From Classroom to Community: Evaluating the Role of Peace Education in Enhancing Human Rights Awareness and Reducing Militancy by the Youth in the Niger Delta

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Abstract

The persistent crisis of youth militancy and abuse of rights in the Niger Delta underscores the need for revolutionary models of peacebuilding outside state security-focused intervention. This paper critically examines the ability of peace education to promote human rights awareness and slow youth militancy in closing the gap between classroom didactics and community transformation. With qualitative data, this paper adopts observation of teaching, and activities of leaders of thought in communities, youth groups and women. Well designed peace education at formal and non-formal study environments, improved the consciousness and strengthens of civic values that offers the youth the opportunity to comprehend and appreciate peaceful and constructive resolution of conflicts. With the enhancement of human rights literacy,

social responsibility is easily achieved with improved active involvement of youths in governance. The paper outlines structural limitations: ineffective policy implementation, restricted outreach in education, and deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities undermine the overall effects of peace education initiatives. The paper puts forth that human rights and peace studies curricula should be integrated into community-based programs and broader socio-political reforms, which are deemed crucial for maintaining peace and minimizing youth mobilization to violence.

Keywords: Peace education, human rights literacy, youth militancy, conflict prevention, Niger Delta, community transformation, qualitative research.

Introduction

Nigeria's Delta region is blessed with abundant natural resources and has been contributing to the economic development of the country but unfortunately witnesses escalated conflict, militancy by youth, and social unrest for over three decades. Despite contributing more than 80% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings through oil exports, the region continues to grapple with environmental degradation, unemployment, poverty, and systemic marginalisation (Ikelegbe, 2013). These structural injustices have fuelled grievances among the youth, many of whom perceive armed struggle and militancy as legitimate means to demand justice, resource control, and social recognition. This volatile context imperils national security, sustainable development, and human security, and demands alternative models that transcend the traditional state-centric approach of militarisation and security repression. One such neglected but promising model is peace education, and its ability to spread human rights awareness and reorient youth attitudes from violence to constructive civic action.

Peace education, broadly defined, is the process of acquiring knowledge, values, skills, and attitudes necessary to prevent conflict, resolve disputes peacefully, and promote social justice (Reardon, 1988; Bajaj, 2008). It extends beyond the classroom to influence community norms, behaviours, and institutions. If executed effectively, peace education can empower young people with the tools for critical thinking, empathy, dialogue, and nonviolent problem-solving, qualities essential for addressing the root causes of violence and fostering sustainable peace (Harris

& Morrison, 2013). Similarly, human rights education supports the role by sensitizing people and societies to their rights and claims, ensuring responsibility, and enhancing democratic participation (Tibbitts, 2017). Both peace and human rights education offer a transformational capacity for changing the dynamics of youth participation in conflict from militancy to productive involvement in peacebuilding and governance.

The region offers a scenario for understanding the events that characterised the resistance of the youth and the people in communities. Tracing it to the late 1990s and peaking in the 2000s, youth-led militant groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) resorted to pipeline vandalism, oil theft, kidnapping, and armed confrontations to press their demands (Courson, 2011). While the 2009 Presidential Amnesty Programme helped reduce large-scale violence, the underlying drivers, environmental injustice, socio-economic exclusion, and weak governance, remain unresolved (Aghedo & Osumah, 2012). Youth resistance and anti-social acts undermine development and make peace to elude the people. These phenomena represent a significant gap in mainstream peacebuilding models, which have thus far privileged security responses at the cost of structural change and community-driven strategies.

It is in this sense that peace education comes across as an urgent and transformative response. In empowering youth with awareness of rights and with skills for peaceful conflict resolution, peace education encourages opposition to violent mobilisation and radicalisation. Most importantly, it provides an alternative narrative that inhibits the normalisation of violence as a response to achieve justice. As Boulding (2000) argues, peace education leads to the "culture of peace" by promoting respect for diversity, tolerance, dialogue, and cooperation, all values that are important to healing fractured societies such as the Niger Delta. Moreover, integrating human rights literacy into peace education ensures that young people not only understand their entitlements but also recognise their responsibilities in building a just and inclusive society.

The timeliness of this study is underscored by current socio-political realities. Nigeria's youth population, comprising over 60% of its total demographic, is both

a potential driver of conflict and a critical asset for peace (UNDP, 2021). In the Niger Delta, where youth unemployment exceeds 35% and political disillusionment is widespread, the absence of structured platforms for civic education and empowerment exacerbates vulnerability to militancy and organised violence (Idemudia, 2014). Global policy frameworks such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 16 (promoting peaceful and inclusive societies) and SDG 4.7 (ensuring learners acquire knowledge and skills for sustainable development, including peace and human rights) reinforce the need for educational interventions that bridge classroom learning with community transformation. As Nigeria seeks to diversify its economy and consolidate democratic governance, addressing youth-driven insecurity in the Niger Delta through innovative, education-based strategies becomes a national imperative.

