

Embracing Peace Education for Interreligious Awareness in Myanmar: A Case Study of the Judson Research Center

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ABSTRACT

There is limited consideration of the role of interreligious awareness in both preventing violent conflict and integrating it into the curriculum of modern peace education. This paper seeks to address this gap by recognizing the significance of religious awareness in peacebuilding through peace education, focusing on the Judson Research Center of the Myanmar Institute of Theology as a key institution in promoting a peaceful society. Myanmar has been prone to religious conflict for a long time, especially as religion has been used by various groups to gain political advantage, and religion has become a sensitive topic. The research method in this study is a qualitative case study conducted through informal dialogue with two key officials and representatives of the center, a literature review (mainly on peace education to align with the purpose of the article), analysis of documents and research articles, as well as dissertations and journal articles, including studying the practices of the research center itself. As a research article and not merely a desk paper based on existing published articles alone, the findings of this article are

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thus not based on pre-conceived themes. Rather, the themes emerged based on actual field observation, interviews, and contextual analysis. This paper highlights the importance of peace education for peaceful communication among different religious groups and its contribution to improving interreligious awareness for building peace. Ultimately, it emphasizes the critical role of peace education in fostering mutual understanding, respect, and trust for the establishment of a peaceful and harmonious society.

Keywords: *communication, Judson Research Center, peacebuilding, peace education, religion*

1. Introduction

Myanmar has earned the reputation of “the land of crisis” due to its protracted internal conflicts, despite a populace that cherishes peaceful coexistence and adheres to peaceful religion. The political landscape of Myanmar is intricately entwined with the diverse array of ethnic groups inhabiting its territory. Consequently, escalating political and ethnic tensions have emerged between the dominant majority and the various ethnic minority groups over time. Moreover, religion stands out as a pivotal element often exploited for political advantage by different factions, thereby evolving into a contentious issue among the populace. This research attempts to examine peace education as a viable strategy for fostering peacebuilding initiatives in Myanmar, underscoring the need to address the religious dimension with this discourse.

1.1. Problem Statement

There is limited consideration of the role of a harmonious multi-religious society in both the prevention and response to violent conflicts for rebuilding peace in Myanmar. Interfaith studies and communication need to be reconceptualized to integrate into modern peace education.

1.2. Research Questions

This paper answers the following questions:

1. What are the elements of the peace education program in the Judson Research Center?
2. How does the Judson Research Center provide peace education for interreligious awareness?
3. Why does it provide peace education in the ways that it does?

1.3. Research Purpose

This paper aims to explore the importance of peace education for religious awareness in peacebuilding by studying the approaches of the Judson Research Center. To achieve the research purpose, the objectives of this paper are:

1. To explain the elements of the peace education program in Judson Research Center;
2. To discuss how the Judson Research Center delivers Peace Education for interreligious awareness; and
3. To analyze why it provides peace education as it does.

1.4. Rationale of the Study

There were two motivational factors to conduct this study. First, literature on modern Peace Education places greater emphasis on secular ways to respond to peace and conflict issues. Comprehensive peace education is needed to develop a holistic and integrative approach to nurture a culture of peace that connects all components related to educating about peace. Therefore, only focusing on one side will not achieve holistic peace. Religious and spiritual dimensions play a key role in nurturing inner peace, as well as establishing a culture of peace for comprehensive peace education (Jenkins 2019).

The second point is about the context of the country. Religion is deeply rooted in Myanmar's social, political, and economic aspects. The unbalanced population of faiths in the country, especially non-

Buddhist faith groups who are also ethnic minority groups, feel marginalized by the state due to their ethnic and religious identities (Hayward 2021). Consideration of religious differences is a critical part of any peace-building initiative for the country of Myanmar (Pauli 2016). Although religion itself may not be the instigating factor, the manipulation of religion throughout history continues to fuel religious tensions and conflict in the country. Thus, a religious dimension is necessary for peace education in Myanmar. The study of the promotion of inter-religious awareness, mutual understanding, respect, and trust among interfaith groups is quite appropriate to contribute to the country's peacebuilding efforts. This paper describes the contextual struggle in Myanmar and the original struggles to coexist and build harmonious relationships from the Myanmar Christian perspective in order to promote peace, which contributes to the existing literature on peace education.

1.5. Coverage of the Study

1.5.1. Scope

This paper focuses on both formal and informal peace education initiatives provided by the Judson Research Center, as well as research, movements, and the community setting from the time it was established in 2003 to the present. The Judson Research Center was selected for this study because of its well-known dedication to interfaith study for over 20 years. It is one of the academic branches of the highly accredited and reputable Christian institution, Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT), located in Yangon where the author lives. The work of faith-based organizations and NGOs on religions and interfaith activities has some degree of political sensitivity in Myanmar. In general, such organizations dare not disclose their activities to unfamiliar individuals or organizations. Cultural insiders have access to data and their perspectives. It is beneficial to acknowledge potential limitations for further research and researchers.

