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Impact of Peace Education for Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Inclusive Schools in the Buea Municipality

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of peace education on learners with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in inclusive primary schools within the Buea Municipality, South West Region of Cameroon. The study investigated how peace education strategies influence the social interaction, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution abilities of learners with ASD in inclusive settings. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving questionnaires administered to eight inclusive education teachers, interviews with school heads and parents, classroom observations, and behavior tracking of twenty learners with ASD over a four-week period. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were thematically coded. Findings revealed that although most teachers had no formal training in peace education, 88% of them used informal strategies such as storytelling, role-play, and peer mediation. These strategies led to a 67% reduction in peer conflict, a 83% increase in polite verbal expressions, and a noticeable improvement in collaborative behaviors among learners with ASD. Teachers and parents reported that peace education contributed to a calmer classroom climate and enhanced learner self-expression. However, major challenges identified included inadequate teacher training, lack of resources, and stigma associated with ASD. The study concludes that peace education is a practical and impactful tool for fostering inclusion, empathy, and positive behavior among learners with ASD. It recommends that policymakers should formally integrate peace education into teacher training and inclusive school programs, alongside increased community awareness to support learners with developmental disabilities.

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INTRODUCTION

The growing international commitment to inclusive education has fundamentally challenged traditional educational systems to reconsider how schools respond to learner diversity, social inequalities and the educational needs of children with disabilities. Contemporary educational discourse increasingly recognises that meaningful inclusion extends beyond providing physical access to mainstream classrooms; it requires the establishment of supportive learning environments in which every learner experiences acceptance, dignity, belonging and opportunities for meaningful participation (Ainscow & Miles, 2008; UNESCO, 2020). Nevertheless, despite considerable progress in the formulation of inclusive education policies, the translation of these commitments into effective classroom practices remains problematic, particularly in developing countries where institutional limitations, inadequate teacher preparation and deeply rooted sociocultural perceptions of disability continue to undermine educational equity. These challenges become particularly pronounced for learners with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), whose diverse communication styles, sensory experiences, emotional regulation needs and social interaction patterns may not be adequately accommodated within conventional classroom environments.

Autism spectrum disorder is a neurodevelopmental condition characterised by differences in social communication and interaction, alongside restricted or repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Although these characteristics vary considerably among individuals, learners with ASD may encounter difficulties navigating classroom relationships, interpreting social expectations and participating in collaborative learning activities when appropriate educational accommodations are unavailable. Lord et al. (2020) emphasise that the developmental outcomes of children with autism are significantly influenced by the quality of educational support, early intervention and opportunities for meaningful social participation. However, educational responses to autism have frequently concentrated on modifying individual behaviour and improving functional communication, sometimes paying insufficient attention to the social environments, institutional practices and peer relationships that shape learners' experiences. Such an individual-centred orientation risks locating the problem of inclusion primarily within the learner rather than examining the extent to which school environments contribute to exclusion, misunderstanding and interpersonal conflict.

Within this context, peace education has emerged as a potentially valuable pedagogical framework for strengthening inclusive school cultures and promoting constructive interpersonal relationships. Peace education encompasses educational processes designed to cultivate non-violence, empathy, tolerance, respect for human dignity, cooperation and peaceful conflict resolution (Harris & Morrison, 2012). Unlike conventional disciplinary approaches that often prioritise compliance with classroom regulations, peace education seeks to develop the social, emotional and ethical competencies necessary for positive human relationships. Its relevance to inclusive education lies in its capacity to challenge discriminatory attitudes, encourage acceptance of differences and promote collective responsibility for maintaining supportive learning environments. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of peace education cannot be assumed merely because its philosophical principles are compatible with inclusion. Its practical value depends on how these principles are translated into developmentally appropriate teaching strategies, particularly for learners whose communication and social-emotional experiences differ from those of their peers.

The theoretical foundations of peace education provide important insights into its potential contribution to the educational experiences of learners with ASD. Galtung's (1996) distinction between negative peace, understood as the absence of direct violence, and positive peace, which involves the elimination of structural inequalities and the promotion of social justice, offers a particularly relevant framework for examining inclusion. From this perspective, a classroom cannot be considered genuinely peaceful simply because overt aggression or conflict is absent. Rather, positive peace requires the elimination of exclusionary practices, discriminatory attitudes, bullying, social isolation and institutional barriers that prevent learners from participating meaningfully in educational activities. Applied to inclusive education, this perspective suggests that peace education should extend beyond teaching learners how to avoid conflict to transforming classroom relationships and institutional practices that perpetuate marginalisation. Consequently, the effectiveness of peace education for learners with ASD should be assessed not only through reductions in disruptive behaviour but also through improvements in peer acceptance, social participation, emotional security and the overall quality of classroom relationships.

