

# **PEACE CLUB INFRASTRUCTURES IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS: IMPACT AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Irene, Oseremen Felix PhD

**Abstract:** This briefing paper reports the impact of peace club infrastructure in the eight schools where such infrastructure was established in Nigeria. The study adopts an action research design and thematic approach in data analysis. The pre- and post-training test results and the focus group discussions point to a very positive outcome for the peace clubs. The study contributes to improving participants' knowledge in anger management and conflict resolution, and builds participants' skills in anger management and in resolving their own conflicts amicably. It promotes a positive attitudinal change of participants, and ensures a peaceful learning environment which in turn enhances students' academic performance in schools. It provides a forum where students and even teachers express themselves on peace and conflict issues. It recommends peace clubs to school administrators, community managers and policymakers as a viable policy option for sustainable peace in schools.

**Key Words:** Peace-Clubs, Nigerian, Schools, impact, policy implication

## **Introduction**

The problem of conflict and violence in schools has been a major concern to the government, teaching profession and community at large in Nigeria. Violence has negative impacts on the mental health of a child which consequently impact negatively on their performance in school. The safer learning spaces which schools ought to be providing have become sites of widespread violence (Burton 2008, 11). The usual response to which has been violent; one alternative is to build infrastructures for peace (Irene 2015, 1) such as peace clubs. This study focuses on building peace clubs and assessing the impact of such infrastructure for peace in: promoting positive attitudinal changes in students; empowering students' skills and knowledge of peace and conflict resolution required for them to be able to resolve their own conflicts amicably; and providing a viable forum where students and teachers interact for a nonviolent social change in school, including promoting a peaceful learning environment which in turn contributes to improving

students' academic performance in schools. The research is fairly novel, and it is particularly important in defining an approach suitable to addressing the problems of conflicts and violence in schools. It contributes to building peace and students' capacity to handle conflicts. The study should influence policymakers to formulate policies in support of peace clubs in schools.

The study was conducted in selected schools in Nigeria where interpersonal conflicts are a common experience among students and school-based violence was high. The stories of school-based violence dot the Nigerian landscape. The case of a 12-year-old Oromoni who died on November 30, 2021, from injuries sustained in an attack by five senior students of Downen College for allegedly refusing to join a cult (NAN Agency Report 2022) is one among many. A study by UNICEF revealed that the type of violence in Nigerian schools include physical, health psychological, sexual, and gender-based violence. Of these, physical violence constitutes 85 percent, psychological violence (50 percent), gender-based violence (5 percent), sexual violence (4 percent) and health-related violence (1 percent) (UNICEF 2007). More alarming is the fact that violent experiences have continued to worsen amidst the general violent context in the country that has kept the Nigerian state struggling against terrorist orchestrated violent menace.

### **Infrastructure for Peace: Peace Clubs and Curriculum**

Peace can be planned (Hopp-Nishanka 2012) and the creation of infrastructure for peace is crucial to planning peace (Kumar and Haye 2011) in schools. Infrastructure for peace, according to the United Nations Development Programme (2010), is a dynamic network of interdependent structures, mechanisms, resources, values, and skills which, through dialogue and consultation, contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in a society. Van-Togeren (2011, 45) conceives it as institutional structures or mechanisms for preventing and addressing conflicts at the local, national, regional and global levels; while Suurmond and Sharma (2013, 3) define it as the structures, resources, and processes through which peace services are delivered at any level of a society. Factors contributing to violence, be they attitudinal, behavioural factors, or factors relating to the broader socio-economic, cultural and political conditions, can be altered (World Health Organisation 2002, 3), and infrastructure for peace can contribute appreciably to altering those factors. Notably, peace clubs and curriculum have been used to address school violence in Nigeria.