1.5.2. Limitations

The findings only cover what Judson Research Center is doing through information gained from analyzing secondary research documents and informal dialogue with the officials of the center.

1.5.3. Delimitation

This study does not cover peace education and peace-g geared activities by other religious institutions, non-governmental organizations, or social organizations. It also does not include foreign government-funded organizations that have similar goals and objectives or activities toward interreligious communications among different interfaith groups for peace education.

1.6. Significance of the Study

This article presents the main argument that a comprehensive approach is critical for socially meaningful peace education that integrates religious and spiritual dimensions, by reintegrating the religious dimension of peace education for peacebuilding in Myanmar. The practice-based approach of the Judson Research Center of the Myanmar Institute of Theology as a center for the promotion of interreligious awareness in the religious conflict-prone country of Myanmar is recorded and appreciated academically. This study fills the gap by reintegrating religious aspects into the process of peace education. Furthermore, the findings from the research questions of this study seek to reveal the local wisdom in peace education for religious awareness to respond to violence within the local context.

2. Literature Review

There is a vast body of literature concerning peace education, and this paper will attempt to highlight some notable works of the leading scholars. To synthesize the literature, this section initially reviews the work of some leading scholars of peace education. Joakim Arnøy (2023) argued that peace education has gone through phases in terms of *subject*, *approaches*, *pedagogy*, and *driving forces*, while

another scholar, Kevin Kester (2022), explained the outlines of the conceptual framework of peace education such as objectives, contents, actors, and resources of peace education. Tony Jenkins (2019) also addressed that peace education is an education both *about* and *for* peace.

After reviewing the literature, this study synthesizes it into an integrated topic with the potential to reconceptualize the existing literature in peace education (Torraco 2005). By reviewing and categorizing the literature, this section presents the relevant research about peace education and its components that are fundamental to promoting a more peaceful culture.

2.1. Concepts of Peace Education

The term “Peace Education” refers to the educational policy, planning, pedagogy, and practice that provide learners with the skills and values to work towards comprehensive peace (Bajaj 2008; B. Reardon 1988). Comprehensive peace includes the discussion of both negative peace, comprised of the abolition of direct or physical violence, and positive peace, the abolition of structural violence rising from systematic inequalities that deprive individuals of their basic human rights (Bajaj 2008; Galtung 1969).

By studying this literature and contributions from leading scholars about the concepts of peace education, comprehensive peace education has been scholarly recognized for building peace. However, the actual application of peace education at different levels should be encouraged and promoted for wider acceptance not only through literature but also in real-life situations for the transformation of social change. Regarding this, it is necessary to reconceptualize the components of peace education to guide the practices of teaching and learning.

2.2. Objectives of Peace Education

Since peace education is both about and for peace, it is oriented toward the elimination of all forms of violence and the establishment of a culture of peace. It is also concerned with violence and injustice

(Jenkins 2019). In peace education, the areas of human rights education, development education, environmental education, disarmament education, and conflict resolution education are included as a broader understanding of such multifaceted approaches.

Although there are different approaches, the overall aim of peace education can be understood as the achievement of all human rights for all human beings (Bajaj 2008; Swee-Hin and Toh 2006). This focus also aims to provide students with an accurate understanding of their social and political contexts while simultaneously focusing attention on possibilities for action and change (Bajaj 2008; Freire 1970). Based on the literature review, the objectives of peace education are not only for understanding social and/or political problems but also the soft dimension of the inner minds of the individuals about how they see and think about the issues.

Since the purposes and objectives of peace education may vary among different perspectives and levels, it is necessary to critically analyze to include as many groups as possible. The objective of peace education should be based on the nature of conflict, culture, and the challenges encountered in particular areas, as well as promoting readiness among the citizens and developing the capacities of the actors.

2.3. Actors in Peace Education

The capacities and performance of peace educators are crucial in peace education. Kester (2022) argued that the objective of peace education is to cultivate a culture of peace in schools and other places. Therefore, peace educators need to consider the multiple spaces in which learning can occur such as in schools, homes, communities, etc. Peace education programs reflect an inclusive and comprehensive approach to designing and facilitating holistic education.

Cooperation and collaboration by all stakeholders are required since peace education is a broad concept related to politics, social and cultural norms and expectations, technological advances, and environmental perspectives. In that sense, the stakeholders, or the actors, in peace education would be the government, local businesses,

non-governmental organizations, students, parents, teachers, student councils, and school administrations, as well as community leaders (Kester 2022). In addition, the role of the community and religious leaders, as well as institutions and various organizations are also recognized as valuable actors and leaders for peace education and conflict transformation (Lederach 1997). The roles of these various actors are important in all the various approaches to peace education.

2.4. Contents of Peace Education

Peace education is demanded as a study of attitudes that include love, respect, and empathy, and as a study of behaviors for cooperation, dialogue, and nonviolence to support peaceful societies. The contents should address a range of topics, including environmental issues, conflict resolution and transformation, gender equality, human rights, justice, the inherent challenge of violence to peace, collaborative peace-building visions, the role of media, and diversity (Kester 2022). Related to the contents of peace education, the “Flower-petal” model guides the six categories of a culture of peace that are used to organize the learning topics and materials.

