



Primary School Curricula Towards Sustainable Peace Education in Post-genocide Rwanda

Edouard Ntakirutimana, Emmanuel Niyibizi,
Protestant Univ. of Rwanda
December 2024 (reedited January 2025)

Keywords

Peace education, sustainable peace, school curricula, primary education

Abstract

Rwanda is a country that experienced the tragic genocide against Tutsi in 1994. In the aftermath of this, a number of initiatives were taken in the country for sustainable peace through reconstruction and reconciliation. In the education sector, peace and values education is part of the school curricula. The study at hand explores, through document analysis, the perspectives of peace education in primary school curricula of Rwanda. This study aims at explicit and implicit perspectives in which primary school curricula reflect peace education. Though the identified perspectives seem to be promising as far as sustainable peace education is concerned, further empirical studies are recommended to explore how the stated topics, values and teaching methods are put into practice in teaching and learning process.

Corresponding Authors: Edouard Ntakirutimana, Emmanuel Niyibizi, Protestant University of Rwanda, Email: ntaedo79@gmail.com

To quote this article: Ntakirutimana, E., Niyibizi, E., 2024. "Primary School Curricula Towards Sustainable Peace Education in Post-genocide Rwanda". *Journal of Ethics in Higher Education* 5(2024): 199–214. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26034/fr.jehe.2024.6893>
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1. Context and problem

The centrality of this article is about the integration of peace education in primary school curricula in Rwanda. Education for peace is a critical topic in the aftermath of 1994 genocide against Tutsi. Education for peace is a concept that is understood as a way of transforming the culture of violence into a culture of peace by inculcating peaceful skills and attitudes to children (Sapao and Dacles 2021). It is the social action that helps the people to find solutions to different forms of violence, injustice, and inequality in the community (Schultze-Kraft 2022). Normally there is peace when different forms of violence including conflict, threats to life, prejudice, coercion, social deprivation, corruption, poverty, injustice, and so many others are absent (Bashir, et al. 2022, 29). Peace education comes as a solution by alleviating, mediating, as well as overcoming the deep-seated conflict dynamics and enemy images. It is one of the approaches used within and outside of the schools to build peace among individuals, groups, nations, and societies (Stetter 2021). In this paper, we talk about the perspectives of Rwandan primary school curricula toward sustainable peace education.

Double-sidedness of education towards peace

Education may be taken as a golden tool to shape young's mindset by providing different knowledge and skills. It is a tool to save, sustain and transform life-long processes and shape the youth's future. It offers competencies, knowledge, and skills to the children for building their future and their society (Shohel 2022). That is evident that education can impact positively on the social cohesion of the community but also it may evidently have a socially destructive impact on it (Bush and Saltarelli 2000). In relation to peace, education can serve a dual function: it can either perpetuate conflict and undermine peace, or it can foster peacebuilding and mitigate conflict (King 2005).

On the negative side of education, the school may be the source of violence including direct, structural, and cultural violence. Direct violence is the one that is the intentional psychological and physical harm to the children within the schools. The structural one regards all forms of violence done through institutional and social mechanisms alienating children or teachers from their

basic rights. Finally, cultural violence refers to different elements of culture or symbolic mechanisms used to justify or legitimize direct and structural violence such as gender issues, or religious norms (Capistrano, et al. 2021, 3).

In the context of Rwanda, from the colonial era, the formal education system was used in one way or another to shape the social injustice, inequality, and segregation and hence contributing to far factors that played a significant role preparing genocide perpetrated against Tutsis (Byanafashe and Rutayisire 2016). The colonial education policies have introduced and sharpened ethnic distribution. In their textbooks used in schools, they documented the difference between Tutsis and Hutus emphasizing linking physical appearances with the intellectual capacity (Bush and Saltarelli 2000). This was inculcating the racist doctrines. Different books and curricula written before the 1994 genocide perpetrated against Tutsis (Hodgkin 2006, 201), especially the one that regarded the curriculum of history embedded divisive stereotypes between Hutu and Tutsis children (King 2005). In the beginning, the colonial education system favoured the Tutsis and discriminated the Hutu, and later the first and second Republics' education systems favoured the Hutu, discriminated against the Tutsis, and excluded most Rwandans to the benefit of a group of the ruling elite. This kind of education characterized by structural violence led many Rwandans to remain in the poverty and is of the factors at the root of the genocide perpetrated against Tutsi in 1994, where more than a million were massacred (Burde, et al. 2004).

