



Pencils over Guns: Prioritizing Schooling for Manipur's Next Generation of Peacemakers

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Abstract: Education is widely recognized as one of the most powerful tools for promoting peace and preventing conflict in societies experiencing violence and instability. In conflict-affected regions, schools function not only as places of academic learning but also as spaces where values such as tolerance, cooperation, and dialogue can be nurtured. The research article “*Pencil over Guns: Prioritizing Schooling for Manipur's Next Generation of Peacemakers*” examines the role of education in promoting peace in the conflict-affected region of Manipur in Northeast India. The article argues that strengthening educational institutions and ensuring continuous access to schooling are essential for building a generation capable of resolving conflicts peacefully. This paper review critically examines the arguments, theoretical foundations, methodology, and policy implications presented in the article. The reviewed study highlights the impact of ethnic conflict on education in Manipur, including school closures, displacement of students, psychological trauma, and disruptions in academic progress. According to peace education scholars, education can help address the root causes of conflict by promoting empathy, intercultural understanding, and critical thinking (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2010). The article further emphasizes that neglecting education in conflict zones can increase social inequalities and contribute to cycles of violence. Conversely, investing in education helps empower youth with knowledge and skills necessary for peacebuilding and democratic participation (UNESCO, 2019). By prioritizing “pencils over guns,” policymakers and communities can foster an environment where young people become agents of peace rather than participants in violence. This review evaluates the strengths and

limitations of the article and discusses its broader significance for peace education and conflict resolution research.

Keywords: *Peace, Education, Conflict- Affected Region, Peacebuilding, Manipur Conflict, Youth Empowerment, Conflict Resolution, Intercultural Understanding.*

1. Introduction

Education has long been regarded as a key factor in promoting social development, economic growth, and political stability. In societies affected by conflict, education takes on an even more important role as it provides young people with the tools needed to understand diversity, resolve disagreements, and participate constructively in society. Scholars argue that schools can act as institutions that shape attitudes toward peace and violence, influencing how young people perceive and respond to social conflicts (Davies, 2010).

The research article *“Pencils over Guns: Prioritizing Schooling for Manipur’s Next Generation of Peacemakers”* focuses on the relationship between education and peacebuilding in the conflict-affected region of Manipur. The phrase “pencils over guns” symbolizes the importance of education as an alternative to violence. Rather than relying solely on military or political solutions, the article proposes that sustainable peace can be achieved through investments in education and youth empowerment.

Manipur has experienced decades of ethnic tensions, insurgency, and political instability. These conflicts have disrupted social life and affected several sectors, including education. School closures, displacement of communities, and destruction of educational infrastructure have limited access to learning opportunities for thousands of students. Studies show that children living in conflict zones often face interruptions in schooling and psychological distress, which can negatively affect their long-term development (UNICEF, 2011).

The reviewed article argues that prioritizing education is essential for breaking cycles of violence and creating a culture of peace. Through education, young people can develop critical thinking skills, empathy, and respect for diversity—qualities necessary for peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies (Galtung, 1996).

The purpose of this paper review is to analyze the main arguments and contributions of the article, evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, and discuss its implications for policymakers and educators.

2. Background: Conflict and Education in Manipur

Manipur, located in Northeast India, has a complex history shaped by ethnic diversity, political movements, and territorial disputes. The region is home to several ethnic communities, including Meitei, Naga, and Kuki groups. Historical grievances, competition over land and political representation, and socio-economic inequalities have contributed to tensions among these communities.

Over the past several decades, these tensions have occasionally escalated into violent conflicts. Such conflicts have caused displacement of families, loss of livelihoods, and disruptions in public services, including education.

Education systems in conflict-affected areas face numerous challenges. Schools may be closed due to security concerns, teachers may be unable to reach classrooms, and students may be displaced from their homes. In many cases, school buildings are damaged or used as temporary shelters for displaced populations.

Research indicates that prolonged conflict can significantly affect children's access to education and overall well-being (UNICEF, 2011). Children who experience interruptions in schooling are more likely to drop out of school and face limited economic opportunities later in life. Furthermore, exposure to violence can lead to psychological trauma, anxiety, and reduced academic performance.

The reviewed article emphasizes that the education sector in Manipur has been deeply affected by these challenges. However, the authors also highlight the resilience of students and educators who continue to pursue learning despite difficult circumstances.

By strengthening educational institutions and ensuring safe learning environments, the region can transform schools into platforms for reconciliation and peacebuilding.

3. Objectives of the Reviewed Article

The reviewed paper outlines several key objectives related to education and peacebuilding.

First, the article aims to examine how conflict has affected educational systems in Manipur. This includes analyzing disruptions in schooling, challenges faced by teachers, and the impact of violence on students' learning experiences.

Second, the article seeks to demonstrate the importance of education as a peacebuilding tool. Education can influence attitudes and behaviors by promoting understanding, cooperation, and mutual respect among individuals from different backgrounds.

Third, the authors aim to highlight the role of youth in building peaceful societies. Young people represent a significant portion of the population and have the potential to shape the future of their communities.

Finally, the article proposes policy recommendations for strengthening education in conflict-affected regions and ensuring that schools become safe spaces for learning and dialogue.

