

Integrating Peace Education in Higher Education Curricula: A Systematic Review of Institutional Policies, Strategies, and Practices

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ABSTRACT

This study systematically reviews existing literature on the integration of peace education in higher education curricula, focusing on institutional policies, curricular approaches, implementation practices, and educational outcomes. Using a systematic review methodology, relevant studies published between 2020 and 2025 were identified from major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The selected studies were analyzed using thematic synthesis aligned with four key areas: policy frameworks, instructional strategies, institutional implementation, and outcomes related to inclusive and lifelong learning.

Findings indicate that while strong international and national policies support the integration of peace education, implementation across higher education institutions remains uneven. Institutions employ diverse curricular approaches, including stand-alone courses and interdisciplinary integration, supported by participatory and transformative pedagogies. However, implementation is often fragmented and dependent on institutional commitment and faculty capacity. Despite these challenges, peace education demonstrates significant positive outcomes, including the development of empathy, critical thinking, intercultural understanding, and civic engagement, which contribute to inclusive and lifelong learning.

The study highlights the need for stronger alignment between policy and practice, enhanced institutional support, and sustained efforts to integrate peace education systematically in higher education.

Keywords: peace education, higher education, curriculum integration, inclusive learning, lifelong learning

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In an increasingly complex and conflict-prone global landscape, education has been widely recognized as a critical instrument for fostering peace, social cohesion, and sustainable development. Contemporary challenges such as rising social inequalities, cultural tensions, political polarization, and violent conflicts have intensified the call for education systems to move beyond traditional knowledge transmission toward transformative learning approaches that cultivate values, attitudes, and competencies necessary for peaceful coexistence. In this context, peace education has emerged as a significant educational paradigm aimed at equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to promote non-violence, mutual understanding, and global citizenship (Istianah et al., 2025; Kester et al., 2025).

Peace education is broadly conceptualized as an interdisciplinary and value-oriented approach that fosters learners' abilities to engage in conflict resolution, critical reflection, empathy, and cooperation. It positions education as a proactive force in addressing structural inequalities and preventing violence. Recent scholarship highlights that peace education remains essential in cultivating socially responsible and critically aware individuals, particularly in contexts marked by inequality and democratic challenges (Garcia et al., 2025).

The global policy landscape has increasingly emphasized the importance of integrating peace education across all levels of education, including higher education. International frameworks, particularly those advanced by

UNESCO, underscore the need for education systems to develop competencies that promote peace, human rights, and sustainable development. These global priorities align with the broader agenda of preparing learners not only for employment but also for responsible citizenship in diverse and interconnected societies (Kester et al., 2025).

Higher education institutions (HEIs) play a crucial role in advancing these objectives. As centers of knowledge production and social transformation, HEIs are uniquely positioned to integrate peace-oriented values into curricula, research, and community engagement. Universities, in particular, are expected to cultivate critical consciousness and empower students as agents of peace and social change. However, despite this potential, higher education systems often underutilize their transformative capacity in fostering cultures of peace (Cole, 2025).

The integration of peace education into higher education curricula has taken various forms, including stand-alone courses, interdisciplinary integration, and co-curricular initiatives. A recent systematic review identified key dimensions of peace education in universities, such as curriculum integration, teaching approaches, institutional partnerships, and the “hidden curriculum” that shapes values and behaviors within academic communities (Shehi et al., 2023). These approaches demonstrate that peace education is not limited to formal instruction but extends to institutional culture and practices that influence student learning experiences.

In the Philippines, policy support for peace education integration has been institutionalized through national directives. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) mandates the integration of Peace Studies/Education into higher education curricula, encouraging institutions to embed peace concepts across disciplines or offer dedicated courses. This policy underscores the role of HEIs in contributing to national peacebuilding and sustainable development efforts (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2019).

Despite these developments, the implementation of peace education in higher education remains uneven and complex. Studies indicate that while institutions recognize the importance of peace education, challenges persist in terms of curriculum design, faculty preparedness, institutional support, and contextual adaptation. In conflict-affected and diverse societies, higher education institutions face additional constraints but also unique opportunities to contribute to peacebuilding through curriculum and pedagogy (Kester et al., 2022).

Moreover, there remains a need to systematically examine how institutional policies translate into concrete curricular practices and whether these efforts effectively foster peace-oriented competencies among learners. While existing studies provide valuable insights, there is still a lack of comprehensive synthesis of how higher education institutions integrate peace education through policies, strategies, and practices across different contexts.