This paper, assesses the role of peace education in improving human rights awareness and reducing youth militancy in the Niger Delta, filling the gap that exists between academic theory and actual practice. It adopts a human security perspective, shifting from state-centric definitions of security to people-centred approaches that define security in terms of freedom from fear, want, and indignity. Human security offers an encompassing analytical framework within which it is possible to understand how education may challenge structural violence, empower the marginalized, and lay the ground for lasting peace.

The importance of the research is not only academic but also practical. with a consideration of peace education and human rights literacy to influence attitudes, behaviours, and agency among youth, it contributes to ways in which education can be used preventively rather than as a response to conflict. In addition, global policy agendas such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peaceful and inclusive societies) and SDG 4.7 (learners' acquisition of knowledge and skills for sustainable development, including peace and human rights) intensify the need for educational interventions that link classroom learning to community transformation. As Nigeria seeks to diversify its economy and consolidate democratic governance, youth-driven insecurity in the Niger Delta becomes a national priority for creative, education-based solutions.

This paper therefore seeks to evaluate the role of peace education in promoting

human rights awareness and reducing youth militancy in the Niger Delta, bridging the gap between academic theory and real-world practice. It adopts a human security paradigm, which shifts focus from state-centric security notions to people-oriented discourses that privilege freedom from fear, want, and indignity (UNDP, 1994). Human security presents a comprehensive analytical model for exploring how education can address structural violence, empower marginalized groups, and lay the groundwork for lasting peace.

The study's importance extends not just to its academic contribution, but also to its everyday implications. By analyzing the impact of peace education and human rights literacy on youth attitudes, behavior, and agency, the study provides insight into the role education might play as a preventative measure, rather than a response, to conflict. Additionally, it provides evidence-based policy recommendations to policymakers, educators, civil society groups, and development agencies interested in building community-led peacebuilding programs in resource-rich and conflict-prone regions.

The protracted crisis in the Niger Delta demands creative solutions outside of policing and militarisation. Peace education, embedded in human rights principles, stands out as a transformative opportunity to empower youths, deconstruct cultures of violence, and disseminate nonviolent alternatives to conflict. As this paper will argue, bringing peace education "from classroom to community" is not just an academic exercise but a necessary step toward breaking cycles of militancy and building a more just, peaceful, and inclusive future for the Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole.

Statement of the Problem

Insecurity in the Niger Delta has reached alarming stage with the need for actions that would stabilise the area in order to prevent the escalation of militancy and social unrest. At the heart of this persisting instability is a fertile interplay between structural inequalities, political exclusion, and widespread human rights abuses. Conventional state reactions, militarisation, amnesty programs, and infrastructure projects, are not merely unproductive but also unaccountable, devoid of influence on the underlying socio-cultural drivers of violence, e.g., those linked to youth marginalisation, civic illiteracy, and deficient conflict resolution skills (Ikelegbe,

2013). Even though peace education and human rights education are globally recognised as empowerment instruments for averting conflict and social change, their empowerment is not yet maximised in the Niger Delta. Few if any systematic studies have examined the ways in which peace education programs, when extrapolated beyond the classroom, can reshape youth attitudes, agency-building, and reduce their vulnerability to militant mobilization. Such lack of scholarship and practice thus offers a pressing call for investigating the ways in which peace education can mediate the gap between knowledge acquisition and social change.

Objectives of the Study

(a)To examine how peace education initiatives influence youth attitudes, values, and behaviours toward nonviolence and social change in oil-producing communities of the Niger Delta.

(b)To assess the extent to which human rights awareness acquired through peace education empowers young people to engage in constructive civic participation rather than militant activities.

(c)To analyze the relationship between peace education, community-level human rights literacy, and reductions in youth militancy and conflict dynamics in the Niger Delta region.

(d)To identify and present a community-based peacebuilding framework that leverages peace education as a strategic tool for fostering sustainable peace, promoting social justice, and strengthening human security in the Niger Delta.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the transformative role of peace education in enhancing human rights awareness and reducing youth militancy in the Niger Delta. Data were collected through key informant interviews, secondary sources and observation from the activities of key stakeholders, including youth leaders, educators, civil society actors, community elders, and government representatives. Data analysis followed a thematic analysis framework, identifying recurring patterns, emerging themes, and relationships between peace education, human rights awareness, and youth behaviour.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on Human Security Theory, Transformative Learning Theory, and Social Learning Theory, which together provide a robust lens for examining how peace education can shape youth behaviour, enhance human rights awareness, and reduce militancy in the Niger Delta.