A peace club is a voluntary organization devoted to empowering its members—in the context of this study, youths or school pupils or students—with skills and knowledge in the area

of peace and conflict resolution (Irene 2015, 329). Peace club may be situated within formal and informal structures. Peace club programmes promote a culture of peace and are transformative (WaMunvwe 2014, 9). Peace clubs can play a leading role in building positive mind-sets for peace. As a standing peace structure, peace club creates a safe and secure place for peaceful relationships (Stomfay-Stitz and Wheeler 2007) that is based on trust and security. Peace clubs help in psychosocial transformation of youths. They emphasize the development of peaceful living competencies among young people (Lokanatha 2011) and help shape patterns of interpersonal, civil and social behaviour (Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery 2005). Peace clubs not only provide trainings for their members, but also contribute to the education of those around them (United Nations Economic, Scientific & Cultural Organisation 2009). They are based on the principles embodied in the values of an ethic of care (Noddings 1992) as members struggle to make sense of themselves as moral being (Smentana 2006). They promote a common bond among students as they learn to treat one another as fellow humans and share mutual experiences (Noddings 1992, Noddings 2007).

Peace clubs can present a sustainable architecture for peace (Irene and Majekodunmi 2017) and conflict intervention in schools, ensuring that it is not a “one-off” initiative but rather one that is both structured and ongoing. As a general statement, peace clubs are made up of learners who meet voluntarily with objectives, which according to Irene (2015, 327) include: understanding the meanings of conflict and violence, echoing the fact that conflict is inevitable while violence is a choice, learning and practicing basic communication skills—both listening and speaking—which are central to the resolution of conflict, supporting members in dealing with the conflict and violence issues that club members face, and finding ways to contribute to a more peaceful school environment.

Typically, peace club members follow a peace curriculum. Peace curricula focus on interpersonal conflict and violence rather than structural violence, although there might also be scope for tackling structural violence within a school. One notable curriculum used for peace club training in Africa was developed by the Mennonite Central Committee in Zambia.<sup>1</sup> This curriculum was adopted and used in the schools included in this study. This curriculum is normally delivered in three trimesters.

The first trimester typically focuses on the meaning and causes of conflicts as well as the approaches of handling conflicts. The specific topics for peace club training sessions

for participants in the first academic term are an introduction to the meaning of conflict, perspectives on conflict, cultural differences as a cause of conflict, approaches to solving conflict, problem solving tools, identifying feelings, and anger management. The topics for peace club training sessions for participants in the second academic term are nonverbal communication, active listening, speaking, simple and fair solutions, brainstorming, and problem solving methods as well as becoming a peace-builder. The topics for peace club training sessions for participants in the third academic term are an introduction to non-violence, non-violent communication, and case studies such as the story of the three bulls, the children of nonviolence story, the story of women united, the story of the servant of God, and the story of non-violence—a case of Mahatma Gandhi. It also includes practical conflict resolution sessions which involve dealing with case studies of personal conflict experience in schools, and developing a right attitude in challenging situations.

Learning methods include skills training (to help build participants basic skills in conflict resolution), brainstorming, interrogation and interactive sessions, plenary and small group discussion, teaching and presentation, case studies, role play and simulation. Furthermore, the learning processes are interactive (active and cooperative learning), practical (applying theory to concrete situations), participatory (making the group itself a learning body and mobilising organizing capacities), and elicitive (drawing from experience, knowledge, and personal resources).

### **Peace Clubs: An Experimental Study in Nigeria**

To assess the impact of peace clubs on school violence, a study of experimental cases in Nigeria was conducted, which is important for Nigeria and potentially other cases in Africa. Besides the strategic location of Nigeria in Africa, its population size, and influence in the continent, Nigeria has a history of direct and interpersonal conflicts among students in high schools. School-related violence in Nigeria has been aggravated by Boko Haram, which notoriously abducted over 200 girls from a school in Chibok village in 2014 and 113 girls from a school in Dapchi village in 2018. Many communities in Nigeria have a history of violence in communities and schools, and direct violence and interpersonal conflicts are increasingly occurring at alarming rates.

