An Assessment of the Impact of Open and Distance Learning in Tertiary Institutions on Peacebuilding in Nigeria

L'évaluation De L'impact De La Formation Ouverte a Distance Dans Les Institutions Tertiaires Pour La Consolidation De La Paix Au Nigéria

Basil O. Ibebunjo, PhD
Centre for Strategic and Development Studies,
Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma
08035385848
drbasibe@yahoo.com

Iroye Samuel Opeyemi, PhD
Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution Unit
Faculty of Social Sciences
National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja
08033337207
lifelinesamuel@yahoo.com

Abstract

School Curriculum is one of the most viable tools that can be used in imparting peace education in any given society and it is therefore in this regard that this study investigates the impact of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in tertiary institutions on peace building in Nigeria. This study used the operations of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) via its Study Centres model as a benchmark for the presentation and establishment of its objectives. The study aimed at examining the effect of School Curriculum at the higher institution level, most especially the Open and Distance Learning system in projecting peace building in Nigeria. Mixed method research techniques were employed to generate data from both primary and secondary sources. Analyses of results from Likert Rating Scale and interviews showed that students, teachers and staff of NOUN have a better appreciation of the ideals of peace education. Results also show

*that NOUN's curriculum possesses national character which provides
better ODL environment for the impartation of peace education in
Nigeria. The study recommends that there should be a national
regulation of tertiary peace education curricula to ensure that regular
Universities key into the ideals of peace education which will help in
enhancing and promoting peaceful atmosphere and co-existence in
Nigeria.*

Résumé

*Le programme scolaire est l'un des outils les plus viables qui peuvent
être utilisés pour transmettre une éducation de paix à une société
donnée et c'est donc à cet égard que cette étude étudie l'impact de la
formation ouverte à distance (ODL) dans les établissements tertiaires
sur la consolidation de la paix au Nigeria. Cette étude a utilisé les
opérations de l'Université nationale ouverte du Nigeria (NOUN) par
l'intermédiaire de ses centres d'études comme point de référence pour
la présentation et l'établissement de ses objectifs. L'étude a examiné
l'effet du programme scolaire au niveau des établissements supérieurs,
en particulier le système de formation à distance dans la projection de
la consolidation de la paix au Nigéria. Des techniques de recherche
sur les méthodes mixtes ont été utilisées pour générer des données
provenant de sources primaires et secondaires. Les analyses des
résultats de l'échelle de notation de Likert et les entrevues ont montré
que les étudiants, les enseignants et le personnel de NOUN ont une
meilleure appréciation des idéaux de l'éducation à la paix. Les
résultats montrent également que le programme d'études de NOUN
possède un caractère national qui offre un meilleur environnement
ODL pour l'éducation de la paix au Nigéria. L'étude recommande qu'il
y ait une réglementation nationale des programmes d'enseignement
supérieur sur la paix afin de s'assurer que les universités régulières
intègrent les idéaux de l'éducation de la paix qui contribueront à
renforcer et à promouvoir l'atmosphère et la coexistence pacifiques
Nigeria.*

Key Words: *Open and Distance Learning, Peace Education,
Peacebuilding, Conflict, Tertiary Institutions.*

Introduction

Historically, mankind sort to resolve conflict and achieve peace through violence (war). Later, armistices were achieved through treaties and law. In fact, the Westphalian-style state as we know it today was the result of the peace treaty known as the Treaty of Westphalia, which was signed in 1648. This ended the Thirty Years War and the dominance of religious authority in Europe and by extension, the world (Mingst, 1999). The efforts of the new international order to secure peace for the state through such treaties consistently failed. The two world wars (World War I and II) are testaments to this fact. This introduction becomes necessary as most studies on peace education do not account for the seriousness of the subject. This is perhaps because they do not consider that peace is only the fragile and short phase on the *conflict* scale.

