

PEACE ASSURANCE IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: A DISCOURSE

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Abstract

Existence of peace in any establishment, including public universities is fundamental to the achievement of the aims and objectives and assurance of sustainability of the organization involved. Peace is a condition that guarantees positive and lasting social conditions for justice, equity and respect for human rights based on values of non-violence, social justice, freedom, trust, equity, responsibility and solidarity. Using secondary sources of information, the paper identified corrupt practices, lack of accountability, poor learning environment, problem of insecurity, lack of emphasis on spiritual dimension, political instability, differences in perception, influence of drug, shortage of infrastructural facilities, low carrying capacity as the major factors that hinder peace in the nation's government universities. Therefore, the paper recommended that commitment to the goals of the universities concerned, adoption of democratic leadership style, creation of effective channel of communication, adoption of better means of managing conflicts, training of students and staff on peace maintenance, ensuring effective screening of students before offering them admissions by authorities of public universities are highly necessary in order to nip in the bud the inhibiting factors for existence of peace in Nigerian government universities.

Keywords: *Peace, Peace Assurance, Nigerian Public Universities*

Introduction

The need for peace in any society is apparently a matter that is not debatable. The seemingly absence of peace owing to various reasons has been a major factor responsible for the malfunction of some establishments including educational institutions. Chelule (2014) opines that peace is an essential ingredient in our society in order to achieve education and developmental goals, transmit values to our next

generation and create a friendlier environment of peace and love. Ada (2013) notes that management, staff, students, teachers, government and trade unions may be sources of conflicts for one reason or the other. In each of such of conflicts, the outcome usually causes destruction of environment, violent conflicts, war, prolong of academic activities, destruction of life and properties while in some cases it renders school environment completely insecure for meaningful academic activities, a situation that is not like to be beneficial to students, institutions and the society at large. Arguably, absence of peace remains one of the greatest threats to sustainable growth and development of the educational system at any level (Momodu, 2013).

The existence of staff and students of different cultural background is likely to lead to conflicts and disturbance of peace in many of the public university communities. This assertion is in line with Chelule (2014) that conflict and instability in an establishment may be due to reasons such as social, economic, political, identity-related, resource based and research dissemination of non-violence theories and principles. Ada (2013) notes further that the size, location, population, mission and specialization of a particular university has relationship with the type, frequency and degree of disturbance of peace. Resolution of conflicts and maintenance of peace among people of diverse cultural background requires careful handling by people with sufficient experiences. Peace assurance in Nigerian public universities is an issue that requires serious attention if public universities are to contribute positively to the development of Nigeria as a nation. The level of effectiveness in the maintenance of peace at all times by any university goes a long way in the proper co-existence of staff and students, achievement of the goals of university education and the acceleration of developmental programmes. Also, it may have positive relationship with the level at which individuals and the organized private sector will be ready to participate in the development of a particular university.

It has been observed with worry that Africa educational environment is highly volatile because of easy flow of arms into the system and the abnormal ways they have been used to perpetuate different kinds of crimes (Alimba, 2013). The presence of intimidation, harassment, cultism, violent fight, maiming and destruction in Nigerian public universities is quiet unfortunate and constitutes a matter of

serious concern to all stakeholders in university education. It is not uncommon to see situations where students freely brandish pistols and revolvers and use them to unleash terror on fellow students. The violate nature of many of the youths in Nigerian public universities, presently, in forms of cultism, armed robbery, rioting, killing, arson, prostitution, vandalism, rapping, kidnapping, in addition to different agitations by both staff and student unions for different welfare matters as well as reactions to poor governance and corrupt practices by university authorities amongst others call for urgent assessment of the commitment of the university authorities, members of staff and students to the realization of the goals of university education.

Universities are expected to promote peace within their immediate communities and beyond. This can be achieved partly via the teaching of appropriate peace-related courses such as political science, history, sociology, psychology, education, law, just to mention a few. Contrary to this expectation, it has been noted with worry that instead of helping in ameliorating the crisis by defining, analyzing and resolving them, public universities, by their actions, in no small measure contribute to the problems (Obanya, 2004). Nigerian public universities appear to be part of the problems rocking the nation, not the solution. Therefore, it is not surprising that a good number of the products of these institutions of learning lack basic pre-requisite for maintaining peace in their respective domains. Therefore, the objectives of this paper are to assess the extent of existence of peace, maintenance of peace, identify the importance of peace, the inhibiting factors and the steps to be taken toward the achievement of sustainable peace assurance in Nigerian public universities.