In response to this gap, this study aimed to systematically review existing literature on the integration of peace education in higher education curricula, focusing on institutional policies, implementation strategies, and educational practices. The objectives of this review are: first to examine the institutional and national policies that guide the integration of peace education in higher education institutions; second to identify and analyze the curricular approaches and instructional strategies used to integrate peace education in higher education; third to explore how higher education institutions implement peace education in terms of programs, teaching practices, and institutional initiatives; and lastly to evaluate the outcomes associated with the integration of peace education in higher education, particularly in promoting inclusive and lifelong learning. By synthesizing current evidence, the study sought to provide a clearer understanding of how HEIs respond to the growing call for peace-oriented education and to generate insights that can inform policy development, curriculum design, and institutional transformation toward more inclusive and peace-responsive higher education systems.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The integration of peace education in higher education curricula is grounded in theoretical perspectives that emphasize active learning, critical reflection, and social transformation. This study is anchored primarily in Constructivist Learning Theory and Transformative Learning Theory, which together provide a strong foundation for understanding how peace education can be effectively embedded in higher education institutions. Constructivist learning theory posits that knowledge is actively constructed by learners through interaction with their environment rather than passively received, highlighting the importance of experiential learning,

collaboration, and reflection (Almulla, 2023). Rooted in the works of Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky, constructivism underscores that meaningful learning occurs when students engage with real-world issues and participate in social interactions that shape their understanding. In peace education, this perspective supports the use of dialogic, participatory, and experiential pedagogies that enable learners to critically engage with issues of conflict, diversity, and social justice (Kester et al., 2022). Such approaches allow students to co-construct knowledge, develop empathy, and build competencies necessary for peaceful coexistence. Complementing this, Transformative Learning Theory provides a critical lens for understanding how education can lead to profound changes in learners' perspectives and worldviews. Developed by Mezirow, this theory emphasizes the process of critical reflection through which individuals examine and revise their assumptions, beliefs, and values (Mezirow, 2009 as cited in Kester et al., 2025). Peace education aligns closely with transformative learning as it seeks to challenge dominant ideologies, promote critical consciousness, and foster inclusive and socially responsible perspectives among learners (Zembylas, 2021). Through reflective dialogue, experiential learning, and critical inquiry, students are encouraged to reframe their understanding of social issues and become active agents of peace and social change (Garcia et al., 2025). In higher education, these theoretical frameworks collectively support the integration of peace education by promoting student-centered learning environments that encourage critical thinking, empathy, and lifelong learning. They also provide a lens for analyzing how institutional policies, curricular strategies, and educational practices contribute to the development of inclusive and transformative learning experiences. Thus, constructivist and transformative learning theories offer a comprehensive foundation for examining the integration of peace education in higher education and its potential to foster both personal and societal transformation.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON INSTITUTIONAL AND NATIONAL POLICIES ON PEACE EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Empirical studies examining institutional and national policies on peace education in higher education highlight the critical role of policy frameworks in shaping the integration of peace-oriented curricula and practices. Globally, research indicates that international policy initiatives, particularly those advanced by UNESCO, have significantly influenced national and institutional efforts to embed peace education within higher education systems. UNESCO's policy frameworks on Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development have been widely adopted and adapted across countries, emphasizing the development of competencies related to peace, human rights, and intercultural understanding (UNESCO, 2023). Empirical analyses by Bajaj and Hantzopoulos (2020) demonstrate that these global policy agenda have led to increased institutional commitments to integrating peace education, although the extent and depth of implementation vary across contexts.

Studies in the Philippines reveal that policy mandates serve as important drivers of curriculum integration but often face challenges in translation into practice. Navarro-Castro and Nario-Galace (2021) found that national policies promoting peace education, including directives from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), have encouraged higher education institutions to incorporate peace-related content into their programs. However, their study also highlights inconsistencies in implementation, with some institutions fully institutionalizing peace education while others adopt minimal or symbolic integration. Similarly, Kester et al. (2022), in their study on higher education peacebuilding in conflict-affected societies, argue that while policy frameworks provide a necessary foundation, institutional commitment and contextual adaptation are crucial in determining the effectiveness of implementation.

Further empirical evidence suggests that institutional policies play a mediating role in operationalizing national mandates. Harris and Morrison (2021) found that universities with clearly articulated institutional policies on peace education are more likely to implement structured programs and curricular innovations. Conversely, institutions lacking explicit policy support often rely on individual faculty initiatives, resulting in fragmented and unsustainable practices. Reardon (2021) also emphasizes that institutional alignment with peace education policies is essential for fostering a holistic and systemic approach, as policies influence not only curriculum design but also teaching practices, research priorities, and community engagement initiatives.

Moreover, comparative studies indicate that policy implementation is influenced by socio-political and cultural contexts. Zembylas (2021) highlights that in diverse and conflict-prone societies, peace education policies must

be context-sensitive and inclusive to address underlying issues of inequality and marginalization. Empirical findings further suggest that policy effectiveness is enhanced when accompanied by institutional support mechanisms such as faculty development, resource allocation, and monitoring systems (Kester et al., 2025). Without these supporting structures, policy mandates often remain aspirational rather than operational.