On the positive side of education, even though educational discrepancies may lead to social conflict and poverty for those who are not educated, it was proven that education especially of good quality for all is an important instrument for social cohesion (Shohel 2022). Education is a positive force, when the schools are inclusive, promote the culture of merit, and the funding mechanisms that promote all children instead of promoting only the elites (Burde, et al. 2004). This kind of education, implemented in a wise manner, gives access to all people and promotes intellectual freedom and critical thinking (Moshman 2015). Education continues to be used as one of the major tools for overcoming and reducing the effect of violence around the world. The World Declaration on Education for all by UNESCO in 1990 used education to lay down practical strategies (Walker-Keleher 2006). As example, effective teaching and learning

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that promote education for peace are implemented in classroom through activating methods involving the student's active participation in their learning to strengthen their self-esteem and confidence for their daily problem solving (Scheunpflug and Wenz 2012).

Curriculum framework of peace in schools

Peace education can include different concepts like human rights, social justice, non-violence and puts its focus on the individual peace. It addresses or prevents violent situations, teaches different solutions to conflicts, and encourages people to have peaceful attitudes. It is a long-standing process of sharing common ground with citizenship education perceived in the world's citizens' interdependence through tolerance as well as the respect for others' rights and differences (Bashir, et al. 2022, 30). Therefore, education for peace is conceptualized in five types including education on human rights, international education, environmental education, conflict resolution education, and education for development. In practice, peace education is understood in two dimensions including "education about peace" and "education for peace" (Bermeo 2022). Education about peace regards the acquisition of knowledge on peace and violence especially by teaching the history, the effect of violence and war, as well as different nonviolence alternative possibilities. While education for peace focuses on getting the necessary skills to live in peace and create different peaceful activities. This dimension develops different skills including conflict resolution, respect, intercultural communication, democracy, equality, and equity.

The curriculum for peace education should address different types of peace education, in the way that the two dimensions are clearly reflected. The curriculum that prepares students for peace should address the universal values including justice, freedom, tolerance, gender equality, human rights as well as respect for other's life (MISHRA 2015). The curriculum should address the peacefulness in three domains of students' lives including intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup domains (Nelson 2021, 110). The intrapersonal involves but not limited to self-acceptance, nonviolence toward self, self-compassion, self-motives, self-perceptions, satisfaction, calmness. Concerning the interpersonal peacefulness includes behaviours and attitudes of creating and

maintaining nonviolent and harmonious relationships with other people like cooperation, helpfulness, consideration, or agreeability with others. Finally, the intergroup domain regards the individuals’ behaviours and attitudes supporting other groups or nations (op. cit).

In the context of Rwanda, education in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide against Tutsis seems to be used as a tool for transformational change, building an inclusive society, and overcoming ethnic stereotypes by promoting the common national identity for all Rwandans (Schulz and Sentama 2021, 1052). The ministry of education was committed to education promoting peace. Accordingly, a number of curricula reforms has taken place at different levels of education. In this regard, themes of human rights and reconciliation including education of citizens who are free from all discrimination, self- and social responsibility are reflected in the curricula frameworks (MINEDUC/REB 2015). Additionally, promotion of a culture of peace, emphasis on national and international values like justice, tolerance, peace, solidarity, and democracy are part of overall education agenda in the aftermath of 1994 (Green 2020). After the genocide, different reforms were initiated in order to revise and bring up to date the curriculum addressing national and global contexts. The current was initiated in 2016 as competence-based teaching. All in all, peace education is mentioned in the school curricula as cross-cutting topic. However, empirical research to delineate its integration in primary school curricula is still limited. Therefore, the current study analyses critically the integration of peace education in today’s competence-based curriculum designed for primary education this study is guided by the research question: “How is peace education integrated into Rwandan primary school curricula?”.