As Harris and Morrison (2003) noted, man's path to achieving peace has gradually evolved from the use of arms/force, politics, and ultimately to through sustainable "holistic and bio centric" education. There is no doubt therefore that peace education is the most sustainable and viable path to world peace. There are two types of education: the formal and non-formal education. While the Non-formal education consists of; literacy, continuing remedial and vocational education, the Formal education consists of the more regulated institutional teaching processes. Both however can be used to project and impart peace education. The relationship between education and peace has gained the attention of scholars and international agencies. It is therefore no surprising that the foundation of many international agencies was built on this ideology. One of such examples is the United Nations and its organ, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). As Koïchiro Matsuura puts it,

> *"The United Nations and UNESCO were founded to achieve a world at peace. This means more than an absence of war. It means justice and equity for all as the basis for living together in harmony and free from violence (Matsuura, 2002 p. 2).*

Statement of Problem

National and international security concerns will continue to take centre-stage in spite of the fact that the number of inter-state conflicts have reduced due to an increase in the number of democratic states. Advancements in the fields of science and technology and the resultant increase in the dynamics of globalisation will continue to ensure that security challenges from new and emerging threats will continue to rise. These threats will include: natural disasters, cyber threat, biological/chemical weapons, rise in organised criminal elements and other non-state actions who would continuously challenge the authority of the state.

Additionally, Africa's security situation will likely be exacerbated due to internal factors that are traceable to their ethno-religious and socio-political composition. Nigeria, a multi-ethnic country further divided along religious and political lines is witnessing an upsurge in conflict and various dimension of civil unrest and agitations. This is in spite of the increasing number of universities in the country. From twelve universities in 1975, the country now has 170 universities. Currently, Nigeria has a total of 676 approved tertiary institutions as at March 2019. (See table 1 below). These tertiary institutions are supposed to be the pillar for not only regular learning but also, a catalyst for the promotion of peace. However, it can be argued that Nigeria is more divided and conflict prone now than any other time in its history.

In spite of this increase in both student enrolment and number of tertiary institutions, there was still a huge gap in learning for many who could not for one reason or the other afford to attend regular tertiary institutions. This gave rise to the paradigm shift in tertiary education, and brought about the establishment of open and distance learning tertiary institutions. This initiative was so grand that a special unique global "intergovernmental organisation solely concerned with the promotion and development of distance education and open learning" was established in 1987 by Commonwealth Heads of Government. The Government of Canada is the host of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), which is headquartered in Burnaby, Canada (UNESCO, 2019). One of the major drivers for this was the need to

improve the education and learning status of mostly workers and other more advanced students.

It is therefore important to study an open and distance learning tertiary institution with wide reach to determine the impact it has on promoting peace and unity of the country. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), fits this profile. This is cogent for not just personal or inter-personal conflicts (as most studies opine), but for national peace building to curb violent/armed conflict and to promote national integration. In other to carry out this task, the following research questions are raised:

- What are the concepts of peace education, peacebuilding and open and distance learning?
- What is the relevance of Peace Education to peace building?
- Does peace education in National Open University of Nigeria impact positively on peacebuilding in Nigeria?

Literature Review
Conceptual Framework
In the section below, three concepts that are of paramount importance are discussed. They are: open and distance learning, peacebuilding and peace education.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL)
Open and Distance Learning (ODL), like many co-joined words or terms are prone to varied and sometimes contrasting conceptions. The Commonwealth of Learning (2015) defines open and distance learning (ODL) as a system of teaching and learning characterized by separation of teacher and learner in time and/or place; uses multiple media for delivery of instruction; involves two-way communication and occasional face-to-face meeting for tutorials and learner-learner interaction.

Similarly, Ghosh, Nath, Agarwal and Nath (2012) explain that the term reflects two things: i) all or most of the teaching is carried out by someone who is away from the learner, and ii) greater dimensions of openness and flexibility in terms of access, curriculum or other

elements involved in the whole structure. According to them, the process is made up of a wide range of components including the mission of the institution in question, programs and curricula, teaching/learning strategies and techniques, learning material and resources, communication and interaction. This may also include the support and delivery systems, students, tutors, staff and other experts (Ghosh et. al., 2012).

They also noted that ODL is becoming more successful because single mode open universities absorb large numbers of new learners. Stemming from these successes many traditional universities now offer programs through distance education mode. In the opinion of Bradley and Yates (2000), ODL is conceptualized on open access to education that makes the learners free from the limitations imposed by time and location. It also affords the learner greater flexibility in learning opportunities.