Peace clubs were set up in a total of eight schools and operated over two periods—April 2013 to March 2014 for the first period (preliminary) involving the eight schools and April 2014

to July 2014 for the second period involving four schools for the main project. One other school, Distinct Jubilee International College, initially participated at the preliminary period but dropped out after a month, thereby reducing participating schools from nine to eight. The study started with the recruitment of participants as part of the processes to establish peace clubs in the selected schools. Proceeding with the study was subject to approval by the school management.

A sample survey technique or purposive strategy was employed in the study to select eight schools with disturbing cases of school-based violence in the study area. The locations (Emmanuel College, Walbrook College, Yinbol College and Kingston School, Immanuel Grammar School, Methodist Grammar School, Community High School and BIC School) had history of direct and interpersonal conflicts among students. These purposively selected schools are co-educational schools.

Overall, the study had an experimental nature in line with what is referred to as action research. The study sought to establish peace clubs as infrastructure for peace in schools, investigate the impact of peace clubs on students' attitudinal change, and to investigate the impact of peace clubs on students' knowledge of conflict resolution and their capacity to resolve conflicts, as well as to examine the relationship between peace clubs and students' academic performance and to provide forums where students and even teachers can express themselves on peace and conflict issues.

The research design for the study is action research (AR). It is AR rather than participation action research (PAR) because the training package used was already prepared and made available for use in the clubs, unlike in PAR where the researcher is expected to work with the participants to developing a training package. AR consists of repeated cycles of planning, observing, and reflecting through which individuals and groups who adopt it can bring about the needed changes for social improvement (Hine 2013).

Recruitment into the peace clubs was essentially on a volunteer basis. The standard procedure was that the management of the schools would announce the project to the entire student body and request that any one interested should register with the researcher. This provided equal opportunity for participants to be selected, hence aligning with random sampling.

Action research requires recording or meticulous diarising of information. The process involves keeping records (using the diary book) of every activity that took place. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) conducted provided data for the study. The study adopts a thematic analytical

approach to analyse the data. Peace club activities for this study were broken into two phases: preliminary and main peace clubs. The preliminary phase occurred on a weekly basis for twenty weeks in four schools (Emmanuel College, Walbrook College, Yinbol College and Kingston School). The main peace clubs operated for twelve weeks in the other four schools (Immanuel Grammar School, Methodist Grammar School, Community High School and BIC School). The schools were selected randomly across Nigeria. These schools received both the preliminary and the main peace club programs. Peace club activities for the main peace clubs commenced after the completion of the pilot or preliminary peace clubs. In general, there were eight peace clubs, 128 meetings and 179 participants (174 students and five teachers). All participants in the peace club project were in grades eleven or twelve, typically between the ages of seventeen and eighteen. The numbers involved were seventy nine (forty four female and thirty five male) for the preliminary peace clubs, and ninety five (fifty females and forty five males) for the main peace clubs, resulting in a total of 174 student participants. There were 128 recorded meetings over a twelve-month period.

Four validity strategies were used in the study: triangulation, use of participants checking, preliminary activities that served as a pilot programme, and prolonged presence in the site of research. One of the ways of “finding out whether for example, an observation is ‘valid’ is to ask other people – especially the research participants and checking whether the participants agree with the researcher’s data” (Creswell 2014, 149), and this was one of the strategies adopted in this study. The giving of clear instructions to participants and respondents as well as not asking questions that require long explanations contributed to the reduction of fatigue and attention deficit for those interviewed. Participants agreed with researcher’s data, which establishes the reliability of the study. The research was carried out in accordance with ethical guidelines. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Durban University of Technology South Africa where the research is based. Also letters of approval were obtained from the location of the study. Information was treated with confidentiality, while pseudonyms were adopted in the paper.

