

Zimbabwe: Teaching Peace in Challenging Environments. Lessons from the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Bulawayo

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Abstract: Although the United Nations, governments, and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are putting efforts into promoting peace education in Africa, challenges remain due to “challenging environments”. A “challenging environment,” as defined in this paper, is an environment that neither fully permits nor bars the teaching of peace. This is typical of environments where peace is introduced, especially in third world countries. When the UN and prominent NGOs advocate for peace education, governments are often willing and quick to comply, but numerous challenges hinder the teaching of peace.

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Based on practical experiences in establishing a peace course across faculties, the authors draw several lessons from the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) experience. Tasked with the mammoth goal of establishing peace programs, the authors faced challenges including: (1) an unstable economic and political environment; (2) student demonstrations linked to economic challenges; (3) large classes and few lecturers; (4) a lack of teaching materials; and (5) being housed under a different department. Experience has shown that it is possible to teach peace in such environments, provided certain tactics, such as being creative in sourcing material, are used. Peace education has limited teaching materials, and even if the materials were to be purchased, acquiring enough books for a large number remains a challenge. As noted by the authors, they resorted to creative ways of finding teaching materials, including assigning different topics to students and then combining the re-

search to create a material base, using newspaper articles to test conflict resolution skills in students, etc. Creative teaching methods include adopting a student-centered approach rather than a lecturer-centered one and transforming the environment through engagement in conflict transformation programs. As part of community engagement, the lecturers participated in transforming campus conflicts through the NUST Campus Dialogue Initiative, as well as providing community training in churches and government institutions.

Keywords: Teaching, peace, challenging environments, lessons, NUST.

Objectives and Motivation

The authors wrote this paper with these objectives in mind:

1. To identify the challenges faced by lecturers teaching peace in challenging environments;
2. To examine the various creative methods of teaching peace in challenging environments;
3. To demonstrate how peace educators can actively be involved in transforming challenging environments.

The Need for Peace Education in Africa and Zimbabwe

The need for peace education in Africa is universally accepted. According to Sane (2021), peace education is key to establishing consensual and sustainable peace worldwide, and nothing replaces the value of peace education. Currently, Africa is home to protracted conflicts like the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia, where generations have been born without experiencing peace. War has erupted in Sudan, and there is ongoing fighting without hope for a ceasefire. The Rwandan genocide, which killed thousands of people, will always remain fresh in the memories of most Africans. Similarly, Zimbabwe needs peace education; the protracted war of liberation left the nation racially and tribally divided, with incidents such as the Matabeleland massacres, the land issue, and continued polarization in politics and other spheres all pointing to the need for tolerance and coexistence. Although the government is making efforts through the Peace and Reconciliation Commission to bring the nation together, there is a need for a long-term solution, which can only be achieved through peace education. Education is known to play a key role in ending the cycle of violence (Kitala & De Cupis, 2018). Therefore, peace education is necessary as it fosters a culture of dealing with conflict without resorting to violence. Values are instilled, especially in children, which include coexistence, tolerance, and patience, as well as skills such as mediation, negotiation, conflict analysis, and resolution, all of which can guarantee a peaceful future.

Aims and Objectives of Peace Education

Peace education worldwide has three major objectives: (1) preparing the world for children and youth by making it better, healthy, peaceful, united, and safe, and preparing the children for such a world; (2) Encouraging the search for alternatives as well as possible nonviolent skills and sharpening the awareness of the existence of holistic relationships between countries, individuals, and groups of people; and (3) Helping the people involved in creating an all-inclusive civilization

A Brief History of Peace Education

The field of peace and conflict studies originated from an amalgamation of many disciplines and has evolved over several years. As shall be noted below, in Africa, the field is relatively new, but in the developed world, it has been established for a long time. Although conflict resolution can be traced as far back as the beginning of humanity, the study of conflict and peace can only be traced back a few decades. Its origins can be traced to discrepancies within the field of political thought, where scholars failed to explain some aspects such as justifying war and peace (Askerov, 2021). The same author notes that Peace and Conflict studies continued to grow through conferences generating central ideas tied to peace and conflict, as well as bodies of work around these areas. Notable scholars include Angell, Marx, Gandhi, and many others. Developments in history also propelled the idea of peace education, especially the world wars. The 1914 First World War, which resulted in more than 10 million deaths, highlighted humanity's need for peace and thus, the need for peace education. The Second World War saw not only more casualties but also the use of more dangerous weapons like nuclear weapons. Thus, the first peace issues revolved around the use of nuclear weapons. With time, peace issues expanded to other areas such as human rights and environmental issues. Due to these developments, peace education covers a broad range of topics from leadership to governance, as well as conflict issues.