Peace

Peace comes from Latin word, *pax*, which denotes contractual relationship, implying recognition and agreement with human relationship (Chelule, 2014). According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2006) peace is a situation in which there is no war or fighting. Peace refers to the absence of war or open conflict. It is a condition that ensures positive and lasting social conditions for justice, equity and respect for human rights based on values of non-violence, social justice, freedom, trust, equity, responsibility and solidarity. Peace is a virtue as well as a condition and it is essential for

the productivity and development of the family, organization, community and country (Alimba, 2013). Momodu (2013) opines that peace is a culture and peoples' way of life which can be promoted or propagated through education as a tool. It is indispensable for the maintenance of an orderly and just society.

In the words of Danesh (2008), Peace, together with freedom, equality, justice, is one of the most desirable values in almost every society. It has become a universal symbol, a master concept that connotes a general positive state that includes all the positive qualities that are cherished and aspired to by human beings. Peace means the absence of violence in all its forms, whether physical, social, psychological and structural (Chelule, 2014). Chelule (2014) notes further that, it is the examination of nature of causes, reasons, goals of war so as to find possible ways of reaching human goals without resorting to use of force and uncover the possible conditions of peace. Assuring peace in the public universities will partly require systematic inclusion of the culture of peace in the minds of members of staff and students with a view to deconstructing the culture of violence from their minds by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, abilities which would assist individuals to interact peacefully and to collaborate to achieve collective as well as personal goals.

The Need for Peace

One of the fundamental pillars that guarantee effective functionality of any organization is, perhaps, the existence of sustainable peace. It is very important for peace to be in existence in the Nigeria public universities for the following reasons.

- **Functional Conduct:** Existence of peace is one of the reliable factors for functional conduct, unhampered productivity, high staff morale, the assurance of prolong and appropriate behaviour from every group of people in the university, lack of tension, students' ability to become great thinkers, students' ability to compete favourable in global market place that together have capacity for enhancing sustainable stability and result oriented ability of any university.
- **Healthy Teaching and Learning Environment:** For students to achieve maximally and for the university to achieve many of the goals of university education, there must be peace. For

instance, Momodu (2013) is concerned with the mainstreaming peace education in the curricular of secondary schools in Nigeria. He notes further that the growing culture of violence and constitutes one of the major factors responsible for unhealthy teaching and learning environment, poor academic performance, low staff productivity, tension, broken social relationship and high incidents of students and staff turn-over.

- **Elimination of Fear:** Fear, being a strong, uncontrollable, unpleasant emotion caused by actual or perceived danger or threat is one of the possible products of non-existence of peace in the Nigerian public universities. Ideally, our universities should be free of dangers and threats if the goals of university education are to be achieved.
- **Elimination of Insecurity:** The alarming dimension of insecurity since about the last two decades in Nigeria generally, and, in particular, higher institutions of learning may not be unconnected with the absence of peace. Insecurity in Nigeria is apparently aggravating on daily basis both in intensity and coverage, even in the public universities. Insecurity is, undoubtedly, an enemy of development. For appreciable level of development to be experienced, there must be peace.
- **Eradication of Injustice:** Some of the qualities of the authority of any university are fairness and impartiality. However, it is with the presence of peace that these identified qualities and others can manifest curricular.
- **Eradication of Inequality:** Equal treatment of people irrespective of social or cultural differences is a hallmark of any administrator. And, university being a community of diverse social and cultural backgrounds dearly needs administrators with stark records of administration. However, the effectiveness or otherwise of administrators in this regard depends largely on the situation of peace in a particular university.
- **Effective Management of Conflict:** Though debatable, there is no community or set of people that is free of conflict. It seems natural; and, whenever it happens, retrogression is always the result. For assurance of minimum level of conflict in our public universities, there must be peace.