The empirical literature underscores that while institutional and national policies provide a critical framework for integrating peace education in higher education, their effectiveness depends on alignment, institutional commitment, and contextual adaptation. These findings highlight the need for a more coherent and systematic approach to policy implementation to ensure that peace education is not only mandated but meaningfully integrated into higher education systems.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON CURRICULAR APPROACHES AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES IN PEACE EDUCATION

Empirical studies on curricular approaches and instructional strategies for integrating peace education in higher education reveal a diversity of models and pedagogical practices that reflect both institutional priorities and contextual needs. A significant body of research indicates that peace education is commonly integrated through either stand-alone courses or embedded interdisciplinary approaches within existing programs. Shehi et al. (2023) found that universities often adopt stand-alone peace studies courses to provide structured and in-depth engagement with concepts such as conflict resolution, human rights, and global citizenship. However, other studies emphasize the growing trend toward curriculum integration, where peace education is infused across disciplines, particularly in teacher education, social sciences, and humanities (Kester et al., 2025). This interdisciplinary approach allows peace-related competencies to be contextualized within various academic fields, making learning more relevant and holistic.

Instructional strategies associated with peace education are predominantly grounded in participatory and transformative pedagogies. Empirical findings by Bajaj (2020) highlight that dialogic teaching, experiential learning, and reflective practices are central to peace education, enabling students to critically engage with issues of inequality, diversity, and social justice. Similarly, Zembylas (2021) underscores the role of affective and relational pedagogies in fostering empathy, emotional awareness, and ethical responsibility among learners. These approaches are consistent with constructivist and transformative learning principles, as they promote active engagement and critical reflection.

Further studies demonstrate the effectiveness of problem-based learning, collaborative learning, and inquiry-based approaches in enhancing peace education outcomes. Garcia et al. (2025) found that these strategies encourage critical thinking, perspective-taking, and conflict resolution skills, which are essential for fostering a culture of peace. In addition, Navarro-Castro and Nario-Galace (2021) emphasize the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in the Philippines, noting that peace education curricula must be grounded in local realities, including historical conflicts and cultural diversity, to be meaningful and impactful.

Empirical evidence also highlights the role of teacher preparation and instructional support in the successful integration of peace education. Harris and Morrison (2021) argue that educators must be equipped with appropriate pedagogical skills and content knowledge to effectively facilitate peace-oriented learning. Without adequate training, instructional strategies may remain superficial or inconsistent. Moreover, Kester et al. (2022) note that institutional support, including professional development programs and curriculum guidelines, is essential for sustaining innovative teaching practices.

Despite these promising approaches, several studies identify persistent challenges in curriculum design and instructional implementation. These include rigid curricular structures, limited time allocation, and lack of alignment between institutional goals and teaching practices (Zembylas, 2021; Bajaj, 2020). Additionally, the absence of standardized frameworks for integrating peace education often results in fragmented or inconsistent application across programs.

The empirical literature suggests that while higher education institutions employ a range of curricular approaches and instructional strategies to integrate peace education, their effectiveness depends on the alignment of curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and institutional support. These findings underscore the need for more

systematic and context-sensitive approaches to curriculum integration to ensure that peace education contributes meaningfully to inclusive and transformative learning.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PEACE EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Empirical studies examining the implementation of peace education in higher education institutions (HEIs) reveal that the operationalization of peace-oriented curricula extends beyond formal course integration to encompass institutional programs, pedagogical practices, and community-based initiatives. Research indicates that universities serve as critical platforms for peacebuilding through their tripartite functions of instruction, research, and extension (Brantmeier, 2020). In this regard, peace education is often implemented through institution-wide initiatives, including peace centers, conflict resolution programs, and intercultural dialogue platforms, which aim to cultivate a culture of peace within academic communities (Synott, 2021).

Empirical evidence also highlights the importance of community engagement and service-learning programs as key mechanisms for implementing peace education. Studies by Leal Filho et al. (2021) demonstrate that HEIs increasingly integrate peace and sustainability initiatives through partnerships with local communities, allowing students to engage in real-world peacebuilding activities. Similarly, Wintersteiner et al. (2020) emphasize that experiential and community-based learning approaches enable students to apply theoretical knowledge to societal issues, thereby strengthening their competencies in conflict resolution, social responsibility, and intercultural understanding.

In terms of teaching practices, implementation is often facilitated through dialogic, participatory, and reflective pedagogies. Research by López López et al. (2021) found that instructors who employ dialogical teaching methods create inclusive learning environments that encourage critical engagement with issues of inequality, diversity, and human rights. Additionally, experiential learning strategies such as simulations, role-playing, and case-based instruction have been shown to enhance students' understanding of complex social conflicts and peace processes (Salomon & Cairns, 2020). These practices align with the broader goals of peace education in fostering empathy, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving skills.

