The Role of Teachers, Parents and Local Community in Peace Building after the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi

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Abstract

Globally research acknowledges that teachers are key determinants of education quality and play a crucial role in nation building, identity construction, and processes of peace and reconciliation. What teachers do in class has the potential to influence what children and young people become in life through shaping their identities and instilling in them values of peacebuilding. To improve Rwandans' relationships and build a peaceful Rwanda, the Government of Rwanda is encouraging cohesion through education for peace in Rwandan schools. Hence, this study investigated the role of Teachers, Parents and Local Community' Involvement in Peace building process after the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi. This study used a qualitative approach because the views were grounded in the interpretive tradition in the development of an understanding of social life and an understanding of how Rwandans construct the meaning of peace in Rwandan society (Neuman, 2000). It was found out that, in every lesson, regardless whether it is natural science or social science, teachers integrate Rwandan traditional social values into these subjects. Parents and local community work with school leadership to enhance social cohesion and peace values among learners.

Key words: Values, Social cohesion, Peace building

1.   The Rwandan Context Leading to 1994 Genocide against Tutsi

Right from Belgians' arrival in Rwanda, education was used as a tool to deliberately divide, discriminate, and sow hatred among Rwandans. Historians agree that Belgian colonialists, for their own political gains, manipulated ethnic ideology among Rwandans, initially granting the minority Tutsi positions of political power and access at the expensive of the Hutu majority. Ethnic divisionism was codified through the use of national identity cards with individual Rwandan's assumed ethnic group indicated (Langford, 2005). This policy of socially constructed identification fuelled hatred and divisionism among Rwandans who had previously lived in relative peace.

Education was characterised by discrimination and elitism that prevented a majority of Hutus from accessing education, as the Belgians favoured Tutsis with their divide-and-rule colonial tactics. This division was reversed in the postcolonial period, as the Hutu took power and promoted anti-Tutsi ideology and violence. Elizabeth King (2008) argues that 'formal schooling – which we very dominantly tend to think about, not only in Rwanda, but globally, as a tool for building peace – often actually underlies conflict'. Elizabeth goes on to argue that,

> *"in both the colonial period and in the years leading up to the genocide, what was taught (especially in history class), as well as pedagogy and classroom practices contributed to collectivizing and stigmatizing groups, and promoted inequality between Hutu and Tutsi Rwandans. All of these factors – collectivization, stigmatization and inequality – are widely recognized to have provided part of the foundation for conflict in Rwanda's past."*

In the postcolonial period, ethnic hatred was further exacerbated within the school system. The curricula from the 1960 until 1993 typically promoted and reinforced social and economic divisions within Rwandan society(Gasanabo, 2006). This divisionism is evidenced by the policy of ethnic quotes initiated during the second Rwandan republic from 1973-94, codified in Article 60 of the public of Rwanda education law regarding the conditions of transitioning from primary to secondary school.

Thus, ethnic and regional quotas system *(iringaniza)* provided a legal framework for discrimination. Hatred based on ethnicity was perpetuated via school curriculum and teacher instruction in classrooms. Teachers thus acted as direct agents of the government, incorporating a toxic narrative surrounding ethnicity, regionalism, and other forms of inequalities into teaching and learning. This made schools a special site for the promotion of hatred and discrimination in Rwandan society. With this destructive political and historical past, considerations of the quality of education became one of the most pressing challenges in Rwanda's quest for social cohesion and peacebuilding following 1994 genocide against Tutsi (Rutaisire, 2012).

The Government of Rwanda has sought to reverse these negative impacts by making sure that teachers get positively involved in peacebuilding by teaching and nurturing peace values into Rwandan young students (Sayed et al). Arguably, schoolteachers can play an important role of nurturing values of peace into young Rwandan through peace education in schools. Teachers play a vital role in nation building, identity construction, and the fostering of peace and reconciliation in conflict-affected nations. Teachers' work shapes the learning experiences of children and young people and help to influence their identities while providing skills for employment and continued peace building. The Government of Rwanda has acknowledged the essential role that education and teachers themselves have played in reconstructing Rwandan society following the devastating events of 1994 genocide against Tutsi (MINEDUC 2016). Sayed et al (2017) re-iterated that, 'Education is responsible for everything that is likely to happen in a society- the good as well as the bad.

