Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of Peace Education and Its Integration into the Competence-Based Curriculum in Rwanda: A Qualitative Study of Practices, Challenges, and Transformative Potentials in Secondary schools

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Abstract: **Particularly in post-conflict settings, peace education has become more popular throughout the world as a means of advancing rights, empathy, and social cohesiveness. Following the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis, it has become a fundamental component of Rwanda's Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC), which aims to develop responsible and peaceful citizens. This study investigates how secondary school teachers in the Rwamagana District view peace education and how it is included in their lesson plans.**

Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were conducted with ten teachers and two head teachers who were specifically chosen from secondary schools using the CBC as a part of a qualitative research approach. The framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyze the data thematically.

The results show that educators see peace education as essential to helping students develop civic engagement, emotional intelligence, and unity. However, workload pressure, inadequate teaching resources, and a lack of training impede implementation. Although there is still a lack of institutional consistency, teachers use innovative techniques like roleplaying, story telling and debate to promote peaceful principles.

According to the study's findings, peace education has the capacity to significantly improve moral growth and national unity. To guarantee that peace education develops into a cross-cutting, sustainable practice within Rwanda's CBC framework, it suggests enhancing institutional support, updating curriculum materials, and bolstering teacher professional development.

Keywords: **Peace education, Teachers' perception, competence-based curriculum (CBC), Rwanda.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Peace Education originated globally after the Second World War as part of International efforts to build lasting peace through Education. UNESCO and other global institutions advocated for teaching values of tolerance, human rights and cooperation to prevent future conflicts (UNESCO, 2014; Harris, 2018). In global context, peace education has emerged as a vital component of Rwanda's post genocide reconstruction and reconciliation agenda, aiming to cultivate values and

tolerance, empathy and social cohesion among learners. Within the framework of the Competence Based Curriculum (CBC), peace education seeks to equip learners with the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for peaceful coexistence and conflicts resolution. However the success of this integration largely depends on teachers' perceptions, pedagogical practices, and their ability to translate peace-related competencies into meaningful classroom experiences. Despite national efforts through the Rwanda Education Board (REB) and the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), evidence suggests that teachers encounter challenges related to limited training, contextual understanding and resource constraints. This study explores teachers' perceptions of peace education and how it is embedded in the CBC. It further examines the existing practices, challenges, and transformative potentials for strengthening peace education within Rwanda' evolving educational landscape.

Research objectives

1. To examine secondary school teachers' perceptions and understanding of peace education within Rwanda's CBC.

2. To investigate how teachers integrate peace education principles into classroom practices.

3. Identifying challenges and contextual factors affecting effective implementation of peace education.

4. To explore teachers' views on the transformative potential of peace education in fostering social cohesion, conflict resolution, and civic values.

Research questions

1. How do secondary school teachers perceive and understand peace education within Rwanda's CBC?

2. How do teachers incorporate peace education into classroom practices?

3. What challenges and contextual factors affect effective implementation of peace education?

4. How do teachers view the transformative potential of peace education on learners' social, emotional, and civic development?

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Education has been as the backbone of sustainable peace and reconciliation process in post-conflict societies worldwide (Obura, 2003; UNESCO, 2022). In Rwanda, aftermath of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, the government adopted education as a key transformative tool for national healing, unity, and sustainable development. Within this context, peace education has been serving as an integral part of the education system to nurture civic values, empathy, and social responsibility among learners (MINEDUC, 2016). The shift to the **Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC)** in 2015 fostered this commitment by blending peace, values, and citizenship education across all learning areas nationwide to insure the sustainability of the peace-building process through education. (REB, 2025).Teachers, as frontline implementers of the curriculum, play an instrumental role in interpreting these peace values into classroom practice to help students catch the broader understanding of this agenda (Nzahabwanayo, 2018). Their perceptions, motivation, and pedagogical skills determine how successfully the curriculum promotes peace-oriented competencies and how students understandingly go around this agenda.

Curriculum and the Promotion of Peace

For decades, peace education has evolved from being a distinct subject into an integrated element of holistic competence-based curricula globally (UNESCO, 2014). The curriculum's role goes beyond academic instruction, for, it serves as a framework for shaping learners' attitudes, aligning them with tolerance, human rights, and peaceful coexistence (UNESCO, 2022). Internationally, countries such as Finland and South Africa have inserted peace values into their national curriculum, emphasizing participatory learning and emotional intelligence as foundations for peaceful societies (Harris, 2018).

