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Njobati Frederick, Fondzenyuy

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Frederick F. Njobati

Shaping resilience through peace education in schools: Results from a case study in Nigeria[1]

Zusammenfassung

Die entschärfende Rolle der Bildung während eines laufenden Konflikts ist relevant, wird aber merkwürdigerweise unterschätzt und nicht ausreichend erforscht. So ist beispielsweise nur wenig über den Konflikt in der Region des Mittleren Gürtels in Nigeria und seine Auswirkungen auf die Bildung bekannt. Schulen wurden niedergebrannt, angegriffen oder geschlossen. Kinder wurden aus den Schulen vertrieben und Mädchen vergewaltigt, aber dies wurde nicht angemessen berücksichtigt. Im Untersuchungsgebiet spielen christliche Kirchenorganisationen eine wichtige Rolle bei der Konfliktlösung sowie Friedenserziehung. In diesem Beitrag wird untersucht, wie friedenserzieherische Aktivitäten im religiösen Bildungssektor in Nigeria Kindern und insbesondere gefährdeten Mädchen Widerstandskraft und Schutz bieten. Die Untersuchung wurde in der Region „Middle Belt" als qualitative Studie durchgeführt. Sie umfasste 13 halbstrukturierte Interviews mit Leitenden von römisch-katholischen und protestantischen Kirchenorganisationen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Beziehung zwischen Konflikten und Schulbildung ambivalent ist. Einerseits bieten die Friedensclubs in den Schulen sichere Räume für Mediation und Traumabewältigung. Andererseits ist der Schulalltag nach wie vor von Formen der sozialen Rückkopplung geprägt, die Konflikte eher schüren als eindämmen, wie z.B. die Anwendung von Körperstrafen und die Forderung nach Gehorsam. Die Friedenserziehung an den untersuchten Schulen berücksichtigt zudem wenig die Bedingungen und Prozesse des Lernens. Aspekte wie die Entwicklung von Selbstwertgefühl, ein gutes Lernklima, kritisches Denken, kooperatives Lernen und Entscheidungsfindung, die von der Forschung als Schlüsselelemente der Friedenserziehung identifiziert wurden, sind im pädagogischen Rahmen der Schulen nicht enthalten. Das Papier schließt mit der Feststellung, dass eine weitere berufliche Entwicklung für pädagogische Führungskräfte in religiösen (und säkularen) Schulen erforderlich ist, um die Rolle der Schulen bei der Förderung der Widerstandsfähigkeit und des psychischen Wohlbefindens von Kindern in anhaltenden Konfliktsituationen zu stärken.

Schlüsselworte: *Friedenserziehung, Gerechtigkeit, Bildungsqualität, Resilienz, psychisches Wohlbefinden, Schule als sicherer Ort*

Abstract

The mitigating role of education during an ongoing conflict is pertinent, yet curiously underplayed and under-researched. For instance, little is known about the conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria and its effects on education. Schools have been burnt, attacked or shutdown. Children have been forced out of schools and girls violated, but this has not received adequate attention. Meanwhile, in the area of the study, Christian church organizations are playing an important role in conflict resolution and peace education. This paper explores how peace education activities in the faith-based education sector in Nigeria provide resilience and protection for children and especially vulnerable girls. The research was conducted in the Middle Belt region as a qualitative study. It included 13 semi-structured interviews with leaders of Roman Catholic and Protestant church organizations. Findings show the two-sided nature of the relationship between conflict and schooling. On the one hand, peace clubs in schools offer safe spaces for mediation and trauma relief. On the other hand, everyday school life is still characterized by forms of social feedback that stir rather than curb conflict such as the use of corporal punishment and demand for obedience. Moreover, peace education offered in the schools under study pays little attention to the condition and processes of learning. Aspects such as the development of self-esteem, good learning climate, critical thinking, cooperative learning and decision making, which have been identified by research as key elements of peace education do not feature in the pedagogical framework of the schools. The paper concludes by underlining that further professional development for educational leaders in faith-based (and secular) schools is needed to enhance schools' role in contributing to the resilience and the mental well-being of children in ongoing conflict situations.