- **Elimination of Prejudice:** Judgments to be passed or opinions to be formed by any person or group of persons, ideally, supposed to be based on facts. In the absence of peace, any opinion can be formed without any iota of genuine reason.
- **Absence of Abuse of Human Right:** Every person is inherently entitled to certain inalienable fundamental right, regardless of his/her nation, location, language, religion, ethnic origin or any other status. These rights require empathy and the rule of law and impose an obligation on persons to respect the right of others. They should not be taken away except as a result of due process based on specific circumstances.
- **Agent of Transformation:** The present situation of many of the public universities in Nigeria in terms of unstable and non-sustainable peace needs urgent attention. Staff and students' agitations for different reasons as well as students' unruly behaviors that together breed negative results on the entire system are worrisome and call for immediate transformation. Meaningful and purposive change of the character, process and individuals in the government owned universities are steps that must be taken without further delay. The transformation of Nigerian public universities should focus on how to change the culture, process and people involved.
- **Provision of Future Orientation:** University students, many of whom are youths, necessarily need to be aware of the challenges they are likely to come across in the future life after school. It is an important orientation and direction towards which students need to be properly and genuinely guided. This is only feasible in a peaceful environment.
- **Development of Intercultural Understanding:** The fact that students and members of staff of a particular university have different cultural backgrounds calls for sincere understanding of and respect for the customs, beliefs and values of the society to which an individual belongs and at the same time requires strong prevalence of peace.
- **Management of Communication Diversity:** The differences in the languages spoken by people of diverse backgrounds like those in a particular university community requires patience, tolerance and clear understanding from one another.

Apparently, these requirements can be met in a situation where there is peace.

- **Understanding of Violent Behaviours:** Though, does not promote the development of any establishment the tendency for the occurrence of violent behavior(s) in any organization or society seems to be natural. Therefore, the leaders, especially, have the responsibility for the understanding of the different behaviours, including the violent ones, at least for the purpose of peace assurance in the Nigerian public universities. It is one of the required qualities of university administrators to understand different forms of behaviours of both the staff and students, including those that can lead to crisis.
- **Shared Responsibility:** The old saying, that a tree does not make a forest is still in vogue. Also, one of the definitions of administration that “administration is the coming together of people to roll a stone that could not have been possible to be rolled by one person” is relevant to this situation”. Each person, be it a student or member of staff is expected to share in the efforts towards the development of any university. This level of commitment may not be achievable if there is no peace.
- **Tolerance:** It seems that tolerance is fundamental to peace, and without tolerance, it might not be possible for two people to live or work together for a reasonable period of time, let alone the one thousand and one types of people that may exist in a particular public university.

Factors Limiting Peace Assurance in Nigerian Public Universities

- **Corruption:** It is a matter of serious concern to note that corruption appears to exist in nearly every establishment, including public universities in Nigeria. Though debatable, corruption in Nigeria is not limited to the political class or town alone, different forms of corruptions and other immoral acts like extortion, admission racketeering, sexual abuse, contract kickback amongst others are taking place in Nigeria public universities. It is, probably, not easy to experience the existence of peace in an establishment where corruption tends to be the order of the day.

- **Lack of Accountability:** A corruptible officer is not like to be accountable for whatever he does. Of course, in leadership roles, accountability is the acknowledgement and assumption of responsibility for actions, products, decisions, politics and others like administration, governance and implementation within the scope of the role or employment position. Administrator of public universities are expected to be accountable to every stakeholder and the society at large, and essentially, providing assurance that all classes of resources are being utilized efficiently in a way that educational attainment of the students can be served effectively. This is one of the major means by which peace can be guaranteed.
- **Poor Learning Environment:** The fact that public universities are characterized by poor learning environment is no more news. All categories of resources in form of finance, physical facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, libraries, workshops, tools, offices people administrative offices and academic staff seem to be grossly inadequate. Situations like these may not be free of one agitation or the other, thus, reducing the extent of existence of peace.
- **Unionism:** Various unions like Academic staff union of Universities (ASSU), Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASSU), Students' Union Government (SUG) amongst others exist in each university. Each of these unions will definitely have cause to agitate for one thing or the other, some of which may lead to break down of law and order. For as long as a particular university experiences these type of union agitations frequently, it may not be possible to enjoy peace at the same time.
- **Problem of Insecurity:** Issue of insecurity, which may take different dimensions such as kidnapping, hired assassination, ritual killings, secret cult, students' unrest just to mention a few, are the order of the day in some universities. Owing to these ugly developments, peace has not seen the day light for a very long time in some government universities.
- **Lack of Emphasis on Spiritual Dimension:** Non-incorporation of spiritual dimension into the present curricular of many public universities is another major reason for inadequate peace in

most of the public universities. Students, be it Christian or Muslim, should be exposed to spiritual orientations and values via the academic programmes of the school.