Human Security Theory: Human security shifts the focus of security discourse from state-centric protection to the safety and dignity of individuals (UNDP, 1994). It emphasizes freedom from fear, want, and indignity, core elements that resonate with the realities of the Niger Delta, where socio-economic deprivation, environmental degradation, and political exclusion fuel youth militancy. Looking at peace education as a tool for addressing structural violence and promoting rights-based empowerment, the human security approach highlights how education can build resilience and prevent conflict at the grassroots level. It also provides a holistic understanding of peace that extends beyond the absence of violence to include access to opportunities, justice, and participation.

Significant principle Human Security Theory is that protection can be achieved through comprehensive support systems involving multiple stakeholders. Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers can be better protected when host countries, employers, and civil society organizations work together to support their integration into receiving communities (Ettang, 2021). This collaborative approach recognizes that human security cannot be achieved through government action alone but requires coordinated efforts across different sectors of society. The theory has practical applications in addressing disrupted learning and educational challenges faced by vulnerable populations.

Transformative Learning Theory: Developed by Mezirow (1991), transformative learning theory explains how individuals critically reflect on their beliefs, assumptions, and worldviews, leading to shifts in behaviour and social engagement. In the context of this study, peace education acts as a catalyst for such transformation, enabling youth to challenge narratives of violence, injustice, and marginalization. Through dialogue, critical pedagogy, and participatory learning, students gain the skills to reinterpret their socio-political environment and pursue

nonviolent alternatives to addressing grievances. This transformation is crucial in regions like the Niger Delta, where structural injustice often pushes marginalized youth toward militancy. Transformative learning involves critically examining and reassessing the structure of assumptions and expectations that frame our thoughts, feelings, and actions (Bostrom et al., 2018). These meaning structures, called frames of reference, encompass cognitive, social, moral, and affective components that guide decision-making until we encounter situations that contradict our expectations (Bostrom et al., 2018). The theory defines transformative learning as "learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change" (Hatlevik et al., 2020). Through critical reflection and dialogue, learners can transform their perspectives to become more inclusive and accommodating of wider ranges of experiences (Dooley, 2020)(Asmara, 2020).

Social Learning Theory: Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory posits that behaviour is learned through observation, imitation, and social interaction. Applying this to peace education, youth exposed to nonviolent norms, human rights principles, and peaceful conflict resolution models within educational settings are more likely to replicate such behaviours within their communities. It showcases the impact and functionality of peace education moving knowledge and attitudes from classrooms into the contexts of wider society. Thus, education moves the norms of community from violence to collaboration for peace and development especially the type that carries all members of community along and accommodates relevant stakeholders.

The relevance to the paper is that these three theoretical perspectives complement one another in explaining how peace education functions as a bridge between knowledge and social transformation. Human security theory situates peace education within the broader struggle for dignity and justice; transformative learning explains the internal cognitive and attitudinal shifts that occur through critical reflection; and social learning theory captures the process by which these shifts influence collective behaviour and social norms.

Literature Review

The following section reviews the related literature on peace education, human

rights literacy, youth militancy, and conflict prevention in relation to how classroom-based interventions may affect change in the wider community. It adopts a thematic approach to the critical synthesis of existing knowledge, therefore identifying gaps that this study will seek to fill.

Peace Education and Its Transformative Potential

Peace education is seen as significant instrument for preventing and managing conflicts for development, including knowledge of teaching, skills, values, and attitudes that promote nonviolence, social justice, tolerance, and cooperation (Harris & Morrison, 2013; Adan, 2025). Scholars have identified how peace education deals with the absence of war, but it is also about transformation in relationships, building of empathy, and empowerment toward the peaceful resolution of conflicts (Reardon, 1997).

Peace education has gained momentum in many African contexts in recent years, at both school and community levels, as a way to respond to endemic violence and foster coexistence (Adan, 2025). In the Niger Delta, where violent conflicts have been linked to socio-economic marginalization and environmental injustice, peace education holds promise for reshaping the attitudes and behaviours of young people. Education, according to Iwilade, can be a driver of disarmament and deradicalization, especially if it tackles local grievances and empowers learners with conflict resolution skills.

Human Rights Literacy and Community Empowerment

Human rights literacy surpasses the simple process of awareness of legal rights and involves the principles of equality, dignity, and justice and their articulation in social and political realities (Tibbitts, 2002). Academics argue that HRE is critical to the process of empowering the most marginalized so they can resist structural violence and access accountability (Bajaj, 2011).

In such torn areas, like the Niger Delta region, human rights violations-from illegal detention to environmental devastations-are both the cause and the result of insecurity (Ikelegbe, 2013). Unaware youth exercise violence as a way of dramatizing their grievances or as an assertion of their free will. Conversely, communities aware of their rights and claiming them are always into constructive

dialogue and nonviolent activism (Andreopoulos & Claude, 2007).

