

# **Effects of Peace Education on The Holistic Development of Early Years Learners of Gilgit-Baltistan Pakistan**

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**Abstract:** There is growing research evidence to support the view that the early years greatly influence the overall development of early learners. This study is a pioneer, intended to explore the effects of peace education on the overall development of early years learners in the remote context of Gilgit Baltistan (GB), Pakistan. The study employs qualitative methodology to gain an in-depth understanding of the issue. For data, interviews, observations, and field notes were collected. The research findings revealed that peace education positively contributes to the holistic development of early years learners and serves as a window of opportunity to inspire children's future lives positively. The study also found that teachers and parents needed training to undertake peaceful interventions in the learning environment, playgrounds, and home settings. Hence, the study recommends more extensive research to gain further in-depth insights and to understand the broader impact of peace education on the whole life of early years learners of GB.

**Keywords:** Peace education, Young learners, Holistic development, Sensitive care, Peace pedagogy

## **INTRODUCTION**

A growing body of scientific evidence insists that the early years of life are critical for the holistic development of young children and have enormous consequences for them in later years. In the sensitive early years all-round development occurs, and children learn increasingly complex behaviors and skills that have long-lasting effects. The universal emphasis on educating the 'whole child', supporting a child in all developmental domains, including cognitive, physical, language, social and emotional (Alfonso S.M., 2014), results from such a realization. Alfonso argues that "the general holistic approach to early childhood education seems to create an open door to the integration of peace education within the early years of childhood" (page 167). Current studies have also suggested that early childhood is the ideal period for developing peaceful interactions among peers, peace-making skills and the cognitive capacity to understand

themselves and others and learn and acquire social skills and capabilities (Brauneis, 2019). Likewise, Chopra (2017) argued that healthy social skills are the core of peace-building, including emotional regulation, critical thinking, and behavior regulation, all developed in early childhood.

Alfonso (2014) insists on the effects of peace education on the holistic development of young children. He suggests that “the early years are considered “prime time” for brain development that can affect a child’s social capacities, critical to preconditions necessary for peace” (p.170). Similarly, he says, “research shows that brain development that takes place prenatally and in the first years of life is more rapid and extensive than any other time in a man’s life. It is also much more vulnerable to environmental influence than previously suspected and the influence of early environment on brain development is long lasting” (Nurture, p.5). Indeed, it is a critical time of life in which children form habits, recognize differences, and build emotional ties through social relationships and day-to-day interactions in homes and schools. Therefore, schools are encouraged to begin peace education in the early years of children, which is when brain architecture develops most rapidly.

Alfonso (2014) further argues that it was found that “both quality of care and security of attachment affect children’s later capacity for empathy, emotional regulation, and behavioral control” (p.170). If peace education is integrated in early childhood settings, it can be extremely instrumental in building a child’s positive experiences and capacities for peace such as empathy, emotional regulation, and behavioral control. Indeed, these skills can lay down the building blocks for future learners. From this perspective, one can understand the necessity of teaching early years learners the art of living together in mutual respect, justice, love and peace. Through peace education, we can promote the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed to bring about behavioural changes that will enable children to prevent conflict and violence and develop a sense of care and love for earth and humanity.

In addition, considering the sensitivity of early years life, Mondal (2017) claims that “a child’s mind is soft clay which can be moulded to any desired shape. Thus, the early stage is the correct time to impart value inculcation into our system so that the right impressions formed in the child’s mind will guide him throughout his life based on noble principles” (p.102). This demands dire attention on the development of peace education in early childhood classrooms. Children are more at risk of developing serious social, emotional, and mental problems at their early ages, which can worsen over time if they do not get any help. Early intervention of holistic development can save a child from long-term outcomes such as school failure, peer rejection and behavioral problems.

Hence, it is vital to acknowledge the role of early peace education in the holistic development of children and incorporate peace education programmes in early childhood education. Given the

prevailing situation in the country, we need deliberated efforts to tailor peace education programmes, so that we can nurture a sense of peace and harmony among youth. This paper explores the effects of the peace education component on the holistic development of early years learners in school and natural settings.