Keywords: *Peace Education, Justice, Educational Quality, Resilience, Mental-Wellbeing, School as a Safe Place*

Introduction

The debate about children exposed to various forms of violence and adversities, necessitates an understanding of how to develop resilience through schools. The situation gets more attention in resource-limited contexts such as sub-Saharan

Africa with poor quality levels of education (Gentz & Ruiz-Casares, 2021, p. 1). This paper reflects the understanding of peace education in shaping children's resilience examined by a qualitative study conducted in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria (located in sub-Saharan Africa). The study explored the experiences of the leaders of Christian church organizations about peace education in faith-based non-state schools. In order to put this in an appropriate frame, violence and conflict dynamics in the area of the study are described.

Nigeria experiences a complexity of conflict situations including violent attacks by the Boko Haram fundamentalist group with adverse effects on education (Piereder, 2014, p. 71). Schools have been burnt, attacked or shutdown and children forced out of schools with girls violated, but this has not received adequate scientific attention in regards to the specific constellation of the conflict, the chances and barriers for the effects of instruments to be implemented for change (Opara & Inmpey, 2019, p. 107–109).

The Middle Belt region, in which this study is contextualized, is the area where the mainly Muslim north meets the largely Christian south, comprising about 50 ethnic groups. Even though, the violent conflicts in this area are described as ethno-religious, the causes are rooted in land resources, population growth and climate change. These limiting factors bring about clashes over land between the cattle herdsmen (who are mostly Muslim) and crop farmers. The peculiarity of Nigerians is that they are highly religious and see themselves first as Christians or Muslims before identifying themselves as Nigerians (Ilo, 2015, p. 100–106). Children and youths are highly involved in these conflicts as both victims or actors, many of whom are disillusioned with life. Meanwhile, Christian church organizations are playing an important role in peace building and education within schools and in communities. Rugah (2020), observes that even though faith-based organisations constitute meaningful landscapes for conflict resolutions and peace building in sub-Saharan Africa, they are accorded little attention and visibility. These faith-based organizations are rooted in religious institutions that have a transnational network, giving them an added value to influence change. Their role in sub-Saharan Africa gets stronger as people tend to have more trust in them than in the state systems and institutions which are perceived as being unstable. From the education statistical stand point, about 52% of primary and secondary schools in Nigeria are non-state ones (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 22–67) of which about one third are Christian schools, thus shaping the landscape of education in the whole country.

Resilience, peace and quality education: Theoretical background

The question of how to support children to cope with developing strategies to respond to challenges of violence from their environment calls for the reflection and development of resilience. This requires the understanding of the complexity of children's social interactions and structures that facilitate their positive development (Ungar, 2008). Research suggests that schools have the greatest impact on resilience among children (Ungar, Connelly, Liebenberg, & Theron, 2019). This has been buttressed by Taub (2005, p. 359–360) who emphasizes that schools are particularly well suited and provide the enabling space to impact the social development of both children and their families. Geist (2019, p. 1) argues that classrooms need to have good learning climate and warmth to assure emotional safety which is a pre-requisite for children's well-being. Meanwhile, good learning climate contributes to the self-efficacy that enhances students learning outcome (Lazarides, Fauth, Gaspard & Göllner, 2021). Even though the mitigating role of education during an ongoing conflict is pertinent especially in regards to children's wellbeing, it is curiously underplayed and under-researched (Davies, 2005, p. 357). Decisions on what kind of education and which role is played by schools need a shared understanding as education on one part can serve as a safe place to enhance resilience but can also on the other part facilitate conflict reproduction and exclusion (Hilker 2011, p. 267; Davies, 2005, p. 357). It is for this reason that the insertion of peace and quality education gets their visibility in shaping resilience in schools. In the following paragraphs, the theoretical basis of resilience, of quality and peace education are described.

There are different approaches to understand resilience. On one part, resilience is viewed from a systemic perspective and on the other part from an individual perspective. Masten (2014, p. 6–7) argues that global perspectives of resilience on children is about the capacity of a system to successfully adapt to disturbances and threats that affects its functioning and development. This argumentation profiles global resilience and considers interactions at different system levels such as social, economic, and ecological. On the other hand, resilience at the individual level focuses on children developing coping strategies to deal more effectively with diverse everyday challenges and adversities, assuring their well-being, and the respect for themselves and for others (Taub, 2005, p. 357–358). From the experience of the global COVID-19-pandemic that had placed various forms of destabilizations and uncertainties of children and families (Prime, 2020, p. 1–2), discourses create room to articulate the well-being of children in the light of global competence on resilience. This requires the reflections and teaching of abstract social relations that are linked to global social justice (Scheunpflug, 2020). This is because social justice is an important aspect of quality and peace education.