Open and distance education can function at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. It can also be formal or non-formal in nature. In most studies on ODL distinctions are not made between the levels and nature of education. This could make the reader not get a proper perspective on the conception of ODL. This study is focused on ODL at the tertiary level. For the purposes of this study therefore, ODL include students (youth and adults), who for some reasons are unable to attend regular tertiary institutions. This also means that the courses and programs are similar to those of regular universities but broadened for the country's more mature population.

The Concept of Peacebuilding
The term is originally attributed to Galtung (1975), who in his study distinguished between negative peace (the absence of violence) and positive peace (the absence of structural violence and the conditions for war). The author differentiates peacebuilding from peacemaking and peacekeeping which entails tackling root causes of violence which feed into and engender direct violence (Smith, McCandless, Paulson, and Wheaton, (2011).

In conceptualizing *peacebuilding,* credit must be given to Boutros-ghali (1992), who defined peace building as an action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict. For Rasheed and Munoz (2016), peace building is the process of positive and sustainable change that goes beyond simply ending violence, but seeks to tackle and resolve issues involved in structural violence, while enshrining structural peace. The United Nations (UN) via the Secretary-General's Policy Committee defines peace building as an action that involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict, by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development" (United Nations, 2007). Thus, in order to be able to exhibit those range of measures, there is the need to acquire necessary information and skills in that regard and this is where peace education will feature.

The Concept of Peace Education
Waters and LeBlanc (2005) explain that education is perhaps the most important tool for human development and thus, for the eradication of poverty. Furthermore, they also explain that education is key in the "creation of modern citizens and workers who can imagine themselves as members of a political and economic community.

Like most important concepts in emerging and established areas of studies, peace education has come to mean different things to different scholars and students alike. It is also a broad subject area, which Harris (2004) separated into five different aspects: i) global peace education (also known as international studies), ii) conflict resolution, iii) violence prevention (including peer mediation), iv) development education (including human rights education) and v) nonviolence education, typically built around the study of great non-violent figures. Salomon (1999) rejects of the above characterisation of peace education content and contends that 'too many things are now called peace education, ranging from violence reduction in schools to learning about war and peace, and from moral and value education to the cultivation of self-esteem'. To him, peace education does not deal with all interpersonal conflicts but rather [with] 'conflicts based in 'ethnic

[racial, national or religious] hostilities crossed with developmental inequities that have a long history and a bleak future' (Salomon, 1999).

Contrary to popular belief, peace education is not a new phenomenon. Back in 1988, Betty Reardon, in her book, *Comprehensive Peace Education* articulated the ideals of peace education. She emphasizes the need to promote what she calls "an authentic planetary consciousness" which will engender functional global citizens and in turn "to transform the present human condition by changing the social structures and the patterns of thought that have created it". (Reardon, 1988). According to her, this should be at the epicentre of peace education.

Harris and Morrison (2003) opine that peace education is both a philosophy and process which involve skills such as listening, reflection, problem-solving, cooperation and conflict resolution. The process involves empowering people with the skills, attitudes and knowledge to create a safe world and build a sustainable environment. They also noted that this philosophy teaches nonviolence, love, compassion and reverence for all life (Harris and Morrison, 2003).

To Johnson and Johnson (2010) the overall essence of peace education is for the individual to be able to maintain peace among its different aspects such as, intrapersonal peace, interpersonal peace, intergroup peace. Collectively, individuals should be able to maintain peace at the international level such as between countries, societies, and cultures. However, there are two problems here. Attempts to achieve such goals are often sort in general education programs of post-conflict countries. Emphasises for peace education should also be placed on societies with fragile peace. Another problem here is peace education usually depends on the sentiments of the lecturers, who are often times speak from their personal biases.

Distinction must be made between peace education and peace studies. Peace education is broader and more inclusive, cutting across disciplines and involves a re-evaluation of the re-examination of existing syllabi, formal, informal, hidden, subject methodologies, school structure, content and teaching styles consistency. He further

explains that peace studies simply describe specific courses, and research projects peace and war issues that are treated at the tertiary levels of education. This distinction is import for this study and forms the conceptual bases for analysing teacher-learner relationship in this study.