- **Political Instability:** Instability in politics in many cases has adverse effects on the governance of public universities. Every government of the day would prefer its candidate to be made the head of any university under it so that such a person will always dance to the tune of the government. Such interest of the government in the leadership position of any public university without respect for due process normally disrupts the activities of the university; and may make the members of staff to have the feeling that the affected university is not enjoying the deserved autonomy.
- **Differences in Perception:** The differences in the background of the people that constitute the population of public universities are probably the major factors for the difference in perceptions. Individual differences have, for a long time, being one of the major factors responsible for differences in perception. For example, some people enjoy violence while others do not. Unfortunately, conflict does not support peace. In every society, the existence of peace matters.
- **Influence of Drug/Drug Action:** People living under the influence of drug cannot, but disturbs the peace of their immediate communities. A good number of students are usually involved in this ugly act; we cannot rule out the involvement of members of staff too.
- **Inadequate Supply of Essential Infrastructural Facilities:** Inadequate supply of electricity, water, bad hostel facilities amongst others have been noted to be the major causes of students' unrest, a situation capable of leading to vandalism of existing scanty infrastructures.
- **Overcrowding:** This is one of the consequences of low carrying capacity. Both the problems of inadequate learning environment and the shortage of accommodation facilities for students of many public universities are worrisome and require prompt attention of the government and other stakeholders. In this situation, the contributions of individuals, religious organizations, alumni associations, philanthropists and the

organized private sector are necessarily needed. Even in the developed countries, government will always require the assistance of the members of the public. This is why a school of thought believes that total free education does not exist anywhere in the world; somebody, somewhere could have paid for the aspect of the educational programme that is assumed to be provided free of charge.

The Way Forward

- **Introduction of peace Education:** The situation of many of the public universities and the exuberance nature of most of the students, undoubtedly require urgent attention. Students need to be exposed to some peace – based courses; they need to know the importance of peace, the need for sustaining peace and the effects of lack of it, in any society. According to Alimba (2013) the urgent need for the introduction of peace education is due to the existence of violent nature of our youths in higher institutions of learning today, which manifests in the form of cultism, armed robbery, rioting, killing, arson, prostitution, vandalism, rapping; just to mention a few. For peace education to be effective, consideration must be given to the historical development of the country, its cultural diversity, changes in the economic environment, its democratic experiences and its current numerous security challenges, such as terrorism, communal, intra and inter-ethnic conflicts amongst others.
- **Reassessment of the Commitment to the Realization of Goals of Higher Education:** The achievement or otherwise of the goals of a particular university depends largely on the level of positive efforts of the management. The management has the responsibility of coordinating every organ of the university; improper coordination of any aspect of the university activities may lead to sharp reduction of the level of peace. All hands must be on deck to ensure that conflicts are not allowed to disrupt school effort toward to achievement of its goals.
- **Democratic Leadership Style:** As much as possible, the management needs to seek the opinions of the staff and students in the relevant areas. The need for participatory decision making cannot be over emphasized; when the interest

and opinions of stakeholders are sought, the decisions made thereafter always have far-reaching positive effects on the school.