These six topics are comprised of dismantling a culture of war, environmental peace, education for justice and compassion, human rights education, inter-cultural solidarity, and inner peace. Each topic has a specific purpose in peace education to achieve different objectives (Kester 2022). They cover all levels such as individual, interpersonal, and societal (Ty 2023). However, effective integration is still needed to reach individuals who are not, for one reason or another, able to access educational opportunities in society. In that case, an integrative approach by all actors is required, especially regarding policy, otherwise, these peace education topics would be learned only by those who already have access to education and choices.

Religion may have the earliest written guidelines for teaching peace through scripture, but it has an ambivalent nature in that religion can promote peace as well as advocate conflict and violence (Appleby 2000). However, there are many instances in which religion has been manipulated for political advantage or other interests, as an inter-

pretation of religious scriptures may lead to the ambivalent nature of religious understanding. Peace education needs to address such a situation, especially in places where religion plays a crucial role in people's daily lives, specifically in developing and conflict-affected countries, for instance, Myanmar.

In Myanmar, almost every person adheres to a particular religion (Hayward and Naing 2023) and that means everyone is guided by and follows the doctrine of at least one particular religion, presenting the opportunity to integrate religious or interfaith education into the contents of peace education. Peace education should be designed based on the local context and not all peace education programs are created equal (Salomon and Nevo 2002). The effectiveness of peace education needs to be aligned with the appropriate approaches or pedagogies in delivering skills, knowledge, and attitudes to the audience.

2.5. Pedagogy

In education, pedagogy is an approach towards teaching the learners, whether it is the theory or practice of educating, which aims to develop their skills and attitudes (Shirke 2021). Various communication channels can be utilized to disseminate the peace message to specific audiences, including formal education lectures, distribution of pamphlets and books, organization of seminars and conferences, publication of newspaper articles, and writing magazine essays. (Galtung 2008).

Comprehensive peace education is rooted in critical and transformative pedagogies. It generally focuses on the future and looks to nurture those inner peace capacities that are essential to external action necessary for social and political change. This concept promotes peace education as a holistic, transformative, and adaptable approach in different areas (Jenkins 2019). Peace pedagogy is constantly evolving to meet the ever-changing needs of education for democratic societies. As such, reflective inquiry is required for transformative pedagogies (Reardon 2012).

Selecting the appropriate teaching methods by addressing the context of the country plays a critical role in the aspect of pedagogy. The practice of accounting for local vulnerability is valuable in the context of learning about diversity (Brantmeier 2013). To go in-depth, it is necessary to consider the views of local scholars and researchers and related peace education approaches derived from the multi-religious society in that particular country. The interreligious dialogue approach is a crucial tool for building peace in multi-religious societies since it promotes understanding and relationship-building among different faith groups and serves as a catalyst to solve the conflict (Ly 2023).

2.6. Resources in Peace Education

People, materials, and time are three resources in peace education programs (Kester 2022). The role of resource persons is crucial for reconciliation and education for a culture of peace in divided societies by contributing their many pedagogical experiences and diverse approaches to transformative peace learning. The possible contribution of resource persons may motivate others, including the targeted audience of the peace education program, to take transformative action in their schools, neighborhoods, communities, towns, and countries, and connect with others who share the same values for peace (Loukaidis and Jenkins 2020).

Access to a special collection of books, other printed materials, or digital resources also plays an important role in peace education for both faculty and students. The publication of peace-related articles by the institutions would also help establish a culture of peace and increase awareness daily (Navarro-Castro and Nario-Galace 2019).

Time also plays a critical role in peace education such as the length of the program and the evaluation in terms of effectiveness. It is necessary to ensure that the implemented peace education program is properly and continuously evaluated for its effectiveness to meet the objective of the program. Resources come in many forms, but they all have a common purpose to support the effectiveness of learning. The significant purpose of the teaching and learning resources is to make

the subject matter and delivery interesting, making it easy to grasp the concepts (The Open University 2020).

Since this study is trying to explore local peace education based on the local contexts, the previous studies of peace education in Myanmar have been explored.

2.7. Peace Education in Myanmar

While the literature on peace education is abundant, research that focuses on the Myanmar context is inadequate. A long-term combination of political and social oppression led to violent tensions between several ethnic and cultural groups. Education should be delivered as ethnically inclusive and related to peacebuilding (Pauli 2016). Myanmar has challenges ranging from huge social inequalities to conflicts over political autonomy, belief systems, citizenship rights, and natural resources.

There is growing recognition that education plays a crucial role in the context of a fragile state. The 4R framework (redistribution, recognition, representation, and reconciliation) is believed to be the framework for sustainable peacebuilding (Lopes Cardozo and Maber 2019). Myanmar has been following a liberal peacebuilding thesis and presupposing that faith in the state can be restored by redistributing opportunities, for example, improving access to education, to remedy inequalities (Lopes Cardozo and Maber 2019).

