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Learning from Rwanda: How post-conflict education for peace can inform Somalia's peacebuilding process

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Abstract
Post-conflict education is central to the long-term success of peace-building initiatives. This paper reviews how post-genocide education in Rwanda was used to build national cohesion and offers lessons to be applied to Somalia's ongoing peace-building process. Specifically, this paper examines Rwanda's post-genocide educational reforms, including curriculum revision, civic education, and teacher training, to understand how they contribute to national reconciliation. A qualitative comparative research design was employed using document and secondary data collected from scholarly and institutional sources. Based upon the data analysis, this paper will discuss both the similarities and differences in the ways Rwanda and Somalia are addressing issues related to post-conflict education and peace-building. Additionally, recommendations are offered that address curriculum development, teacher professionalization, non-formal community peace education, and intergovernmental partnerships.

Keywords: Rwanda, Somalia, post-conflict education, peace-building, curriculum reform, reconciliation, teacher education

1. Introduction
Education in divided or fragile societies can serve as either a source of division or a source of unification. In Rwanda prior to the genocide in 1994, education was one mechanism through which ethnic hierarchies were institutionally embedded and extremist ideologies were promoted (Buckley Zistel, 2009) [2]. After the genocide, Rwanda underwent a significant transformation in its educational structure and processes, transforming education to become a source of unity and reconciliation (Obura, 2003; Freedman *et al*., 2008) [13, 8].

Somalia, too, has experienced devastating conflict that destroyed the country's education system and fragmented governance (Abdi, 2010; UNESCO, 2022) [1]. In 2017, with a degree of political stabilization achieved, the Federal Government of Somalia began to prioritize the integration of peace and civic education into the country's curriculum and non-formal programs (MoEHE, 2021; UNICEF, 2022) [20].

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to comparative peace education scholarship by providing empirical insights into how Rwanda's post-genocide educational strategy can inform Somalia's peace-building processes. Moreover, this study supports the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically SDG 4.7 which calls for education for peace, global citizenship and human rights (UNESCO, 2019) [18].

Although peace education is increasingly being recognized as a priority policy area, very little research has provided practical and transferable advice on how to successfully apply the most effective aspects of peace education strategies across different contexts. Somalia faces many of the same institutional capacity, curriculum coherence and teacher preparation challenges faced by Rwanda after the genocide, making it imperative that an evidence-informed model be developed to support fragile states.

1.1 Research Objectives
- To analyze how education both contributed to conflict and to post-genocide peace-building in Rwanda.
- To assess current efforts and challenges in integrating peace education within Somalia's education system.
- To compare Rwanda's and Somalia's educational approaches to peace-building and identify areas of similarity and difference

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- To generate policy-relevant lessons from Rwanda's post-genocide experience that are relevant to Somalia's current peace-building context.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Education and Conflict
Research has identified education as both a cause of social cleavage and a means of healing (Davies, 2017) [6]. Prior to the genocide in Rwanda, the Rwandan colonial and post-colonial regimes utilized education as a means to create ethnic identity and, ultimately, to produce exclusionary sentiment among various groups (Harber, 2019) [9]. Similar to Rwanda, clan-based schooling in Somalia, along with unequal regional access to education, further exacerbated existing social divisions (Abdi, 2010) [1].

2.2 Post-Conflict Educational Reform
Following the genocide in 1994, the Government of Rwanda, with assistance from UNESCO and UNICEF, re-established education as a vehicle for unity and reconciliation. This transformation included the establishment of Peace and Values Education Framework, civic education through Itorero ry'Igihugu, and the introduction of inclusive curricula (Obura, 2003; Paulson, 2009) [13].

In Somalia, frameworks for peace education have begun to emerge through the Education Sector Strategic Plan (2018-2023) and donor funded projects (MoEHE, 2021). However, there remain significant variations in programmatic implementation across Somalia's regions due to resource limitations and ongoing insecurity (UNESCO, 2022) [19].

2.3 Comparative Approaches to Peace Education
Literature comparing approaches to peace education (Novelli & Smith, 2011; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013) [12, 25] suggests that peace education must balance universal values with local realities. Rwanda represents a state-led model focused on reconstructing identities, while Somalia's fragile governance environment demands a decentralized and participatory approach.

3. Research Methodology
3.1 Research Design
The methodology employed in this study utilizes a qualitative comparative case study design. This methodological approach is congruent with Yin's (2018) [24] method for investigating complex social phenomena through contextual examination. A qualitative comparative case study design allows for a detailed exploration of post-conflict education systems, given the absence of feasible experimental designs (Creswell & Poth, 2018) [5].

3.2 Data Sources and Sampling
Secondary data, including peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents and organizational reports published between 2000-2024 were the primary sources of data used in this study. These sources include UNESCO, UNICEF, The World Bank and national education policy frameworks. The purposeful sampling strategy allowed for the inclusion of a variety of perspectives regarding educational peace-building in both Rwanda and Somalia (Patton, 2015) [14].

3.3 Data Analysis
Thematic analysis of data was conducted using the Braun and Clarke (2006) [2] thematic analysis framework. The themes that arose from the data include "curriculum reform", "teacher professionalization" and "civic education". Comparative analysis of the themes that emerged from both Rwanda and Somalia allow for the identification of cross-contextual lessons for Somalia's peace-building process (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2020) [10]. The reliability of the data was increased through the use of triangulation among reports and scholarly studies.