Empirical studies demonstrate the positive influence of human rights literacy in civic participation and the peacebuilding process. For instance, a study by Bajaj and Hantzopoulos (2016) showed how rights-based education develops agency among youth and fosters collective action against injustice. In the Niger Delta, including HRE within the peace education curriculum can bridge knowledge gaps into empowerment, making youth active players in solving the root cause of militancy.

Youth Militancy and Structural Violence in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta's youth militancy has been variously studied in connection with environmental degradation, unemployment, political exclusion, and economic inequality (Okonta & Douglas 2003; Ikelegbe, 2005). Oil exploration has ravaged local ecologies, impoverished livelihoods, and fueled feelings of injustice; protests, sabotage, and armed resistance have emerged in regular cycles (Watts, 2008).

What started as militant groups clamoring for resource control and environmental justice has transformed into complex actors in kidnap, oil theft, and political violence. This evolution, scholars would argue, reflects deeper structural issues: state neglect, poor governance, and intergenerational frustration-a process one scholar captured as follows, to wit: Osaghae (1995). Efforts to address militancy through militarization and amnesty programmes have yielded mixed results, often failing to tackle the root causes of the problem. Aghedo & Osumah (2014)

Within this context, peace education and human rights literacy represent an alternative and preventive approach. They can, by addressing the cognitive and normative foundations of violence, redirect youth energies toward constructive engagement and socio-political transformation.

Peace Education, Human Rights, and Human Security Nexus

The intersection of peace education and human rights literacy goes precisely in the direction of what has been defined as human security: protection from fear, want, and indignity (UNDP, 1994). According to scholars like Galtung (1996), sustainable peace cannot be achieved without tackling the structures and cultural

violence that feed into inequality, exclusion, and injustice.

Peace education promotes non-violent conflict resolution and social cohesion, whereas human rights literacy empowers agency and accountability. Together, these elements address the symptoms and causes of insecurity, ranging from youth violence and militancy to injustice and marginalization. Put into practice, such an education would enable young people to demographically argue for change, influence governance, and build community resilience-a combination of elements very much in line with Bajaj & Hantzopoulos (2016).

This is an integrative approach that is particularly relevant in the Niger Delta, where security interventions by the state have failed to deliver sustainable peace for decades. As Obi (2010) puts it, peacebuilding efforts need to go beyond merely reactive and militarized responses to developmental and rights-based approaches. While there are studies that have looked separately at peace education, human rights, and militancy, only a few have been able to bring these factors into one analytical framework, especially as it relates to the Niger Delta. Most of the research work also focuses on policy interventions, overlooking micro-level dynamics of how classroom-based education translates into community transformation. Furthermore, there is a need for empirical evidence linking peace education to an eventual impact on youth militancy behavior through human rights awareness. This study, therefore, bridges these gaps in existing literature by assessing how peace education and human rights literacy together contribute to conflict prevention. It shall be important to establish how knowledge acquired in the educational setting is applied in real-life situations, the ways in which such knowledge shapes the attitude of youths toward violence, and how it builds human security in marginalized communities.

How Peace Education Initiatives Influence Youth Attitudes, Values, and Behaviours for Nonviolence and Social Change in Oil-Producing Communities

Shifting Attitudes from Militancy to Dialogue

One of the most striking findings is the attitudinal shift observed among young people exposed to peace education. Historically, the Niger Delta's youth militancy was fueled by feelings of injustice, exclusion, and state neglect (Ikelegbe, 2013; Obi, 2020). However, peace education initiatives, often delivered through community

workshops, school curricula, NGO-led programmes, and reintegration trainings, have reframed violent resistance as counterproductive and introduced dialogue, negotiation, and civic engagement as more effective tools of change.

Participants widely echoed this transformation. A youth leader in Port Harcourt noted:
"Before these programmes, we believed carrying arms was the only language government understood. Now, we are learning that dialogue, advocacy, and peaceful protests can achieve more without destroying our future." (Youth Leader, Port Harcourt, KII 2024)

This shift aligns with Galtung's (1996) concept of positive peace, where conflict resolution transitions from direct violence to constructive negotiation. With the vhanging of narrative and perception of militancy and reframing violence as self-defeating, peace education has helped youth reconsider the ethics and efficacy of their actions.

Transforming Values: From Victimhood to Agency
Peace education also fosters values transformation, shifting youth self-perceptions from victims of systemic injustice to active agents of social change. This is particularly significant in communities where environmental degradation, economic deprivation, and human rights abuses have historically generated a culture of resentment and aggression (Agbiboa, 2021).