The Myanmar Ministry of Education is the central institution responsible for spreading the concept of peace education to empower the population with the required tools. Education policies in Myanmar should integrate peace education because Myanmar is a country full of myriad influences, diversity, and adversities. Through an analysis of education policy utilizing the peace education theory, educational policies that could be related to peace education and the important concepts of peace education were never present in the education system in Myanmar. Peace education in Myanmar remains an unexplored field experiencing a lack of scholars and data (Ferro 2021).

The current national curriculum of Myanmar has not yet integrated the concept of peace education. The current learning content and objectives do not encourage students to learn about human rights or respect diversity, nor do they encourage learning about collaboration, enhancing their problem-solving skills, or promoting social harmony, which are necessary elements for both peace education and peacebuilding (Wong 2022).

The frame of research in Myanmar is rooted in pre-existing assumptions about peace, war, and society from outside Myanmar that are especially influenced by foreign donors. The historical narratives and local context need to be incorporated to develop cultures of peace and more effective peace education in Myanmar (Waters 2022).

In summary, local contexts and narratives must be integrated into the existing ideas of leading scholars. Local ideas about what is needed and how to respond are more relevant in addressing the problem. The religious aspect is not widely covered in much literature or current research on peace education in Myanmar. Some faith-based organizations provide peace education to address the gap left by the government's curriculum, which lacks certain components essential for peace education.

These efforts require academic documentation and recognition. By examining the minority Christian viewpoint in Myanmar, it contributes to the understanding of how peace is advanced through interfaith dialogue within a predominantly Buddhist nation. This analysis adds to the efforts of faith-based organizations in promoting peace education in Myanmar. The conceptual framework of this study is shown below.