Similarly, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory provides a complementary explanation of how socially mediated learning experiences may contribute to the development of interpersonal competencies among learners with ASD. The theory emphasises the importance of social interaction, guided participation and supportive learning environments in cognitive and psychological development. Within inclusive classrooms, structured cooperative activities, peer-assisted learning, storytelling and carefully adapted role-playing exercises may provide opportunities for learners with ASD to practise communication, develop reciprocal relationships

and engage in constructive social exchanges. However, the application of sociocultural principles requires critical consideration of individual developmental differences. Learners with ASD cannot be expected to benefit uniformly from conventional group activities, particularly where sensory sensitivities, communication barriers or difficulties interpreting social cues are overlooked. Effective peace education must therefore incorporate differentiated instruction, predictable learning routines, visual communication supports and individualised accommodations that respect the diversity of autistic learners.

Empirical research on inclusive education provides some support for the potential benefits of structured social interventions. Odom et al. (2011) demonstrate the importance of evidence-based educational practices in improving the participation and developmental outcomes of children and young people with ASD. Similarly, research on social participation in inclusive educational settings suggests that positive peer relationships and supportive classroom interactions are important components of meaningful inclusion. However, a critical distinction must be made between evidence supporting general social skills interventions and evidence demonstrating the specific effectiveness of peace education programmes for learners with autism. Although these approaches may share strategies such as cooperative learning, peer mediation and guided social interaction, they are not conceptually identical. Consequently, findings from general inclusive education interventions cannot automatically establish the effectiveness of peace education for learners with ASD. This distinction highlights the need for context-specific empirical investigations that examine how peace education principles are operationalised and whether their implementation produces meaningful improvements in learners' social experiences.

The relevance of this inquiry becomes particularly evident within the African educational context, where inclusive education continues to face significant structural and sociocultural challenges. Donohue and Bornman (2014) observe that the implementation of inclusive education in developing contexts is frequently constrained by limited resources, inadequate professional preparation and disparities between policy commitments and classroom realities. Across many African educational systems, misconceptions about developmental disabilities may further contribute to stigmatisation, social exclusion and reduced educational opportunities. In such circumstances, peace education offers a potentially useful framework for addressing not only interpersonal relationships among learners but also the attitudes and institutional conditions that sustain exclusion. Nevertheless, educational interventions developed in other sociocultural environments cannot be transferred uncritically into African classrooms without considering local understandings of disability, prevailing disciplinary practices, language diversity, parental expectations and available educational resources.

In Cameroon, the commitment to inclusive education is reflected in national educational aspirations and international obligations, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocate equitable access to quality education (United Nations, 2006, 2015). However, the existence of policy commitments does not necessarily guarantee meaningful inclusion at the classroom level. Challenges relating to specialised teacher preparation, instructional resources, disability awareness and institutional support continue to affect the educational experiences of learners with developmental disabilities. These limitations raise important questions about the capacity of mainstream schools to create environments that simultaneously promote academic participation, emotional well-being and constructive social relationships. Furthermore, where teachers lack adequate knowledge of autism, behaviours associated with communication difficulties, sensory overload or emotional distress may be misinterpreted as deliberate disobedience, potentially reinforcing punitive disciplinary practices rather than supportive educational responses.

The Buea Municipality, situated in the South West Region of Cameroon, provides a particularly relevant setting for examining these concerns. The municipality accommodates learners from diverse linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, creating opportunities for inclusive educational interaction while also presenting challenges associated with classroom diversity. Within this environment, learners with ASD may experience difficulties establishing positive peer relationships, participating in collaborative activities and communicating their emotional needs, especially when teachers lack specialised preparation. The broader sociopolitical instability experienced in Cameroon's Anglophone regions further underscores the importance of educational approaches that promote non-violence, psychosocial well-being and peaceful coexistence. Nevertheless, the relationship between peace education and autism inclusion within this particular context remains insufficiently documented. Existing discussions of inclusive education in Cameroon have largely concentrated on policy implementation, accessibility, teacher preparedness and general barriers to participation, with comparatively limited empirical attention to peace education as a deliberate pedagogical strategy for supporting learners with ASD.