The understanding of peace education requires the link to justice. This view is supported by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 (United Nations, 2015) which emphasizes the access to justice. The arguments on peace understanding are shaped by different world views, that makes the global understanding of the subject complex (Smith & Burr, 2014). However, there is a common drive for sustainable development, inclusiveness, human dignity and human rights development (United Nations, 2015, & UNESCO, 2008). These arguments suggest that the understanding of peace needs to be connected to justice, giving it a wider perspective to include social, economic and ecological dimensions. It is important for peace education to address inequality gaps and to contribute to social justice especially in countries experiencing violent conflicts or having post-conflict experiences (Scheunpflug & Wenz, 2015). Davies (2017) confirms this with the notion of justice sensitive education that enhances

self-esteem, autonomy, critical thinking, democratic and participatory approaches. This is at the heart of quality education. Even though sustainable peace is rooted in quality education, measures on conflict and violence prevention have not given much attention to the dimension of education. Quality education is a necessity for safe places of learning, providing an open space to reflect on issues like self-esteem, problem-solving, power balance, diversities, uncertainties and perspectives of change in a global society (Scheunpflug, 2008). In the framework of peace and justice, quality education can therefore be understood as a right (Pigozzi, 2009) which gets support by the argumentation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (United Nations, 2015) on inclusive quality education. Ross & Genevois (2006) further argue that it is by first achieving quality education that other rights can be practised and fulfilled to assure sustainable peace.

Resilience for the well-being of children requires schools as safe places. Bajaj (2015, p. 1) argues that schools as safe places reflects on pedagogies of resistance and critical peace education. An important feature to understand resilience is exploring the experience of adversity (Daniel, 2010, p. 232–239) and reflecting this beyond dimensions related to personality factors to include broader process-based factors (McFadden, 2015, p. 1547–1548). Literature on resilience is mostly based on researches conducted in the global North. Above all, current discourses in development studies do not pay enough attention to the visibility and the impact of the role of faith-based organizations (Koehrsen & Heuser, 2020). With the case of Nigeria, research could be enriched by perspectives of the global South. This study therefore reflects on how resilience looks like in the global South, more specifically, the case of the Middle belt region of Nigeria and the role of faith-based organizations.

Research question and reasearch methodology

Based on the problem description highlighted in the introduction (chapter 1) and the pertinence of the subject described in the theoretical background (chapter 2), the study at hand is guided by the following question: What are the experiences of Christian Church leaders about the contribution of peace education to resilience in Nigerian faith-based schools?

As the research topic is new in the context of the global south, it necessitated and exploratory study for which a qualitative approach was used (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Data were collected by semi-structured interviews from 13 leaders of Roman, Catholic and Protestant church organizations in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria to get systematic insights into their experiences about the contribution of peace education to resilience in schools. Semi-structured interviews were prefered because they allow the exploration of subjective viewpoints as well as get in-depth accounts of participants' experiences (Evans & Lewis, 2018; Flick, 2009). Interviews were conducted online by means of Zoom, Skype or WhatsApp (as COVID-19 security restrictions at the time did not allow for flights and face to face activities). The sample considered participants from Christian church umbrella organizations, schools, church organizations involved in justice and peace, church congregations, and church-based funding organizations. These organizations had functions connected to either schooling or diaconal work or to both. The persons interviewed comprised of women and men reached by digital means. For ethical purposes and confidentiality, the names of participants were anonymized (Surmiak, 2018) using the names of food crops in Nigeria.[2] Data which comprised of interview transcripts were analysed by content analysis with the process of coding and inter-coding (Mayring, 2014) using a software program MAXQDA.

Findings

Based on the materials of the study and in relation to the research question that focused the experiences of Christian Church leaders in regard to the contribution of peace education to resilience in Nigerian faith-based schools, the results of the study are described. These results are differentiated under four themes that emerged from the material of the study as abstractions following the process of coding and intercoding.