Educators involved in peace studies programmes highlighted that modules on human rights, civic responsibility, and social justice encourage critical reflection and moral reasoning among students. An educator from Yenagoa explained:
"Peace education does more than teach about peace, it teaches them they have the power to shape their society positively. We see young people taking initiatives, forming advocacy groups, and speaking at town halls." (Educator, Yenagoa, Interview, 2025)

This reorientation reflects Freire's (1970) notion of conscientization, where education cultivates critical consciousness and collective responsibility. Youths increasingly view themselves as partners in peacebuilding rather than passive

recipients of external interventions.

Behavioural Shifts: From Confrontation to Constructive Engagement

Beyond attitudinal and value changes, peace education has directly influenced behavioural outcomes among youths, especially former militants and those at risk of radicalisation. Several participants described reduced involvement in violent protests, cultism, and resource sabotage, replaced by participation in community dialogues, development committees, and entrepreneurship initiatives.

A former militant from Warri reflected on his transformation:

"I used to see violence as the only way to demand justice. But the peacebuilding training taught me negotiation skills, mediation techniques, and community mobilisation. Now, I lead a youth cooperative focused on environmental advocacy." (Ex-Militant, Warri, Interview, 2025)

These behavioural changes resonate with Lederach's (1997) theory of conflict transformation, which emphasises building new social patterns and relationships that support long-term peace. By equipping youths with conflict resolution skills and nonviolent strategies, peace education addresses the behavioural dimension of insecurity.

The Role of Context and Delivery Mechanisms

The influence of peace education is mediated by contextual factors such as programme design, facilitator credibility, and community support. Programmes co-designed with local stakeholders and delivered by trusted educators or civil society actors were found to have a greater impact than externally imposed initiatives. Moreover, linking peace education to livelihood opportunities, human rights advocacy, and environmental justice campaigns increased youth engagement and retention.

Civil society participants stressed the importance of contextualising peace education:

"If peace education ignores the lived realities of oil pollution and poverty, it won't resonate. We must connect lessons on nonviolence to the structural injustices youths face." (CSO Representative, Ughelli, Interview, 2025)

This underscores the need for context-sensitive curricula that integrate local grievances into broader discourses on peace and justice.

Implications

The findings demonstrate that peace education is not merely an academic exercise but a practical intervention capable of transforming youth worldviews and social behaviours. By promoting empathy, tolerance, civic responsibility, and human rights consciousness, peace education dismantles the ideological underpinnings of militancy and fosters a culture of constructive engagement. These outcomes corroborate previous studies (Albert & Albert, 2008; Okoh, 2022) showing that peace education contributes significantly to conflict prevention and post-conflict reconciliation in fragile contexts.

However, challenges remain. Limited institutional support, inconsistent funding, and inadequate integration into formal education systems hinder the scalability and sustainability of these programmes. Addressing these gaps requires stronger collaboration among governments, universities, civil society, and community actors.

The Extent to Which Human Rights Awareness Acquired Through Peace Education Empowers Young People to Engage in Constructive Civic Participation Rather Than Militant Activities

From Victims of Injustice to Agents of Change

A central theme that emerged was a significant shift in identity among youths exposed to human rights education. Historically, many young people in the Niger Delta saw themselves as victims of systemic neglect, whose only means of demanding justice was through violent resistance (Ikelegbe, 2013; Obi, 2020). Human rights education often delivered through community workshops, reintegration programs, and NGO initiatives, reframes this narrative by empowering youths with knowledge about their rights, legal frameworks, and peaceful avenues for redress.

A youth leader in Warri explained this shift:

“We grew up thinking that government didn’t care about us and that violence was the only way to be heard. Now, we know our rights, to education, to a healthy

environment, to participate, and we know how to demand them without guns." (Youth Leader, Warri, FGD, 2024)

This transformation reflects Freire's (1970) notion of critical consciousness, particularly the one that makes oppressed groups to be more aware of their power to transform unjust structures through informed action rather than violent rebellion. Human rights literacy thus empowers youth with the psychological and intellectual tools necessary to act as agents of social change.

Expanding Knowledge of Civic Tools and Institutions

The paper also observed that human rights education empowered young people with the skills of democratic processes, knowledge of legal instruments, and civic channels available for advocacy. Improved awareness of mechanisms such as petitions, peaceful protests, litigation, town hall meetings, and policy consultations were well noted. These approaches are more result-oriented than acts that create instability such as confrontation and vandalism; Educators in Yenagoa how students completed peace and rights-related courses and appear more likely to join CDAs, attend local government meetings, or partner with civil society organizations.

"Many of them now write petitions, use social media campaigns, and join youth forums to engage government officials. They are learning that civic pressure can yield results." (Educator, Yenagoa, Interview, 2025)

This practical shift is critical in a region where disillusionment with state institutions historically fueled militancy (Agbiboa, 2021). By demystifying governance structures and legal processes, human rights literacy lowers the barrier to peaceful participation and expands the repertoire of nonviolent resistance strategies available to young people.