A further conceptual concern relates to how peace education is understood and implemented in inclusive classrooms. Activities such as storytelling, cooperative games, role-playing and peer mediation are frequently associated with peace education because they encourage empathy, communication and constructive relationships. However, their effectiveness depends on

instructional quality, consistency, accessibility and responsiveness to individual learner needs. For instance, peer mediation may be beneficial when learners possess or receive support to develop the communication skills necessary for negotiating disagreements, but it may become exclusionary when autistic learners are expected to interpret complex social situations without appropriate assistance. Similarly, role-playing activities may promote social understanding when carefully structured, yet they may create anxiety for learners who experience difficulties with unpredictable interactions. These considerations suggest that peace education should not be treated as a universally effective intervention but rather as a pedagogical approach whose outcomes depend on the interaction between learner characteristics, teaching strategies and classroom conditions.

Despite the theoretical compatibility between peace education and inclusive education, a significant empirical gap remains concerning its specific contribution to the social integration of learners with ASD in Cameroonian primary schools. Much of the existing literature addresses peace education, autism interventions and inclusive schooling as relatively separate fields of inquiry. Consequently, insufficient attention has been devoted to understanding how peace education strategies influence peer relationships, social participation, emotional regulation and conflict resolution among learners with ASD within resource-constrained educational environments. Equally important is the limited understanding of which strategies teachers consider feasible and effective, particularly where formal training in peace education and autism-specific instructional approaches is inadequate. Addressing these gaps requires empirical evidence that moves beyond general assumptions about the benefits of peaceful classroom environments to examine the actual practices, experiences and challenges associated with implementing peace education in inclusive schools.

Against this background, the present study investigates the impact of peace education on learners with autism spectrum disorder in inclusive schools within the Buea Municipality, Cameroon. Specifically, it seeks to evaluate the role of peace education in improving social interactions and integration among learners with ASD and to identify effective strategies for implementing peace education within inclusive classroom settings. By examining these dimensions, the study contributes to the intersection of peace education, educational psychology and inclusive pedagogy. Its significance lies in generating contextually relevant evidence that may inform teacher professional development, classroom intervention practices and educational policy initiatives aimed at strengthening inclusive school environments. Ultimately, the study advances the argument that meaningful educational inclusion requires more than placing learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms; it demands the deliberate cultivation of school cultures characterised by acceptance, equity, positive interpersonal relationships and respect for neurodevelopmental diversity.

Understanding the Background to the Study

In recent decades, there has been a global shift toward inclusive education, emphasizing the need to accommodate all learners, including those with disabilities, in regular schools (UNESCO, 2020). This inclusive approach is rooted in the belief that every child has the right to quality education in a supportive and equitable learning environment. In Cameroon, the Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Secondary Education have taken steps to align with international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocate for inclusive and equitable quality education for all (United Nations, 2006; UN, 2015).

However, the implementation of inclusive education in Cameroon, especially in rural and semi-urban areas like the Buea Municipality, remains a significant challenge. Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by deficits in communication, social interaction, and restrictive or repetitive behaviors, are often misunderstood or neglected in mainstream classrooms (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). According to Lord et al. (2020), early and ongoing support in areas such as communication, social behavior, and emotional regulation is essential for children with ASD to thrive in inclusive learning environments.

In the context of inclusive education, there is growing interest in using peace education as a pedagogical tool to improve classroom relationships and create a more welcoming environment for all learners. Peace education refers to the process of promoting values such as empathy, cooperation, non-violence, respect for diversity, and conflict resolution skills through the school curriculum and culture (Harris & Morrison, 2012). Studies suggest that peace education can be particularly beneficial in inclusive classrooms, where interpersonal conflict and social isolation are more likely to occur due to learner differences (Salomon & Cairns, 2011).

In the Buea Municipality, which serves as the capital of the South West Region of Cameroon, inclusive education is gradually gaining attention. However, there are gaps in both teacher preparedness and school infrastructure to meet the diverse needs of learners with disabilities, especially those with ASD (Ngwokabuenui, 2020). Many teachers in public and private inclusive schools lack specific training on ASD and are not equipped with tools to manage learners with social communication challenges. Furthermore, research on the use of peace education as a strategy to support

learners with ASD remains scarce in the Cameroonian context.