2. Methodological Considerations

This study used a qualitative approach because its views were grounded in the interpretive tradition in the development of an understanding of social life and an understanding of how Rwandans construct the meaning peace in Rwandan society (Neuman, 2000). Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and the researched, and the situational constrains that shape inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Government document analysis and Interviews as a method of data collection together with semi-structured questions were used because based on Bell's (1993) argument that interviews centre around the topic, and in skilled hands may produce quite valuable data. Cohen and Manion (1993) describe this as a process that provides access to what is 'inside a person's head' making it possible to understand what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs). Government of Rwanda documents provided the historical peace distortion from

colonial days till the present time. However, the researcher was much aware that document analysis requires more contextualised interpretation. In line with this methodological argument, I posed three specific objectives:

i.   To assess the extent to which the government of Rwanda is using policy as an intervention to position and empower teachers to be agents of peace building in Rwanda;

ii. To critically examine the role of teachers in supporting education for peace building through classroom work in Rwanda;

iii. To find out how parents, students and community at large are helping teachers to nurture peace values amongst Rwandan school children.

3. Literature Review

The study assessed how Rwanda tried to use education and the role of teachers as agents of peace and by involving parents and students in peace building process in post conflict Rwanda. King (2008) correctly put that, 'Contrary to the predominantly positive view of education in both literature and practice, education in Rwanda contributed to multiple episodes of violent intergroup conflict. At the same time, Rwanda's education system did not do many of the things that promote peacebuilding: building horizontal equity, shaping inclusive identity strategies, promoting reconciliation, and developing critical thinking skills. Designing education such that at a minimum it does not contribute to underlying conflict – what humanitarians call a "do no harm" approach – and such that, at a maximum, it actively contributes to peace is a challenge around the world'. King (ibid) re-iterated that, 'In Rwanda and elsewhere, horizontal inequalities developed through differing levels of access to schooling have been an important foundation of conflict. For example, the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement to end the conflict in Burundi especially names unequal access to education along ethnic lines as "a cause of violence and insecurity.

According to Buckland 2005), 'the role of education in conflict-affected countries has received increased attention over the past decade due to its significance for the achievement of the education-related Millennium Development Goals. A growing body of work has emerged on the subject, both within the academic field', (Smith 2005; Paulson and Rappleye 2007; Novelli and Cardozo 2008) and from donors, including the World Bank (Buckland 2005). Smith went on to state, 'While the international community has demonstrated a commitment to peacebuilding, it has been slow to take on board the lessons regarding education's contribution to conflict transformation.

This study based its analysis on the 4Rs framework: Redistribution, Recognition, Representation and Reconciliation (Novelli et. al, 2015). These 4Rs framework builds on a normative approach that seeks to capture the multiple economic, cultural, political, and social dimensions of inequality in education and the ways in which these might relate to conflict and peace (ibid 2015). The framework combines dimensions of recognition, redistribution, representation, and reconciliation, linking Nancy Fraser's (1995, 2005) work on social justice with the peace building

and reconciliation work of Galtung (1976), Lederach (1995, 1997), and others, to explore what sustainable peace building might look like in post-conflict environments.

In order to develop a normative framework in studying education and peace building efforts, academic environments should be addressed in and through education system, which engages teachers in peace building efforts. This framework is congruent with broader conceptualisations about peace building (Galtung, 1976; Lederach, 1997) which emphasise the role of negative peace, or the cessation of violence, and positive peace, which addresses systemic and symbolic violence that acts as a driver of conflict.

This framework explores the stance of sustainable peacebuilding in post-conflict environments. This framework analyses the role of teachers within education system and seeks to capture the interconnectedness of teachers 'classroom work with peacebuilding and reconciliation process. It must be noted that, one of the reconciliation concerns are the legacies of the past events, injustices and educational effects of conflict. Therefore, reversing these injustices by engaging teacher in peace building efforts in schools, would assist in developing relationships and trust among the future generation of any society (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo and Smith, 2015). In the similar argument, King (2008) stated that:

> "The dominant view is that education contributes to building peace. When wars end, the international community rallies to get children back into schools. After the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, for example, reopening schools was a top priority for the foreign forces, and the world cheered the return of three million children, including girls, to classrooms. As the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientii c and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stated, "Education . . . will enable us to move from a culture of war, which we unhappily know only too well, to a culture of peace."[1] The UN's Education for All action reports also present education as one of the best means of averting conflict and overcoming violence".

