

**Secondary Education and Peace Building in Somalia: The Case  
of the 21 October Public School in the Wabeeri District in  
Mogadishu**

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## Introduction

From the civil war in 1991 to the rise of terrorist organizations in Somalia, education systems have been mismanaged and a very limited number of boys and girls have access to schools. However, the Government of Somalia and its international partners are attempting to restore peace and stability in Somalia, specifically in Mogadishu which has been the hot spot for radical ideologies in past years.

The conflict environment in Mogadishu has affected young people psychologically. This has been exacerbated by the presence of armed men around the town who sow fear among families and children. Due to this long-standing fear, children became accustomed to violence, and this is, at least partially, attributed to the inadequate role of public secondary schools in providing the foundation for promoting peace education to the pupils.

The population living in Mogadishu is estimated at 2.7 million. There are a total of 149 secondary schools in Mogadishu, Banaadir region (FGS Education Statistics Year Book, 2015). Three secondary schools are concentrated in Waaberi District: *Waaberi Cusub*, *Raage Ugaas* and *21 October* (currently known as Al-Mathal).

Waaberi District is in the southeastern part of Mogadishu. The number of people living in the Waaberi district is estimated to be 50,864 (UNDP, 2005), which makes it one of the most populated districts. The district is comprised of mixed clans and different classes of the community.

This study will focus on the school *21 October*, because it is accessible and located in a secure area where the researcher can collect data from participants without fear. The school has a diversity of pupils from different classes and clans of the community, who can provide information needed for the research. *The 21 October (Al-Mathal Secondary School)* consists of four levels of grades, and they are form one, form two, form three and form four. This year 525 new pupils enrolled the school (School Registrar).

## **Background and Literature Review**

Education is important and significant to solve many crucial problems in society, including poverty, unemployment and conflict. Education can bring peace and stability if peace education is allied with the curriculum and aims to deliver the values of peace to the pupils. In Somalia, less attention has been given to peace education. The education institutions in Somalia have overlooked peace studies, and secondary schools in Somalia have been giving less attention to the role of peace education and the importance of teaching peace to children.

The hazard and conflict environment in Mogadishu, has affected young people psychologically. This is exacerbated by the presence of the armed men around the town who sow fear among families and children. Due to this long-standing fear, children became accustomed to violence, and this is, at least partially, attributed to the inadequate role of public secondary schools in providing the foundation for promoting peace education to the pupils.

UNDP, UNICEF and other UN agencies are implementing programs targeting children and youth to provide peace education and social rehabilitation programs. The UNDP in particular is continually providing programs which target the youths associated with crime, group gangs and school drop-outs to teach them the essential skills and knowledge needed to create a peaceful life and responsible citizens.

But these programs have had a relatively small impact on schools. Curricula have not been designed to provide peace education and teachers have not been trained to teach peace in the classroom. From that perspective, there is a need to enhance peace education in schools, and to include curricula with peace related subjects like life skills to equip the younger generation with essential skills and knowledge to enjoy peace, thus transforming the pupils and creating a peaceful and tolerant society.

### **Peace Education**

Peace education means delivering peace to pupils through the process of teaching pupils not to harm others and themselves, and to provide them with peace information. It also means being respectful to common values, justice for everybody, the distribution of government power and resources, and freedom from any kind of marginalization and discrimination.

Altaf Ahmed carried out a study on youth perceptions of peace education (Altaf, 2014). In his view peace education is teaching children the information, values and behavioural abilities required to solve conflicts in a diplomatic way without violence, in order to build and maintain mutually beneficial and harmonious relationships.

## **Peace Education in Somalia**

“Education as a tool to prevent violent extremism” (UNECSCO, 2017).

As this quote from UNESCO states, education can be used to prevent violence and establish peace. Proper peace education in Somalia’s secondary schools can prevent violent extremism and it can be a potential solution of Somali insecurity problems.

In Somalia, different organizations and institutions comprising international organisations such as the United Nations and national NGOs are working on peace stabilization in Somalia. But the methods used by those organizations to promote peace are different to the peace education method. In the context of Somalia, UNICEF is mainly supporting peace education for children in Somalia to restore peace and bring children together and create peace.

However, education institutions in Somalia have ignored the study of human rights, gender equality, tolerance, justice, friendship information, love and unity, and mutual respect, which can solve conflicts without violence and restore peace in Somalia. It is assumed that during the era of conflict and civil war in Somalia people developed a culture of war, weapons and ammunition of destruction, fighting for their rights through violence and hate for neighbouring countries. It is time to teach our children peace, because the next generation needs to learn the necessary skills and knowledge from school to enjoy a peaceful life.