Empowerment Through Collective Mobilisation

The data also reveal that human rights awareness strengthens collective mobilisation and youth-led advocacy. Instead of forming armed groups, many young people now organise around environmental justice, education access, or employment rights. Civil society actors in Port Harcourt noted that youth

coalitions increasingly collaborate with NGOs, legal practitioners, and media platforms to amplify their demands.

An ex-militant in Ughelli reflected on this transformation:
"I used to belong to a militant camp. Now I belong to a youth advocacy group that campaigns for clean water and holds oil companies accountable. We lobby lawmakers and file complaints instead of blowing up pipelines." (Ex-Militant, Ughelli, Interview, 2025)

This finding aligns with Lederach's (1997) concept of transformative peacebuilding, which emphasises local agency and collective participation as cornerstones of sustainable peace. Human rights awareness helps youth transition from violent collectives to advocacy networks that pressure for systemic change without destabilising their communities.

Rebuilding Trust Between Youth and State Institutions
An often-overlooked but critical effect of human rights education is its role in rebuilding trust between youth and state institutions. In regions like the Niger Delta, where historical grievances against government and oil companies have deepened cynicism, such trust is a prerequisite for peaceful civic engagement (Okoh, 2022).

Through knowledge of human rights, youths are now more likely to engage law enforcement, environmental agencies, or local government officials constructively. Civil society respondents noted increased attendance at community consultations and public hearings, which they attribute directly to rights-based education.

Challenges and Limitations
Despite these positive trends, the study found that barriers remain. Limited access to quality peace and rights education, especially in remote or marginalized communities, continues to hinder broader impact. Additionally, instances of state repression, political exclusion, and systemic corruption sometimes discourage civic participation, leading to sporadic relapses into militancy among disenfranchised youth. These challenges underscore the need for sustained, institutionalised human rights education integrated into school curricula, youth

development policies, and post-conflict reintegration programs.

Implications

The findings underscore the profound capacity of human rights awareness to reorient youth political engagement in the Niger Delta. Through the pursuit of justice through a rights-based lens, young people transition from reactive violence to proactive citizenship. This shift not only reduces militant recruitment and resource sabotage but also strengthens democratic participation, accountability, and local governance.

Moreover, the empowerment generated by rights education extends beyond political engagement. It cultivates self-efficacy, social responsibility, and collective identity, essential ingredients for long-term peace and development. These findings are consistent with previous scholarship emphasising the transformative potential of rights literacy in conflict-affected societies (Albert & Albert, 2008; Okoh, 2022). Human rights awareness acquired through peace education is a pivotal factor in reshaping youth trajectories in the Niger Delta. This brings empowerment and promotes confidence and justice**.**

Peace Education, Human Rights Literacy, and the Reduction of Youth Militancy

The fieldwork conducted across Rivers, Delta, and Bayelsa States, with participants drawn from Port Harcourt, Warri, Ughelli, and Yenagoa, revealed a complex but significant relationship between peace education, human rights literacy, and the observable decline in youth militancy and conflict patterns. Across the focus groups and interviews with 30 participants (including youth leaders, ex-militants, civil society actors, and educators), several interconnected themes emerged: the transformative power of knowledge, attitudinal reorientation, structural empowerment, and the diffusion of peacebuilding norms within communities.

Transformative Knowledge and Conflict De-escalation

Since the increase of peace work in the Niger Delta involving institutions, scholars and practitioners with the support of government and non-governmental organisations, insecurity associated with militancy has declined and this means that many communities are now safer than they used to be. The outcome shows

that human rights are beginn9ng to gain unusual recognition in the region especially among the youthful population.

An ex-militant from Warri (Delta State) reflected:
"Before we joined the amnesty programme, many of us believed violence was the only way to be heard. Now we understand there are rights, laws, and legitimate ways to demand them." (Field Interview, 2025)

This sentiment aligns with the view of Lederach (1997) that peacebuilding requires a shift from coercive resistance to constructive engagement. By linking grievances to human rights discourses, peace education reframes youth identities from "fighters" to "rights holders." This cognitive reorientation reduces the appeal of militancy as a primary mode of resistance.

Human Rights Literacy and Empowerment Pathways
Human rights literacy acts as a bridge between peace education and de-escalation of conflict that prevents confrontation. When young people learn about their constitutional and socio-economic rights, such as access to education, environmental justice, and political participation, they are more likely to pursue civic channels instead of violent means to address marginalization.