Peace Education in Zimbabwe

It wasn't until well after independence that peace education was introduced in Zimbabwe, with Africa University setting the pace by introducing a Master's in Peace and Governance, plus a Diploma in the same area. This attracted many students not only from Zimbabwe but from the whole of Africa to study peace. After Africa University, Solusi University, a small private Adventist university, followed suit with a Bachelor's in Peace Studies, thereby becoming the first university to offer peace at the undergraduate level. With time, The National University of Science and Technology became the first government/state university to offer peace education in the form of a university-wide course offered to all those pursuing their first degrees for two semesters, i.e., the first year of study. As noted above, the course was taught during the first and second

semesters of part one for every first-degree student. However, the course was later trimmed to one semester and was, until recently, compulsory for all part-one students. After NUST, Bindura University of Science Education went on to introduce its Master's in Peace and Governance. Today, almost every university has a Peace course running. The only remaining challenge is bringing peace education further down to primary and secondary schools, a mammoth task that is currently facing every peace practitioner, including the government. However, the efforts made to promote education in Zimbabwe so far are highly commendable.

Lessons From NUST

Finding themselves working in difficult environments, the authors strongly believe that peace education is the key to peaceful environments. Even though teaching peace is not given as much priority as other well-established subjects in universities, it is necessary and must be taught regardless of the challenges. This motivated the authors who have wide experience in peacebuilding to think outside the box and devise methods of teaching peace. The authors have gone further than just being resourceful to the extent of writing and are still in the process of writing a book that tries to cover the current syllabus of peace to ease the pressure of resources. From their experience, the authors felt it important to encourage others in similar situations to also think alike and continue teaching peace instead of giving up.

1. Unstable economic and political environment

Teaching peace is different from activism in the sense that it implies imparting peace values to the students and fellow lecturers; one must be the peace that they teach, and the environment and the classroom must be peaceful. Teaching peace at NUST in 2009 was a challenge due to economic upheavals. The students had paid fees in Zimbabwean dollars, but from January to February 2009, there was dollarization. All those who had paid fees and those who were in the process found themselves at zero as they had to pay fees afresh. Thus, the economic situation became tough for students who were not allowed to write their exams if they had not completed paying their fees. There was also pressure on lecturers to check whether the students in class had paid before commencing lectures. With large numbers, as each of the three lecturers taught a faculty on their own, this proved very difficult, leading to the lecturers being labeled uncooperative. Unfortunately, the Peace examination paper was the first to be written because it was a university-wide course with all those doing their first degrees being compelled to do it. On the very day peace was supposed to be written, students rioted, and the standard response from the authorities was to call the armed riot police who descended mercilessly on the students. Some colleagues ended up joking that "Peace was written at gunpoint". When they realized that they had no chance of fighting back, the students fled from the administration block and retreated downwards.

As they retreated, they smashed windows and windscreens of vehicles, especially in the Transport Department where vehicles are parked. Thinking that the students had dispersed, the administrators were shocked to receive a devastating report that except for those vehicles that were out, those which were parked had been damaged. In the end, the students who demonstrated missed the exam and had to write a supplementary one, but the problem remained.

A. The Campus Dialogue 2010

To resolve the standoff between students and members of the administration the three peace lecturers decided to carry out a campus dialogue with the assistance of a non-governmental organization (NGO), the Centre for Conflict Management and Transformation (CCMT) based in Harare. The lecturers proposed and the NGO funded the program. The first step was stakeholder analysis as it was necessary to bring all the concerned people on board. The students were represented by the members of the student representative council, about two of them. Every department on campus was represented, the registrar's office, the bursars, the secretaries, the groundsman, campus security, and the police were represented by a certain police inspector. The idea was to create a platform where every concerned sector would say their views and feelings in a relaxed manner. The lecturers not only facilitated but also presented on conflicts and their dynamics and what to expect during the conflict, including the tactics each of the warring parties was using. There was an interesting exchange, for example, tactics in a conflict consist of the actions being taken and the words being spoken by a certain group. Asked what tactics were being used by the administration, the students were quick to note that the administration was using the police as a tactic, "whenever they mess up they call the police to beat us up and disperse us instead of talking to us so that we can address the issues". The student representative went on to say, "We should be allowed to call the police as well whenever we feel there is a problem and the police must come". This provoked a quick reaction from the inspector who was shocked to hear that thereby responding, "You calling the police in what capacity?". The student went on to say in their capacity as students they should be allowed to call the police because the police should protect everyone. Such a fair exchange revealed the different attitudes and suspicions the different groups had. The dialogue lasted more than a month of weekly meetings with the last dialogue being done off campus. As a result, the administration and students agreed that students should have payment plans since the problem was not because they did not want to pay but rather due to economic hardships the funds were limited. In the end for close to a decade, there were no student demonstrations on campus. One cannot pin the success to the campus dialogue alone but it played a crucial role. The lesson is that teaching peace should not end in the classroom but taking an extra mile to deal with conflicts within the environment can help people understand the need for teaching peace in the first place.