2.8. Conceptual Framework

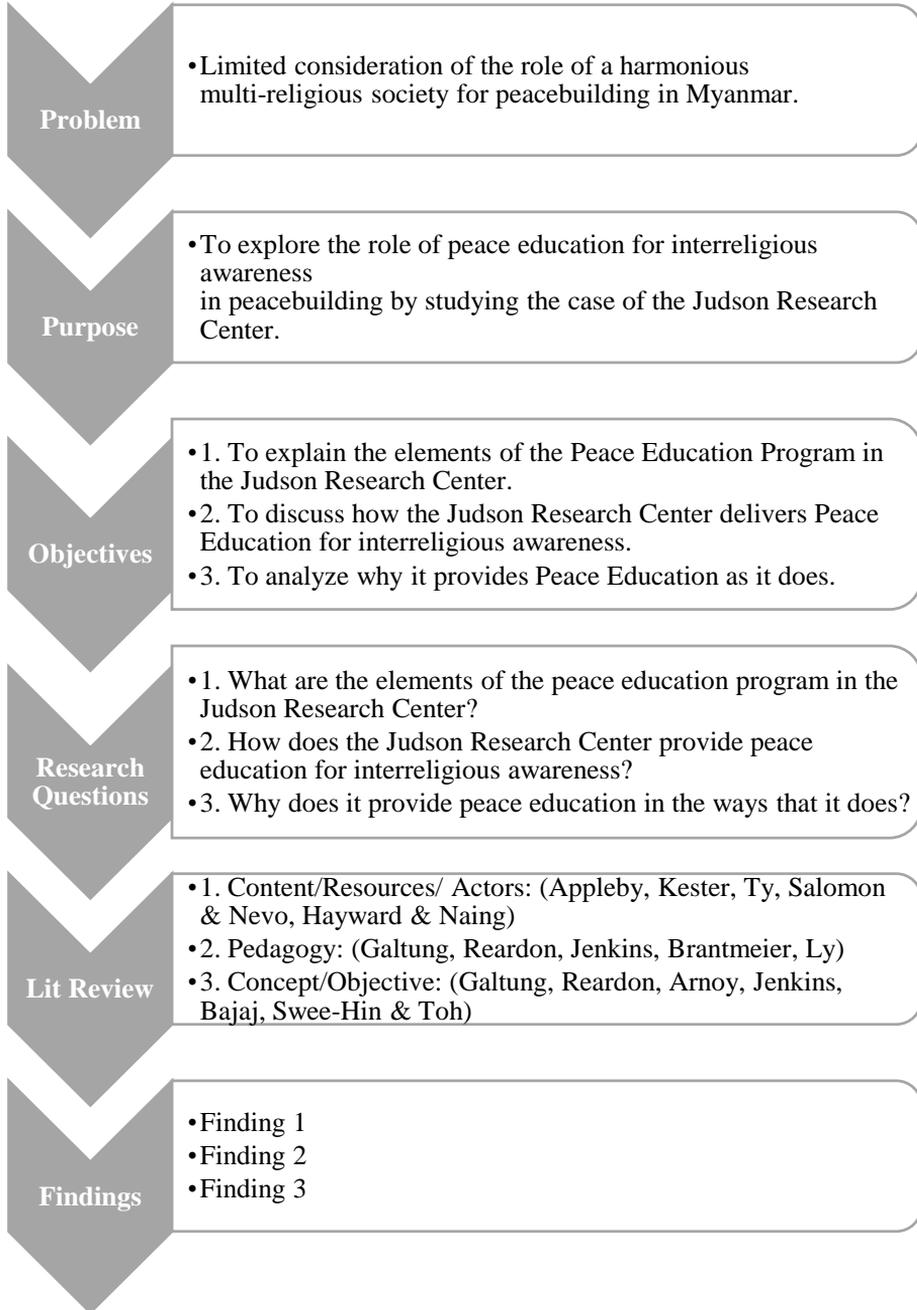


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author of this paper

3. Methodology

This study employed qualitative case study research as a methodology to explore a real-life case since the research focus and problem required the development of an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases. Judson Research Center (JRC) is the object of this study and the product of the inquiry to explore peace education in Myanmar that is aligned with the research focus to produce an in-depth understanding (Creswell and Poth 2016). In qualitative case study research, the unit of analysis is studying an event, a program, an activity, or more than one individual. The unit of analysis in this paper is the peace education program for interreligious awareness provided by the Judson Research Center of Myanmar Institute of Theology. The forms of data collection in this study are informal dialogue, reviewing literature, analyzing documents, digital information relating to Myanmar issues, and the Judson Research Center. The sources of data are books, journals, dissertations, publications, curricula, and information from social media that includes posts about politics, religion, education, conflict, violence, and peace from Myanmar.

Informal dialogue related to JRC peace movements was held with the two officials from the JRC in November 2023 at Seminary Hill, Insein Township in Yangon, Myanmar where JRC is located. Convenience sampling was applied for the informal dialogue with two officials who represented the center and answered valid findings for this research as well as meeting the purpose of the case study research methodology, based on their convenience and availability among the four numbers of the official population of JRC. Member checking was performed to ensure the accuracy of the findings and to uphold validity, a critical aspect of qualitative research. This involved presenting specific descriptions to participants during informal dialogues to ascertain whether the author's interpretations and writings aligned with their views and opinions. After this process, the paper was revised with more information and appropriate wording. To enhance accuracy, this paper utilized the peer debriefing process with the professors and students of the department to which the author belongs (Creswell and Creswell 2018).

4. Findings

It is necessary to address the local issues when designing and delivering peace education. That will determine the effectiveness of the programs delivered by peace educators or institutions. Judson Research Center (JRC) addressed the contextual issues from both secular and spiritual perspectives in its peace education program. JRC designed and delivered its programs based on the availability of resources, the possibility of achieving programs, and the philosophy derived from the proper research on contextual issues.

4.1. Elements of Peace Education in Judson Research Center

Regarding Research Question 1 (What are the elements of peace education in Judson Research Center?), it is found that JRC provides different academic programs, recruits, and develops the resource persons for those programs, and promotes their interfaith awareness endeavors with publications. Since it was established on July 13, 2003, it has served as a center for the promotion of interfaith studies, dialogue, and current issues, and one of the pioneer organizations dedicated to interfaith communication in Myanmar. With a vision and goal to foster mutual understanding, respect, and trust among various faiths, it seeks to promote cooperation toward creating a peaceful, just, participatory, responsible, and sustainable society. The center educates scholars, religious leaders, theological students, and youth from different faith groups to nurture communication practices and actions to address the issues for the betterment of society.

Since Myanmar is prone to religious conflict, JRC initiated the *Master of Arts in Interfaith Dialogue (MAID)* in 2014 as a postgraduate offering that is now running within the liberal arts program of MIT. The contents of the curriculum contribute to peace education to promote interreligious awareness in Myanmar, respecting all four of the country's major religions and their philosophies. Additionally, the curriculum facilitates the development and communication skills among learners of different faiths. This empowers them to actively engage in community efforts aimed at raising interreligious awareness, thereby preventing violent conflicts, and fostering peacebuilding initiatives.

JRC has established a resource person team comprised of faith leaders from Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam to provide peace education for interfaith awareness and communication. Young leaders from different communities are also recruited to interfaith communication awareness training programs.

JRC has produced some successful initiatives that have contributed to peace education in Myanmar. The center designed and published a *Guidebook for Interfaith Dialogue* in 2017 and a *Faith-Based Community Dialogue Facilitative Training Curriculum* in 2018, based on its rich experience of interfaith dialogue practices in various communities. In 2021, it collaborated with local churches in Kachin state to publish the book *Contextual Resilience Power* under its parent unit, MIT. This publication has provided significant benefits to readers, learners, practitioners, and communities, offering insights into the power of resilience in coping with hardships. These home-grown materials are useful as guidelines and facilitative tools for effective communication in communities (Judson Research Center 2023b).