Peace club activities in schools: A contribution to positive change in students' life and responsibility

Talking about peace club activities in schools, the description of church actors lay emphasis on the positive change for the life of students. This understanding comes from interviews which shape the quality of the field as presented below. In the following quotation, Yam talks about a behavioural change of a boy who was a perpetuator of violence on girls in school. In the course of the interview she mentioned the process in peace clubs to bring about the change and explained: "One of the schools where this program (peace clubs) was run, our attention was drawn from the office on the fact that there is a young boy, that has been following young girls with violence in this school. And of course the school was about to suspend him, and we pleaded with the management of the school to allow us come in and intervene, and when we went in there, and part of our work and mandate is to actually hear from all sides, so we interviewed the young child […] his father usually beat his mother at home, and the father encouraged him never to tolerate any woman who belittles him, and so for that, and every day he comes to school he does the ways and the beatings as the father […] We met the father and we told him, well, your son is actually reaping the fruits of your labour he is now a bully in the school, he is beating girls, left right and centre. Is it true that you actually encouraged him, he said no, that here he is, he can actually speak for himself of course at the end to cut the long story short, we had an understanding and together with the parents we had to go to the school to resolve this issue amicably. From that moment onwards, the kid vowed never to do so and he never did it until he graduated from that school" (Yam, lines 399–415). The expression of Yam above indicates that peace clubs in the school involve the parents, school management and students in the process of bringing change. Another interview which is that of Cassava, contributes to this situation by describing the religious inclusivity in peace clubs as well as students' responsibility to conduct peer mediation. Cassava reported in the interview: "We are actually partnering and starting clubs in schools, you train the students on how to do mediation, you have them from both Christian and Muslim faiths […]. You get peer mediators who resolve issues in the school without referring to the guardian counselor master rat-

her they will report successes" (Cassava, lines 456 – 463). Other materials from the interview of Pumpkin contribute to this aspect by the church actor expressing that peace education through peace clubs offer space for trauma healing. Pumpkin explained in the interview: "We have had instances where we had trauma healing with children and you ask them what easily comes to their minds. The first thing the child does is that he draws a gun. Now, this gun when I grow up, I'm going to buy a gun and when I buy a gun, I'm going to kill that particular person who killed my father. Irrespective of whether you don't know the person so, what we do with trauma healing is that we bring the person to start learning to forgive" (Pumpkin, lines 140–146). The statement of Pumpkin above also reveals the diagnostic process to find out the stressors and intentions of students who are victims and their expression of violence reproduction. From the materials as described above concerning the contribution of activities of peace clubs in schools, Church organizations give the visibility of peace clubs as a safe space of strengthening and building hope in students. The materials also show that the successes of peace education through peace clubs take place at individualized settings at the grass-root levels.

Understanding of peace and justice: Christian churches and church organizations show a varied understanding of just peace

Regarding the understanding of peace and justice, the materials from the study shows a varied understanding of just peace. Some passages of the materials show the statement of the interviewed person that there is only a demand for justice when conflicts are experienced. In the quotation that follows, Carrot contributed to this aspect by mentioning during the interview that peace is primordial but that justice is not necessary when people live in harmony: "Yes Peace comes first. Where there is peace and people are living together in harmony, there is no need for justice. But when there is conflict and people are trying to retaliate, and to console them, then there will be justice" (Carrot, lines 293–296). Other materials from the study such as Potato (MAXQDA, lines 215–219) describe experiences of peace education without the connection to justice, laying emphasis on reactive approaches when conflicts and crisis arise.

On the other hand, some other materials from the study show a broader understanding of just peace. This understanding comes from interviews, which shape the quality of the field as presented below. In the following quotation, Pumpkin explained that there is no peace if there is no justice and connects his explanations to climate change: "Actually, one of the things; the problem is that here, we have had many people who are struggling; I mean there is no peace if there is no justice for what is being done here in this particular country. So, it is beyond our power. So I think, one of the things is that we need to build the capacity of the church […] So we need a church that is knowledgeable; a church that will build the capacity in justice and they can speak to power without fear of people […] But again, another thing coming up that I am beginning to see, standing up for peace that we are not doing in XX[3] is the issue of climate change and food security […] Because last week, we just did a workshop on climate change and we are seeing that most of our trees are being felled and so there is this invasion of the Saharan Desert and so the farming lands are also being encroached by herdsmen and it is causing a lot of problems in the Middle Belt; water crises also. So, we need to change. These are some of the issues put together. We cannot talk about justice and peace when we don't talk about sanitation, food security. That's the way I look at things. So, if we do justice building so what? Those people don't have food to eat. So what when the rains are not coming? So what when the people go to the fields and the Fulani people kill them? So, […] peace building; it's just a component" (Pumpkin, lines 335–369). Other materials from the study show similar expressions like that of Pumpkin and expand the understanding of peace and justice to population explosion and economic factors (Cassava, lines 78–82).