In Rwanda, the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) openly promotes peace through its **cross-cutting competences**, such as citizenship and national identity, communication, and critical thinking (REB, 2015). These competences aim to develop learners who are responsible, empathetic, and capable of resolving conflicts nonviolently. According to MINEDUC (2019), the CBC underscores participatory pedagogy discussion, cooperation, and community engagement as crucial tool to internalize peace values in national curriculum.

However, the curriculum's transformative potential is hinged largely on teachers' understanding and commitment. Nzahabwanayo (2018) and Uwitonze and Nizeyimana (2020) argue that some Rwandan teachers interpret peace education narrowly as moral discipline or civic obedience, missing its deeper objective of social transformation. This indicates that while the curriculum framework is strong, its implementation suffers gaps in preparedness and contextual adaptation of the teachers.

Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Peace Education in Rwanda

How teachers perceive this peace education agenda through their training, experiences, and the socio-political environment of their schools shape how deeply they understand it. In Rwanda, Nzahabwanayo (2018) explores that several teachers prioritize peace education conceptually but face challenges in integrating it into everyday lessons. They often depend on rote methods rather than experiential learning strategies such as role play, dialogue, or storytelling, which are more effective in peace pedagogy. Similarly, Kayitesi and Umubyeyi (2021) reveal that the insufficiency of instructional materials and large class sizes hinder teachers' ability to engage learners in reflective peace activities.

Nizeyimana and Uwitonze (2020) highlight that inadequate professional development of teachers who are the implementers in this peace pedagogy, constrains the full realization of CBC objectives. Moreover, Bizimana and Twagirayezu (2022) note that teachers in rural areas often lack access to updated teaching guides, supervision, and recognition, causing lack of their motivation to integrate peace values in their daily teaching practice. Nevertheless, some progress of the peace education in Rwanda is evident: Niyibizi (2020) points out that schools participating in Peace and Values Clubs have demonstrated significant improvements in students' empathy and collaboration skills. These findings indicate that supportive school cultures and continuous teacher training can boost curriculum-driven peace education.

Global and Regional Perspectives

On global stage, **UNESCO** and the **United Nations** advocate for the integration of peace and global citizenship into educational systems, as articulated in *Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.7* (United Nations, 2015). UNESCO (2014) emphasizes that peace-oriented curricula must sharpen critical thinking, empathy, and intercultural dialogue to address the root causes of violence and inequality. Similarly, the **African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16–25)** promotes education for peace, unity, and human rights across member states (African Union, 2016).

Scholars from Africa conducted comparative African research on peace education, indicate similar challenges. For instance, Mugisha (2019) in Uganda and Osei and Appiah (2020) in Ghana emphisize that teachers' limited training and contextual constraints prevent teachers from turning interpreting the core concept of peace curricula into practice. These studies resonate with Rwanda's experience, where strong policy intentions exist but practical implementation varies by region, school leadership, and capacity of individual teacher to have the broad understanding of this agenda.

Challenges and Emerging Research Gap

Despite substantial policy efforts by the government of Rwanda through the Ministry of Education, challenges persist in the effective integration of peace education within the CBC framework. Teachers continue to face heavy workloads, insufficient training, and minimal institutional incentives (REB, 2023). Many rely on traditional, exam-oriented teaching methods that weaken participatory dialogue essential for peace learning (Uwitonze & Nizeyimana, 2020). Furthermore, schools in rural areas often don't have structured monitoring systems to assess how peace competences are taught and internalized by students (Bizimana & Twagirayezu, 2022).

The research gap evidently lies in the limited understanding of how teachers *perceive, interpret, and operationalize* peace education within the competence-based framework. While previous studies (e.g., Nzahabwanayo, 2018; Uwitonze & Nizeyimana, 2020) explore teachers' conceptual views, there still exists a lack of empirical evidence connecting these perceptions to actual classroom practices, contextual factors, and policy realities. Additionally, few studies have examined how teachers' professional development, motivation, and institutional support influence the sustainability of peace education outcomes at the school level.