4. Analysis of the Findings

4.1 Introduction

This section analyses respondents' views of how the government of Rwanda is using educational policy as an intervention to position and empower teachers to be agents of social cohesion. It concentrates heavily, on the classroom environment as structured through policy, and this analysis is interspersed with response from interviewees. The analysis mainly looks at issues of teacher-pedagogy, teachers' classroom experiences, teachers' beliefs and practices, parents and community engagement in nurturing peace values among students in Rwandan schools. Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP-MINEDUC 2013) calls for nurturing of Rwanda's values into students in order to promote unity, social cohesion, gender equality, and equity in all walks of life of Rwandans.

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[1] Quoted in Harber 1996, p. 151.

4. 2 Findings

4.2.1 The Government of Rwanda Policy Engagement in Empowering Teachers to be Agents of Peace

The research interrogated teachers, head teachers and policy makers to find out why Rwanda's education policy is empowering teachers to be agents of peace building. Majority of policy makers, head teachers and teachers reported that, '*a common thread through much of the reformed Rwanda's educational policy seeks to reconstruct Rwandan national identity around notions of social cohesion, integration of diversity, and protection of minority groups.* These views from policy makers, teachers and head teachers, do agree with Smith (1991) who reflects this apparent theoretical basis in arguing that national identity represents what is most "fundamental and inclusive" (p. 143). Smith suggests a civic territorial model of national identity, which emphasizes a common culture and a common civic ideology. *Several interviewees, including policy makers and teachers, echoed this conceptualization in that:*

> *"Identity and unity are the vehicles through which Rwandans can adopt national goals into their personal lives. National identity and nationalism nurture citizens' beliefs, symbols, and sentiments about their country and themselves" (Policy makers; 1, 5, 8). They went to state that: Rwandans' core values of unity, patriotism, selflessness, integrity, responsibility, volunteerism, and humility must be integrated in national curriculum because, a nation without its core values cannot build a peaceful future for its young people. In fact, the National curriculum designed its program basing on National Intorero commission programs (NIC report 2011)".*

In reimagining Rwandan identity around nationalism, Rwanda's educational policies have played an important role in challenging the notion that other government of Rwanda's policies and the affairs of government are conducted within an elite sphere outside of the lives of local citizens. The government has sought to challenge this, specifically with a move towards decentralisation within education from early decentralising policies in the mid-2000s (MINALOC, 2004) to the current iterations(MINALOC, 2018). For example, the overall goal of the Decentralisation Implementation Policy is to reinforce grassroots-based democratic governance and equitable political, economic, and social development as well as maintaining effective functional and mutually accountable linkages between central and local government entities(MINALOC, 2011). Henceforth, most of the respondents argued that, decentralisation policy in Rwanda is a tool for empowering the Rwandan populace to participate in development activities and to promote social cohesion.

However, this can only be sustainable if teachers and their classroom work constantly and insistently take peace building education and values seriously in all their day-to-day teaching and other ex-curricula activities. Teachers, district education officers and parents re-iterated that: *with regard to enhancement of social cohesion, decentralisation of education has proved to be instrumental.* The respondents went on to state that:

> "Specifically*, decentralizing education helps local education and teachers by consolidating national unity and identity by fostering, enhancing, and sustaining the spirit of reconciliation and common belonging as a nation. This strengthens peace building and consolidating volunteerism, community work and self-reliance*

based on cultural and other values of collective responsibility, personal worth and productive involvement into young Rwandans in all schools (Teachers; 6, 11, 16 and Head teachers; 3, 9, 10)."

In fact, according to Minaloc (2011) report, this seeks to act as a strong anchor for national stability, peace, and unity.