The material described above on the understanding of justice and peace, makes visible two qualities: One quality which is about reactive processes to conflicts in a restricted sense, another quality which emphasizes on the need for justice and extends concerns to broader aspects connected with ecological and economic factors. The material therefore shows the representatives acting in those church organizations working in the domain of peace education in schools have a varied understanding of just peace.

Understanding of peace education in the school daily life: Peace education is limited to the basic content of peace

Talking about peace education understanding, the description that reflects this as shown by the material of the study lays emphasis on the basic content of peace on the one hand and on morality and strict discipline on the other. This understanding is represented in interviews which describe the quality of the field as presented below. In the following quotation, Groundnut, being a leader of a school that runs peace education through peace clubs, emphasized on punishment as a measure for students who misbehave and explained: "[…] If you misbehave we discuss your punishment, […], there are rules and regulations of the school so for any form of misbehaviour, you know the rule, so you tell us your punishment" (Groundnut, lines 256–259).

In a similar understanding as Groundnut, the material from one of the interviews (Okro, MAXQDA, lines 181–238) emphasizes on the enforcement of morality and corporal punishment. In the following quotation, Okro, a leader of a school said: "Two years ago I had to expel about 5 students in the school, because of their immoral life, I just noticed that they dodged exam and were trying to get in more students […] One of the things we do is we give punishment to a child who is involved in that, you ask him to cut the grasses outside or pick some stones and fill up some areas that need to be refilled, its actually the disciplinary committee that decides on what punishment has to be given depending on the gravity of the problem. So they decide and sometimes we make them to apologize on the assembly ground, we could punish them by flogging them and then we make them to apologize, to say they are sorry for the behaviour and of course it's that type of behavior that is being counseled by school guardians and counselors. And we also have a chaplain in the school who will also pray for them" (Okro, lines 230–238). The statement from Okro above shows the stress of the school leader on strict discipline with

corporal punishment on students as an institutional measure of the school she is talking about. The interpretation of the interviews underlines an understanding of peace education in the daily life of schooling that is restricted to peace clubs. The materials from the study show that the daily practice by school leaders and teachers emphasizes on punishment up to flogging and morality as appropriate aspects for learning and the school atmosphere.