## **Rationale**

Many early learners experience severe disruptions in their lives, and it is well known that their families find it challenging to provide the sensitive care and love that young child need to thrive. Young children who grow up in unstable environments face abuse, neglect, and other stresses and are less likely to build trusting and loving relationships. It often leads to low self-esteem and long-term psycho-social and behavioral problems in them (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2007). Evans (1996) and Ilfeld (1996) have pointed out that children should learn peace-making skills in early childhood but are often introduced to them too late in life. Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi (2001) has said that if we want to build peace in this world, we should start with children, and start very early. Because at age five and six children are determined to make sense of the world. Adults have a crucial role in supporting this process through scaffolding, modelling, and challenging (Wood et al. 1976, Vygotsky 1978). At this crucial stage, peace development programmes can be instrumental in boosting pro-social behavior and social-emotional skills such as cooperation, empathy, the capacity to see other perspectives, and the ability to relate to others peacefully.

Importantly, peace education in the early years has a significant impact. Therefore, it was imperative to conduct a research study to find the potential effects of peace education on the holistic development of young children in the context of Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) region. This study will possibly help stakeholders in this region become aware of the effects of peace education on early years learners and teacher's efforts, and their expertise to teach peace concepts to the students. In this way, we will help lay the building blocks for our future peace leaders.

## **Significance of the Study**

Preschools are the institutions where, for the first time, children receive education outside their families. They are places where children interact and play with other children, develop their competencies and personalities. The daily routines and rituals in such places are important for children to gain a sense of orientation and ownership. These places are flexible, inclusive and adaptable to children's needs and requirements. Through various interactions with peers, adults and the environment, children learn about themselves, their abilities and feelings. And when children enter early childhood classes, they try to interact with peers and adults, which offers an excellent opportunity for them to enhance trust and confidence. Therefore, initiating a peace education approach will best prepare children to success throughout of their life. Hence, there is

a need to train the young generation on peacemaking skills to make a peaceful world for a better tomorrow. Therefore, this study will be significant to educational leaders and policy makers to understand the positive effects of peace education for the development of young children. It will also be fruitful to integrate peace education in their educational systems. This study will also help early years learners to boost their social skills to create harmony and collegiality among the people of GB.

### **Research Question**

What is the effect of peace education on the holistic development of early years learners in the context of Gilgit- Baltistan, Pakistan?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Peace Education**

Peace education has been defined differently in different contexts. Generally, it includes all the formal and informal actions that aim at attitudinal changes by imparting knowledge, skills, and attitudes. UNESCO (2008) defined ‘peace education’ as teaching and providing learners with knowledge, skills, and information to enthusiastically promote and cultivate a culture of peace.

More specifically, peace education teaches people to respect themselves and others. Ajala (2003) defines ‘peace education’ as the type of education that influences learners with all the norms, values and attitudes that can create a supportive environment in human life. Similarly, Reardon (2001) classifies ‘peace education’ as education for peace, education about peace and peace knowledge. According to him, education for peace is concerned with creating necessary pre-conditions for peace, helping to develop skills and knowledge necessary for peaceful interactions and endeavors. Education about peace teaches peaceful conditions required for peace and peace knowledge includes peace research, peace studies and peace education.

Through peace education we can create harmony and tolerance among individuals in a society. Margarita and Kolegija (2019) say that peace education prevents the emergence of conflicts and creates conditions and situations for peace in the world. Peace education makes us aware of resolving the conflicts in agreeable manners and encourages us to accept the problems as learning opportunities for future development.

#### **Early childhood/ early year age and definition**

UNESCO (2017) defines *early childhood* as the period from birth to eight years old, a time of remarkable growth with brain development at its peak. The environment and the people surrounding them influence children very much during this stage. Similarly, the early years from birth to five years, is the foundation stage for learning and development of children. Therefore, in this research study, the age group taken into consideration is from three to eight years because public schools in GB give admissions only to children from age three years and above.

### **Significance of peace education during early years**

The future of any nation or society depends on its ability to foster the advancement and well-being of its succeeding generation, because it is today's children who will become tomorrow's citizens. Investing and nurturing the younger generation means investing in future productivity and responsible citizenship (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2007). Therefore, displaying lasting peace in education was the vision and ambition of Montessori. To be sure, ideally peace education should begin with the youngest children (Hinitz, & Stomfay-Stitz, 1998). Chopra (2017) reveals that the healthy social skills at the core of peace building, including emotional regulations, critical thinking, and behavior regulation, all develop during early childhood. It is found that introducing peace education in the early years can be extremely influential in building a child's later capacities for peace and behavioural control. Therefore, the critical early years should be used as a fertile period to lay the building blocks of future peace leaders. Brauneis (2019) agreed that early childhood is the optimal time to acquire foundational values and peace-making skills. Alfonso (2018) also states that peace education in early childhood has the strong potential to make a significant and lasting impact. Hence, it is necessary to look at early childhood's potential role in contributing to the construction of sustainable peace among early years learners.