4.2.2 The Role of Teachers in Peace Building Efforts

The study investigated teachers' understanding and conceptualisation of peace values in order to integrate them in all school programs regardless of the discipline. The study explored teachers' purported beliefs about peace education, social cohesion, and their pedagogical approaches in the light of the new curriculum (Competence Based Curriculum). This was an attempt to understand teachers' interpretations of teaching of Rwandan values, social cohesion and peace building within the Rwandan schools. Teachers, head teachers and policy makers interviewed, majority reported that:

Teachers' have strong zeal and determination to play their role as agents of peace by incorporating peace values in all the subjects they teach. They further stated that,

"We *as Rwandan teachers must embrace the teaching of peace values through learner centred pedagogies because it is a key avenue to create a socially cohesive Rwandan society. Through our day to day teaching, we revisit Rwandan traditional social values –the very social fabrics that used to unite all Rwandans and incorporate them in our teaching in classrooms across the curriculum regardless of the discipline."*

Despite the tenor of these affirmations by respondents about building peace through teaching Rwandan values and other social cohesion related programs, an official from the ministry of education cautioned that: "*Achieving social cohesion and sustainable peace is always a slow and demanding journey. This is true especially in Africa where legacies of colonial, postcolonial, and genocide consequences in case of Rwanda are still visible".*

In spite of the difficulties in building peace among Rwandans though school programs, teachers expressed a belief in tolerance as a main characteristic of social cohesion. Majority of teachers indicated that:

"One cannot talk of social cohesion when there is no harmony, not living together peacefully, but rather fighting over national wealth. This makes it paramount for incorporating peace values into the Rwandan education system for teachers to teach peace values to learners when they are still young". The interviewee went on to argue that*: Tolerance combined with a fair and equal society, is the foundation of social harmony".*

The above argument is also discussed by Rutayisire et al. (2004, p. 332) who argued that before genocide, teaching practices greatly contributed to conflict and genocide, including ''ethnically defined pupil identification files, biased access to national examinations'', and ''violent forms of punishment''. This included writing students' ethnic identity

on their school file (McLean-Hilker 2009b; Walker-Keleher 2006). Teachers sometimes segregated the class into Hutu and Tutsi pupils (Des Forges 1999). Head teachers and teachers interviewed argued that:

"Rwanda cannot dream of fair and full socio-economic development where every Rwandan is respected, recognized as an important citizen with full rights without being at peace with each other. The only way of achieving this, is through giving holistic education, that is, education that does not only emphasize academic content but also social Rwandan values that encourage and inculcate social cohesion among young Rwandans in schools while still at a tender age ready to change for the best. This demands, however teachers themselves to understand what peace and social cohesion is all about. Harmonious living requires developing peace values among learners. Respondents re-iterated that: 'tolerance, harmony, and solidarity are interrelated essential mix for social cohesion for any country' development".

During interviewing policy makers, officials from the ministry of education re-iterated that:

*"The role of teachers in the efforts of peace building is so crucial in that it influences the thinking of not only the learners but also the whole society. The policy makers went on to state that: beliefs and behaviours of teachers have a serious impact on learner' behavio*ur. *For example, during postcolonial era, teachers used to reward attitudes of superiority among Hutu learners and conversely bred inferiority complexes among Tutsi learners.*"

Twelve respondents recalled attending school prior to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and reported that:

"While a teacher was teaching, it was very common and supported by school leadership to use divisive examples such as 'long nose, height, calling Tutsi learners foreigners within schools, cockroaches-which were all attributed to Tutsi'. Role-calls based on ethnic belonging were quite common. Learners could be forced to respond to roll calls by saying: Hutu, Tutsi or Twa. Any Tutsi learner who could respond 'Hutu' in an attempt to protect him or herself from humiliation, s/he would have a big case to answer to the school leadership, the case that more often would end in dismissal".