JRC designed its master's degree program within a sufficient timeframe, as a two-year master's program that requires two to three weeks of intensive in-class teaching every semester. This program is a combination of three semesters of modular-based coursework and one semester of research writing. Regarding the length of time for the entire mission, JRC moves its operations forward to expand the time by stage 1: promotion of the awareness of interfaith dialogue among faith leaders at an academic level (2003-2010); stage 2: Implementing dialogue training and activities through academic programs with young leaders (2010-2017); and stage 3: Conducting dialogue in the community (2017-present). Starting in 2018, JRC initiated the community dialogue program that focuses on Kachin state (Moo 2019).

4.2. The Ways Judson Research Center Provides Peace Education for Interreligious Awareness

Regarding Research Question 2 (How does the Judson Research Center provide peace education for interreligious awareness?), it is found that JRC is a specialized center committed to promoting

peace education along an interfaith trajectory to address contemporary issues in Myanmar. Its approach to peace education is grounded in the principle of “Engagement.” The center focused on broader issues in its early years; however, it is currently sharply focused on the “Engagement” practice in different areas that contribute to peace education in Myanmar.

Interfaith Engagement: The center actively promotes interfaith awareness and builds interfaith capacities. Despite being a Christian faith-based organization in a predominantly Buddhist nation, JRC endeavors to bridge the majority/minority divide by fostering relationships with other faith institutions in the country. Through these efforts, the center nurtures interfaith awareness to address social challenges. JRC spearheads Buddhist-Christian dialogue initiatives and offers dialogue training to improve communication skills among diverse faith communities. It begins by fostering individual understanding of personality and spirituality, gradually fostering constructive relationships among various faith groups. This process enhances the necessary skills and mindset for collective action in addressing societal issues. See Figure 2 below.

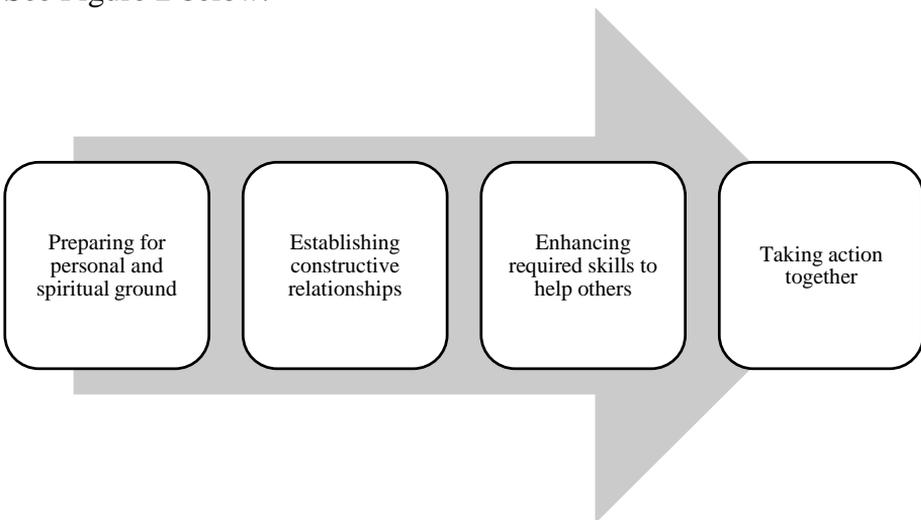


Figure 2: Approach to Promote Dialogue in the Community (Bwa 2021)

The *Master of Arts in Interfaith Dialogue (MAID)* program initiated by JRC is an academic interfaith engagement that covers religious philosophies, theology, research methodology, politics, interfaith dialogue skills and facilitation, community dialogue, and research work. The programs aim to equip students with facilitation skills to cultivate a culture of communication within their communities. In addition to these programs, the center organizes various research initiatives and activities to promote interfaith awareness, including short training, workshops, seminars, and dialogue conferences involving interfaith groups. Furthermore, JRC offers certificate training in interfaith dialogue to foster communication and engagement within communities (Judson Research Center 2023a).

Media Engagement: JRC has recognized the importance of utilizing the media to disseminate information and promote interfaith awareness. However, it also understood the significance of delivering the appropriate message to specific communities and the necessity of journalists to effectively manage conflict and reduce violence. As part of its strategic approach to achieve its interfaith awareness objectives, JRC focuses on enhancing the capacity of journalists and establishing a media monitoring system.

Church Engagement: JRC acknowledges the role of churches within their respective communities. Growing concerns have arisen regarding communal violence in the country, often closely linked with religion, religious leaders, and their followers. In response, JRC has established interfaith groups, networks, and committees in most major cities and towns. Leveraging the influence of churches is a strategic approach to fostering and promoting interfaith awareness. JRC provides support and promotes dialogue skills within churches, empowering them to actively engage in interfaith awareness efforts within their communities. Engagement between the mission of churches and interfaith awareness enhances the effectiveness of JRC's interfaith communication endeavors.