Altaf (2014) states “children naturally absorb the spirit of violence in the atmosphere and will grow up to be next generation of perpetrators of violence. Therefore, the need to nurture peace in the heart of children has arisen as urgent issues to be addressed”. From that perspective the researcher agrees with the author that the presence of armed men and armoured vehicles in Mogadishu city sow fear among the children and families in the city, where the children become accustomed to conflict and violence. Peace education can change the children’s attitude and values and pave the way for the creation of peace-loving citizens.

## **Analytical and Methodological Approach**

The purpose of this research paper is to explore the role of secondary education in peace building in Somalia. The starting point of the author is that secondary education can play a vital role in promoting peace and turning young people into peace loving citizens. From that perspective, pupils can act as agents of peace and influence their peers, thus transforming the society into a peaceful and tolerant place. The researcher assumes that if the system of education and the curriculum are aligned towards the values of peace and tolerance, they could equip the children with necessary skills and knowledge to live in peace and this could pave the way for the creation of peace in Somalia. This research paper analytically draws on the distinction between the positive and negative peace initiatives, made by (Galtung 2003). In his view, “negative peace” is a mere absence of direct physical violence while “positive peace” is much more, and refers to an environment in which humans are free from structural violence and can develop their potential. This study uses this distinction between “negative peace” and “positive peace” to analyze the perception of peace by pupils and teachers from the *21 October* secondary school. This have been analyzed and compared in the research findings.

The analytical limitations of this study are that there are only a few studies carried out on this topic in Somalia. Therefore, the research uses data from studies carried out in neighbouring countries. Although this study’s focus on one school reveals many problems that exist across Somalia, the schools outside of Mogadishu have their specificities. Because of that, this research paper findings are not entirely generalizable to the rest of the country. To that end, further research outside of Mogadishu is required.

The key research question that this paper investigates is: how teachers and pupils in the public secondary school “21 October” in the Waaberi District of Mogadishu perceive the role of secondary education in peace building? The central aim of this research paper is to identify the role of public secondary schools in the Waaberi District Mogadishu-Somalia in the process of peace building.

The specific objectives of the paper are to describe how public secondary schools address the issue of peace and peace building in the educational process. Another specific aim of the research will be to analyse how teachers and pupils from the selected school in the Waaberi district perceive the role of secondary education in peace building.

In terms of methodology, this research paper relies on qualitative data on how public secondary schools engage young people in peace building and collected information regarding pupils’ and instructors’ perception about peace. The school 21 October (currently known as Al-Mathal) was selected for this study out of three schools in *Waaberi* district because it is government-owned, and attended by members of different clans from the district. The location of the school is also secure and accessible. The researcher informed the school principals in advance about the research project and its purpose.

The research started with a document analysis which examined how the school’s curriculum covers the issues of peace and conflict. The analysis targeted courses that are the most relevant to peace building, specifically History, Islamic and Social Studies subjects. In the next phase, the researcher conducted Key Informant Interviews with three teachers, who are involved in teaching of History, Islamic and Social Studies subjects which are related to peace and conflict. Finally, two Focus Group Discussion were conducted in 21 October Secondary School, Mogadishu on 12 to 14 of July. Each group comprised of six pupils, with a total of 12 pupils participating in the discussions. Selected pupils represented four different grades in the secondary school, and reflected the school’s diversity in terms of household locations and gender, to avoid bias and to ensure that the whole district is represented. With respect to

gender sensitivity and local culture, girls were separated from boys. The researcher recorded all the interviews and discussion with the consent of the participants.

## ***Research Findings***

This research paper aims to explore the role of secondary schools in the peace building process in Somalia. This section will analyse the findings and discussions gathered from research respondents. The first specific objective of this paper is to describe how public secondary schools address the issue of peace and peace building in the educational process. The findings from curriculum analysis suggest that the public secondary school did not properly structure peace education as a sustained program to include the subject in the curriculum. Minimum attention has been given to address the issue of peace education. This research has found out that there are a few subjects which have included topics which are relevant to peace education but not in an organized and systematic manner.

The second objective of the study is to analyse how teachers and pupils perceive the role of secondary education in peace building. To that end, three KIIs and two FGDs were conducted. It was significant to note that continued violence and a lack of proper peace education drives the perception of teachers and pupils that peace is an absence of war and armed conflict.

Teachers believe that they can play a seminal role in peace education in public secondary schools, if the school curriculum is designed in sustained programs to endorse peace education.

Pupils believe that they can act as agents of peace and influence their peers, and that can happen when peace is fully taught as a unit in their curriculum. Participatory methods have been adapted to deliver effective peace education, where pupils can learn life skills to apply them in their daily life. With such peace education pupils can therefore transform their families into peaceful people.