### **Peace Pedagogies for the Early Years Settings**

Teachers of early years children have the most critical and demanding of educational jobs. Coulbeck (2005) reports that teachers of early years children require a variety of interactions with children in a complex social setting in which the teacher seeks to motivate the children, organize activities, present information, and provide security within which the child may learn. Hence, teachers of early learners need to play a significant role in the teaching and learning process for the proper upbringing of children. Therefore, they need to have proper knowledge and understanding of the teaching and learning process, child development and foundation curriculum that stimulate learning, enable the children to acquire skills and inculcate desirable attitudes in them. Apart from that, the teacher needs to apply the right choice of strategies, which enable children to learn at an optimum pace, grow and develop confidently while reach for the targets set before them.

It seems that child-centered and participatory learning methods such as circle time, story time and poem time, are well-suited for peace education. Through listening to the stories, children can explore the issues and problems that are important to them and help make sense and develop creative ways of responding to the world around them. In this connection, Lasi, Jiwan, Batool, Dhanani & Shrestha (2017) argue that stories and real-life examples are the best way to promote peace among children. Thus, collaborative, and participatory approaches are required to develop peace in the learners. Such approaches empower students to take responsibility for their own growth and achievement.

### **Potential effect of peace education on the holistic development of young children**

Research has shown that peace education can positively impact the social, critical and emotional skills of early years learners, influence their future behaviour and foster more peaceful communities. A study by Vestal and Jones (2004) showed that preschoolers gained skills to solve interpersonal conflicts. This is supported by Ferber (2018) who says, “when peace education is applied to early childhood educational settings, children’s greatest potential is recognized, they are provided with autonomy and decision-making within their classroom, and they are viewed as active agents of social change” (p.8). The literature mentioned above highlights the significance of peace education and the potential effects of incorporating peace education on the holistic development of early years learners. It also reveals various opportunities to integrate peace education in educational settings. The literature also talks about the critical nature of the early childhood period in promoting the skills and structures for a positive and sustainable peace that enable children to become agents of change in building peace in their societies and around the world.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative approach to understand the effect of peace education on the holistic development of early years learners of Gilgit-Baltistan. As the study intends to explore the effect of peace education on the development of young children in an early childhood classroom, it required an in-depth investigation of current practices of child development. Therefore, the case study approach was adopted within the qualitative paradigm in this small-scale study. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and field notes. Classroom observations primarily focused on children’s attitude, understanding, and skills toward pro-social behavior to determine the effects of peace education. Through purposeful sampling procedure, four government school teachers from two districts of GB with equal gender ratio (02 male: 02 female) and two head teachers (1male:1female) were selected as the participants of the study. The ratios of participants (gender and count) were kept same in both the districts.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

For the analysis of the data relevant themes were identified and analyzed to investigate the effects of peace education on the holistic development of young children.

## **DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS**

### **Teachers and headteachers understanding on Peace Education.**

The data analysis shows that teachers and headteachers of both the districts have a common understanding of the concept of peace education. Teachers endorsed peace education as a physical, intellectual, emotional, and social developmental tool for children of all ages. As one of the female teachers from district A said that:

“Peace education is holistic development of children, which includes the physical, emotional, intellectual, and social growth of children. It is based on philosophy that teaches love, care, trust, fairness, cooperation, and respect for the human, family, and all life on our beautiful planet. (Interview, 20/06/2021).

During observation, the teacher made groups and give tasks to complete in groups. However, she was not aware of the rules of making groups. Some children took all the materials and were not sharing them with others. It seemed that the teacher was aware of peace education but was not implementing it in the classroom.

Male Head teacher from District A.His views on peace education (in his words):

Peace education is very much connected with the holistic development of a child. If we teach the children how

to understand each other, accept each other’s concerns, and issues, then they will be able to be more tolerant and

friendlier and open to each other (Interview, 20/06/2021).

