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Teaching Peace in Turbulent Times: Exploring Pakistani Teachers' Strategies for Peace Education amid Sectarian Conflict

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Abstract

This study explores the inclusion of teachers in peace education strategies and measures how they interpret sectarianism within their classrooms as a category of teaching experience about promoting peacemaking approaches concerning new state school syllabi and national textbook curricula. This research reviews relevant national and international literature through a critical lens. It analyses it using hermeneutics, providing an in-depth insight into the strategies teachers successfully applied to integrate peace education into their curricular activities. Obstacles faced by educators, including a lack of resources and training, as well as societal attitudes that impact the effective acceptance of education for peace, are explored in this research. This study highlights how nurturing school cultures and strong curriculum delivery guidelines are crucial for the advancement of peace education initiatives. This work is based on existing knowledge and provides recommendations for educationalists, policymakers, and practitioners in Pakistan about peace-ways within an institution. This evidence highlights the importance of developing the capacities of teachers so that they can promote peacebuilding more effectively and therefore lay a foundation for a peaceful society based on social justice.

Keywords: Peace Education, Conflict Resolution, Teachers' Practices, Interpret Sectarianism, National and International Literature.



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Introduction

In the current global setting, promoting peace education is a necessary undertaking in educational systems across the world. This is because it fundamentally rests on the foundations of empathy, comprehension, and conflict resolution. By cultivating peace education, we can empower future generations to navigate various viewpoints, settle disputes, and advocate for fair and inclusive societies (Purwanto et al., 2023). The United Nations has highlighted the significance of peace education. According to an article in United Nations General Assembly resolution 23/243 of 1999, peace education can support a variety of beliefs, customs, behaviors, and lifestyles based on respect for human life; advancing nonviolence by dialogue and collaboration; promoting fundamental liberties and all human rights; fairness, equality, broad-mindedness, unity, cultural cooperation, cultural diversity, and fostering dialogue and comprehension throughout societal levels and between countries.

This study investigates the roles of teachers in Pakistan who contribute to promoting peace education by addressing sectarianism. Sectarianism is a conflict between two different religious and ethnic groups, which leaves very little space for peace teaching (Abbas Jafri, 2022). In this study, the researcher highlighted how teachers negotiate these conflicts in their classrooms. Intrinsically, the idea is that the students can learn about peace together, create a friendly environment, and accept everyone's opinion. The researcher explored a follow-up to this, examining the techniques used, and aimed not only to provide information on how peace endeavours were being taught around religious and ethnic divide zones, but also to offer some insights into using them within the context.

This study provides a deeper understanding of the role of teachers as agents of change in promoting peace education within a complex political landscape. Teachers play a crucial role in teaching peace in schools. While they are already educators, teachers can be important elements in ensuring that the teacher is the home of peace (Tandon, 2014; Ardizzone, 2001; Parmar, 2014).

While the study of peace education and teacher practices is not new, the specific focus is on exploring teacher practices in promoting peace education. Within the Pakistani context, the present study filled a noticeable gap in the literature. Existing research in this area has often been fragmented, with limited attention paid to the viewpoints and experiences of teachers in Pakistani classrooms (Khan, 2017).

Research Questions

1. How do Pakistani teachers conceptualize and define peace education within the context of ongoing sectarian conflict?
2. What pedagogical strategies and classroom practices are documented in the literature as being used by Pakistani teachers to promote peace in sectarianly divided communities?
3. How do teachers' lived experiences and socio-cultural contexts influence their approaches to peace education in turbulent, conflict-affected environments?

Literature Review

Peace education is the discovery of new skills to live in harmony with one another. It fosters the acquisition of those skills and values required to prevent conflicts, and resolve problems peacefully without violence, and also contributes generation to generation to a peaceful environment in all spheres of society from local to global (Salomon, 2006; Kester et al., 2019). This encompasses various educational curricula and programs that can be employed to foster a culture of peace by

educational initiatives (Snauwaert, 2011). For this, the researcher reviewed the literature and articles related to peace education from different angles, including how it is being practised as a teacher's teaching practices in Pakistan. This study considers the landscape of peace education. It explores the nature of peace education, including its fundamental concepts and theories, and examines why educating for peace is important. The study also investigates how teachers can create an environment that helps people cope with peace, as well as the specific approaches they take (peace pedagogies). This review aims to provide a better insight into the functioning and impact of peace education in Pakistan by looking at these areas closely.