Empirical Review

In the section below, existing literatures relating to this study are reviewed with a view to showing gaps that this study bridges. The relationship between education and peacebuilding is has been well articulated. One of such studies was the work of Smith (2010: 1), which emphasized the relationship between education in conflict and peacebuilding. Stating why it is important to continuously study the linkage. He noted that besides that fact that education is a tool for human development and consequently poverty eradication, it is a basic human right, which can also be invaluable to *conflict transformation* and peacebuilding.

There are a number of studies that have highlighted conflict-susceptible education. Examples include the works of Bush and Saltarelli (2000), Buckland (2004), and Tawil and Harley (2004). Bush and Saltarelli (2000) brought to light an often-neglected aspect of the relationship between peace education and peacebuilding/conflict. This is the fact that peace education is 'two faced' or double edged in nature. In other words, peace education cannot only be used to mitigate but also to exacerbate conflict. The study used international examples such the fact that education is used as a weapon to culturally repress Kurdish minority in Turkey by disallowing them the use their native language in schools. They also pointed to the use of education as weapon by denial such as the destruction of schools in Mozambique. Also, in this class was the forced closure of schools in Palestinian schools by Israel. According to them also, textbooks are also manipulation of textbooks for negative ethnic stereotypes as was seen in Rwanda. Peace education can thus be used as a political tool to either achieve peace or to ensure the escalation of conflict.

Most of the studies in the field of peace education and peacebuilding are hinged on general post-conflict environment. One of such is

Beleuta (2017), which investigates Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. The Study found that post-conflict peace education has been successful in Sierra Leone, while peacebuilding interventions Afghanistan is yet to achieve set goals. In other words, countries such as Nigeria that are not in the category of post-conflict recovery countries but are deeply divided are not studied. This is one of the shortfalls this study addresses.

Amini and Oluyide (2016) examined the process of building capacity for ODL in the sub-region by the Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDAL). The study finds that the mandate of RETRIDAL has largely been achieved through workshops, training sessions and research commissioning in Nigeria and other West African countries.

Recent studies on open and distance learning include the gender-based study by Oluwadare (2015). This study reveals that open and distance learning enhances women intellectually through the acquisition of knowledge and then translates this to radical thinking, autonomous and liberation. The study details the challenges women face in participating in peace building efforts until they attain certain educational levels. It ultimately identified stereotyping and marginalization as part of the problem women face in society and recommended that they should be protected from it. A number of other studies are generalized, dealing with problems associated with ODL and prospects that are accruable from the scheme. Examples include Yusuf (2006), Ikegulu and Oranusi (2014) and Jimoh, (2013). These studies are all projected along the same theoretical and empirical solutions.

There is therefore a general gap in studies concerning tertiary peace education for ODL for countries like Nigeria that are divided along ethno-religious and political lines. This must be investigated in the areas of teaching and learning which has direct consequence for peace, security and national integration of the Nigerian society.

Theoretical Framework
Early social theorists recognised only the power and relevance of the state and its institutions. They therefore did not give credit to the impact

of socio-cultural activities of man on institutions generally. In fact, it took the studies of newer constructivism advocates to gravitate towards this idea until neo-institutionalism was born. In the 1970s, new institutionalism was adapted as a theory when scholars accepted the idea that the success of an organisation had more to do with the social relationships within such organisations, rather than mostly with its objective tasks (Palmer, Biggart and Dick, 2017).

The social institutional theory served as a pathway to the discovery of the new institutionalism theory and is still sometimes used simultaneously with it. Institutional theory was forged in reaction to functionalism, Marxist and conflict theories that were the hallmark of the social sciences from the late 1960s. New institutionalism was thus established when scholars challenged established notion that socio-cultural elements do not affect organizations and that the efficiency of organisations do not affect their existence as long as they are legitimized externally (Finnemore, 1996. and Meyer, Ramirez, Frank, and Schofer, 2008).