- **Creation of Effective Channel of Communication:** The flow of communication from the authority to both the staff and students must be effective. Also, the down-top communication channel too should be the type that is free of any form of hindrance. Communication has to be done timely, considerably relevant, passed through appropriate channel and made available to all parties for which it is meant. In a situation where negotiation is necessary, it has to be done timely too.
- **Effective Management of Conflict:** Conflict management in the school system requires non-violent techniques, if peace will reign and high level of productivity is to be ensured. Conflicts must not be allowed to disrupt school efforts towards the achievement of goals.
- **Love:** Non-possessive love is required in any community, including educational institutions. It is generally believed that love never fails. However, love should not be possessive, selfish or demanding, it should be spontaneous, unconditionally showered all the time. Love breeds faith, true cooperation and this is what peace requires.
- **Effective Screening of Students before Offered Admission:** Through process of students' admission is highly necessary. Measures must be devised to screen candidates in a way that students with questionable characters can be identified and denied admission.
- **Dialogue:** Research finding have revealed that unresolved and poorly managed conflict is the major blockage to school development. Each time there are conflicts, the parties involved can resolve it amicably through dialogue.
- **Training of Staff and Students on peace Maintenance:** Staff and students need to be exposed to peace maintenance measures. This can be achieved partly by organizing peace maintenance focused seminars for members of staff and students on regular basis.
- **Effective Style of Management:** The level of effectiveness of peace maintenance, to a reasonable extent, depends on the

style of management of a particular university. Management has the responsibility for the coordination of human and non-human resources and whatever that goes on in an organization in order to achieve a given set of objectives. Unless conflicts among staff, students, authorities of educational institutions and communities are well managed, it can lead to serious loss of lives, destruction of properties and disruption of normal academic activities. The development of better means of resolving conflicts go a long way in the survival of any institution. This can be achieved via appropriate dialogue, arbitration, confrontation, neglect or silence.

- **Using Appropriate Leadership Style by the Authority:** A particular type of leadership may not be one hundred percent appropriate for a big organization like a university, the leadership style to be used may be determined by the prevailing situation. However, leadership style like tyranny may not be beneficial to any of the public universities.

Summary

Peace is the concept of harmony and the absence of hostility. It is a lack of conflict and freedom from fears of violence between individuals and heterogenous social groups. Existence of peace is very important in Nigerian public universities in order to allow for peaceful co-existence of people of different backgrounds that are normally found in this category of institutions of learning. Uninterestingly, however, a good number of factors such as corruption, lack of accountability, poor learning environment, difference in perception, influence of drug amongst others constitute challenges to existence of reliable peace in the government universities. In this situation, issues like injustice, insecurity, existence of fear, violent behaviours, abuse of human right, just to mention a few may be rampant; if the identified factors are not appropriately attended to by the school authorities and other stakeholders. Therefore, placing emphasis on actions like commitment to the goals of the higher education, ensuring good leadership style and good management of conflict is necessary.

Conclusion

Peace is very essential in any society including the communities of public university. Existence of peace in any society or organization assists to achieve the set aims and objectives. Irrespective of the cause, absence of peace in public universities is capable of leading to the destruction of life and properties, prolonged academic activities and cumulatively results in serious threats to sustainable growth and development of any university involved. Owing to its importance, peace assurance requires careful handling, especially in the nation's public universities. In this regard, authorities of this group of institutions of learning have the responsibilities of realizing that the diverse social, economic, cultural and political backgrounds of the university population imply that everybody cannot be expected to exhibit the same type of behaviour.

University authorities are expected to be highly committed to the promotion of peace within and outside the university premises through the teaching of courses that are highly relevant to the assurance of peace. The present situation where some of the public universities contribute meaningfully to incidents of crisis of different kinds that the nation is facing instead of being the providers of solutions is worrisome. As one of the major desirables for the well-being and development of any society, peace is most cherished and aspired to by individuals and organizations. It is not enough to allow peace to reign in the nation's public universities, genuine efforts of all stakeholders are required for its sustainability. This is necessary in order to ensure appropriate behaviour from both students and members of staff, better teaching and learning environment, security of life and properties, justice, equality, fair conflict management, and development of inter-cultural understanding.

Recommendations

In view of the identified challenges that tend to frustrate the existence of genuine and sustainable peace in the nation's public universities, the situation therefore places on the authorities of these institutions of learning the responsibilities of demonstrating high commitment to the achievement of the aims and objectives of their respective universities, maintaining discipline on continuous, always shunning corruption, promoting genuine accountability, ensuring the availability of minimal

learning facilities, maintaining high level of security, running peace education courses, creating effective channels of communication among all parties, embracing better methods of dialogue and using better leadership styles.

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