The understanding of quality education as a landscape to just peace is varied

With regards to the role of education to just peace, the materials from the study show varied understandings. Some expressions present the understanding of schools as an inclusive and safe place while the understanding from other statements emphasizes on fundamental religious aspects. All of these dimensions of understandings can be found in the interviews that shape the quality of the field. Maize, from the background as actor from a church funding organization, explains in the following quotation that schools are crucial and first need to have quality education to shape safe places of learning and peace building: "[…] just to mention to say we want to support peace initiative, we need to start a school project because schools are so crucial, I mean this all everything I introduce schools first of all, to have a quality of education, schools have to be a safe place […] it's not enough to have peace education in schools, it is like a step before, we have to know a bit more, what have we first to do to have a school as a safe place and then of course peace education is of course one element […] in conflict regions and also post conflict regions it is very important to face violence like a structural problem, that's why we must also think about the prevention of violence or to make schools a safe place for all the children and we identify that the most vulnerable in schools are girls and so our focus in schools are girls" (Maize, lines 168–177). The statement of Maize above shows the multi-layered quality of peace education and emphasizes the need to recognize violence as a structural problem for which schools need to contribute towards its prevention. Some of the materials from the interviews show the response to religious plurality. In the following quotation, Njangsa explained that giving access to children from different religious backgrounds is a source of motivation to children and the community. Njangsa reported in the interview: "Just like I said, the output from the school motivates people to come, they have seen that the school is really good, like this small one, the place I am, majority of the people are not members of our church (name of church withheld), like I said, it's a mixture of the villagers, […]. Yes, we have Christians, some of them are even Muslims" (Njangsa, lines 174–178). In addition to religious tolerance, some materials from the study ensure access to the disadvantaged students. From this backdrop, Groundnut explained in the interview in the following quotation: "[…] if we go for all the best candidates who will help the non-best candidates, in the course of our admission we consider those candidates who even emerge with B or C class, we still take them in, and we help them […] some come from very disadvantaged environments from their primary school level, […] so our job also is to get a support for them, […] and that enables us to carry everybody along" (Groundnut, lines 73–95). The statement of Groundnut above shows a contribution to social justice by the school. On the other hand, some other materials form interviews show religious intolerance in teacher recruitment. In the following quotation, Okro emphasized that the main criteria in teacher recruitment is based on faith. " […] teachers should have Christian backgrounds before they are recruited. When recruiting and we discover that they don't have sound background, we have turned them down and actually even in the process if we discover that you only pretended to be who you are not, there are instances we have to terminate the appointment. I have to write a letter of termination and hand it over to the churches where they are coming from to ask their pastors that they follow them up, because it is their lives that we want saved. We keep that kind of discipline on them" (Okro, lines 139–143). The statement from the interview of Okro above shows the blame and discipline on the teacher by the church leader or organization based on the faith affiliation of the teacher. In addition to emphasis on faith for teacher recruitment, Okro also focuses on connecting faith to subject content. In the following quotation, she explained: "As the head of the school, I've been able to let teachers know that biology is not a separate subject from their Christian lives, so while teaching biology, we expect them to bring in Christian biblical referencing to incorporate into what they are teaching the students, and actually as I am talking to you, I've gone through a course in the peace house [name of the place withheld] I tried to tell my colleagues that we cannot carry bible away from whatever we are teaching, that will help these children to be sound here before graduating" (Okro, lines 122–133).

From the descriptions above, the statements from the interviews of church leaders show varied understanding regarding education as a landscape to peace. While some materials from the study show multi-dimensional understanding of peace education to include religious plurality, inclusion and social justice, other materials emphasize that faith should be combined with school subjects, teaching and teacher profile. Based on the interviews, the findings reveal the following:

- Peace education through peace clubs in schools contributes to positive change in students' lives and responsibilities.
- Christian churches and church organizations show a varied understanding of just peace with daily school life characterized by emphasis on morality and the use of corporal punishment.
- Peace education is limited to the basic content of peace.
- The understanding of quality education as a landscape to shape peace education and resilience is varied amongst Christian church leaders.
- Dealing with religious tolerance is a challenge for building peace in schools.

Discussion

The findings of the study show that Christian church actors are aware of the importance and the role of peace education in schools and how this is important for the well-being of children and the community. Meanwhile, findings also portray an ambivalent nature of the relationship between dealing with conflict and schooling with respect to the experiences of school leaders. Based on participants' understanding, on the one hand, peace

clubs in schools offer safe spaces for violence prevention, mediation and trauma relief. On the other hand, everyday school life is still characterized by various forms of social feedback such as the use of corporal punishment and demand for obedience. The latter contradicts the drive for schools as safe spaces for learning and building resilience. Moreover, peace education offered in the schools focuses on the content of peace and pays little attention to the structural dimension of violence and the condition and processes of learning. The discussion that follow articulates on two aspects, namely: Ambivalence within the understanding of developing resilience for the benefit of the children in regards to the need for schools as safe places and peace education in faith-based schools for societal stability.

Ambivalence within the understanding of developing resilience for the benefit of children and the need for schools as safe places