To Meyer and Rowan (2006) new institutionalism adequately theorises education because the theory showcases the possibility of convergence in often fragmented disciplines. It also shows promises of providing a uniform universal language to help solve conception and research problems common in this and other fields (Meyer and Rowan, 2006). They also take cognizance of the fact that this theory "has a unique contribution to make in analysing complex and contradictory patterns of institutional change" (Meyer and Rowan, 2006). The resurgence of new institutionalism adequate captures peace education and its place in tertiary institution. Tertiary and other higher education viewed from the periscope of an institution helps explain many of its characteristics and its effects in modern society (Meyer et. al., 2006). Another point to consider is the idea that tertiary institutional are supposed to be societal unbiased watchdog. According to Meyer and Jepperson (2000), Institutional arguments point out that all these broad social movements are shaped by highly institutionalized collective authorities—many associated with the university. These authorities eschew sectarian interests and instead putatively represent common goods and universal truths (Meyer and Jepperson, 2000).

In new institutionalism the past and present changes of incorporated to analyse tertiary institutions. This correctly explains why many institutions are a product of their history, and the composition of their policies and staff and students. Examples of these are seen across regular universities in Nigeria. These limitations can increase the peace or exacerbate conflict situations in a society. These are areas where ODL such as NOUN can take the initiative and build peace through education.

Research Methodology
This study used mixed methods research techniques and relied on primary and secondary sources to generate data. Descriptive survey design was adopted to analyse certain aspects that were appropriate for data generated from primary sources. These include sections from interviews.

Location of the Study: This study on ODL used the NOUN as base for questionnaires. This decision was informed by elementary pre-study interviews/observation carried on staff and students of regular universities. Results from the pre-study interviews/observation are discussed under the sub-section *Results/Discussion.* Additionally, NOUN was chosen because it was primarily set up for ODL and has a national spread. It is therefore best suited for uniform national peace education and peacebuilding purposes.

Sample and Sampling Technique: The population for the study were students and lecturers of various geo-political study centres of NOUN. This was done so as to adequately caption the diverse nature of the country. In line with this, five study centres and Abuja (the Headquarters) were selected. Lagos (South West,), Uyo (South South), Enugu (South East) and Kano (North East). The sample thus consisted of 25 students and 25 facilitators and academic/senior management staff of NOUN. This brings it up to a total of 300 respondents The respondents were selected randomly.
Research Instrument: Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and insider (observer) participation were used to collect primary data for the study. Section A of the questionnaire and semi-structured

interview comprised demographic information of the respondents. Section B comprised questions on peace education and peacebuilding. For the questionnaire, respondents were required to answer correctly such as strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed. The semi-structured interview questions were used to engage respondent, as their answers to a question generated more questions. Questionnaires were retrieved and results from it were calculated, coded and scored. Data generated were analysed using simple percentage and a Likert scale rating of four points was used as follows:

SA = Strongly Agree '4'
A = Agree '3'
D = Disagree '2'
SD = Strongly Disagree '1'

Results and Discussions

Results from questionnaires are tabulated in the Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1: Results from Students of NOUN

Items	SA	A	D	SD	N
Peace education at NOUN has made you better appreciate that conflict is inevitable and that Nigeria's conflicts can be successfully managed to ensure peaceful co-existence.	31	7	6	6	50
Facilitator/Teachers at NOUN are not biased in their socio-political analyses of events in the country.	29	11	6	4	50
The diversity of Nigeria is a blessing and should not be a source of conflict.	32	12	3	3	50
TOTAL	**92 (61.3%)**	**30 (20.0%)**	**15 (10.0)**	**13 (8.7%)**	**150 (100%)**
Combined total (Agreed/Disagree)	**122 (81%)**		**28 (19%)**		**(100%)**

Table 2: Results from Facilitator and Staff of NOUN

Items	SA	A	D	SD	N
You can facilitate or work in study centre of NOUN, even those outside your geo-political zone.	30	14	4	2	50
Teaching/working at NOUN has bettered your understanding of issues of peace and security of Nigeria.	27	15	2	6	50
The diversity of Nigeria is a blessing and should not be a source of conflict.	30	18	1	1	50
TOTAL	**87 (58%)**	**47 (31.3%)**	**7 (4.7%)**	**9 (6.0%)**	**150 (100%)**
Combined total (Agreed/Disagree)	**134 (89%)**		**16 (11%)**		**(100%)**

Discussion of Results

Table 1 shows that 92 out of 150 student respondents from NOUN strongly agreed to questions that suggested that ODL in NOUN has improved peace education for students. Similarly, 30 of such respondents agreed to same suggestions. This gives us a total of 122 of 150 respondents who agreed that ODL in NOUN has improved peace educations for students. This corresponds to 81 percent of the total student respondents. In sum, 29 of 150 student respondents disagree that ODL in NOUN has improved their perception on peace education in the country. This corresponds to about 19% of our total respondents.