Addressing this gap is vital for aligning Rwanda's CBC with its broader national goals under *NST2* and *SDGs 4 and 16*, which advocate for inclusive, equitable, and peaceful education systems. This study therefore intends to explore teachers' perceptions, practices, and the contextual enablers or barriers affecting peace education integration in Rwanda's CBC.

Theoretical aspect

This study is grounded in **Constructivist Learning Theory** and **Humanistic Education Theory**. Constructivism, as proposed by Vygotsky (1978), emphasizes that learners construct knowledge through social interaction and active engagement principles central to peace education within Rwanda's Competence-Based Curriculum. Humanistic theory, advanced by Rogers (1983), underscores the development of empathy, respect, and self-actualization, aligning with peace education's moral and emotional goals. Together, these theories provide a framework for understanding how teachers' perceptions, pedagogical approaches, and classroom interactions foster learners' capacity for dialogue, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence in post-genocide Rwanda.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore teachers' perceptions of peace education and its integration into Rwanda's Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC). A qualitative approach was appropriate because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences and meanings within their real-world contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interpretive paradigm guided the study, emphasizing participants' subjective perspectives and how they construct understanding of peace education in their teaching practices.

Research Setting and Participants

The research took place in 10 selected secondary schools in Rwamagana District, Eastern Province of Rwanda. This district was chosen because it represents a range of both rural and urban schools implementing the CBC. Participants consisted of 2 Head Teachers and 10 secondary school teachers purposively selected based on their teaching experience, subject area, and familiarity with peace education concepts (Patton, 2015). This sampling ensured that participants could provide rich, relevant information concerning the integration of peace education in their classrooms.

Data Collection Method

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to ask guiding questions while allowing teachers to share their views freely (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Each interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes and explored teachers' understanding, pedagogical practices, and challenges related to peace education. Classroom observations were conducted to complement the interviews and to capture actual teaching behaviors, instructional methods, and teacher–student interactions. Field notes were taken to record key observations and contextual information.

Data Analysis Procedures

Thematic analysis was employed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. The process involved transcription, familiarization with data, coding, theme development, and interpretation. Both inductive and deductive approaches were applied inductive to allow themes to emerge naturally from participants' narratives, and deductive to align findings with the study's research questions and theoretical framework.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, credibility was established through triangulation of data sources and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was supported by providing rich descriptions of the context and participants. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail documenting the research process, while confirmability was achieved through reflexive journaling to minimize researcher bias. These strategies enhanced the overall rigor and reliability of the study's findings. Research Setting and Participant

IV. FINDINGS

Teacher's perceptions and understanding of peace education.

The findings reveal that teachers have a positive and profound appreciation for peace education as an integral part of Rwanda's competence-based curriculum (CBC). Many participants described peace education as more than the absence of conflict; it is about "*Teaching students how to live harmoniously with others*" (T1). Teachers agreed that it involves

Page | 133

nurturing "*Skills to be good peaceful citizens*" (T2) and "*education that heals and prevents*" (T3). These responses reflect a collective understanding that peace education should empower learners to manage emotions, appreciate diversity, and reject division.

Teachers linked the concept closely to Rwanda's post genocide context, seeing it as vital for moral generations and nation-building. As T1 stated, "*our history shows us why it's crucial … we need a generation that can manage their emotions, understand different viewpoints, and reject division*." Similarly, T4 noted that peace education is essential "*to prevent the mistakes of the past from repeating.*" This connection between historical awareness and moral education is at the heart of Rwanda's peacebuilding curriculum (MINEDUC,2015). However, not all teachers possessed formal training in peace education. T4 admitted," *I haven't had much formal training. I mostly rely on government directives and my own reading."* This shows that understanding varies across teachers depending on exposure and training. Still, the consensus was that peace education fosters unity, tolerance, empathy, and civic responsibility, which are vital elements to Rwanda's recovery and sustainable peace.