## **Findings**

A randomized control trial (RCT) approach was adopted using a research group (participants) and control group (non-participants). Before commencing the peace club trainings and meetings, pre-training tests were conducted for both members of the peace clubs (i.e. the experimental groups)

and non-members of the peace club (i.e. the control groups). The same test questions were used for both groups. The members or participants are those who volunteered to participate in the peace clubs and the non-members or non-participants are those who did not volunteer to join the peace clubs. Post-training tests were also conducted at the end of the trainings for both experimental and control groups. Ten participants were absent for the post-training test. The pre- and post-training tests sought to measure the knowledge and skills of participants in conflict resolution before and after the training activities. The results from both the experimental groups and control groups were compared to evaluate the impact of the peace club activities on school violence.

In the evaluation carried out for the preliminary peace clubs, the average score for knowledge of the peace activities and peace curriculum in the pre-training test was eight out of twenty five points, while that of the post-training test was twenty out of a total of twenty five points. The randomized control trial (RCT) compared the outcome of the participants and non-participants as shown in table below.

Table 1: Knowledge of peace activities and the peace curriculum. Summary of test results.

Schools	Participants	Pre-test scores	Post-test scores	Non-participants (Control groups)	Pre-test result	Post-test result
	Number			Number		
Community High School	17	9.9	25	15	9.3	9.5
Methodist Grammar School	30	9.3	24	30	9.4	9.7
Immanuel Grammar School	21	9.8	22	17	9.6	9.7
BIC School	17	10.1	23	14	10.0	10.0
Total number and mean scores	85	9.8	23.5	76	9.6	9.7

As the results show, the training resulted in increases from the pre-training and post-training scores for the participants, while for non-participants the scores remained the same. The mean score for the pre-training test for participants is 9.8, which shows existing knowledge of participants in interpersonal conflict management and resolution, anger management and the peace

curriculum prior to the training sessions. On the other hand, the mean score of the post training test among participants was 23.5, which shows increased knowledge of conflict resolution and the peace curriculum. For the control group (i.e. non-participants) the result of the pre-training test is 9.6 and the result of the post-training test is 9.7, which shows no significant difference in accordance with the absence of training. By comparing the mean pre- and post-trainings tests scores (23.5 minus 9.8) of participants (experimental groups) and the mean score (9.7 minus 9.6) of non-participants (control groups), it can be seen that the training made a positive impact on participants' knowledge in the focused area of the training: interpersonal conflict management and resolution, anger management and peace curriculum, other peace activities covered during peace club meetings.

### ***Focus group discussion***

In addition to the surveys, focus group discussions (FGD) were also conducted. Four FGDs were organized. Each comprised of fifteen participants who were members of the peace clubs in their schools. Participants were asked key questions pertaining to things they found to be beneficial from the peace club, changes in their attitudes toward violence, competency in dealing with conflicts, anger management, and the difficulties they experience with the peace club. These questions served as themes through which data was analysed. Each focus group lasted for forty to forty-five minutes. Each group had a moderator, even though there was little need for the moderator to say much as the participants in all groups were very willing to talk with each other—just as FGDs are intended. The quotations reported below are typical of those made by participants and may be regarded as representative. From the responses of the participants, it is clear that the peace club infrastructure project achieved its objectives.

The first theme relates to the benefits of involvement in peace club. In terms of what participants found beneficial following involvement in peace club, the dominant opinion in all the focus groups pointed to a peaceful learning environment the schools enjoy following the peace club and the positive impact the project had on the academic performance of the students in the schools. The comment below from the focus group discussants at Immanuel Grammar School is an indication that the project was truly beneficial as it reduced fighting. As the group agreed: *“We are happy we joined the peace club. Fights among students have reduced and at low ebb in the school, and the peaceful learning environment we now have has led to an improvement in their*



*academic performance.*” The informant response corroborates the point that the study had an impact on the learning environment and students’ performance in their academics, which they see as beneficial.