The center focuses on peace education for interfaith awareness through peace initiatives involving faith leaders, which include seminars, conferences, consultations, and workshops. JRC emphasizes this method of engagement in implementing its peace education pro-

gram, exemplified by the publication of a journal titled “Engagement” (Judson Research Center 2023b). Additionally, the center has published a dialogue handbook based on its extensive experience in dialogue activities and findings. Most recently, the center released a book entitled “Contextual Resilience Power,” aimed at empowering the people of Kachin state to voice their concerns and enhance communal resilience. Renowned peace education scholar Johan Galtung has also suggested various communication options, such as lectures through formal education, pamphlets and books, seminars and conferences, and newspaper articles and magazine essays, to convey the message of peace to the target audience (Galtung 2008). Presently, JRC acknowledges paradigm shifts and endeavors to extend its efforts to the wider community through Community Engagement, aiming to strengthen mutual understanding, trust, and respect through an inclusive and comprehensive integrative approach (Shaw and Moo 2023).

4.3. Reasons that Judson Research Center Provides Peace Education in Its Ways

Regarding Research Question 3 (Why does it provide peace education in the ways that it does?), it is found that the reason and the selected way of providing peace education by JRC are derived from the contextual issues of the country and the core values of JRC in promoting interfaith relations.

JRC’s slogan, “Community Dialogue for Peaceful Co-existence,” reflects its vision and aims to improve interfaith relations by providing peace education. The center facilitates communication between people of different faiths and promotes interreligious awareness and cooperative action in community issues. Behind these endeavors, there are rationale and issues that the center addresses.

Rationale: The reason that the center provides peace education derives from the situation of the country. Myanmar is a pluralistic society of over fifty million people with hundreds of different languages and dialects. Christianity constitutes a minority religion in the country, comprising approximately 8.2 percent of the population. Within this demographic, around 5.5 percent identify as Protestant, 1.3 percent as Roman Catholic, with the remainder belonging to independ-

ent churches (Harvard Divinity School 2023b). Many people in Myanmar perceive Christianity as a colonial religion. This perception has resulted in Christians being hesitant to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Buddhist majority, which comprises nearly 90 percent of the population (Harvard Divinity School 2023a), as well as with adherents of other indigenous religions. Poor communication among the different faith groups in the past led to communal conflict associated with religion. As such, there is a vital need for Buddhist-Christian dialogue and study of the primal religions of the people of Myanmar. Clear and effective communication between various faith groups also serves to prevent conflicts stemming from misunderstandings and external factors like political tensions. This circumstance has prompted JRC to develop initiatives focused on providing peace education tailored to the contextual issues in Myanmar.

Issues addressed by JRC: JRC analyzed contextual issues through the lens of interfaith relations, identifying theological issues based on conservatism and exclusivism prevalent among people of various faiths in Myanmar. These issues breed arrogance, hatred, misunderstanding, mistrust, and self-righteousness, stemming from limited knowledge of one's own faith and misconceptions about others. Such negative outcomes are fueled by uncritical cultural attitudes shaped by traditional stereotypes, hindering open and critical communication. This fragmented social structure fosters isolation and perpetuates intergenerational trauma, particularly between Burmese Buddhists and other ethnic groups, fueling fear and impeding genuine dialogue. Given these challenges, JRC framed its approach within its strengths, capabilities, and the specific circumstances of the time (Ngun Ling et al. 2011).

In addressing the identified issues, JRC opted to offer peace education aimed at fostering interreligious awareness, aligning with its core values of nurturing, and reconciling relationships through dialogue. This approach emphasizes mutual understanding, respect, and acceptance, as well as openness, honesty, equality, tolerance, appreciation for diversity, and fostering trust within relationships through dialogical practices.

5. Summary, Challenges, Recommendations, Conclusion

5.1. Summary

To address Research Question 1, JRC relies on resource persons representing diverse faith groups and communities, along with academic content, materials, publications, and research works. For Research Question 2, JRC implements peace education through a dialogue-based pathway for interreligious awareness, emphasizing “Engagement” approaches. In response to Research Question 3, JRC explores the concept and underlying reasons stemming from a pluralistic society entrenched in conservatism and exclusivism within the country.

Table 1 shows the summary of the findings on the peace education program provided by JRC, see the table below.

Reasons to promote interfaith relations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pluralist society 2. Conservative 3. Exclusive 4. Misunderstanding 5. Mistrust 6. Hatred
Objective of JRC	To promote interreligious awareness for peaceful co-existence
Actors in JRC’s activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Faith leaders from different faiths. 2. Young leaders in different communities 3. Community practitioners
Contents in JRC’s peace education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Different religions and their philosophy and theology 2. Politics 3. Interfaith Dialogue 4. Community Dialogue 5. Research Methodology
Pedagogy for implementing programs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interfaith Engagement 2. Church Engagement 3. Media Engagement 4. Community Engagement 5. Integrative approach

Resources in delivering programs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resource person teams 2. Curriculum on interreligious dialogue 3. Publications (Bulletins, Journals, Guide books) 4. Sufficient timeframe for the academic program and interfaith and community dialogue program
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Table 1: Summary of the findings on the peace education of JRC
Source: Author of this paper

However, there are several challenges that JRC is facing. The following sections explore the challenges that JRC currently faces.