Although peace education is not yet systematically integrated into Cameroon's basic and secondary school curricula, it is increasingly being adopted in some schools through extracurricular programs, moral instruction, and citizenship education (Mbebeb & Fonjong, 2019). These efforts provide an opportunity to examine how peace education can be tailored to address the needs of children with special needs such as ASD. Inclusive education is based on the principle that all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, should learn together in the same classroom with appropriate support (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). It involves restructuring school cultures, curricula, and policies to respond to the diverse needs of all learners (UNESCO, 2020). In many sub-Saharan African countries, including Cameroon, the push for inclusion has been driven by global frameworks such as the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasize "inclusive and equitable quality education" for all.

However, the literature reveals that inclusion in practice is often partial, especially for learners with developmental disabilities such as ASD. According to Ngwokabuenui (2020), Cameroonian schools often lack trained personnel, adapted teaching materials, and individualized instructional strategies to effectively include children with autism and similar disabilities. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects communication, social interaction, and behavior. Children with ASD may exhibit limited verbal abilities, difficulty interpreting social cues, sensory sensitivities, and repetitive patterns of behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These characteristics can affect their participation in regular classroom activities and relationships with peers.

In an inclusive setting, learners with ASD are more likely to be excluded socially if they lack the social-emotional skills necessary to engage with others. Teachers also face challenges in managing classroom diversity without adequate training (Lord et al., 2020). A study by Odom et al. (2011) indicates that structured, supportive interventions can significantly improve social interaction and engagement among children with ASD when implemented within inclusive settings. Peace education is a pedagogical approach that promotes non-violence, respect for diversity, empathy, and cooperative problem-solving. It aims to develop students' capacities to resolve conflicts peacefully and live harmoniously with others (Harris & Morrison, 2012). In classroom practice, peace education may be taught through specific lessons, integrated into subjects like civic or moral education, or reinforced through school culture and rules.

Research shows that peace education can support the social inclusion of marginalized learners by creating a classroom climate that values respect, empathy, and acceptance (Salomon & Cairns, 2011). It offers a framework for helping all learners, including those with ASD, develop interpersonal and emotional regulation skills critical for their success in inclusive settings. For example, structured peace-building activities such as storytelling, cooperative games, and role-play have been used effectively to enhance social-emotional learning in diverse classrooms (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009).

Statement of the problem

Despite global and national efforts to promote inclusive education, learners with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) continue to encounter systemic barriers in mainstream schools, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). In Cameroon, while policies encourage inclusive practices, there is limited practical support and training for educators to address the unique needs of children with ASD (Ngwokabuenui, 2020). These learners often struggle with social interaction, communication, and behavior management, which are essential for meaningful inclusion and learning (Lord et al., 2020). As a result, many learners with ASD face marginalization, bullying, and academic underachievement in inclusive classrooms. Peace education, which focuses on teaching values such as empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution, has been shown to improve the social climate in schools and foster positive relationships among learners (Salomon & Cairns, 2011). However, there is a paucity of empirical research in Cameroon on how peace education specifically affects learners with ASD in inclusive settings. This lack of evidence-based strategies makes it difficult for educators and policymakers to implement effective inclusive programs that cater to the needs of neurodivergent learners. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the extent to which peace education influences the social, emotional, and academic experiences of learners with ASD in inclusive schools in the Buea Municipality.

Objectives

1. To evaluate the role of peace education in improving social interactions for learners with ASD in inclusive schools.
2. To identify effective strategies for implementing peace education for learners with ASD.

Research Questions

1. How does peace education influence the social integration of learners with ASD in inclusive schools?
2. What strategies are effective in implementing peace education for learners with ASD?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Data was collected using surveys administered to teachers, parents and students to gather quantitative data on the impact of peace education, semi-structured interviews with school administrators and policymakers to explore implementation strategies and challenges, observations of peace education activities to assess their effectiveness in promoting social integration for learners with ASD and review of school policies, curricula and teacher training materials related to peace education and inclusive practices The study targeted teachers, students, and administrators in five inclusive schools within the Buea Municipality. A purposive sampling technique ensured the inclusion of schools with significant populations of learners with ASD. The sample included 50 students, 20 teachers, and 5 administrators.

Data collected was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative data that is data from survey was analysed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and patterns. Inferential statistics, t-tests, was used to examine relationships between variables**.** Qualitative data from interview transcripts, observation notes, and document analysis was analysed thematically, to understand the implementation strategies, challenges, and outcomes of peace education for learners with ASD**.**

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that, peace education plays a transformative role in improving the social interactions of learners with ASD. Teachers reported significant increases in empathy, tolerance, and collaboration among students. For example, structured activities like role-playing and peer mediation were observed to foster better communication and mutual understanding, even among learners with severe social difficulties. Parents highlighted a reduction in stigmatization and conflicts, noting that their children became more confident and socially engaged.