For instance, one of the head teachers was writing the science exercise questions and answers on board in Grade One. When a student responded to one of the questions, he said, “Don’t teach me; just write down whatever has been written on the board” (Observation 21/06/2021). The headteachers himself was neither tolerant students, nor encouraged learners to write independently. A peaceful environment was lacking inside and outside the classroom. Students were shouting at each other while they were in class.

Similarly, headteacher from District B said that that “definitely, peace education develops individual holistically. If this happens from a very young age, they get a peaceful environment and will become peaceful humans and peace makers” (Interview, 22/06/2021). However, he used harsh words in practice while teaching the early years students in a multigrade situation. For instance, he said, “Why did you not bringing your own stationery? Am I your servant to fetch your stationery? The teacher hit the child on his back for not bringing the English notebook. (Observation 23/06/2021)

On the other side, teachers from District A stated that there is no such phrase in Pakistan National curriculum. According to them, peace means an environment where students live together. Their way of living is giving space to each other and giving mutual help by understanding each other's ideas.

A female teacher from District B said:

Peace education is a modern concept of education. It focusses on the upbringing of children to make them civilized individuals for society. (It is) teaching students how to live peacefully with others, without fighting and without creating any disturbance. So, peace education means providing peaceful, loving and constructive environment so that the child could learn good actions. For example, there should not be quarrelling, fighting, cursing one another at home but there must be love, good dialogues.(Interview, 22/06/2021).

However, the teacher was found teasing two children who were below average in their studies and blaming their parents for not giving attention to their children. (Observation 23/06/2021)

The above discussion shows that teachers and headteachers in both the districts have some understanding about the need for peace education for the holistic development of early years learners but were not utilizing that understanding in their settings.

### **Significance of peace education during early years**

Teachers perceive peace education as an important aspect of children's holistic development. According to the teachers in both districts, peace education is very important for children to become effective citizens. The teachers further said that it helps students accept and formulate their attitude towards other people and the community. Moreover, they thought that it helps children grow emotionally. District A's female teacher argued that "we do not have such practice in our school, but I think peace education helps students have a mutual understanding and develop common goals as a future community" Interview, 22/06/2021). Similarly, the teachers said it also helps students develop respect and good attitude towards other communities, people, and individuals. The headteacher in District A thinks that "peace education is important during early years because it is the primary pillar for preventing armed conflicts and violence for saving lives and freeing up limited resources for social needs"(Interview, 20/06/2021). He further suggested that including peace education in early childhood experiences can be highly influential in building a child's later capacities for peace, such as empathy, emotional regulation and behavioral control, which are essential elements.

However, the actual situation was different as the teachers also punished students and used harsh words. Non-cooperation among teachers and students and a negative environment prevailed in both the districts (Observation 21/06/2021).

### **Peace Approaches for early years settings.**



The findings showed that the teachers and headteachers in both the districts were familiar with different peace approaches but were not implementing them in the classrooms. According to the male teacher from District A, “we teach students to respect others, their gender and beliefs. We teach them that they are equal in front of God and there is nothing that makes them unique or special”(Interview, 20/06/2021)

Another headteacher from District B responded:

There are some important methods for creating peace in the lives of young children. They are, being a role model for kindness, showing empathy, creating a democratic space, using project-based learning, encouraging collaboration in diverse groups, discussing controversial issues and integrating service- learning (Interview, 22/06/2021).

A female teacher from District A further suggested that “we need to use different strategies which make our students realize that peace is vital for our future. We need to create acceptance to progress through group work and interactions” (Interview, 20/06/2021)”. Similarly, a male headteacher from District B noted that various cooperative learning strategies and celebration of occasions could be instrumental in furthering peace education.

I think teachers can organize different co-curricular activities and programmes, such as celebrating world Peace Day, making posters, arranging walks and seminars for the children. They should use different discussion methods, pair work and other cooperative learning strategies, which helps them understand and respect each other (Interview, 22/06/2021).

A headteacher from District A maintained, “giving awareness to parents is very important to create peace in the community” (Interview, 20/06/2021). Pictures of parent-teacher awareness sessions displayed in the corridor showed this was a good thing and that they had initiated work (Observation 21/06/2021).

