NEW DIGITAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES as panacea for conflict resolution in university education in Nigeria

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Review

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Conflict is an attendant feature of human interaction and cannot be eliminated; however, its proper management and transformation are essential for peace and progress in human society. The paper examines the use of new digital media technologies in conflict resolution in higher institutions of learning with specific reference to Nigerian Universities. The paper observes that students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria engaged in conflict because of one reason or the other. Nevertheless, the outcomes of such crisis such as prolong of academic activities, destruction of life and properties and in most cases, render school environments completely insecure for serious academic activities were not beneficial to the students, the institutions and the society at large. With the help of new digital media technologies, peace education will improve the public’s sense of security in Nigeria. The study advocates for immediate use of new digital media in peace education teaching and learning. The argument this article presents is that using new digital media in peace education must be seen as a core national project and therefore taken seriously by stakeholders because peace is synonymous with development. Without alternative methods, the conflict situations can contribute to a highly adversarial environment. Disputes over university reorganization, faculty performance, multimillion dollar grants, intellectual property, affirmative action, freedom of information, to name a few, all contribute to a complex conflict landscape.

Key words: Conflict, conflict resolution, new digital media, tertiary institutions, development and violence

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts on campus are growing in number, kind, and complexity. The current university context is clearly more challenging than in the past. The range of conflicts and the forums available for their management are much more far-reaching than ever before. In short, society has changed, and so has the university. It has been observed that students’ crisis is becoming more rampant in the tertiary institutions and the resultant consequence has been to the detriment of the teaching – learning atmosphere (Adeyemi et al., 2010).

University-based conflicts vary from campus to campus and reflect university size, location, student population, mission, specialization, governance, and unionization. What can trigger conflicts, perhaps even large scale ones, on one campus may be inconceivable on another. However, university-based conflicts also share enough in common to be universally understood. For instance, even in those instances where student evaluations of faculty are not required, they are a widely understood feature of the academic workplace.

Universities are confronting with countless pushes and pulls from internal and external sources which influence the kind and quantity of conflicts that emerge. The University community experiences countless conflict situations. Without alternative methods, the conflict situations can contribute to a highly adversarial environment. Disputes over university reorganization, faculty performance, multimillion dollar grants, intellectual property, affirmative action, freedom of information, to name a few, all contribute to a complex conflict landscape.

Though it is often said that conflicts are desirable in shaping human ideologies and relationships, they never occur without negative consequences. Very often such
consequences constitute serious threats to humanity and undermine particular human development objectives (Okeye e al., 2010). Such threats may be in the form of disorderliness, destruction of life and property in the university campuses, hunger, poverty, high death toll and destruction of property which are evident in the wars going on in some parts of Nigeria.

However, one factor that has been found common in a conflict situation is the absence of the right information or breach of communication between the parties involved. Provision of the right information has been seen as the Panacea for conflict resolution. According to Gisesa (2008), researches regarding conflict and peace have revealed that conflicts are based on deficiency of information, stressing that cases of misinformation, wrong information or missing information enhance disparity in opinions and social differences which may lead to as well as heighten conflicts.

New digital media technologies have become significant in addressing the increasing wave of internal security threat which undermines flow of academic activities in some Nigerian tertiary institutions. New digital technology refers to computer mediated systems which are enhanced by the internet and satellite technology. Recent events in the country have made it crucial for Nigeria to move towards utilizing the great benefits of new digital media in conflict resolution especially in university campuses considering the increased threat to peace and security in Nigerian university. According to UNESCO, “greater access to information and improved communication among different sectors of the population are vital for building a culture of peace in Africa” (Akibu, 2010). An important tool for conflict management and research in Nigeria is the internet, including the use of new digital media.

The internet has revolutionized access to information for the business world, libraries, education and individuals. Small or large, a computer network exists in these areas to provide computer users with the means of communicating and transferring information electronically (Ogunsola, 2005). Utilizing new digital media in conflict resolution offers great opportunities for sustainable peace in Nigeria because through this media it becomes easier to reshape the mindset of youth. In recent studies for instance, as part of its mission to educate key audiences about peace building and conflict management, the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) in February 2012 activated a virtual Global Peace building Center that provided younger audiences and educators with substantial peace building resources and activities, including educational materials, a virtual passport experience, and many ways for young people to learn about the importance of peace building (USIP, 2012). The three tiers of government in Nigeria have the resources to take such steps to ensure that institutions are empowered to make peace education effective with new digital media. In this article, the benefits of utilizing new digital media for conflict resolution in university education in Nigeria are examined, as well as institutional responsibility for using new digital media to promote peace in university campuses in Nigeria.