Integration of Peace Education into Classroom Practices

Teachers employ diverse strategies to incorporate peace education principles into their teaching. Many focus on creating a respectful classroom environment where students feel heard and valued. As T1 explained, "*I make sure every student gets a chance to speak and that we listen to each other.*" Similarly, T5 uses class meetings where "*students can raise issues and we solve them to gather as a group ".*

A range of teaching methods emerged across subjects. Teachers integrate peace messages through storytelling, role-playing, and group discussions. For instance, T2 mentioned using role play because "*When students act out a conflict and its peaceful resolution, it makes the idea more real and memorable for them.*" T4 shared that storytelling helps students learn from traditional wisdom, while T3 uses literature and poetry: "*we read poems about unity, and then the students write their own poems about what peace means to them".*

Although humanities subjects such as history, citizenship, and religious studies were frequently mentioned as natural platforms for peace education, teachers also demonstrated creativity in other areas. T5 argued that "*all subjects can , if the teacher is creative . Even in physical education, we teach sportsmanship and fairy play".* This supports that CBC's design that peace education should be a cross–cutting theme embedded across all learning areas (REB, 2019). Nevertheless, teachers admitted that implementation remains inconsistent. Some colleagues still believe that peace education is "*The job of the history teacher or the guidance counsellor, not their responsibility "*(T2). This suggests that peace education has yet to be fully institutionalized across all subjects despite the curriculum's intentions.

Challenges and contextual factors affecting implementation.

While teachers are committed, they face several obstacles in integrating peace education effectively. The most frequently cited challenge is a lack of time. T1 explained." *The syllabus is very packed, and sometimes it feels like peace education is an extra thing to squeeze in.*" This reflects a structural issue where academic demands overshadow value-based learning.

Another major challenge is the shortage of teaching material. T2 Lamented, "*We have support from the headteacher, but a lack of teaching aids like posters or story books that focus on peace makes it harder*." Similarly, T4 expressed a need for "*more visual aids*" to reinforce the peace message consistently. This indicates a need for the REB and NCDC to develop and distribute contextualized teaching resources on peace education. Teachers also raised the issue of limited training and pedagogical support. Several participants (e.g, T4, T2, T5) mentioned that workshops are infrequent and often theoretical. T3 added that "*Training on how to handle sensitive conversations…in a way that is healing, not divisive"* would be valuable. Behavioral and contextual challenges also affect classroom dynamics. T3 observed that "students come from homes where different values are plasticized…". We are trying to teach one thing, but they must be another at home ". This highlights the influence of family and community environment on school-based peace initiatives.

Headteachers also confirmed institutional challenges. H1 identified consistency as a major issue, saying "*Ensuring every teacher every day is reinforcing these values, not just when it's convenient*." H2 mentioned resource constraints, explaining that "*We would love to have a dedicated counsellor and more learning materials, but our budget is tight…. ".* These perspectives emphasize that peace education requires both policy commitment and financial investment.

Transformative Potential of Peace Education

Despite those obstacles, all participants recognize the transformative power of peace education. Teachers observed visible improvement in student's behavior, empathy, and civic responsibility. T5 Proudly noted, "*I have seen a noticeable decrease in bullying and an increase in students taking initiative to help others*." Similarly, T1 described how "*you see a student choose to walk away from a fight or include someone who is often left out you know it's working*" Teachers agreed that peace education strengthens emotional intelligence. T3 stated, "*When a student learns to resolve a conflict peaceful, they feel capable and mature*" T2 described it as a giving student "*A moral compass*" that helps them distinguish right from wrong. Headteachers also highlights institutional benefits. H1 reported that "*Disciplinary cases have gone down and student engagement has gone up. Its proof that it works*" H1 and H2 stressed that schools are "*factories where the future citizens of Rwanda are shaped*". This aligns with national goals to promote unity, reconciliation, and civic responsibility through education (MINEDUC, 2020).

V. DISCUSSIONS

Teachers' perception and understanding of peace education.

Teachers in Rwanda secondary schools view peace education as essential for nurturing empathy, tolerance, and moral responsibility. This aligns with Harris and Morrison's (2013) assertion that teachers are central to fostering a peace-oriented mindset among learners. Variation in understanding where some rely on self-directed learning reflects Nzahabwanayo's (2028) view that limited training reduces pedagogical confidence. Consistent with Freire's (1970) notion of education as a means of liberation, teachers perceive education as transformative in shaping ethical citizenship. Its long-term success, however, depends on sustained professional development to strengthen teachers' conceptual clarity and classroom competence. This finding suggests that national teachers' training programmes should systematically integrate peace education pedagogy to ensure consistent understanding and implementation across schools.