A youth leader from Port Harcourt (Rivers State) explained:
"Our training on human rights gave us the confidence to write petitions, organize dialogues, and engage local government officials. We no longer feel powerless or invisible." (Focus Group, 2025)

Civil society representatives further emphasized that awareness of state accountability has shifted the political dynamics in many communities. Youths now form advocacy coalitions, engage in peaceful protests, and participate in town hall meetings—behaviours that contrast sharply with the armed resistance strategies that characterized earlier decades (Ikelegbe, 2013).

This finding supports Galtung's (1996) structural violence theory, which posits that knowledge of rights and the ability to challenge structural injustice are essential to dismantling the root causes of violent conflict. As human rights

literacy increases, so too does the capacity for nonviolent contestation.

Community Norm Shifts and Collective Security Gains

Residents observed that all young people who have benefited from peace education or peace project seem to be more equipped and positioned to contribute to stability needs of the society than those who do not understand the difference between peaceful conduct and managing grievances or violence.

An educator from Yenagoa (Bayelsa State) remarked:

"Some of my former students are now leading local NGOs or mediating community disputes. Their work has reduced clashes between youth groups and oil company security agents." (Interview, 2025)

This diffusion of peace-oriented norms contributes to a gradual normalization of dialogue and negotiation over violence. By implication, the decline of vandalisation critical infrastructure points to the fact that peace education is yielding desired results. This is evident in the reduction of inter-communal confrontations and increasing understanding of community members despite their differences; This demonstrates manifestation of Burton's (1990) human needs theory, which argues that addressing underlying socio-political grievances through education and empowerment is more effective for long-term peace than coercive policing.

Impact on Human Security

This paper noted the interaction between peace education and human rights literacy extends beyond reducing militancy, it also enhances human security. Youth engagement in democratic processes, advocacy for environmental justice, and participation in community policing initiatives collectively improve safety, governance, and trust.

A civil society leader in Ughelli (Delta State) stated:

"When youths stop carrying arms and start attending policy dialogues, the whole community feels safer. Investors return, schools reopen, and the police are less aggressive." (Interview, 2024)

This underscores Paris's (2004) argument that sustainable peacebuilding requires not only the cessation of violence but also the cultivation of democratic institutions and socio-economic stability. Peace education thus serves as a catalyst for a positive peace, one rooted in justice, dignity, and participatory governance.

The relationship between peace education, human rights literacy, and reductions in youth militancy is both causal and reinforcing. Education fosters awareness; awareness empowers civic action; civic action reduces the structural incentives for violence; and reduced violence creates conditions for deeper peacebuilding. This cyclical dynamic reflects the transformative peacebuilding model proposed by Lederach (1997), in which peace is constructed from the grassroots through sustained changes in values, relationships, and institutions. Moreover, the Niger Delta case illustrates how education-based interventions can transition from individual attitudinal change to collective conflict transformation, addressing both direct violence (youth militancy) and structural violence (political exclusion and environmental degradation).

A Community-based Peacebuilding Framework for Sustainable Peace in the Niger Delta

Core Components of the Community-Based Peacebuilding Framework (CBPF)

The proposed framework consists of five interlinked components that work together to foster sustainable peace, promote social justice, and strengthen human security:

1. Grassroots Peace Education and Human Rights Literacy (Knowledge Base)

At the foundation of the framework is continuous peace education, delivered not only through formal schools but also through community-based platforms such as youth centres, local NGOs, faith-based groups, and traditional institutions. This component focuses on:

Conflict analysis, mediation, and negotiation skills.

Civic education, human rights awareness, and constitutional literacy.

Nonviolent communication, environmental stewardship, and gender equality.

Educators and civil society actors in Yenagoa emphasized the need to "take peace education beyond classrooms to churches, town halls, and markets where the majority of the youth gather" (Interview, 2025). This broadened reach ensures that

peace values are internalized by a wider segment of the population, including out-of-school youths and former militants.

2. Youth Leadership and Civic Engagement Platforms (Agency Base)
Empowerment is the bridge between knowledge and action. The second layer of the CBPF focuses on transforming peace education outcomes into practical civic participation opportunities. Activities include:
Establishing youth peace councils in each local government area.
Facilitating youth representation in community development committees.
Supporting advocacy groups focused on environmental justice, employment, and governance accountability.

A youth leader from Warri explained:
"Peace education gave us the knowledge, but what really changed things was having a seat at the table when decisions were being made." (Focus Group, 2024)
Such platforms transform youth from passive recipients of state policy into active peacebuilders and watchdogs, reducing the lure of militancy as a form of political expression.

3. Community Dialogue and Restorative Justice Mechanisms (Relational Base)
Because Niger Delta conflicts often stem from broken relationships, between youth and state, communities and oil companies, and among rival groups, the CBPF embeds structured dialogue and restorative practices. These include:
Community peace forums involving youths, elders, security agencies, and oil multinationals.