The campus dialogue, however, was not a walk in the park and many challenges led to its termination. It was a mechanism that was supposed to be used whenever there was a challenge there was supposed to be a meeting of all stakeholders, as the scenario above portrays demonstrations came back again but this time the lecturers demonstrated first and students had to demonstrate due to lecturers not attending to them. The major challenge was that of lack of sincerity from the top management who were sending juniors to attend the dialogue sessions while they excused themselves. Unfortunately, these juniors had no power to make decisions thereby stifling the progress of the dialogue. It was supposed to be a standing mechanism but it later collapsed due to lack of commitment from the administration. There were also challenges with resources as the dialogue was supposed to be a prolonged one. Though the first and second meetings were held on campus other preceding ones according to the plan as stakeholders got used to each other it was necessary to meet outside the campus in resort areas so that people would feel relaxed and ready to discuss their issues. Dialoguing is not about presenting the most convincing argument or being very eloquent, it involves empathy where you have to put yourself in the shoes of someone and feel how they feel to understand why they acted in the way they did. There is a need for space and room to understand each other though you may not be seeing the same way. Money was needed to sustain this dialogue project and to some extent, this became a limitation.

B. Other conflict transformation programs in the community

Another lesson learned is that peace should not end in the classroom with students but peace education should spread to communities in one way or the other to transform the environment. The lecturers engaged in activities targeting the community and besides the campus dialogue that transformed the NUST community, there was also a conflict management program that was conducted targeting the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), first as a Departmental initiative with the backing of the faculty. There was later support from a local NGO so that these trainings could be carried out in all police provinces. This program, how it spread and the impact it had on the ZRP is an article on its own but it serves as an example of the effort made to transform the environment. Another community program was rolled out on a low scale targeting churches two examples being the Training of African Apostolic Faith Mission Overseers at Troutbeck Inn in Nyanga and the Training of Family of God Church trainee pastors from Bethel Mission and another regular training of church leaders in conflict management. The two were carried out with the support of the churches concerned. The environments where peace education is introduced also require transformation and the peace lecturers had to involve themselves. It is also interesting to note that a lecturer at that time before Education 5.0 was expected to fulfill three domains: (1) teaching in the classroom; (2) researching; and (3) community service or engagements, the lecturers were thus also acting within their university expectations, these actions were part of their effort to transform the environment.

There were also other community engagements in the form of workshops to deal with peace issues affecting the community. One of them was the workshop on Gender mainstreaming in the security sector. It saw quite a number of workshops targeting the ZRP which were conducted at NUST with the help of (NGO), Zimbabwe Peace and Security Trust. The NGO did the funding while lecturers facilitated the workshop as well as coordinating it. In addition, two peace and conflict symposiums were held at NUST in the area of Conflict management.

C. Designing a simple and relevant curriculum/course outline

Peace education as the UN emphasises is a developmental issue in the sense that the young people who are taught peace values and principles will grow up into adults who understand and value peace. In the long run, society is likely to be peaceful as more and more people attain peace education. These peaceful norms include cooperation, and resolution of conflict by dialogue, negotiation, and nonviolence (Salomon, 2010).