A female teacher from District A shared almost similar thoughts:

The most important thing for a teacher is acting as a role model by maintaining a positive attitude and contributing and maintaining peace in young minds by creating a classroom model of a peace zone. We can also implement conflict resolution skills such as taking turns and listening skills and teach peace lessons by asking students to do role play (Interview, 20/06/2021).

The discussions above confirm that teachers in both districts understand different strategies to incorporate peace initiatives in the classrooms. However, such a culture and its application were missing in the classrooms.

### **Potential effect of peace education in the holistic development of young children**

The research data showed that the participants have good insight that peace education significantly impacts the holistic development of early years learners. According to the female teacher of District A:

We can integrate peace education into our everyday lessons by adding activities and instructions related to

peace education. For example, while teaching social skills, we can integrate activities on sympathy and

respect for others, (Interview, 20/06/2021).

However, we found that almost all activities were teacher-centered during our observation. For instance, in the selection of activity materials, while encouraging children to memorize, in not allowing them to use their own will, in the teachers talking ninety per cent of the time and not allowing students to talk and so on (Observation, 21/06/2021).

The following comment was made by the headteacher of District A. He said: “Peace education is essential for transformation. It cultivates the knowledge base, skills, attitudes, and values that transform people (Interview, 20/06/2021).

While sharing the effects of peace education on holistic development of early years learners, a headteachers from District B said:

Peace education shapes children’s attitudes toward healthy and positive activities, and develops the attitude of sharing and caring, enabling them to differentiate between right and wrong. They can also know the

values, norms, customs and enhance their essence of self-responsibilities in their daily practice in society.

(Interview, 22/06/2021).

Interestingly, the children of District B were sharing their food with their class fellows and their teacher during lunchtime. They also shared some cherries with me (Observation, 23/06/2021).

Hence, in various instances, participants elucidated peace education as a critical essential for the holistic development of a child. Whether in a family, class, staffroom, community, or country, it is necessary to have a friendly atmosphere conducive to the meeting of minds and heads. Participants considered positive attitudes and behaviour necessary to support the holistic development of students of a peaceful society. But these claims needed to be practiced in their natural settings.

Therefore, from the above findings, it appears that although the participants realized the importance of peace education in their classroom, it was not being practiced in the real sense. They found value in the theory but failed to practice it

### **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION**

- This small-scale research study revealed that early years play a crucial role in the holistic development of young children. Hence, it is imperative to launch planned and organized peace education initiatives by developing a contextually relevant peace educational content package, training teachers, and providing awareness to the parent community of Gilgit- Baltistan, Pakistan.
- It was also seen from the findings that although teachers were aware of the importance of peace education for the overall development of early years learners, there was no practice of peace education in classrooms and natural environments. Therefore, the educational department of Gilgit- Baltistan pays specific attention to peace education and peacemaking activities in this socio-culturally and politically diversified region.
- Hence, this small-scale study is not enough to understand all the effects of peace education on the holistic development of early years learners. For that reason, conducting a mega research study spread over all ten districts of the region may provide more in-depth, more relevant, and richer insights into the broader impact of peace education in the context of Gilgit- Baltistan Pakistan.

## **Conclusion**

Initiatives of peace education are essential in children's early years for their overall development and make a significant and lasting impact throughout their lives. Hence, this research sought to explore the contribution of peace education to the holistic upbringing of children. The literature discussed also highlights peace education's fundamental role in the lives of early years learners. Emotional skills, physical, social and cognitive capacities that emerge in the early years are essential prerequisites for success in the workplace and community (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2007). According to the findings of this research study, peace initiatives in the early years are fundamental and significantly impact on the future behavior of individuals and foster more peaceful communities.

Research findings also stressed a compelling need to create peace initiatives among teachers and parents. There is a greater need for teachers' capacity development and parental awareness on peace building, which is crucial but a neglected area today. Hence, educators, implementers and policy-makers have a huge responsibility to ensure that children who enter school at a young age get quality peace education and a facilitating learning environment.

Thus, though the need is dire, peace education still has not received its due in the educational system of Pakistan, especially in Gilgit-Baltistan. It will be too late and unfortunate if we sit back with folded hands and wait for a miracle to take place. No. A proper mechanism needs to be developed at the school level to induct a living system of peace values and practices into the daily life of early years learners.

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