Meaning of new digital media technology
Experts have defined digital media technologies in various perspectives. Okolie, (2010) refers to digital media technology as computer mediated systems which are enhanced by internet and satellite technology. Wikipedia (2011) also defines digital media technology as on-demand access to content, anytime, anywhere, on any digital devices as well as interactive, user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content. On the other hand, Rieger, (2010) sees digital media technology as a range of new media application that converges at the interaction of technology and the humanities.

Most technologies describe as digital media are digital, often having characteristic of being manipulated, networkable, dense, compressible and interactive. Some examples of these media include internet, websites, computer, multimedia, video games, CD-ROM and DVDs, television and radio programmes integrated with technologies that enable digital interaction.

The concept of education
Okolo (2009) sees the link between education and development in contemporary society as essential in the preparation of everyone (children, youth, adults, women and men) both for their self sustenance and for functional participation in grappling effectively with the challenges of social, economic, political, scientific and technological development of their respective societies. Accordingly, education is the “articulation of informal opportunities for self-improvement, non-formal structures for the inoculation and sustenance of basic and post basic life skills, and formal systems for the awakening and continuous development of the human potential” (Obanya, 2004 as cited in Okolo 2009). The use of new digital media technologies in peace education is also crucial for both development and stability which are synonymous with peace in the society. Olarinde and Onifade (2010) on the other hand see education as “a dynamic instrument of social change that can bring about rapid development of a nation's total resources, hence the need for constant evaluation of the educational system to ensure its adequacy and continued relevance to national needs and objectives.”

Meaning of conflict
Conflict in simple terms, means a state of disagreement, controversy or opposition. It could also mean the existence of a prolonged battle, struggle or clash between two or more parties. Obegi and Nyamboga
(2008), quoting Nicholas (1992) described conflict as situations where two people (or groups) wish to carry out acts which are mutually incompatible. He further states that conflict involves, “the pushing and pulling, giving and taking, process of finding the balance between powers”. In either case, conflict is generally characterized by a breach of peace or understanding among parties involved. Various dimensions to the causes of conflicts have been identified by writers. Namande (2008), citing Donelson (1999) asserts that any factor that creates dissatisfaction can increase the chances of conflicts among people and this may include struggle for resources, egocentrism, ethnocentrism, bigotry, assertion, struggle for recognition, ignorance, pride and fear. According to Obegi and Nyamboga (2008) conflict has structural causes, proximate causes and trigger which are evident in the presence of pervasive public policies and structures, inadequate security measures and unsatisfactory state of economy.

The benefits of new digital media in conflict resolution

The applications of new digital media to communication, facilitated by transmission hardware, are very significant to information sharing and circulation (Osazee-Odia, 2008) especially in conflict resolution and peace education. Examples of new media technologies include digital satellite television, global satellite telephones, internet websites, mobile telephony, short message service facilities, and multimedia equipment, such as video, audio, and pod cast facilities, among others. Some of these products consist of user-generated content, while others depend on service providers. New digital media technologies are veritable tools in improving the effectiveness of peace education. Akpan-Ita (2008) posited that, “modern conflict no longer respects the line between the military and the civilians.” This is why policy makers in Nigeria need to consider giving peace education adequate attention and embark on peace advocacy projects through new digital media to serve as a preventive measure.

Peace education need not always be formal; it can be carried out in an informal manner in most communities. Using new digital media in evaluating peace education is an imminent need in Nigeria as continuing to improve it, wherever it is available, is important. To predict the likely results of utilizing new digital media in peace education there are few areas to address. These include, but are not limited to the following: visible reduction in social conflict, shaping perceptions, promoting integration, sharing case studies, peace and conflict awareness, as well as a wider reach to different groups in the society especially students in the university campuses. This expanded reach would make it easier to learn from conflict indicators and trends in other parts of the world, train students and lecturers to acquire skills in the use of new digital media, reduce campus and societal violence, increase in societal harmony and cooperation, and increase positive activities in the society.