The first port of call was designing a simple and relevant curriculum that fitted the situation, and level of the students as well as the objectives of the course. The first semester saw the teaching of Peace Leadership and Conflict Transformation (PLC1). The challenge of establishing a peace program sometimes stems from the pressure to include everything. What topic to include or to exclude is a function of the environment within which peace is being established and the aim of establishing it. Eventually, five topics were included but they were equally loaded topics considering the fact that peace was taught only once a week for two hours. The first topic was Concepts of Conflict and Peace. Under this topic the basics were included, definitions of conflict, definitions of peace, types of conflict, structure and dynamics of conflict as well as the link between peace and conflict. The second topic looked at the theories of conflict. The theories were further grouped into individual-level theories, societal-level theories as well as classical and modern structural theories of conflict. The third topic was on conflict analysis, which included conflict analysis tools. The fourth was on natural resources and conflict. This topic was necessitated by the fact that resources are at the centre of conflict in Africa and Zimbabwe is not an exception. The fifth and last topic was on gender and conflict, this topic explored the gendered dimension of conflict. The second semester saw the continuation of the same course but now Peace Leadership and Conflict Transformation (PLC II). The second semester focused on leadership from the definitions of leadership, theories of leadership, and styles of leadership as well as contemporary issues in leadership especially the challenges of women in accessing leadership positions and how such challenges can be overcome. Africa has always faced challenges in terms of leadership hence the relevance of leadership. The course however could not accommodate governance issues which are also peace issues due to pressure on time. However, some governance issues were covered under leadership but not as much as some critiques would have loved. Another consideration was the

fact that the course was being taught to part ones who at best had to appreciate these concepts, especially the basics.

2. Shortage of teaching material

Due to the way peace education was introduced in universities, there was a shortage of textbooks as well as reading material. To begin with, peace was introduced to undergraduates as a compulsory course. The old-school texts like Galtung and Lederach's writings proved to be a bit above them. Local literature on conflicts is yet to materialize in the form of textbooks. Although some documents could be found online, the internet itself proved to be a jungle where students needed guidance due to the existence of too many documents. The lecturers, therefore, had to be resourceful to teach the basic concepts such as the theories of peace, stages, levels, and ways to deal with conflict. One basic way of doing it was to look for case scenarios such as newspaper articles that were converted to use as a teaching aid in the absence of written books to demonstrate some aspects of conflict. The questions that followed the conflict scenario showed how the basics of conflict and peace concepts could be tested depending on what the examiner or lecturer wants students to focus on. Students can determine the level of conflict with justification thereof. The students were also tasked to identify a certain stage of conflict which could be the settlement, latent, manifest, escalation stage, etc., with justification depending on the scenario. One of the skills that is fundamental in teaching peace is the student's ability to analyze conflict. Conflict analysis is a process that brings in several tools that are used to analyze it. These tools include conflict mapping, ABC triangle, Conflict tree, and many others. To avoid confusion, normally students are asked to read about all the tools that are used, then they are asked to demonstrate the use of one tool in the exam.

The use of a conflict scenario is better than asking the students themselves to look at a conflict of their own choice, in the sense that sometimes students may come up with an ongoing conflict that may be so controversial that the lecturers or the students may end up being misquoted during the discussion. The newspaper article avoids further conflicts as anyone who feels the conflict was not reported well can actually either sue the newspaper or the relevant media house or complain directly to them. This again makes the newspaper article more useful as teaching aids in the sense that they report on current conflicts that are so contemporary that when students are asked to provide solutions for some of the challenges, they can even put suggestions which can contribute to the transformation of that conflict. In most areas, especially in management, people make use of case studies which are usually drawn from textbooks, mostly Western case studies. The use of newspapers with examples of local conflicts makes peace a subject very relevant to the students and their contexts. Another advantage also is the fact that peace being taught in different faculties and departments might require case studies that are not rigid but relevant to a particular department. For example, a conflict

scenario in sports can be used for Sports Science and Coaching students, whereas in engineering and other departments, similar case studies can be used depending on the faculty or department being taught, hence the case studies will always remain relevant to the students being taught, thereby arousing interests in the students who are being taught as they relate to conflicts in their fields. Besides demonstrating as a teaching aid, the article also helps students to understand the challenging environment they live in. Demonstrations, complaints, arrests, and uncertainties make teaching and learning very difficult. Either the students are demonstrating, or the lecturers are on a go-slow or demonstrating, as noted in the case above.

In response to the shortage of teaching material, the authors embarked on writing a book that could be useful in the basics of peace studies. The book is still being written and will go a long way to help students as it will be written with their needs in mind. The challenges of publishing remain as resources are still a challenge, and seem not to be improving. One way would be to use it like a module since it does not necessarily have to be published for it to be useful. To improve their writing skills and widen their research capabilities, all four lecturers had to pursue their PhDs, and all of them have now completed them (one studied in Britain, another in Zambia, and two with different South African universities, this variety in universities acted as a strength as it would give a fair view of how peace education can be established).

Another faster method of generating reading material was to assign students different case studies and then combine the different research and create a reader. This is not a new practice but it can help students read well-researched material on different areas and case studies faster than each student researching on their own. Another way of doing it was to make sure the students exchanged their research as they would have researched in different areas. This can assist in covering a wider area faster as the students would have covered a wider area by being assigned different topics to study and present on.