Integration of peace education into classroom practice.

Teachers integrate peace education through storytelling, role-play, and dialogue that promote empathy and cooperation. These participatory methods affirm Bajaj and Hantzopoulos,s (2026). argument that experiential learning enhances peace education's impact. Integrating peace principles across subjects reflects the competence–based Curriculum (REB2019), which embeds peace as an across-cutting theme. Yet inconsistency persists, as some teachers limit peace education to social studies. This supports Bar-Taland Rosen's(2009) claim that peace education remains marginal without a clear institutional policy. Stronger guidance and school wide reinforcement are vital for consistent implementation. Therefore, REB should develop clear instructional guidelines and monitoring tools to support effective integration of peace education across all learning areas.

Challenges and other contextual factors

Teachers face constraints such as limited time, inadequate materials, and scarce training opportunities. These reflect Harris's (2010) and Salomon's (2011) findings that institutional capacity determines peace education's success. Overcrowded syllabuses and exam pressure marginalize value-based learning (Davies 2017), while the lack of teaching aids mirrors resource limitations common in post-conflict contexts (Bajaj 2019). The gap between school and home values supports Smith and Vaux's (2003) argument that peace education thrives only when aligned with community culture. Policy makers should prioritize funding and school community partnerships to reduce these barriers and strengthen the peace education environment.

Transformative Potentials of Peace Education

Teachers reported visible behavioral change among learners, reduced bullying, great empathy, and improved cooperation. This supports Salomon and Cairns's (2010) and UNESCO's (2017) findings that peace learning fosters inclusion and Civic responsibility. These outcomes align with Galtung's (1996) concept of "Positive peace promoting enduring social harmony. To sustain these transformations, institutional support, community engagement, and teachers' motivation must remain national priorities. MINEDUC and school leaders should institutionalise recognition programmes that reward teachers and students exemplifying peaceful behavior to maintain these gains.

In short, peace education in Rwanda demonstrates strong transformative potential but faces systemic barriers related to resources and uneven teacher preparation. Strengthening teacher capacity, institutional support, and school community collaboration is essential to advance peace education as a foundation for Rwanda's sustainable peace and development

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

To Ministry of education (MINEDUC)

MINEDUC should integrate peace education indicators into teachers' performance standards to enhance accountability and uniform practice. It must also allocate dedicated funding for peace education initiatives, teaching materials and community outreach. These actions will ensure that peace education remains a national priority and is sustainably implemented across schools.

To Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB)

REB should produce teacher- friendly manuals showing how peace education fits in to every subject and organize regular practical teacher workshops on classroom strategies and inclusive pedagogy. It should also include peace education outcome in national assessments. Such measures will improve teachers' competence and promote consistency in teaching peace values.

To National curriculum Development Center (NCDC)

The NCDC should revise curriculum materials to clearly embedded peace education as an across cutting theme rather than an optional topic. It should also provide cultural relevant teaching aids like local stories, posters, and short films that promote unity empathy and integrity. This will make peace education more practical and engaging for learners.

To School Leaders

School leaders should strengthen peace clubs and promote community service to help students practice peace beyond the class. By creating supportive environments and linking school activities with community values, they can build a culture of peace and social responsibility among learners. Encourage collaboration with parents and local leaders to reinforce peace messages at home and in the community.

Acknowledgement

VII. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that teachers and head teachers in Rwanda secondary schools possess a strong belief in the power of peace education to transform learners and society. They view it as essential for emotional maturity, national cohesion, and moral growth. Teachers' dedication, despite limited resources, demonstrates their commitment to rebuilding Rwanda's social fabric through education. However, the research also exposes gaps in training, resources, and curriculum integration. For peace education to achieve its full impact, it must be institutionalized across subjects, backed by continuous teacher support, and sustained by strong leadership at both school and national level. In the words of one head teacher, "*Peace must be practiced not just preached*." Therefore, peace education in Rwanda's CBC must continue evolving from theory into lived, emphatic, and united in purpose.

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