considered to be retroactive -trying to solve a conflict after it had already occurred - peace education, on the other hand, has a more proactive approach because it prevents a conflict in advance or rather educate individuals and a society for a peaceful existence on the basis of nonviolence, tolerance, equity, respect for differences and social justice. Alimba (2010) listed some of the basic issues under the knowledge, skills and attitudes as contained in peace education as follows:

Knowledge: Self-awareness, peace and conflict, justice and power, human rights, globalization, duties and rights of citizens, environment and ecology, social justice and power, non-violence, conflict

resolution and transformation, culture and race, gender and religion, healthcare and AIDS, Arms proliferation and drug trade.

Skills: Critical thinking, problem solving, self-solving, self-awareness, assertiveness, reading, orderliness, perseverance, cooperation, cheerfulness, self-control,, self-reliance, sensitivity, compassion, active listening, patience, mediation, negotiation, conflict resolution.

Attitudes: Self-respect, honesty, open-mindedness, fairplay, obedience, caring, empathy, tolerance, adaptation to change, sense of solidarity, respect for differences, gender equity, sense of equality, reconciliation, bias awareness, appreciation, transparency.

From the above analysis, one can deduct that through exposure to KNOWLEDGE on the highlighted issues; an individual will be able to develop the SKILLS enumerated above, which in turn will enable him/her to exhibit the stipulated ATTITUDES that are required for peace building. This deduction finds support in the assertion of Alimba (2010) that the essence of acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes is to change the perceptions of people concerning the ''others'' collective narratives.

Suffice it to say therefore that with better changes in the perception and behaviour of employers and employees, arising from training on peace education, industrial conflict will be more effectively handled and it will bring about sustainable industrial peace and harmony in Nigeria. This view finds support in the studies of Hammed and Ayantunji (2002) and that of Bankole (2009), which indicated that industrial conflict as is found in most organizations in Nigeria today bothers on conflict-handling behaviour of both labour leaders and representatives of the management. Bankole (2010) thereafter suggested that both employers of labour and employees in Nigeria need to acquire some conflict management skills (some of which are contained in peace education) that will enhance the way they handle conflicts and consequently bring about sustainable industrial peace and harmony in Nigeria. Some of the suggested skills are assertiveness, emotional intelligence, communication skills, self-efficacy and interpersonal skills.

Using the objectives of peace education as a premise, Heaton (1999) described peace education as a dynamic field that essentially aims at the reduction, control and elimination of violence, whether latent or overt, and the promotion of structures that will enhance the full development of people for the promotion of understanding, tolerance, and friendship in a society. It goes without saying therefore that the objective of peace education is to promote a culture of peace in organizations and societies at large.

It is however germane to mention that in spite of the noble and novel goals of peace education, it requires the commitment of both employers and employees to make peace education have a reasonable chance of success at the industrial or organizational level. In other words, the two social actors must be willing and ready to undergo peace education training that will enable them to negotiate in 'good faith'. It is obvious that no bargaining is possible if employers merely listen to demands of workers and thereafter reject or refuse to discuss them. Similarly, there is no genuine negotiation if workers representatives make inordinate demands and thereafter threaten to call a strike if the demands are not fully met. What any conflicting situation requires is compromise and cooperation between the two conflicting parties, which is exactly the 'gospel' that peace education preaches.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It has been established that conflict especially in an industrial setting is inevitable but not inherently destructive. Its outcome depends largely on how it is responded to. It is observed that in Nigeria the orientation and perception of employers and employees to each other particularly on conflicting issues is negative hence their response to conflict situation has always been negative. This development is found to be responsible for the high frequency of industrial conflict in Nigerian work organizations. Therefore, to curb the situation, there is need for re-orientation and one major way by which this can be done is through peace education. This is so because the cardinal objective of peace education is to change the behaviour and perception of people in positive thinking and creativity (Alimba, 2008).

Based on this fact, it is suggested that government at federal, state and local levels should introduce training on peace education for trade union leaders as well as other public servants. Also, employers of labour in the organized private sector could complement the efforts of government by incorporating into their staff training programme the content of peace education. Higher institutions in Nigeria could as well introduce courses on peace education. It is also advisable that Michael Imoudu Institute for Labour Studies expands its curriculum to accommodate the content of peace education. It is believed that if all the above mentioned bodies sincerely adopt and apply peace education, there will be total transformation of perception and behaviour among the principal actors (employers, employees and government agents) of Nigerian industrial relations system and by so doing the major cause of industrial conflict would have been dealt with thereby making ways for industrial peace and harmony in the economy.