3. Teaching classes that are too big

When peace education was established, it was made compulsory for all those doing their first-year degrees across faculties and the result was classes that were too big. At one time the writers each taught a class of more than 250. Only three lecturers were to teach the whole university since the fourth lecturer joined later and the Peace Leadership and Conflict Transformation was taught for two semesters and thus was divided into PLC 1101 and PLC 1201. Since one lecturer would teach the whole faculty, this raised a lot of challenges. The first one was that of securing a venue which can accommodate all the students and at NUST such venues are not many. For one taking the commerce faculty, The Large Lecture Theatre popularly known as The Delta Lecture Theatre was the only venue suitable. Unfortunately, any function that involved the whole faculty or a lot of people was scheduled for the Delta Theatre, sometimes without prior communication

the Delta would be occupied and it would mean canceling the lectures thereby falling behind. Dividing the students into departments would not work either as this would imply the lecturer would teach Monday to Saturday without a break. There were also incidents of some lecturers with few students occupying the Delta and refusing to vacate, which would also mean the lecture would have to be canceled. Until the courses were withdrawn there were challenges with venues

Another challenge of big classes was that of too much marking. To deal with this problem, the lecturer would give some group work of 5–8 Students, which in a way reduced the marking but not much since there was also an in-class test. Tests had an advantage over assignments in the sense that the students were timed hence there was a limit as to how much they could write. Either way, there was a lot of marking. Besides trying to limit the marking, the authors had to increase their working speed when it comes to writing and marking work, this came naturally as an adjustment to too much work. Experiments on reducing marking done between marking essay questions and short questions revealed that actual essays were easier to mark and follow than short questions. The peace subject by nature requires students to reason, argue, compare and contrast thereby making multiple choice questions not very useful but essay questions. Multiple-choice questions were never considered.

Too big classes also posed the challenge of some students bunking lectures. In response to this challenge, the lecturers had to make the lectures exciting in many ways, including making different groups present and also inviting resource persons passionate about a particular topic. Although the marking of the register was the only way to make sure students attended, it would mean spending half the lecture on that. Sometimes loose registers that were blank would be issued to avoid a roll call but some students had a bad habit of taking the registers with them hence more creative ways of encouraging them to attend produced better results.

4. Being housed under a different department

According to university regulations, a new course or program has to be housed under an existing department until it is established as a department on its own. The Peace course at NUST was and still is housed under the Business Management Department which by that time consisted of two departments rolled into one, Management and Marketing then four new lecturers were added to teach the Peace course thereby making it the biggest department in commerce. It took time for the other members to accept both the new course and the new lecturers as being one. The first meetings were not very friendly with the newcomers at one time being described as “novices,” “them” as opposed to “us.” Although relations later on improved with time the sense of entitlement from the original departmental members continued. The fact that the three and later four lecturers had more work than others was overlooked and any plea for teaching assistance was snubbed and not even taken seriously by the then chairpersons of the day

who saw no need as they were not being involved in teaching large classes. No money was assigned for textbooks either and the authors had to be resourceful by reading documents and downloading relevant material from the net and then passing it on to the students. Another simple way was to assign students in their groups to research different topics and then ask them to compile their research in essay form, the groups would then exchange their assignments thereby making sure that they have enough to read, this is akin to compiling a reader which covers all the areas as noted above. The challenges did not end there, whereas peace as a subject involves attending conferences, presenting, and writing papers any attempt to do so was not much appreciated as some felt that the money in the departmental vote would be depleted. Thus, the department was not used to the humanities way of operating where people constantly write present and attend workshops. To deal with these challenges the lecturers had to be more useful as they ended up taking on other duties like supervising students' dissertations and going on industrial visits when asked to do so and they were first confined to local visits. This however is an international challenge, there are few universities, especially in the developing world with a real Department of Peace Studies, and most peace programs are housed under other departments like Sociology and Anthropology, Management, History, and Sometimes Geography.

Teaching peace in a challenging environment is very difficult as noted above. This is due to the fact that though challenging environments permit the teaching of peace, they do not allow peace to be taught as it ought to be due to challenges which include: (1) an unstable economic and political environment; (2) student demonstration linked to economic challenges; (3) big classes and few lecturers; (4) lack of teaching material; and (5) being housed under a different department. The authors' experience has proved that although there are many obstacles to teaching peace in those environments, it is still possible to teach peace provided the lecturers are resourceful, assist in transforming the environment, and maintain a positive attitude when dealing with students to demonstrate the peace that they teach.

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