4. Research Findings
4.1 Rwanda: Education as a Mechanism of National Reconciliation
Rwanda's post-genocide reforms prioritized moral and civic reconstruction, the key findings of this section include:

- **Curriculum Reform:** The Ministry of Education removed ethnic identifiers from students' academic records (Rutayisire *et al*., 2003) [17], altered history instruction to emphasize national identity, and created a Peace and Values Education Framework (Williams, 2017) [21].
- **Teacher Professionalization:** Peace pedagogy was incorporated into Rwanda's teacher education programs and over 30,000 teachers received in-service training on conflict-sensitive pedagogy between 2005 and 2016 (World Bank, 2021) [22].
- **Civic Education and Commemoration:** Programs such as Itorero ry'Igihugu and Ingando camps promoted social responsibility and dialogue among generations (Obura, 2003) [13].
- **Local Participation:** School-communities, memorial sites, and reconciliation villages worked together to foster social healing and empathy among Rwanda's youth (Freedman *et al*., 2008) [8].

These interconnected reforms facilitated trust, diminished the divisive narratives that had existed since the genocide, and cultivated a sense of collaboration among Rwandans. Rwanda serves as a continent-wide benchmark in post-conflict education.

4.2 Somalia: Emergent but Fragmented Peace Education Initiatives
The data suggest that Somalia's education sector is moving forward, although at varying rates:-

- **Sectoral Institutional Framework:** The 2018-2023 Education Sector Strategic Plan includes "Education for Peace Building" as a cross-cutting theme (MoEHE, 2021).
- **Curriculum Reform:** Modules on peace and citizenship education have been added to primary and secondary school curricula with a focus on dialogue, mutual respect, and conflict resolution (UNICEF, 2022) [20].
- **Professionalization of Teachers:** Although new curricula exist, many teachers lack training in participatory and trauma-sensitive pedagogies (Federal Government of Somalia, 2020) [7].
- **Non-Formal Education:** Peace clubs and youth forums sponsored by community and religious institutions exist, although their geographic scope of operation is currently limited to urban centers.
- **Challenges:** Ongoing insecurity, physical destruction

of school buildings, brain drain, and limited coordination among federal states continue to impede the sustainability of these initiatives (World Bank, 2022) [23].

5. Discussion
The results of this study confirm that education for peace is fundamentally a socio-political endeavor and not simply a curricular initiative. Rwanda provides an example of a multi-dimensional model of structural transformation, in which peace education has been embedded into governance, pedagogy, and national consciousness. The results of this study also illustrate that Rwanda's model of post-genocide educational reform aligns with the transformative peace education paradigm (Reardon, 1999) [16], which focuses on critical thinking, moral reasoning, and structural change.

Somalia, in comparison, presents a case of emergent reconstruction, characterized by encouraging policy intentions but limited implementation due to capacity deficits and security concerns. As comparative literature (Davies, 2017; Novelli & Smith, 2011) [6, 12] warns, the failure to account for context-specific variation undermines the potential for successful policy transplantation. Therefore, while Rwanda illustrates the potential benefits of top-down reform combined with broad-based citizen participation, Somalia must develop a hybrid model that recognizes community-based dialogue and informal education reform.

Teacher agency is a critical component of effective peace education. In Rwanda, teachers were empowered to mediate unity through comprehensive and ongoing professional development (Williams, 2017) [21]. In Somalia, teachers frequently operate in precarious conditions and receive limited pedagogical support (MoEHE, 2021). Therefore, empowering teachers to effectively engage in educational peace-building activities is critical.

Both cases highlight the importance of collective memory and truth-telling in curricula. Rwanda's intentional rewriting of its history has helped to prevent denialism and engender empathy among the population (Buckley Zistel, 2009) [2]. Conversely, Somalia's diverse clan histories necessitate a pluralistic history that fosters dialogue and understanding among clans, rather than promoting conformity.

6. Policy Implications and Recommendations
Recommendations based on this study include
- **Curriculum Reform:** Integrate peace values throughout all disciplines, language, history and religion, similar to Rwanda's cross-disciplinary approach.
- **Teacher Education Reform:** Establish a continuing professional development framework to incorporate conflict-sensitive pedagogy and trauma-informed training.
- **Local Engagement:** Engage clan elders, women's organizations, and religious leaders to legitimate peace education messages at the local level.
- **Technical Cooperation:** Formalize technical cooperation between Rwanda's REB (Rwanda Education Board) and Somalia's MoEHE to share peace education methodologies.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Develop measurable indicators for peace learning outcomes to measure behavioral and attitudinal changes that are in line with SDG 4.7 targets.
- **Non-Formal Education:** Support expansion of youth civic clubs, madrasa-based peace education and radio-based education to reach rural communities.

7. Conclusion
Education has the potential to positively influence the way individuals think about themselves and others, and the manner in which society functions. Rwanda's systemic post-conflict educational reform demonstrates how interconnected reforms in curriculum, teacher education, and civic engagement can be used to foster national unity and reconciliation. While Somalia's application of Rwanda's experiences will require adaptability and flexibility, and may be limited by its decentralized and fragile governance environment, Somalia has the opportunity to develop a unique model of peace education that combines the best practices of Rwanda and incorporates Somali cultural and Islamic values of peace (salaam). Ultimately, the goal of peace education is to develop a generation that is not only educated but committed to peaceful coexistence and nation-building.

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