New digital media technologies offer great opportunities to make the teaching and learning of peace more effective. Effective use of new digital media in teaching and learning of peace education will provide adequate information which according to Umunadi (2009) is recognized as a catalyst for both personal and national development. The essence of using new digital media is to communicate peace. It will be relevant in the monitoring and evaluation of peace education projects especially among youth in rural areas of the country.

The rationale for utilizing new digital media technologies in promoting peace education considering the benefits of globalisation, is building in people the universal values and behaviors on which a culture of peace is predicated, including the development of non-violent conflict resolution skills and a commitment to working together to realize a shared and preferred future (Kester, 2009). Though it is gradually becoming part of the people, this should be highly encouraged considering the percentage of Nigerians that have access to new digital media technologies. It could be formal or informal in terms of delivery. Formal terms of delivery are concerned with direct teaching and making training materials available, while informal involves peace building at the community level through the advocacy of various markets and groups.

Strategies to adopt new digital media in tertiary institutions

In an attempt to utilize digital media technologies for conflict resolution, it is important that the enlightenment of people on the relevance of peace education is carried out. It is pertinent for stakeholders to adopt a holistic strategy to ensure that new digital media becomes effective in shaping the mindsets of youth and adults on issues of peace, especially conflict management, conflict transformation, peacemaking, and negotiation skills especially in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

There is a need for peace education evaluation with new digital media, especially among youth, to monitor and evaluate peace projects. Schools could partner with non-governmental organizations (NGO) and other institutions that carry out advocacy projects. With the help of new digital media, Nigerians may improve on the following peace education skills, knowledge, and attitudes, including: skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, assertiveness, reading, self-control, sensitivity, cooperation; knowledge content, such as self-awareness, peace and conflict issues, human rights, justice and power, gender issues, and social justice; and appropriate attitude dispositions regarding self-respect, honesty, obedience, open-mindedness, gender equity, tolerance, and adaptation to change, (Alimba, 2010).
Okolie-Osemene (2010) identified some ways of utilizing new digital media in schools as follows:
- Bringing different digital technologies into peace and conflict studies teaching and learning.
- Capacity building and training of trainers.
- Using digital technology to source information on peace studies.
- Creating peace blogs accessible through digital mediums.

**Challenges of utilizing new digital media**

Some of the challenges that face the utilization of new media in conflict resolution in university education are worth mentioning. For instance, some financial and institutional constraints hinder the progress of using new digital media in peace education, political education, and democratic participation. These areas could be expanded with increased availability and accessibility to new digital media at the grassroots level. Since access to information and information exchange is enhanced through the technology, it is expected that political participation also increases.

One of the major problems militating against the adoption of new digital media in teaching and learning peace education is power supply problem. Umeadai (2009) sees electricity as a major problem in Nigeria. Therefore, stakeholders should be able to harness these energy resources to ensure that the problem of inadequate power supply is resolved.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

With the support of new digital media, peace education may be promoted to address social justice, conflict drivers in Nigerian universities may be redirected toward peace, and restless students may be transformed. The issue of attitudinal change in governance and leadership electoral processes may benefit the war against corruption, reduce ethnic conflict, maintain constructive social controls, promote interpersonal relations, and encourage joint problem solving. Through peace education, people may envision commitment to leadership based on the core values of peace and integrity, and respect for diversity.

To implement the use of new digital media technologies, there should be immediate training for teachers and lecturers in the promotion of peace education in Nigerian institutions. The curricular should be updated so that the teaching of peace education is part of mainstream teaching and learning, including how to use new digital media. For example, they need training on peace education presentation skills and computer projector uses for peace advocates or practitioners. Institutions should embark on teaching of peace education with an up-to-date peace education curriculum that is mainstreamed.

One of the most dramatic advances in communication potential is that of computer data communications systems. Computers are available in many formats for use in industries, businesses, hospitals, schools, universities, transport networks, and individual homes. With new digital media, the gap between the rich and poor should be addressed through peace education. This will ensure attitudinal change and transformation. New digital media technologies are relevant to improved peace education teaching and learning in the country. This author's opinion is that peace education which must start at the family level to promote harmony in the society. With the help of new digital media in the schools and communities, peace education will have a positive impact.

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