This biased kind of teaching is further analysed by Gasanabo (2004). Gasanabo (ibid) analyzes the history textbooks and associated teaching materials in Rwanda from 1962 to 1994. He argued that:

"*The history taught at both primary and secondary levels propagated a version of the past based largely on colonial stereotypes of Rwandan history, which supported the political ideology of the Hutu regimes in power during that period (see also Rutayisire et al. 2004; Rutembesa 2002). This version of history emphasized the separate geographical and racial origins of Rwanda's "ethnic" groups, portraying the Tutsi*

as outsiders who conquered the Hutu and Twa and imposed feudal rule, exploiting and oppressing the Hutu peasantry. The history materials then described how the colonial regimes favoured the Tutsi and further exacerbated "ethnic" divisions, until the Hutu majority rebelled and took power during the 1959 "social revolution" to end Tutsi hegemony and establish "democratic" rule by the majority Hutu population (Eltringham 2004; Rutembesa 2002). it is clear how teachers can be used to either destroy or positively construct the minds of learners to appreciate social cohesion rather than creating a decadent society build on hatred and divisionism".

4.2.3 Parental and Community Involvement in Nurturing Peace building Values among Learners

In order to strengthen the culture of peace building through Rwandan values, the Ministry of education through its policies, curriculum and other rules and regulations tasks both private and public schools to maintain close relationships with local administration. Local leaders, such as vice mayors in charge of social affairs, police and military local commanders and non-government organizations work closely with schools. Such institutions and agencies come to schools and talk to both teachers and learners in view of enhancing social cohesion and peace values among learners and hence in the local community. Majority of the head teacher interviewed stated that:

"The rationale of parental and communal involvement in school is to give learners another source of information by sharing with them of what happened in Rwandan past, how it happened, and its consequences and how to make sure that it should never happen again. Various parents and community leaders who have a lot experience both from professional and age perspectives, are given different schedules by school administration to come and address learners on social themes such as harmony, tolerance, forgiving, peace building, Rwandan values, gender in Rwanda and modern perspectives, respect, integrity (agaciro) and the general Rwandan social cohesion before colonial times. Through this parental and community involvement in schools, teachers and learners are given an opportunity to listen to a number of various speakers on peacebuilding need and requirement for all Rwandans as an addition to what is taught by teachers in day-to-day classroom setting. Once the community retains contact with teachers, teachers in return feel supported by the community to carry out their responsibilities of assisting learners to develop into full responsible citizens".

Unfortunately, despite of the emphasis put on parental involvement in the learner's day-to-day life for holistic development, majority of teachers reported that: *generally, parental follow-up of children's education is weak. Parents especially in rural areas blindly over-trust teachers to do everything for their children. Some parents are too busy to be involved with their child's education.* In the similar manner, many head teachers reported that:

"Parents from urban schools are too busy seeking for a living. On the other hand, in rural areas lack of parental guidance is because parents are not educated. They are not interested in knowing how their children are taught. They even do not want to discuss what the teacher teaches learners or problems that

school leadership faces. They claim that their work is to pay school fees and the rest is for the teachers and head teachers. Learners are quite followed up by parents who know the value of education."

5.1 Conclusion

The study has argued that Rwandan policy has worked as a tool for empowering Rwandan teachers to promote social cohesion through teaching of academic content juxtaposed with nurturing social and peace building values into learners. However, this can only be sustainable if teachers and their classroom work constantly and insistently take peace building education and values seriously in all their day-to-day teaching and other ex-curricula activities.

It was clear from teachers' arguments and reports that, their   efforts of peace building are so crucial because it influences the thinking of not only learners but also the whole society. Teachers' understanding and integrating peace values in their teaching have a serious impact on learners' behaviour and social cohesion development. The expected outcome is to make learners appreciate and practise the spirit of social cohesion in Rwandan society as opposed to the negative mind-set created by education system before 1994 genocide against Tutsi.

Parental and communal involvement in school leadership is to give learners another source of information demonstrating the importance of Rwandan values. This is done by integration of social themes int the national curriculum such as harmony, tolerance, forgiving, peace building, Rwandan values, gender in Rwandan and modern perspectives, respect, integrity (agaciro) and the general Rwandan social cohesion before colonial times.

5. 2 Recommendations

1. The ministry of education through its implementing agency the Rwanda education Board, should build and strengthen teachers' pedagogical capacity in acquiring strong skills in integrating Rwandan values across the curriculum.

2. The ministry of education in collaboration with the ministry of local government should sensitize and design informative seminars for parents and local communities to enhance their skills and knowledge of social values that they impart to learners in schools

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