The second theme is about competence in dealing with conflicts. The participants stated that they are more competent in dealing with conflicts, whether school-based or interpersonal outside the walls of their schools. The competence flows from the knowledge and skills in resolving their own conflicts amicably, which they acquired through the peace club projects. When asked whether peace clubs helped to reduce conflicts and violence in their schools, they all said yes. As the group at Community High School stated, *“We no longer get involved in violence and peace club experience has increased our knowledge in conflict resolution, we must say that the peace club project contributed to a reduction of conflicts and violence in their school. We like to say again and again that the conflict level has reduced and that we no longer fight as before in the school.”*

The changes in terms of conflicts and violence in the school as a result of the peace club project is widely noticed by all members of the communities in which the schools are located. The communities felt the negative impact when conflicts and violence were prevalent in the schools. They now feel the positive impact of the significant reduction in conflicts and violence in the schools. In fact, some of the respondents described their schools as new zones of peace.

The third theme pertains to anger management. Participants point to anger management skills as one of the keys gains from their experience with peace club infrastructures in their schools. As they noted, the skills have helped them better manage their tempers, which makes them less violent. The skills have added value to their conflict handling capacities. Some of the focus group discussants said they were persons with high temperament prior to their peace club experience in their schools. Notably, the FGD at Methodist Grammar School stated that *“Many of us used to be high tempered individuals, and these negatively affected our relationships, but peace club has helped us to re-write our stories for good in the area of anger management. The skill in anger management that we acquired in the peace club is indeed useful to us in prevent violence, managing conflicts and sustaining our relationships. Thanks to peace club.”*

The fourth theme is about change in attitudes. A significant number of participants noted an attitudinal change, which even parents are believed to have noticed. As stated by the FGD members at Immanuel Grammar School, *“Our experience with the peace club was one that*

*brought about a positive attitudinal change. And even our parents have observed the positive attitudinal changes in us, and also we are now able to settle our conflicts and live more peaceably with one another.*” The above statement shows how bold the positive attitudinal change manifested by participants appeared to their parents. Study participants also indicated that their teachers, schools officials, other students and the communities at large have sensed the changes in their attitudes toward violence.

The final theme addresses the difficulties associated with peace clubs. Many of the focus group discussants said there was no particular thing they found difficult in the peace club. This may be connected to the way the researcher and the research team conducted the project which made it interesting and fun. However, few persons said sacrificing most of their break time to attend the peace club meetings was something they found difficult. A comment by an informant at BIC School summed it up for others as he said:

*“We enjoyed the peace club. I know some of us who do not like much play did not find sacrificing our break time for the pace club a difficult experience. But for me and a handful of my other colleagues, this was really challenging for us. The break time is the time we play and enjoy ourselves, so sacrificing it for peace club was something many of us found difficult about the peace club. But we took solace on the fact that it was only once a week, so we could let o for the greater benefits that peace club offers.”*

The above comment is understandable considering that the peace club session usually occurred during the school hours. Because regular hours in the schools were used for their academics, teaching and class works, the only time school management (in the different schools for the project) provided for peace clubs was during the long break period, which was once a week.

### **Conclusion and Policy Implications**

This study is an experimental work in which peace clubs were established in eight schools to assess the impact of peace education in reducing school violence. The peace structure contributes significantly to peacebuilding in the schools, improving participants’ knowledge of how peace clubs work, building participants’ capacities and skills in anger management and conflict resolution. Thus, students were able to resolve their own conflicts more amicably. It also contributes to a positive attitudinal change of participants including fostering a peaceful

learning environment which in turn improved academic performance. Overall, the study provided a forum where students and even teachers expressed themselves on peace and conflict issues.

The above findings underscore the importance of peace clubs in schools. It is important for governments to formulate policies that embrace peace clubs in schools. As seen in the study, peace clubs are critical to uprooting a culture of violence and replacing it with a culture of peace. It has positive impacts on students, schools and the community at large. As such, peace clubs can serve as a viable policy option to promote sustainable peace in schools. Peace clubs reduce various kinds of conflicts including interpersonal and peer conflicts. Overall, the study focuses on establishing and evaluating the impact of peace clubs. It points to the importance of peaceful relationship and positive attitudinal change among students in Nigeria. It helps to deepen students' ability to promote peace, enhance their skills and knowledge of conflict resolution, and provide a viable forum where students can interact and work cooperatively to ensure a peaceful learning environment. Notably, peace education contributes to improved academic performance. The study points to important lessons about peace clubs, underscoring the point that peace clubs work and would be crucial in securing peaceful schools.