4. Theoretical Framework

The article is grounded in the concept of peace education, which refers to educational approaches that aim to promote peace, social justice, and nonviolent conflict resolution. Peace education encourages students to develop skills such as empathy, cooperation, and critical thinking (Galtung, 1996).

Peace education scholars argue that traditional education systems often focus primarily on academic knowledge while neglecting social and emotional learning. However, in conflict-affected societies, education must also address issues of identity, prejudice, and historical grievances (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000).

The reviewed article also draws upon social learning theory, which suggests that individuals learn behaviors and attitudes by observing and interacting with others in social environments. Schools provide opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to interact and learn from one another. These interactions can help reduce stereotypes and promote mutual understanding.

Additionally, the article references theories of human development and social cohesion, which emphasize the role of education in strengthening democratic values and civic participation (Davies, 2010).

By combining these theoretical perspectives, the article presents a framework in which education is viewed as both a developmental and peacebuilding tool.

5. Methodology of the Reviewed Study

The article adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the relationship between education and peacebuilding in Manipur. Qualitative research is appropriate for studying complex social issues because it allows researchers to analyze experiences, perceptions, and social dynamics in depth.

The methodology used in the article includes the following components:

Literature Review

The authors analyze previous research on education in conflict zones, peace education, and youth empowerment. This helps establish a theoretical foundation for the study and situates the research within broader academic discussions.

Policy Analysis

The article examines existing education policies and programs related to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. By evaluating these policies, the authors identify gaps and areas for improvement.

Case-Based Observations

The paper also discusses examples of educational initiatives and community programs that aim to promote peace and dialogue among young people in Manipur.

Although the study primarily relies on secondary data, it provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with education in conflict-affected regions.

6. Key Arguments Presented in the Article

The article presents several arguments supporting the prioritization of education as a peacebuilding strategy.

Education Reduces the Risk of Violence

One of the central arguments is that education can reduce the likelihood of youth involvement in violent movements. Young people who have access to quality education are more likely to pursue careers, engage in civic activities, and contribute positively to society (Davies, 2010).

Schools Promote Social Integration

Schools bring together students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. These interactions allow students to learn about different perspectives and develop respect for diversity. Such experiences can reduce prejudice and foster cooperation among communities.

Education Supports Psychological Recovery

Children exposed to conflict often experience emotional trauma. Schools can provide supportive environments where students receive counselling, mentorship, and social support. These resources help students recover from trauma and rebuild confidence.

Youth as Future Peacemakers

The article emphasizes that young people have the potential to become leaders in peacebuilding efforts. By equipping students with knowledge and leadership skills, education can prepare them to address conflicts constructively.

7. Critical Evaluation of the Article

While the article provides valuable insights, it is important to critically examine its strengths and limitations.

Strengths

One of the main strengths of the article is its focus on a region that receives limited attention in global academic discussions. By highlighting the challenges faced by students and educators in Manipur, the study contributes to broader debates on education and conflict.

Another strength is the article's interdisciplinary approach. By integrating perspectives from education, sociology, and peace studies, the authors provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The article also offers practical recommendations that can guide policymakers and educational institutions in strengthening education systems in conflict zones.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, the article has certain limitations. The study relies primarily on qualitative analysis and secondary sources. Including primary data such as interviews with students, teachers, and community leaders could have strengthened the findings.

Additionally, the article could provide more detailed evaluation of specific peace education programs implemented in the region.

Nevertheless, the study provides an important foundation for future research on education and peacebuilding in Manipur.

8. Policy Implications

The findings of the article have several implications for education policy.

First, governments should prioritize rebuilding and maintaining educational infrastructure in conflict-affected areas. Safe and well-equipped schools are essential for ensuring uninterrupted learning.

Second, educational curricula should incorporate peace education and conflict resolution training. These programs can help students develop skills for managing disagreements peacefully.

Third, teachers should receive training in trauma-informed education so they can support students who have experienced violence or displacement.

Finally, special initiatives should be developed to support displaced children and ensure that they continue their education despite disruptions.

Investing in these initiatives can help transform schools into centres for community dialogue and reconciliation.

9. Role of Community and Civil Society

The article also highlights the role of communities and civil society organizations in supporting education and peacebuilding efforts. Local organizations often have a deep understanding of community dynamics and can facilitate dialogue between different groups.

Community involvement in educational initiatives can help build trust and strengthen social cohesion. For example, youth programs, cultural exchanges, and community workshops can encourage cooperation among different ethnic communities.

Civil society organizations can also collaborate with schools to provide resources, training, and support services for students and teachers.

10. Conclusion

The article “*Pencils over Guns: Prioritizing Schooling for Manipur’s Next Generation of Peacemakers*” emphasizes the transformative potential of education in conflict-affected societies. In regions like Manipur, where violence has disrupted social and economic life, investing in education is essential for building a peaceful and prosperous future.

Education provides young people with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to address conflicts constructively. By promoting empathy, dialogue, and critical thinking, schools can nurture a generation capable of overcoming divisions and fostering social harmony.

While education alone cannot eliminate conflict, it plays a crucial role in addressing its underlying causes and preventing future violence. Policymakers, educators, and community leaders must therefore work together to ensure that all children have access to safe and quality education.

Choosing pencils over guns represents a commitment to peace, knowledge, and hope. Through sustained investments in education, societies can empower young people to become the next generation of peacemakers.

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