### **Peace building in public secondary school's curriculum**

This section analyses how the syllabus covers the issues of peace and conflict. It specifically targets courses relevant to peace education, such as History, Religion Studies and Social Studies. These subjects are a part of the secondary school syllabus, and are being taught in four levels of secondary grades (form one, form two, form three and form four).

Peace education is not a standalone course, as this matter is covered in many related subjects including History, Islamic studies, Poetry and Arts. The Somali Government developed the curriculum in 2014.

This study has found that History as a subject in the secondary school addresses human rights issues. The subject covers some topics about the history of human rights. It provides the definition of human rights and it outlines the importance and key elements of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The history sessions regarding human rights provide pupils with information about the end of slavery, social justice, the legal right to education and freedom. This allows pupils to demand what has been assured in their rights through assertiveness and legal means in a peaceful manner.

In History it is essential to address human rights issues which can support teachers and pupils to build an environment based on the values of peace, tolerance and equal rights for all. Furthermore, in Somalia it's more important to include in the history curriculum topics that are covering human rights which equip pupils with the knowledge of humanity, to understand that people around world, people from every colour, race and religion are equal and share the same principles of human rights.

For Instance (History, unit 6, Form 2) teaches the principle of equality and equal rights for men and women. By having equal rights for all, justice is born. On the same note, lessons in History (unit 8, Form

3) encourage the respect of fellow school mates and underpin the significance of tolerance among all cultures.

In the History textbook, human rights are thoroughly emphasized on the premise of understanding the causes of the past conflicts, including World War I and II, and the lessons that can be learnt from such wars. In this textbook (History, Unit 2, Form four) it is recommended that the different nations of the world come closer to create global unity and peace amongst themselves.

The subject of Somali Poetry and Arts provides deep coverage of Somali history and the era of peace and rule of law before civil war in Somalia. This subject provides information about unity, peace and love and reminds pupils of the relevance of peace in the era before 1991. The poetry portrays an image of horror in relation to armed conflicts and indicates how the conflict has affected all aspects of life, including health, education, housing, economics and how that has damaged the Somali existence and country's integrity.

Religious Study emphasizes the basic principles of tolerance and respect for all, while it also encourages treating the weaker sections within the society well. By attending to the needs of the poor, criminal tendencies born out of poverty are minimized. From that support, the community will also live in peace with each other.

### The role of teachers in peace building

There is a gap in the curriculum as it lacks the right content aimed at teaching peace. The three teachers interviewed asserted that they were motivated to teach peace to pupils, yet all of them stated to the researcher that they have never attended peace education courses or peace initiative training. One of them said: "I have been teaching History four years, and I have never received or witnessed other teachers receive peace training". It can be concluded that teachers can play a seminal role in peace education in public secondary schools but the school curriculum in Somalia is not designed to fully endorse peace education. This therefore, creates a gap that calls for education program reforms.

### Practical strategies to deliver peace education to pupils

Teachers used their own approaches to deliver peace education. They use domestic examples in the city to transmit peace lessons to pupils. They are also active in storytelling, especially stories related to peace and conflict. As one of them points out: "The school textbooks are not directly appropriate to peace education, therefore; I as teacher make them significant to the pupils by creating stories about the peaceful era in Somalia, and how the conflict destroyed Somalia."

This research paper found that students did not perform role plays, brainstorming, class discussion, pairs and group discussions on peace related topics.

### Distinctions between positive and negative peace initiatives

The study analyses how teachers and pupils describe peace to determine their perception regarding peace education. Teachers and pupils were asked to describe their understanding of the term 'peace'.

The majority of KIIs and FGDs have showed similar perceptions. They defined peace as the absence of war, and going school without fear. One of the pupils described this in the following words: "I am coming to school every day without fear, because we have peace". She added, "Without peace it wouldn't be possible for us to come to school every day."

Very few teachers in KIIs mentioned that peace means justice for everyone in the community regardless where they come from, their community class, and integration with tolerance and respect.

The research found that the majority of the KII's and FGD's perceived peace as an absence of war and direct harm to others, as this matches the definition of negative peace made by Galtung (2003). Respondents did not talk about justice for all and distribution of resources equitably. It is important for the teacher and also pupils to understand positive peace to develop relationships with each other, mutual respect and tolerance.

### Pupil's perceptions of peace education

The pupils who participated in the FGDs appreciated that teachers provide peace information and explain about the miseries resulting from armed conflicts. In the words of one pupil: "I focus all my attention when teachers recount on the peace time in Somalia, and I like to see my nation having peace again".

The study found that pupils can act as agents of peace and influence their peers, and that can happen when peace is fully taught as a unit in their curriculum. Such peace education pupils can therefore transform their families into peaceful people. A female from the pupils' FGDs stated: "When I receive peace story from my teacher, I share it with my families and friends when I go back home."