2. Methods

This paper was conducted through documentary analysis of the curriculum programs and school textbooks of primary education in Rwanda. The thematic content analysis was used to examine the documents by identifying the themes, concepts and pedagogical strategies to be used for peace education in primary schools (Alhojailan 2012, 42). Three subjects were analysed in primary, including social studies, Kinyarwanda and mathematics. The documents

analysed include curriculum program, student textbooks and teacher guides. This method of analysis involved the identification and interpretation of themes within these curriculum documents. This method helped to go deep into the curriculum content to understand its intention and to assess how it is aligned with sustainable peace education. The analysis covered the content, teaching methods, and activities to be given to the students.

3. Results: Sustainable peace education in Rwandan primary curricula

This section presents the results of an analysis of the Rwandan primary schools' curricula regarding the sustainable peace. The analysis led to the generation of two core paradigms. They include explicit content-centred and implicit process-based peace education as reflected in the primary school curricula.

Explicit peace education: Content-centred

The curriculum guide and textbooks demonstrate an explicit integration of peace education in two distinct aspects such as direct and indirect content. In the first aspect, the content of peace is referenced in chapters that are specifically dedicated to peace education. There are expressed in different forms, including the culture of peace, the fight against genocide, justice and peace, respect, tolerance, human rights and conflict resolution (REB 2024, 17-35), unity and reconciliation, living in harmony, mutual help and protection (REB 2022a). The textbook of social sciences details the content of peace in different topics. Each topic is described and then a series of activities are planned for students to engage the students with the content for memorising what they have learned, analysing the case studies or develop their own strategies for promoting peace in the community. In the textbook of Kinyarwanda, the concept of peace is explicitly articulated in various reading passages, including an excerpt from the text titled “Kwita ku batishoboye” which translates to “Caring for the disadvantaged”.

“ Those who are disadvantaged should be treated with dignity, respect, or not be isolated. Since they are not the authors of their existence, mistreating them would be unfair.

Therefore, the disadvantaged should not be abandoned, but they should be cared for in a way that gives them a sense of value and trust (REB 2022a, 18¹).

In this excerpt, the content is designed to educate the child on the value of respecting, caring for, and protecting individuals who may be underprivileged or marginalised within the society. This illustrates that the planned learning package for children incorporates the principles of empathy, equity and inclusion. The content also encompasses various peace building activities undertaken in the Rwandan community. One of such activities is collaborative effort of the local community to resolve conflicts through the village reconciliation council, known as the “Abunzi, Mediator” (REB 2022a, 156). Furthermore, the content is also illustrated with pictorial representation, which demonstrates the role of the community in addressing and resolving conflict to promote or preserve peace.

The concept of peace is reflected directly in the texts and activities described in the textbooks of *Social Sciences and Kinyarwanda*, which illustrate a range of values associated with peace, including but not limited to friendship, forgiveness, justice, rightness, love, patience, forgiveness, passion, togetherness, fairness, humility, respect, non-retaliation, and mutual support, tolerance.

Additionally, the curriculum encompasses other content that pertains to peace though in a more indirect way. Aspects such as human rights, gender, environmental sustainability, social solidarity, social cohesion, and citizenship education are also incorporated in the program materials and serve to educate the children in the values of peace and social cohesion (REB 2022a, REB 2024). As a result of engagement with this content, learners develop an understanding

¹ Abatishoboye bagomba guhabwa agaciro, ntibasuzugurwe cyangwa ngo bahabwe akato. Kubagirira nabi kwaba ari ukubarenganya kuko baba atari bo babyiteye. Abatishoboye rero ntibagomba gutereranwa ahubwo bagomba kwitabwaho ku buryo bumva bafite agaciro n'ikizere cyo kubaho. [Engl. transl. by the authors].

of a number of peace-related values, including tolerance, equity, justice for vulnerable groups, inclusion, human dignity, integrity and democracy.

A comparative analysis of the three subjects' students' books reveals that the textbook of social sciences and the textbook of Kinyarwanda include both direct and indirect content related to peace education. In contrast, the book of mathematics does not have any explicit content linked to peace education.

Implicit peace education: Process-based perspectives

The content of peace education is also reflected in Rwandan curricula and textbooks in implicit ways, including the expected learners' competencies methods of teaching as well as activities for engaging the students in learning.