5.2. Challenges Faced by the Judson Research Center

The challenges that JRC faces can be categorized under four broad categories: financial resources, human resources, physical resources, and political issues (Ling 2023).

Financial resources: Financial projection for the projects of JRC is a major challenge for the center. JRC is financially independent from MIT. Some funding comes from outside as a project grant, but the center still has a challenge to be financially independent. Financial challenges create other challenges for effectively implementing the activities of the center.

Human resources: JRC encounters challenges in sourcing a sufficient number of experts or research scholars in the field of interfaith dialogue, specifically in the context of Myanmar. In addition, the number of staff and growing activities of the center lead to an unbalanced workload and it limits the expansion of activities at the center.

Physical resources: The availability of educational resources poses significant challenges for JRC. Establishing a comprehensive website to showcase the center's programs and activities could offer numerous benefits, including attracting potential donors, partners, and other stakeholders who could contribute to the center's mission.

However, creating and maintaining a website may still present challenges for various reasons. Additionally, setting up a dedicated research library is another hurdle for the center, as it aims to provide research materials and study resources in interfaith communication to interested learners and communities.

Politics: Restrictions and limitations of religious freedom and publications in Myanmar are challenges for JRC. Unpredictable policies and decisions regarding minority religions may stem from deeply entrenched conservatism and exclusivism. These factors could result in failures or delays in distributing published materials to wider communities, thereby undermining the effectiveness of the center's efforts in terms of both resource allocation and time management.

5.3. Recommendations

Recommendations for the improvement of JRC range from financial to technical aspects. To ensure financial sustainability, it is advisable to expand networks by establishing more connections with overseas research centers and academic institutions. This facilitates mutual learning, particularly in maintaining financial stability. Maintaining open lines of communication both domestically and internationally, especially with JRC and MIT alumni, can serve as a valuable means of financial support. Furthermore, adopting a “Center to Center” approach is recommended. JRC should seek partnerships with other research organizations sharing similar objectives, such as the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice at the University of Western Cape, South Africa, and the Religion, Culture, and Peace Laboratory at Payap University, Thailand. Collaborating with such institutions can also address other challenges faced by JRC.

It is recommended that JRC develop the capacity and knowledge of local resource people with additional skills and awareness of local issues. Inviting visiting scholars and experts from similar or alliance organizations is another way to expand the scope of knowledge and capacity of individuals. For instance, the Desmond Tutu Centre supports researchers and academicians from their alliance institutions in various ways. Recruiting more staff is necessary as the activities of JRC have been growing at the community level. Training

future researchers from among current students or alumni is recommended to respond to that challenge.

The website of JRC needs to be developed to expand the international network for various collaborations. The website could help engage various communities. Upgrading the research library to provide research studies and materials can strengthen the activities of JRC. Building a cost-effective digital library as an initial stage could also be a solution to respond to the requirement of educational resources for targeted audiences.

Political concerns, however, remain sensitive as authorities might not want to support or if they misunderstand the efforts of peace educators. It is recommended to approach relevant authorities to collaborate in providing peace education to fill the gap while the state curriculum does not address peace components when the situation demands. That could improve the awareness and appreciation of authorities over the work of JRC.

These potential actions would help the future endeavors of JRC to be more successful and sustainable in providing peace education-related programs and events in Myanmar.

5.4. Conclusion

Insufficient knowledge and understanding of one's religion and others often breed conflict in multi-religious societies. Addressing these root causes and critically assessing responses is crucial. In the case of JRC, recognizing the isolated nature of each religion led to the selection of an educational pathway as a response. As a research center under an academic institution, JRC focuses on facilitating communication between religious groups to remedy this lack of understanding. Their approach, known as peace education through engagement, aims to tackle local issues by nurturing individual knowledge and skills, developing networks, and broadening engagement efforts from faith groups to the wider community. By educating and engaging together, JRC seeks to foster interreligious awareness and peace. While JRC has achieved milestones in producing educational materials for conflicted communities, further research is needed to explore the impacts and

outcomes of this communication and dialogue approach. This paper contributes significantly by describing JRC's engagement approach in interfaith awareness programs for peace education, shedding light on its unique role as a Christian institution and its contributions to interfaith education and peacebuilding. However, additional research is necessary to delve deeper into JRC's impacts and outcomes, its stance on sensitive issues in Myanmar, and the perspectives of other religious followers and specific Non-governmental Organizations benefiting from peace education in the interreligious field.

Statements and Declarations: From the ethical perspective, this paper followed and did not violate the ethical guidelines throughout the process of research in each stage, such as before conducting research, beginning of the research, collecting, and analyzing data, and in reporting, sharing, and keeping of the data (Creswell & Creswell 2018, 145). The author also got informed consent from both Judson Research Center and the interviewees about the entire research objectives and questions, as well as the publication of this article. Lastly, this paper is free of any financial dependencies from the Judson Research Center.

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