### Friend making and interaction among pupils

In this study, peace means teaching pupils skills and knowledge they need to create positivity and peaceful tolerance among themselves and others. To measure how pupils perceive peace education the study analysed the relationship between pupils and their empathy, tolerance and cooperation between them when they come from different clans and community classes.

Pupils were asked to discuss how they make friends to determine their integration with others and their perception of peace. Most of the pupils interviewed expressed that they make friends based on mutual understanding and interest, and doing school assignments together. One of the pupils interviewed expressed and others agreed "I make friends by mutual understanding, his/her interest and class participation." Therefore the pupils can establish a friendly and cooperative class room where they can feel positive, and develop peace.

The pupils are from different clans, and the clan issue has been the main cause of insecurity in Somalia. Making friends amongst themselves with different clans and different community classes creates integration and tolerance at school and generally in the community. It is important to note that friendship between pupils with different clans and community classes can progress optimistic relations with their colleagues. Pupil's friendship can break down restrictions created by the clan conflict and hatred between communities which inhibits peace and stability and fuels conflict in Somalia.

### Pupils' perception of violence and conflict.

The pupils were asked how they deal with conflicts and they expressed that they are willing to avoid conflicts. A few of them affirmed that they will try to resolve conflicts but they did not mention how they will approach it. From this it can be concluded that there is a gap in the conflict resolution concept taught in the secondary schools.

It was unique to note that during FGDs, none of the respondents expressed the view that they will call the police or inform other government security agencies when they came across an act of violence. This

shows a low level of trust of the community in security agencies. It has been found that the pupils lack trust in the official security agencies and they are not willing to seek help from legal institutions when they see an act of violence being committed.

The pupils were asked what they will do if someone violates their rights. One of them responded: “I would have shouted and fought for it. Most of them asserted that they will fight for it physically while only a few of them said that they will resort to the legal means to obtain their rights. This indicates that the pupils need to understand how to protect their rights through legal means and being assertive about them. It is the responsibility of education institutions to educate children about the existences of the rule of law and legal institutions in the country.

Using aggressive behavior to bring back their rights will only fuel conflict and strengthen the boundaries of conflict and hatred in the country. To achieve peace and stability in Somalia children need to be taught peace education and the rule of law. If pupils learn how to use the rule of law and cooperate with police it would create an opportunity to build peace in Somalia.

## Conclusion

This study provided a brief insight into how one public secondary school in Mogadishu addresses the issue of peace building in Somalia. More precisely, it analyzed how the public secondary syllabus relates to peace education and how teachers and pupils perceive peace education.

Significant attempts have been made to restore peace in Somalia, but peace education has not been structured as a sustainable program which is included in the curriculum. The findings from the curriculum analysis show that the public secondary school did not properly include peace education as a sustained program in the curriculum. Furthermore, it has found out that only a few subjects have included topics which are relevant to peace education although not in a focused, structured and systematic manner. Secondary education in the observed school gives minimum attention to the issue of peace in Somalia.

In terms of teachers' and pupils' perception of peace education, it has been found that continued violence and a lack of proper peace education drives the perception of teachers and pupils that peace is an absence of war and armed conflict, or to use Galtung's term a "negative" peace. For them, peace means to have an everyday access to school. Teachers believe that they could play a seminal role in peace education in public secondary schools, if the school curriculum was designed around sustained programs to endorse peace education. Pupils believe that they can act as agents of peace and influence their peers, and that can happen when peace is fully taught as a unit in their curriculum. Teachers and pupils agreed that they can play a vital role as agent of peace, thus transforming the community into peace loving citizens, and that can happen when the secondary public education is designed to deliver peace in a systematic manner.

It is significant to teach our children the importance of peace to develop a positive attitude to one another, to cultivate a responsible generation in the future. This research paper outlined that the pupils lack trust in the official security agencies and that they are not willing to seek help from legal institutions when they see an act of violence being committed. In addition to that, pupils tend to use aggressive behavior to access their rights and fight physically for their rights.

Our children and community also need to understand that peace is beyond the absence of war. The development of the country, the distribution of power and resource, unity and love of humanity is also an essential part of peace.

In addition to this, there are no participatory teaching methods which can support practical peace education sessions in classroom. It is important that pupils perform practical sessions including role-play, brainstorming and group discussions where they can learn to apply life skills in their daily life. Including peace education in the syllabus of secondary schools can be the way to build and sustain peace in Somalia.

Finally, there are a limited number of studies that were carried out on peace education in Somalia. Therefore it is suggested that there is a need to carry out further research on building a culture of peace in Somali secondary schools. Furthermore, this research paper's findings were not entirely generalizable to the rest of the country. To that end, further research outside of Mogadishu is required.

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