From Table 2, 87 out of 150 facilitators/staff respondents from NOUN *strongly agreed* to questions that suggested that teaching/working in NOUN has improved their perception of peacebuilding in Nigeria. 47 of similar respondents *agreed* to same suggestions. This gives a total of 134 (89%) of 150 facilitator/staff of NOUN who agreed teaching/working in NOUN has improved their perception of peacebuilding in Nigeria. This is important for them to successfully impact peace education to ODL students in NOUN, their perception of peacebuilding must first improve or change for the better. Also, 16 out of 150 facilitator/staff respondents disagree that teaching/working in

NOUN has improved their perception of peacebuilding in the country. This corresponds to approximately 11% of our total respondents.

In addition, results from questionnaires, students, facilitators/staff of NOUN were engaged using unstructured interviews. Also, observation techniques were used by the researches to generate data from staff and students of regular and NOUN. The results are discussed in this section. Ideally, tertiary institutional are supposed to be societal unbiased watchdog. This is however not the case from the results from oral interview and participant observation carried out on some of the lecturers of conventional universities. Even media reports show that some teaching staff of the universities makes statements that are capable of dividing Nigerians along ethnic and religious lines, causing sedition and armed conflict in the country. This negates Meyer and Jepperson (2000) postulations on new institutionalism, which states that universities "authorities eschew sectarian interests and instead putatively represent common goods and universal truths".

Also, from interviews and participants' observation with students/teachers and even teaching in NOUN, we find that NOUN peace education programmes have performed better than those of regular Nigerian universities. This triangulation technique confirms our questionnaire results and a function of many variables including the fact that NOUN has uniform curriculum and even teaching materials. This ensures that teachers teach students accordingly and are not totally left to source for teaching materials that are mostly subject to their imaginations and personal experiences of peace/conflict analyses of the country, which are usually influence by personal, ethno-religious and political inclinations. The national spread of NOUN is also key to the success of its efforts at peacebuilding in Nigeria. This is because NOUN provides a meeting point where Nigerians from various religious, ethnic, political and social standing meet. One of our respondents noted that having to travel out of his zone to defend his thesis was an opportunity to make new friends from other parts of the country and also experience the diversity of the country.

This is in line with Jegede (2016), who states that the foundation for Nigeria's National Policy on Education, were built on (a) a free and,

democratic society; (b) a just egalitarian society; (c) a united, strong and self-reliant nation; (d) a great and dynamic economy; and (e) a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens. The ideals of open and distance learning even at the tertiary levels have long been known and accepted in Nigeria. Even the maiden edition of the country's National Policy on Education (NPE, 1977), recognised ODL as a distinct sector of education that was to be organised nation-wide and given flexibility in order to develop human resources of the country for national development (Jegede, 2016).

Conclusion

From the foregoing, we find that NOUN, unlike regular universities, provides better ODL for peace education in Nigeria. This has been linked to the uniform curriculum and teaching materials, ensuring that facilitators, teachers and students are guided accordingly. It also has a national spread, which ensures adequate mixing of staff, facilitators and students from different religions, ethnicity and political affiliations. These three elements are undoubtedly the catalysts for conflicts in Nigeria. Thus, ODL in NOUN can thus be used to support large-scale campaigns against ethno-religious conflicts, political violence and other factors that disrupt the peace and unity of the country.

Recommendations

1. Firstly, the management and staff of NOUN must understand the prime position NOUN holds for peace education in the country. It must therefore make concerted efforts with regards to policy and implementation of peace education and general studies of the institution.
2. Part of the successes of ODL in NOUN is its uniform curricula. It is therefore recommended that there should be a national-wide regulation of tertiary peace education curricula to particularly guide regular tertiary institution on peace education.
3. Stemming from the successes of NOUN's peace education, the country's policy makers must therefore ensure that policies are made to guide regular tertiary institutions towards improving peace education.

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