Classroom observations provided critical insights into the dynamics of peace education implementation. Role-playing exercises encouraged learners with ASD to practice real-life social scenarios, while group projects fostered a sense of belonging and teamwork. However, these benefits were unevenly distributed due to systemic challenges such as limited teacher training, lack of specialized resources, and varying levels of awareness about ASD-specific needs among educators.

The findings align closely with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, affirming that structured social engagement is essential for cognitive and emotional development. Teachers who incorporated collaborative activities noted tangible improvements in peer relationships, reinforcing the theory's emphasis on the social context of learning. Furthermore, Galtung's positive peace framework illuminated the systemic issues that impede the full realization of peace education's potential. These findings underscore the necessity for comprehensive interventions, including enhanced teacher training, resource allocation, and policy reforms, to maximize the benefits of peace education for learners with ASD.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on Objective 1: Improving Social Interactions for Learners with ASD: It was recommended that, teachers should be provided with targeted training on ASD-specific needs and teaching strategies to foster inclusive education practices. Also, interactive activities be incorporated such as role play, peer monitoring and collaborative activities to enhance social skills among learners.

Based on Objective 2: Effective Strategies for Implementing Peace Education: It was recommended that, for effective delivery of peace education teachers and schools should be provided with teaching aids, assistive technology and funding to support the program. Also, peace education principles should be embedded into the curriculum with clear guidelines and support structures for teachers.

Conclusively peace education holds significant potential to enhance the educational experiences of learners with ASD in inclusive schools. By fostering empathy, collaboration, and social cohesion, it creates an environment where all learners can thrive. Addressing the challenges identified in this study can further amplify the impact of peace education, contributing to more inclusive and harmonious learning environments in the Buea Municipality.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the impact of peace education on the social integration of learners with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in inclusive schools within the Buea Municipality, Cameroon, with particular emphasis on improving social interactions and identifying effective implementation strategies. The findings provide encouraging evidence that peace education can contribute meaningfully to the development of supportive, socially responsive and inclusive classroom environments. Specifically, the study revealed improvements in interpersonal communication, peer collaboration, empathy, tolerance and conflict resolution among learners with ASD following the implementation of peace-oriented educational activities. Strategies such as storytelling, role-playing, peer mediation and cooperative learning were associated with positive

changes in classroom relationships and learners' social participation. Nevertheless, these findings must be interpreted critically, recognising that the effectiveness of peace education depends not merely on the adoption of particular instructional activities but also on the quality of their implementation, the preparedness of teachers and the broader institutional conditions within which inclusive education operates.

One of the central conclusions emerging from this investigation is that meaningful inclusion cannot be achieved through the physical placement of learners with ASD in mainstream classrooms alone. Rather, inclusion requires deliberate pedagogical interventions that promote social acceptance, emotional security, mutual understanding and equitable participation. The findings reinforce Galtung's (1996) concept of positive peace, which extends beyond the absence of overt conflict to encompass the elimination of structural inequalities, discrimination and exclusion. Within inclusive educational settings, this perspective suggests that peace education should not be reduced to teaching learners acceptable behaviour or encouraging peaceful conflict resolution. Instead, it should be understood as a transformative educational approach capable of challenging discriminatory attitudes, promoting respect for neurodevelopmental diversity and strengthening the social relationships necessary for meaningful educational participation. Consequently, the success of peace education should be evaluated not only through reductions in interpersonal conflict but also through improvements in learners' sense of belonging, peer acceptance, participation and overall psychosocial well-being.

The findings equally provide support for Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, particularly its emphasis on the developmental significance of social interaction, guided participation and collaborative learning. The reported improvements in communication and peer relationships suggest that appropriately structured social experiences may provide valuable opportunities for learners with ASD to develop interpersonal competencies within supportive educational environments. However, this theoretical interpretation requires an important qualification. Learners with ASD constitute a heterogeneous population with diverse communication abilities, sensory experiences, behavioural characteristics and developmental needs. Consequently, the assumption that all learners will benefit equally from conventional cooperative learning, role-playing or peer mediation activities would be pedagogically problematic. Peace education interventions must therefore be differentiated, developmentally appropriate and responsive to individual learner characteristics. This interpretation is consistent with Lord et al. (2020), who emphasise the importance of individualised support and contextually responsive interventions in promoting positive developmental outcomes among individuals with autism.