The findings show that the participants in the study at hand who are actors of Christian church organizations in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria describe an ambivalent understanding of schools as safe places. Also from the results of the study, the understanding of just peace and resilience by Church actors is not adequate for a global understanding. As everyday school life is still characterized by emphasis on corporal punishment, morality and obedience, this may rather facilitate conflict reproduction and exclusion (Hilker 2011, p. 267; Davies, 2005, p. 357). Even though schools may serve as breeding grounds for conflict, research still shows that schools have the greatest impact on children's resilience (Ungar et al., 2019; Taub, 2005, p. 359–360). This suggests that schools should be safe places that offer access and good a learning climate to assure children's well-being and the development of their social competences (Geist, 2019, p. 1). The conditions of learning as described by Bajaj (2015), which include self-efficacy, inclusion, critical thinking, autonomy and cooperative learning (Lazarides et al., 2021; Davies, 2017; Opotow et al., 2005), offer an added value to the development of resilience in children. Until now the discourse in Nigeria does not reflecting the role of schools in violence prevention and shaping resilience in children. Schools as safe places needs to be addressed as an aspect of school quality especially in a precarious context of violence that affects the access of children to schooling. In this connection, peace education cannot be seen as an isolated topic but unfolds itself more as an integrated principle of all pedagogic efforts in the framework of quality education.

Peace education in faith-based schools and societal stability

The results of the current study show that peace education through peace clubs in the schools involved in the research contribute to positive change in students' lives and responsibilities at individualized levels. Given that societal stability is not only about the question of attainment of individual resilience but much more on global perspectives of resilience (Masten, 2014, p. 6–7), a systemic approach to address threats on societal development is important. Development discourse has shown that sustainable peace for societal stability requires the insertion of access to justice, giving it a wider perspective to include the respect of human rights, social, economic and ecological dimensions (UNESCO, 2017; United Nations, 2015). From this back drop, peace education in areas characterized by violent conflicts or post conflict experiences as shown by research (Davies, 2017; Scheunpflug & Wenz, 2015) needs to emphasize the narrowing inequality gaps and fostering social justice. Furthermore, as Smith & Burr argue that the global understanding of peace is complex (2014), children and school actors need global competences which requires broader reflections and the teaching of abstract social relations (Scheunpflug, 2020). Such competences can be developed though the network of schools that provides an open space for dialogue with the potential of shaping global perspectives of resilience (Nyiramana & Niyibizi, 2020, p. 30).

Even though faith-based organizations have by their trans-national character, the potential to shape the stability of the global society, development discourse has not given this visibly (Koehrsen & Heuser, 2020, p. 1–2). Until now, the study shows that the discourse on peace education in these schools in Nigeria, focuses mainly on the basic content of peace in a restricted sense and gives a limited reflection to the role of faith-based schools and organizations. However, the role of faith-based schools in shaping peace education and societal stability cannot be underestimated. A study of selected non-state actors in Africa from Catholic and Protestant churches show that non-state faith-based schools offer an innovative response regarding educational quality development, contribution to justice, inclusion, peace and democracy (Scheunpflug et al., 2021, p. 3–4). This narrative on non-state actors in education emphasizes the role of faith-based schools and their contribution to education as a public good. Tawil & Locatelli (2015) argue that positioning education as a public good is a necessity for development and requires the engagement of non-state actors as well as the recognition of their role in education. As an added value for the promotion of social cohesion, faith-based schools have strong networks that are rooted in participation and make use of church relations, missionary or religious societies, and international development structures. Conversely, these schools face the challenge of funding especially in the developing context (Scheunpflug et al., 2021, p. 16–31). Even though, the role of faith-based organizations and faith-based schools can be ambivalent regarding the understanding for global societal stability, they play an important role in protecting against fundamentalism (Barber et al., 2020, p. 3). Furthermore, fundamentalism is not only rooted in religion but as well in secular life. Therefore, faith-based schools have room to respond to social plurality and educational justice by not only contributing towards the right to education but as well on the right to religion through the offer of various choices.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the paper concludes underlining two dimensions. First on the dimension of practice, that further professional development for educational leaders in faith-based (and secular) schools is needed to enhance schools' role in contributing to the resilience and the mental well-being of children in ongoing conflict situations. In the second dimension it should be taken into consideration for further research, that a quantitative study on resilience and children's well-being should be conducted for schools in Nigeria as the country is experiencing recurring conflicts and violence with greater effects on children and youths.

Notes

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2 Names taken from food crops in Nigeria: Yam, Cocoyam, Banana, Plantain, Beans, Cassava, Groundnuts, Pumpkin, Potatoes, Maize, Okro, Njangsa and Carrots.

3 The original name of the organization is replaced for anonymity.

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Frederick F. Njobati

is working a research assistant at the University of Bamberg, Chair of Foundations in Education and at Pedagogic In-Service Training Programme (ISTP), Cameroon.