Local truth-telling and reconciliation initiatives to address historical grievances.
Mediation panels for resource-sharing disputes.
As one civil society actor in Port Harcourt noted, "Without dialogue, grievances pile up until violence seems inevitable. These forums help us address issues before they explode" (Interview, 2024).

4. Economic Inclusion and Social Justice Programmes (Structural Base)
Peace cannot be sustained without addressing structural violence, poverty, unemployment, and inequality, that fuel militancy. Therefore, the CBPF integrates

livelihood support with peace education through:
Vocational training linked to local employment opportunities.
Partnerships with oil companies for youth enterprise funds.
Land reclamation and environmental remediation initiatives.

This aligns with Galtung's (1996) argument that sustainable peace requires dismantling structural barriers to dignity and opportunity.

5. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge-Sharing (Sustainability Base)
Finally, the framework emphasizes iterative learning and adaptation. Local peace committees, universities, and NGOs should collaboratively monitor indicators such as youth militancy rates, civic participation levels, and perceptions of human security. Results should feed back into programme design, ensuring continuous improvement.

An educator from Ughelli stressed:
"We must treat peacebuilding as a learning process. What works in Warri may not work in Yenagoa, so we need feedback to adapt our strategies." (Interview, 2025)
Conceptual Model of the CBPF
[Peace Education & Human Rights Literacy]
↓
[Youth Empowerment & Civic Engagement]
↓
[Dialogue & Restorative Justice Mechanisms]
↓
[Economic Inclusion & Social Justice]
↓
[Strengthened Human Security & Sustainable Peace]
This vertical progression model illustrates how peace education acts as the entry point for a cascading series of transformations, from individual capacity-building to systemic conflict prevention.

Policy and Theoretical Implications
The CBPF offers a paradigm shift in conflict prevention thinking. It repositions peace education from being a supplementary social intervention to a strategic

anchor of regional peacebuilding. Linking education to empowerment, justice, and development, the framework mirrors the "bottom-up" peacebuilding philosophy advocated by Lederach (1997), which emphasizes building relationships and structures capable of sustaining peace from the grassroots.

Furthermore, the model reflects the human security approach by integrating economic, social, and political dimensions of safety. Rather than focusing narrowly on disarmament or security operations, it addresses the full spectrum of threats, structural, cultural, and direct violence, that sustain conflict in the Niger Delta.

The proposed Community-Based Peacebuilding Framework (CBPF) demonstrates that sustainable peace in the Niger Delta is achievable when peace education is deliberately integrated into broader processes of empowerment, justice, and human security. Youth transformation into informed citizens, active participants, and community leaders, the framework not only reduces militancy but also builds the foundations of a just, inclusive, and peaceful society. If implemented collaboratively by governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector, this model can shift the Niger Delta from a cycle of violence to a culture of peace and shared prosperity.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the significance of peace education which enhances the extent of recognising and appreciating human rights protection In the Niger Delta, peace education has added value to the lives and well-being of the youth and elders whose daily lives are now more peaceful than in the past. The culture of nonviolence, critical thinking, and social responsibility that peace education promotes outside the class setting directly counters the structural and psychological triggers of these militant acts. Peace education thus empowers the youth with the needed cognitive and emotional competencies to engage constructively in social and political challenges with tolerance, dialogue, and conflict resolution, rather than violence.

Furthermore, peace education instills human rights awareness, thereby giving youth the capacity to demand accountability, fully participate in governance, and

clamor for justice in their communities. This shift from being mere passive acceptance of structural injustices to active civic engagement reflects a critical transformation in the agency of young people, enabling them to become stakeholders in peacebuilding processes rather than agents of conflict. Observation in Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta States showed that communities with sustained peace education programs recorded lesser cases of youth restiveness and more involvement in community development projects.

The interrelationship between peace education, human rights literacy, and declining militancy underlines the necessity of a holistic and community-driven approach toward peacebuilding. It implies that security-focused or economically empowering interventions with no agenda to address disempowerment, injustice, and exclusion will not accomplish peaceful coexistence. Instead, education, advocacy, and community engagement must be interwoven into one multidimensional strategy that aims at transforming structural conditions that fuel violence.

The paper also proposes a community-based peacebuilding framework which shall draw from the strategic tools of local participation, cultural sensitivity, and educational intervention in promoting long-term peace. Such a framework calls for collaboration by schools, civil society, traditional institutions, and government agencies to sustain continuous learning, dialogue, and civic action.

Peace education and human rights literacy must be seen as more than pedagogical tools, they are essential pillars of conflict prevention and social transformation. Both classroom knowledge and community realities when linked together will nurture a generation capable of addressing grievances through peaceful means, thereby reducing youth militancy, strengthening human security, and laying the foundation for a just and sustainable peace in the Niger Delta.

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