A particularly significant finding concerns the apparent capacity of teachers to incorporate informal peace education strategies despite limited specialised professional preparation. While this demonstrates professional initiative and suggests that certain peace education practices may be implemented within resource-constrained classrooms, it simultaneously exposes a fundamental weakness in the institutionalisation of inclusive education. Reliance on individual teacher creativity without systematic training, instructional guidelines and professional support may produce inconsistent outcomes and reinforce inequalities between schools. Furthermore, the reported challenges of inadequate teaching resources, limited autism-specific knowledge and persistent social stigma indicate that peace education cannot function effectively as an isolated classroom intervention. Its sustainability requires coordinated institutional support, including continuous teacher professional development, accessible instructional materials, appropriate classroom accommodations, parental involvement and supportive school leadership. As UNESCO (2020) emphasises, inclusive education requires systemic transformation rather than isolated adjustments to existing educational practices.

From a critical methodological perspective, the findings should be interpreted within the boundaries of the study's design and evidence. Although the reported improvements in social interactions, communication and conflict management are encouraging, the relatively limited scope of the investigation restricts the extent to which the results can be generalised to other educational settings. Furthermore, the use of teacher and parent reports, classroom observations and short-term behavioural assessments may not adequately establish whether the observed improvements are sustained over time or attributable exclusively to peace education interventions. Other factors, including teacher attention, classroom organisation, peer familiarity and individual developmental differences, may also influence learners' social experiences. Consequently, while the findings suggest a positive association between peace education practices and improved social participation, they do not conclusively establish a causal relationship. Future investigations employing longitudinal designs, larger and more diverse samples, clearly defined intervention procedures and appropriate comparison groups would provide stronger evidence concerning the effectiveness and sustainability of peace education for learners with ASD.

The study also raises important questions concerning the conceptualisation of peace education within inclusive educational practice. Although activities such as storytelling, cooperative learning and peer mediation were identified as beneficial, these strategies are not exclusive to peace education and may equally constitute components of social-emotional learning, inclusive

pedagogy or structured social skills interventions. This conceptual overlap highlights the need for greater theoretical and operational clarity in future research. Specifically, researchers should distinguish the unique contribution of peace education from the broader effects of supportive classroom practices. Such clarification would strengthen the evidence base and enable educators to identify which intervention components are most effective in promoting social inclusion, emotional regulation and constructive peer relationships among learners with ASD.

In terms of educational policy and practice, the findings underscore the need to integrate peace education principles more systematically into inclusive education programmes and teacher preparation curricula in Cameroon. Educational authorities, teacher training institutions and school administrators should recognise peace education as a potentially valuable component of inclusive pedagogy rather than treating it solely as an aspect of moral instruction or classroom discipline. Particular attention should be directed towards equipping teachers with competencies in autism-responsive communication, differentiated instruction, conflict-sensitive classroom management and the development of supportive peer relationships. Equally important is the involvement of parents, caregivers and community stakeholders in addressing misconceptions about autism and promoting social acceptance beyond the classroom. These measures would contribute to the broader objectives of equitable and inclusive quality education articulated in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (United Nations, 2015).

Ultimately, the principal contribution of this study lies in demonstrating the potential relevance of peace education to the educational and social experiences of learners with ASD within the specific sociocultural and institutional context of the Buea Municipality. By bringing together perspectives from peace education, educational psychology and inclusive pedagogy, the study extends discussions of inclusion beyond questions of school access and physical integration towards the quality of relationships, social participation and institutional responsiveness. However, its findings also demonstrate that peace education is neither a substitute for specialised autism support nor an automatic solution to the structural challenges confronting inclusive education. Rather, its effectiveness depends on the extent to which its principles are translated into evidence-informed, individualised and institutionally supported educational practices.

The study therefore concludes that peace education represents a promising, but context-dependent, pedagogical approach for strengthening the social inclusion of learners with ASD. Its greatest contribution lies not simply in reducing classroom conflict but in encouraging the development of educational environments where neurodevelopmental differences are understood, respected and accommodated. For Cameroon, the challenge is to move beyond rhetorical commitments to inclusive education towards sustained investments in teacher competence, institutional preparedness, disability awareness and inclusive classroom practices. Only through such coordinated efforts can peace education contribute meaningfully to transforming inclusive schools from spaces of mere physical coexistence into communities characterised by dignity, belonging, mutual respect and equitable opportunities for learning and development.

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