The curriculum delineates competences that have to be cultivated through teaching and learning activities. They are called "generic competences". They include collaboration, teamwork, cooperation, life skills, communication, critical thinking and interpersonal management (REB 2022b, 14, REB 2022c, 7). As these competences are developed, there is a likelihood that they implicitly shape the harmony of the community. In addition, the formulation of exercises, the content provided and the methodology used contribute to shaping of the different cross-cutting issues. The cross-cutting issues that facilitate the development of peace within curriculum include peace education, values, environmental sustainability, gender, as well as inclusive education. These concepts are integrated implicitly within other topics to that are taught explicitly.

Furthermore, the program elucidates various pedagogical approaches that can be employed in the classroom. Some of those approaches could particularly be conducive to the cultivation of peace education, particularly those that engage students in active, reflective and collaborative engagement with their peers. Among these participative leaning strategies include pairs and group discussions, which can facilitate and enhance respect of others ideas, mutual respect, tolerance and other collaborative values.

Summary

In short, the concept of peace education is both explicitly and implicitly reflected in the formal curricula for Rwandan education especially in the

documents that guide primary education as far as the mother language and social sciences subjects are concerned. In contrast, the documents guiding mathematics do not explicitly address the concepts of peace. Furthermore, the learning activities provided in the textbooks do not facilitate the development of competences that enable students to engage with the application of those concepts in the contexts of their lived experiences.

4. Debate about Peace education: Reflecting curriculum for sustainable peace

In a society of post-genocide era, peace education is a crucial concept that should be reflected in the curriculum of every single subject. It is also a global concept, given that the world is experiencing numerous global conflicts, social inequalities as well as environmental crises. The concept of sustainable peace extends beyond the mere absence of the armed conflict. Rather, it compasses the creation of societies that promote the core dimensions of sustainable development, including social cohesion, economic equity and environmental stewardship (Fleetwood 2020, 4, Khoshnava, et al. 2019, 1). A curriculum that integrates the various dimensions of sustainable peace, including social justice, ecological sustainability and economic equity may facilitate the students understanding of these concepts and their capacity to act upon them within their communities. Education provides students with the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of social justice, and instils the capacity to actualise it through the promotion of the human rights, inclusivity and the resilience at the individual and community levels. Such education may prompt students to reflect on and act for ecological sustainability through cultivating an understanding of the interdependence between human well-being and environmental health, and subsequently taking action to protect natural resources. Furthermore, education may facilitate the cultivation of economic equity, which could potentially mitigate the systemic inequalities that are the main source of conflict and instability in different communities. Accordingly, a curriculum of sustainable peace development adopts the interdisciplinary approach to facilitate students’ comprehension of the intricate interconnection

between different separate domains of knowledge and to elucidate the multifaceted influences of social, economic and environmental factors on peace.

Moreover, education for sustainable peace is reflected in two dimensions namely “negative peace and positive peace”. The concept of negative peace denotes the absence of war or conflict. In contrast, positive peace reflects peace as an atmosphere characterised by the presence of prosperity, justice and freedom (Wahyudin 2018, 23). Therefore, the curriculum should not only reflect the negative peace but also the positive peace to educate a complete citizen able to develop sustainable peace.

In examining the Rwandan primary curriculum, it become evident that peace education is reflected both explicitly and implicitly in the curricula and textbooks of social studies and Kinyarwanda, yet not explicitly reflected in the mathematics textbooks and curriculum. The absence of explicit peace education content and the lack of alignment between the planned exercises and real-life of learning experiences may hinder students’ ability to reflect on how mathematical concepts can be utilised for the advancement of peace within their communities. This highlights a crucial aspect that requires particular attention during the curriculum development. Furthermore, the curriculum should extend beyond the mere development of values to encompass the cultivation of individual life skills, and professional competences, and critical thinking abilities that are applicable in the real-world context of children. Additionally, this should be achieved in a way that enables individuals to identify solutions to problems that students and their community are facing, thereby contributing to the creation of a more harmonious and peaceful society. This necessitates the reflection of peace in a cross-curricular approach. An activity in mathematics, for instance, can reflect issues such as environmental protection, and conflict resolution, or economic resilience and equity.