Peace education has been a part of human history for centuries, with its roots dating back to ancient Greece. Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle emphasised the importance of peace and development in their theories (Harris & Morrison, 2003). In the 17th century, Comenius argued that universal knowledge was necessary for achieving peace (Harris & Morrison, 2003). Following the devastation caused by World Wars I and II, peace activists initiated efforts to establish a peaceful world. As a result, peace societies were formed in Europe and America (Harris & Morrison, 2003). The most significant development in peace education was the emergence of Montessori, who created a new educational system. Montessori advocated for a flexible and dynamic curriculum (Montessori, 1940/1998) and believed that constructing peace required an education that would foster love for others, remove compulsory restrictions, and free the child's spirit (Harris & Morrison, 2003).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is the primary agency within the United Nations system, responsible for establishing international educational policies. The Preamble of UNESCO's Constitution emphasises the organisation's purpose of fostering a culture of peace by promoting peaceful minds and defences against war. The works of Read (1949/1999) highlight the importance of a coordinated effort between art and peace education to promote peace through image-based educational processes (Harris, 2004).

Additionally, Read stressed the need to develop creativity among individuals to protect humanity from the devastating effects of war. As a result of civil society movements and the contributions of educationists, peace education has become a significant focus in various countries around the world. The first academic peace studies program in the United States was established at Manchester College in Indiana in 1948, according to Harris (2004). The significance of peace education has consistently been emphasised in UNESCO's regular issuance of documents. During the 1990s, the United Nations promoted a culture of peace by initiating peace programs such as the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World.

UNESCO's programs on education for tolerance include numerous commitments to peace education. The 1995 UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance and the 1996 United Nations General Assembly Follow-up to the United Nations Year for Tolerance emphasise that tolerance is a crucial component of peace. The UNESCO document's Article 1 describes tolerance as the virtue that enables peace and contributes to replacing a culture of violence with a culture of peace. Article 4 of the UNESCO document commits to enhancing teacher training, curricula, textbooks, lessons, and educational materials to produce responsible citizens who value freedom, respect human dignity and differences, and resolve conflicts non-violently (Smith et al., 2016).

(Smith et al., 2016) mentioned that there are many founding figures in peace education, which became a recognised field of study in the 1960s. They also helped expand this field into areas like disarmament, sustainable development, and human rights. Three well-known peace educators

(Morrison, 2008; Reardon, 2004; Harris, 2004) discussed the dangers of nuclear war in their books. Their work greatly influenced peace studies, especially when environmental education was included. Those focusing on the environmental side of peace education work to raise awareness about environmental issues. They also teach people to use resources wisely and provide them with tools to support environmental sustainability, according to Verhagen (2012). In recent years, peace education has gained greater recognition in international law, particularly in United Nations documents and declarations. This is evident in the increasing explicitness of international declarations on peace education. Furthermore, peace education is now widely acknowledged as a professional field, with the Peace Education Commission being recognised as one of the Commissions of the International Peace Research Association. It is also noteworthy that articles on peace education are now frequently published in educational journals, and there is even a specialised scholarly journal, the *International Journal of Peace Education*, dedicated to the subject (Smith et al., 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory is another important theory in this regard. It is a theory of psychologist Albert Bandura, which explains how people learn from one another simply by observing social behaviour (Gerstein et al., 2021). For example, in peace education, students might learn to act peacefully by observing others who do so. If teachers and community leaders are showing them to engage each other in cool, healthy ways, students will probably adopt these behaviours as well. In this way, an atmosphere of peace can be propagated by living examples. However, there is no real module design in peace education, such as that of special models. One of the well-known models is the Comprehensive Peace Education Model (Misra, 2020).