REFERENCES

AJALA, E. M. (2003). The influence of peace education on labour-management relations in selected industries in Oyo State, Nigeria. Ph.D Thesis. Dept. of adult Education. University of Ibadan.

AKANJI, T. A. (2005). Perspective on workplace conflict management and new approaches for the twenty-first century. In I. O. Albert (ed). *Perspectives on peace and conflict in Africa.* Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd.

ALIMBA, C. N. (2008). The place of peace education in achieving the Millenium Development Goals in Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Research and Policies. 3(1) 21-26.*

------------------- (2010). Peace education: An untapped pathway to managing ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. In I. O. Albert and O. N. Olarinde (eds). *Trends and tensions in managing conflicts.* Abuja: Society for Peace Studies and Practice.

BANKOLE, A. R. and DAUDA, Y. (2009). Influence of interpersonal and assertiveness skills on conflict-handling styles of labour leaders in Lagos State, Nigeria. *Pakistan Journal of Social Science 6(6) 366-371.*

BANKOLE, A. R. (2010). Influence of assertiveness and communication skills on conflict-handling behaviour of trade union leaders in Lagos State. In I. O. Albert and O. N. Olarinde (eds). *Trends and tensions in managing conflicts.* Abuja: Society for Peace Studies and Practice, Central Bank of Nigeria (2005). Statistical Bulletin, Vol. 16, Dec., pp.293.

CONSTANTINO, O. and CATHY, A. and MERCHANT, O. (1995). Conflict management systems design: A guide to creating healthy and productive organization. San Francisco:Jossey Books.

COSER, L. (1956). The functions of social conflict. Glencoe: Free Press.

EDWARS, P. K. (2000). Industrial conflict. In M. Poole and M. Warner (eds). *The Handbook of Human Resources Management.* London: International Business Press.

FASOKUN, T. O. (2004). Culture of Peace, Peace Education and Adult Education: Issues and Perspective. A lead paper presented at the Nigerian National Council for Adult Education at University of Ibadan, 21-22 September.

FISHER, R. and URY, W. and BRETT, O. (2004). Getting to Yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

GROFF, L. and SMOKER, P. (1996). Creating global-local cultures of peace. *Peace and Conflict Studies Journal 3, June*

GUMUT, V. (2007). Peace Education and Peer Mediation. In S. G. Best (ed). *Introduction to peace and conflict studies in West Africa: A Reader.* Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.

HAMMED, T. A. and AYANTUNJI, O. A. (2002). The effect of Six thinking hats in enhancing the conflict-handling behaviour of selected trade union leaders in Lagos State. *Nigerian Journal of Applied Psychology 7 (1) 19-26.*

HAMMED, T. A. (2002). Conflict management at work. In J. O. Akinboye (ed).*Psychological Principles of success in life and workplace*. Ibadan: Sterling-Horden Publishers (Nig) Ltd.

HARRIS, I. and SYNOTT, J. (2002). Peace education for a new century. *Social Alternatives 21(1) 3-6.*

KOMHAUSER, A. and DUBIN, F. and ROSS, A. (Eds). (1954). Industrial conflict. NewYork: McGraw-Hall Book Company.

LEDERACH, J. P. (1995). Preparing for peace: conflict transformation across cultures. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

OJIELO, M. O. (2002). Managing organizational conflict: a system approach. Ibadan: John Archers (Publishers) Ltd.

ONYEONORU, I. P. (2005). Industrial conflict in historical context: evolution, management and transformation. In I. O. Albert (ed). *Perspectives on peace and conflict in Africa.* Ibadan: John Archers(Publishers) Ltd.

OTITE, O. (2001). On conflicts, their resolutions, transformation and management. In O. Otite and I. O. Albert (eds). *Community conflict in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation.* Lagos: Spectrum Books Ltd.

OTOBO, D. (2000). Industrial Relations: Theory and Controversies. Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.

QUISUMBING, L. P. (2000). Educating young children for a peaceful world. Second World Forum on Early care and education in Singapore, 16-19 May.

SEITZ, K. (2004). Education and conflict. The role of education in the creation, prevention, and resolution of social crises: consequences for development and cooperation. German: Deutcha Gesse// schaftfur Technische Zusammenarbelt(GTZ) Gmbtt.

Wikipedia (2010). Peace Education. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace-education downloaded on 4/05/2010.