## References

- Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery. 2005. *Youth and Violent Conflict: Society and Development in Crisis? A Strategic Review with a Special Focus on West Africa.* New York: Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery.
- Burton, Patrick. 2008. *Merchants, Skollies and Stone: Experience of School Violence in South Africa.* Cape Town: Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention.
- Hine, Gregory S. 2013. "The Importance of Action Research in Teacher Education Programs." *Educational Research* 23(2): 151-163.
- Creswell, John W. 2014. *Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches.* Fourth ed. Lincoln: Sage Publications.
- Hopp-Nishanka, Ulrike. 2012. *Giving Peace an Address? Reflections on the Potential and Challenges of Creating Peace Infrastructures.* Berlin: Berghof Foundation.

- Irene, Oseremen Felix. 2015. *Building Infrastructure for Peace: An Action Research Project in Nigeria*. PhD thesis. Durban: Durban University of Technology.
- Irene, Oseremen Felix and Samuel .A. Majekodunmi. 2017. "Infrastructure for Peace: the African experience." *African Research Review* 11(2): 25-41.
- Kumar, Chetan and Jos De la Haye. 2011. "Hybrid Peacemaking: Building National Infrastructures for Peace." *Global Governance* 18(1): 13-20.
- Mennonite Central Committee. Peace Club Materials. <http://.tinyurl.com/peacematerials> (accessed December 7, 2022).
- NAN Agency Report. 2022. "Sylvester Oromoni: Father Confirms Downen College Student was not taken to Hospital." *Premium Times*, Lagos, February 2022, pp.1-2  
<https://.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/511616-sylvester-oromoni-father-confirms-downen-college-student-was-not-taken-to-hospital.html> (accessed December 7, 2022).
- Noddings, Nel. 1992. *The Challenge to Care in Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Noddings, Nel. 2007. *Philosophy of Education (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*, Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Smentana Judith G. 2006. "Social Cognitive Domain Theory: Consistencies and Variation in Children's Moral and Social Judgement." In *Handbook of Moral Development*, Edited by M. Killen and J. Smentana. Mahwah, NJ: LEA.
- Stomfay-Stitz, Aline and Edyth Wheeler. 2007. "Caring for Each Other in a Peace Club." *Childhood Education* 84(1): 30-H(3).
- Suurmond, Jeannine and Prakash M. Sharma. 2013. *Serving People's Need for Peace: Infrastructures for Peace, the Peace Sector, and the Case of Nepal*. Berlin: Berghof Foundation.
- United Nations Children' Fund (UNICEF). 2007. *Assessment of Violence against Children at the Basic Education in Nigeria*. Abuja: Federal Ministry of Education & UNICEF.
- United Nations Development Programme. 2010. "Meeting in Naivasha, Kenya." In *Van-Togeren Paul Supporting Ten Countries to Build National Infrastructures for Peace by 2016*. New York: UNDP.
- United Nations Economic, Scientific & Cultural Organisation. 2009. "Clubs for UNESCO: A Practical Guide." Sector for External Relations and Cooperation. Paris: United Nations Economic, Scientific & Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

Van-Tongeren, Paul. 2011. "Increasing Interest in Infrastructures for Peace." *Journal of Conflictology* 2(2): 45-55.

WaMunywe, Ndung'u. 2014. *Influence of Peace Clubs on Peaceful Co-Existence among Students in Public Universities: A Case of the University of Nairobi*. Masters Dissertation. Nairobi: University of Nairobi.

World Health Organisation. 2002. *World Report on Violence and Health*. Geneva: World Health Organisation (WHO).

## **Endnotes**

---

<sup>i</sup> The curriculum is available at: <http://www.tinyurl.com/peacematerials>.