This model involves teaching about the roots of conflict, human rights, social justice promotion, and empathy with respect for others. Studying in these areas, the course seeks to provide students with a comprehensive view of peace and how it can be applied to their lives (Santoso & Khisbiyah, 2021). These theories and models underpin peace education programs that help to set the direction for how peace can be taught and learned in different parts of the world (Tanyel & Kıralp, 2021). Transformative Pedagogies based on the studies developed by Paulo Freire have as their centre the enhancement of voices and the preparation for critical reading that allows us to act upon our social environment. Critical consciousness, as conceived by Jackson (2007), is the proliferation of socio social concerns and development with the need for people's involvement in addressing such issues in groups. This pedagogy is directly connected to peace education as it promotes student learning leading up to active citizenship in the construction of a more just and stable society.

There are numerous approaches used in peace education that help the appropriate teaching methods to become more credible, where students are capable of critical thinking and empathy, and come out of their shell while creating a sense of social responsibility (Dutta et al., 2016). There are three primary peace education pedagogical paradigms in the literature reviewed: participatory learning, transformative pedagogy, and experiential learning.

Participatory learning in the peace education model for pedagogy stresses a more active participative engagement and collaboration among students in order to create an environment where they can examine and analyse the dynamics of conflict and resolution. A post-conflict situation is a challenge or an opportunity for using this method, but certainly, with the proper introduction related to peace education, it can lead to success (Beigi, 2013).

However, Peace education in schools applies transformative pedagogy through the development of critical reflection skills that enable students to identify and address the root causes or complicities associated with conflict and peacebuilding. This educational approach represents a move away from the conservative didactic nature of teaching, towards a more participatory and student-centred approach, with disruption and critical reflection being central to learning (Jenkins, 2008). These ideas suggest, thus, that a pedagogy should be built on humanist, collectivist, and commonality of purpose principles in promoting knowledge construction among teachers and students.

Although there is widespread endorsement for transformative pedagogy in promoting student learning and development, the literature includes signs that this understanding of praxis has not been fully actualised (Kelly & Kelly, 2018). Although there is an agreed need for transformative pedagogies, peace education remains taught inadequately in schools due to a lack of preparedness among teachers. There is much to be in favour of with transformative pedagogy as an approach for peace education in schools by promoting decolonised teaching and learning, but also because it looks at equipping receivers with the conditions they need to build lasting peace. However, the achievement of its potential depends on overcoming current deficiencies in teacher training and curriculum (Gounari, 2012). More research is needed in these areas to ensure that peace education programs are effective and transformative of educational goals for a culture of peace.

In addition, experiential learning is an important pedagogical approach to teaching peace education, aiming to promote students' active acquisition of knowledge, skills, and direct experiences through experiencing situations or environments. This approach is moreover concerning for Pakistan, whereby the educational sectors face challenges associated with violence, and therefore, peacefulness is of the utmost priority (Hoti & Ahmed, 2016). As Cromwell (2019) highlights, experiential learning in peace education can include engaging students to participate in role-playing, community service, and dialogue where they can explore the meanings of peace as well as conflict resolution through an interactive approach.

Research Methodology

The study employs a non-empirical research method, focusing on the analysis of existing literature and theoretical perspectives. The researcher addressed this question through a traditional literature review, supplemented by a hermeneutic analysis technique. This method is based on reviewing the literature to analyse the effectiveness, difficulties, and contextual appropriateness of peace education strategies in a Pakistani context. The purpose of this methodology was to deliver a detailed account and critical examination that would guide future avenues regarding teaching practices carried out in Pakistani institutions to promote peace education.

The traditional literature review was conducted for said study. Traditional review is less structured and flexible. It does not have any prescribed methodological requirements. This flexibility allows researchers to quickly combine, aggregate, and interpret all related studies, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the research topic in a comparatively shorter time frame. (Blumberg et al, 2005; Lau & Kuziemy, 2017). In such a context, the use of desk-based systematic review enables the synthesis of knowledge through different sources, e.g., peer-reviewed journal articles and books; policy papers, as well as curriculum guidelines, which are combined to build an overall picture (Cassell & Nadin, 2008). This is most powerful when there may be cases where access cannot or should not be enabled for field settings and populations

After conducting a search using the keywords, the results yielded 24 articles from Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar. By comparing the results from these three search engines, eight duplicate articles were identified, leaving a total of sixteen articles. All of these sixteen articles were available in full-text format. Each of the 16 articles was thoroughly screened for relevance to the study's research topic and research question, which was the introduction of Peace Education, encompassing a total of sixteen articles that were included in the current study for the review of literature.