It is imperative that students be encouraged to engage with their communities, participate in service-learning projects, and tackle the authentic, real-world problems in order to nurture their deep understanding of the local and global challenges that they will inevitably encounter in their future endeavours. The curriculum must facilitate experiential learning, enabling students to apply

the theoretical knowledge in practical, real-world contexts and thereby enhance their ability to contribute to peacebuilding efforts.

A curriculum must be clear and promote with critical participatory pedagogy in order to facilitate sustainable peace education. This entails encouraging learners engage in a reflection about their own behaviours and contribution as community members. This can be accomplished through problem-based or place-based educational approaches. Such approaches engage learners in social critique and critical thinking by analysing their local context (Wahyudin 2018, 29). Education has potential to enhance the students’ resilience through exposure to the challenges facing their community. While attempting to identify solutions, students may experience disappointment or failure. However, as they become more familiar with these challenges, potentials consequences or the disaster associated with them tend to diminish. Students are assisted in perceiving challenges not as disasters but the potential avenues for creative engagement (Standish und Nygren 2018, 103). This critical pedagogy enables educators to challenge the existing power structures and engage students in discussion about privilege, inequality and justice. Furthermore, the aspect of cooperative learning must be emphasised for active, interactive and reflective participation of learners through various methods including but not limited to case studies, role play, group discussion, journaling, storytelling, empathy activities, negotiations, and mediation practices (Obeka und Nwigwe 2024, 438). In short, the critical participatory pedagogy emphasises critical reflection, dialogue and the co-creation of knowledge, thereby fostering an environment conducive to learners sharing their perspectives and engaging in transformative actions.

A curriculum that reflects the principles of sustainable peace must prioritise the inclusivity and incorporate global citizenship education. It is imperative that the learners receive education that cultivate awareness and action to ensure the integration of marginalised individuals and enable them to have a voice. It is also crucial to foster a sense of belonging not only to the local community but also to a global community. This enables students to understand and react to the global issues such as climate change, human rights, and migration. It instils in them an understanding of their role in the global community and the significance of collective action in developing sustainable peace.

In Rwandan, traditional approaches were reinvented and used in the post-genocide peace-building process (Gatwa und Mbonyinkebe 2022). Though not all explicitly reflected in the analysed curricula and textbooks, mediation through traditional reconciliatory approaches, such as Gacaca and Abunzi, are part of the school and teacher education curricula (REB, 2020b; MINEDUC/REB, 2015). This implies the reinvention of traditional approaches for the post-genocide peace building process. Moreover, the traditional educational approaches fostering resilience, solidarity and mutual support are important for sustainable peace in the post-genocide context. Accordingly, the sustainability of peace education that values indigenous approaches is an important step for making school curricula valuable channels of sustainable peace.

5. Conclusion

The integration of the concept of sustainable peace in the school curricula is a crucial step in equipping a new generation of individuals with the necessary competences to address the pressing challenges facing our society today. The school curricula may employ a variety of approaches, including interdisciplinary approach, critical and participatory pedagogy, experiential learning, inclusivity, and global citizenship education. These strategies can be used to equip the school learners with competences necessary to become proactive contributors to sustainable peace.

Given the swiftly evolving changes transpiring globally, which are accompanied by intricate complexities, creating unforeseen opportunity gaps and challenges, it is absolutely imperative that education robustly promotes justice, equity, and environmental sustainability to foster the creation of a harmonious and cohesive local and global society.

This study examined how peace education is integrated into the primary school curriculum in Rwanda. However, in order to develop competences, the process of teaching and learning is of great importance. Consequently, further research is required to assess the integration of peace in the classroom setting, as well as in assessments, in the context of Rwanda and similar contexts.

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7. Short biography

Edouard Ntakirutimana is a PhD scholar in Foundations of Education from Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg, Germany. He is a lecturer at Protestant University of Rwanda. His research interests include research training and integrity, global and peace education.

E-mail: ntaedo79@gmail.com

Emmanuel Niyibizi holds a PhD in Foundations of Education from Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg, Germany. He is a senior Lecturer and Director of Research at Protestant University of Rwanda. His research interests include educational quality, citizenship education, international education and digitalization of education.

E-mail: emafique@gmail.com