The hermeneutics technique was used to analyse the text (research articles) because the interpretive nature of hermeneutics provides the flexibility to explore different layers of meaning within the literature. Hermeneutics is especially suitable in the study of practices of teachers for the enhancement of peace education in the Pakistani context, because the knowledge it seeks is in the subjectively experienced, constructed meanings of the teachers' lived worlds. Hermeneutics emphasises comprehending these contexts to interpret texts and practices accurately. Moreover, this method provides a holistic understanding of various influences on peace education (Debesay et al., 2008).

This methodology allowed for the examination of the teachers' practices in supporting peace education through cycles of reading, interpreting, and re-reading of the data, and themes critical to this research emerged. In the current study, the hermeneutic circle is vital in attaining theoretical and conceptual understanding. This technique contains an iterative procedure where understanding is continually advanced over a dialectical movement between parts and the whole. Through continually reading and interpreting, again and again, reading and interpreting teachers' practices for the promotion of peace education, the hermeneutic circle confirms that understandings are not out of the way but unified, leading to a holistic understanding.

This technique is mainly valued in the context of Pakistani schools as it permits an in-depth understanding of how social, socio-cultural, and educational factors interrelate to impact the applicability and efficiency of peace education strategies. Thus, the hermeneutic circle facilitates a robust examination that not only answers how teachers integrate peace education but also addresses the extent to which these practices are relevant and effective in promoting peace within Pakistani schools. It also illuminates some of the difficulties they encountered and how they addressed them (Freeman, 2020), due to the concept of "open" and "rounded" understanding. The researcher then revisited the texts discussed earlier in light of this broader understanding. The researcher also carefully checked my arguments before adding them to reflect my latest understanding of the literature and related concepts.

Data Analysis

During analysis of the selected articles, specific insights struck the researcher as particularly impactful because they highlighted the profound disconnect between theoretical approaches to peace education and their practical application within Pakistani schools. This discrepancy is crucial as it underscores the urgent need for more contextually adapted strategies that resonate with the local educational landscape. The following table showed the key themes, summary of key themes and references of articles.

Table 1: Summary of Key Themes

S.No	Key Themes	Summary	References
01	Methods of Teachers how to practice peace Education	This comprised such methods as use of collaborative learning approaches, integration with the existing curricula, and extra-curricular activities through peace clubs or community service projects. Teachers were repeatedly urged to use the classroom experience as a way to encourage students' respect, empathy, and critical thinking.	(Sufi et al, 2020; Amber, 2021; Kilag et al., 2023).
02	School curriculum	School curriculum was a prominent recurring theme, as well as school culture . The role of curriculum mandates emerging from governmental authorities regarding peace education practices. Better peace education practices corresponded with schools in which this culture fairly pervaded the life and character of that school. Conversely, individuals working within the authoritarian environment of the school itself faced various obstacles to peace education implementation	(Amin, 2023; Sheikh & Akhter, 2023; Khan et al., 2023).
03	challenges and barriers for teachers	There was such a prominent theme of in the articles. Most of the articles acknowledged problems such as scarce resources, insufficient training, and public attitudes which were at times in conflict with the goals of peace education. Simply put, there were many circumstances surrounding these issues and teachers often had to tackle them single-handily which is why providing good institutional support for the same as well professional development opportunities are much needed. These challenges highlight the significance of preparing educators for peace education in an appropriate manner and establishing these key competencies	Amber (2021 ;(Sufi et al, 2020; Kilag et al., 2023).

The introductory passage imparted crucial information about the timing and reasoning behind the educators' relentless commitment to advancing peace education in Pakistan, despite encountering formidable barriers. Kilag et al (2021) observed how versatile and resourceful teachers are. According to Sufi et al (2020), these teachers often brainstorm innovative ways in which to

integrate peace lessons into their regular instruction. In one grade level, certain teachers work on storytelling and role play with a competition about peacemaking, where students can dialogue as the story character of their choice, dealing with conflict related to empathy. Amber (2021) mentioned that these techniques allow for more students to engage and actively participate in peace education, which can lead them to conceptualize what they are learning as essential and practical.

The analysis further provided a related theme of ***teacher training and professional development***. Sufi et al (2020) and Amber (2021) featured in their articles success stories with peace education, but they usually noted that specialized teacher training programs enabled these successes. These were the programs that used to facilitate teachers with such skills and insight, which proved very useful for the successful execution of peace education. This highlights the importance of ongoing professional development for reinforcing and deepening peace education efforts over time (Sufi et al, 2020).

In addition, Amin (2024) mentioned the ***support from school leadership*** was found as a key to successful peace education programs. According to Sheikh and Akhtar (2024), teachers felt more power and motivation to practice peace education in schools when the principals, heads, or higher authorities of their institutions actively supported peace initiatives. Khan et al (2023) therefore explored that it helps make the point that there also needs to be a more comprehensive peace education at schools involving not only teachers but the whole school community (Amin, 2023; Sheikh & Akhter, 2023).

The analysis ultimately provided an excellent summation of societal and cultural weaknesses in managing peace education. According to Rizwan and Asim (2023), the contexts that teachers worked and lived in largely contributed to any peace-building efforts, or lack thereof. In regions where social conflicts occurred frequently or in a context of deep-rooted norms resistant to change, teachers also faced additional barriers. At the same time, however, they also highlighted the urgent need for peace education. It became clear that it is crucial to create plans for understanding and resolving conflicts among community members. This analysis has shown that societal and cultural factors can impede but, importantly also drive the need for peace education efforts.

To sum up, the analysis of the articles under review revealed an intricate and ever-evolving landscape of peace education in Pakistan. However, it is teachers who are driving these efforts, and they employ a variety of strategies to overcome many challenges in order for students to find peace and understanding. These observations provide a strong springboard to dive further and more extensively into the data. As we further this research, more exploration of the particular practices and paths underlying peace education challenges and contexts is needed to inform our understanding as well as influence future educational policy and practice.

The following sub-research questions, under the umbrella of the main research questions, were framed after understanding.

- i. Were the programs and curricula implemented both pertinent and considerate to cultural and conflict-related issues?
- ii. What teaching methods and content were most effective in different contexts?
- iii. What are the differences and similarities between peace education initiatives in conventional schools and madrassas (educational institutions centered on Islamic teachings)?

Conclusion

The primary objective of peace education is to instil qualities such as love, compassion, trust, fairness, cooperation, and a profound respect for all forms of life. To achieve this goal, educators must cultivate a culture of peace within the school environment and serve as role models for their students. They should prioritise resolving any conflicts or issues that may arise through peaceful dialogue. In today's world, the significance of peace education has become more critical and relevant than ever before. Rather than being taught as a separate subject, it should be integrated into other subjects to promote peace-related content. Topics such as peace families, peace societies, UNO and UNESCO peace initiatives, as well as the work of organisations like the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Red Cross, Scouts, and Guides, should all be covered. The secondary school curriculum should include literature on the pioneers of peace education, Nobel Peace laureates, the consequences of war and conflicts, and some prominent global peace movements. The Pakistani government can demonstrate its dedication to promoting peace education by establishing peace clubs and self-defence training centers in all secondary schools across the country.

Recommendations

The main objective of this study was to determine the extent to which peace education methods are applicable in Pakistani schools.

Although there have been many peace education programs in place for over a decade, the curriculum is still restricted to subjects like interfaith harmony, basic conflict resolution, and the concept of peace in Islam. These programs have not addressed critical areas such as conflict analysis, negotiation, mediation, reconciliation, disarmament, environmental security, or overall human security. These topics are vital for discussions on peace and conflict resolution, not just in Pakistan but around the world.

Additionally, there are no evaluations that compare the understanding and importance of human rights in Islam with internationally acknowledged frameworks like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Typically, topics such as conflict resolution, tolerance, religious harmony, and human rights are considered Western values, which unfairly leads to the negative perception of peace education. Conversely, traditional religious leaders often criticise modern technology as a tool of the Western world that weakens Muslim culture and values, neglecting the benefits that scientific advancements have brought to humanity and overlooking the substantial Muslim tradition of science and learning that has significantly impacted modern science.

Experienced educators and trainers play a crucial role in providing both theoretical and practical knowledge in peace education programs. However, many programs, especially those offered at madrassas, overlook the importance of critical thinking, a skill that many trainers lack. Consequently, the dissemination of knowledge and skills in this field is limited. To guarantee the success of peace education, educators and trainers must have hands-on expertise in these topics. Furthermore, despite the rise in online and distance learning, the advantages of conventional in-person teaching should not be underestimated. Considering the growing number of internet users, organisations ought to create online peace education programs that use social media to reinforce learning consistently.

Virtual peace education has gained significant popularity worldwide, and many of the tools used in this area could be valuable for Pakistan. This includes not only the increased use of audiovisual materials but also more interactive resources that encourage both students and teachers to engage

with the theory and practice of peace education critically. Donors could be instrumental in testing this approach.

In conflict-affected areas, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), organisations often avoid disclosing that foreign entities fund them, as this information could lead to serious security risks. However, in other regions where organisations work with larger donors, they can openly share this information due to a strong relationship with their beneficiaries. These organisations often address a range of issues beyond peace education, such as livelihoods and health. They are supported by well-known donors like United Nations agencies and the European Union, which have a strong presence in Pakistan.

The effectiveness of NGOs in advancing peace education initiatives on a local level depends on various factors, such as their capacity to customise their efforts to the specific context and to establish strong connections within the community. Although internationally produced peace education resources that have undergone extensive research can be helpful, these resources must be modified to address local needs. Unfortunately, many projects have proven unsuccessful due to a lack of relevance to the local context, limited funds, capacity, and donor interest. To ensure the sustainability of their programs, organisations working in the peace education field must develop a long-term strategy that allows them to continue even when external funding is no longer available. Even though some organisations may be hesitant to promote peace education due to the perception of pushing a Western agenda or a lack of capacity to monitor and document their efforts systematically, they must develop the necessary skills to create a knowledge base from which they can learn and educate the broader public about peace education.

Researchers at universities like the National Defence University and Peshawar Campus Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad offer courses on peace education, both directly and indirectly. These courses can provide valuable insights for NGOs, schools, and madrassas, which are institutions that focus on Islamic teachings. The government, at both the federal and provincial levels, should acknowledge the importance of peace education by assisting donors and local partners in launching related projects. One way to do this is by creating a group of international and local non-governmental organisations under the federal and provincial education ministries. Additionally, NGOs should be supported in their efforts to start projects in areas like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where security can be a concern. Curriculum reforms can also be developed and implemented to make peace education an essential part of the existing syllabus.

Stakeholders involved in collaborating with madrassas (the education system refers to a form of religious education centred on Islamic teachings, usually offered in institutions known as Madrassas) need to exercise particular caution. They must assume responsibility for their participation in madrassa projects (the education system refers to a form of religious education centred on Islamic teachings, usually offered in institutions known as Madrassas). Recognising the constraints of the framework within which the madrassa (a form of religious education centred on Islamic teachings, usually offered in institutions known as Madrassas) is likely to take part in a peace education program is vital. For instance, organisations report that indirect peace education models (such as teacher training) may take longer to yield results, but they are more effective. Outsourcing programs should be avoided because madrassas (a form of religious education centred on Islamic teachings, usually offered in institutions known as Madrassas) have strong connections among their graduates. To ensure that peace education concepts and pedagogies are integrated into the madrassa (the education system refers to a form of religious education centred on Islamic

teachings, usually offered in institutions known as Madrassas) administration's training material, program guidelines should be developed.

Furthermore, it is essential to concentrate on the role of women who teach or study at madrassas (the education system refers to a form of religious education centred on Islamic teachings, usually offered in institutions known as Madrassas) in order to counter radicalisation in this demographic. This resource enabled partner organisations, such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and the Paiman Alumni Trust, as well as other agencies, to share content that they have already created and implemented in various locations, including Pakistan. It is crucial to closely monitor peace education projects and ensure that the content is culturally relevant and adheres to international peace education standards. A committee of experts could be formed to evaluate the program content before it is delivered, paying equal attention to the quality of the training materials and the methods used to train teachers.

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Conflict of Interest

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