Institutional support structures also play a significant role in the successful implementation of peace education. Studies by Millican (2021) indicate that universities that provide faculty development programs, resource allocation, and policy support are more effective in sustaining peace education initiatives. Furthermore, UNESCO (2021) reports that institutional commitment, including leadership support and strategic planning, is essential in embedding peace education into the broader mission and vision of higher education institutions. Without such support, peace education efforts tend to remain fragmented and dependent on individual faculty initiatives.

However, empirical studies consistently identify several challenges in implementation. Research by Bajaj et al. (2021) highlights issues such as limited funding, lack of institutional coordination, and insufficient training for educators. In addition, context-specific challenges, including political constraints and cultural sensitivities, may influence how peace education programs are designed and delivered (Davies, 2021). These barriers often result in uneven implementation across institutions, despite the presence of strong policy frameworks.

Literature suggests that the implementation of peace education in higher education is multifaceted, involving a combination of curricular integration, pedagogical innovation, and institutional initiatives. While universities have made significant strides in promoting peace-oriented practices, the sustainability and effectiveness of these efforts depend largely on institutional commitment, resource support, and the alignment of programs with broader educational goals. These findings underscore the need for a more coordinated and systemic approach to implementing peace education in HEIs.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON THE OUTCOMES OF PEACE EDUCATION IN PROMOTING INCLUSIVE AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Empirical studies examining the outcomes of peace education in higher education demonstrate its significant contribution to promoting inclusive learning environments and fostering lifelong learning competencies among students. Research indicates that peace education enhances learners' social-emotional development, particularly

in areas such as empathy, tolerance, and intercultural understanding. For instance, studies by Fountain (2020) show that students exposed to peace-oriented curricula develop greater sensitivity to diversity and are more likely to engage in inclusive behaviors within multicultural learning environments. Similarly, Danesh (2021) found that peace education programs contribute to the development of a “unity-based worldview,” which promotes respect for differences and supports inclusive education practices in higher education settings.

Evidence also highlights the role of peace education in fostering critical thinking and reflective learning, which are essential components of lifelong learning. Research by Sterling (2020) emphasizes that peace education encourages learners to critically examine social issues, challenge assumptions, and engage in continuous learning beyond formal education. In addition, Wals and Benavot (2021) argue that education for peace and sustainability equips students with the competencies needed to navigate complex global challenges, thereby reinforcing the principles of lifelong learning. These findings suggest that peace education not only addresses immediate educational outcomes but also contributes to the long-term development of adaptive and socially responsible individuals.

Studies further reveal that peace education enhances civic engagement and social responsibility, which are key indicators of both inclusive and lifelong learning. Empirical work by Hantzopoulos and Bajaj (2021) demonstrates that students who participate in peace education initiatives are more likely to engage in community service, advocacy, and peacebuilding activities. This aligns with findings by Brooks and Normore (2022), who note that peace education fosters leadership skills and a commitment to social justice, enabling students to actively contribute to their communities and societies.

Moreover, research indicates that peace education supports the development of collaborative and conflict resolution skills, which are essential in diverse and interconnected societies. Studies by Bar-Tal and Rosen (2021) show that learners exposed to peace education are better equipped to manage conflicts constructively and engage in dialogue across differences. These competencies are particularly important in higher education contexts, where students from varied cultural and social backgrounds interact and collaborate. In addition, UNESCO (2023) reports that peace education contributes to the creation of inclusive institutional environments by promoting values of respect, equity, and participation.

Despite these positive outcomes, there are also highlights of certain limitations and challenges. Research by Salmi (2020) suggests that the impact of peace education may vary depending on the depth of integration and the level of institutional support. In some cases, outcomes are difficult to measure, particularly in terms of long-term behavioral change and societal impact. Furthermore, the lack of standardized assessment tools for peace education outcomes presents challenges in evaluating its effectiveness across different contexts (Wals & Benavot, 2021).

The empirical literature provides strong evidence that peace education in higher education contributes significantly to the promotion of inclusive and lifelong learning. It enhances learners’ social-emotional competencies, critical thinking skills, civic engagement, and capacity for collaboration and conflict resolution. However, the sustainability and measurability of these outcomes depend on the extent to which peace education is systematically integrated into institutional policies, curricula, and practices. These findings reinforce the importance of strengthening peace education initiatives to ensure their long-term impact on learners and society.

METHODS

This study employed a systematic review methodology to comprehensively examine existing literature on the integration of peace education in higher education curricula. A systematic review enables the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of relevant studies using transparent and replicable procedures, thereby ensuring rigor and minimizing bias in the research process (Sam, 2024). A comprehensive search of the literature was conducted across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and Google Scholar, which were selected for their extensive coverage of peer-reviewed educational research. To ensure the retrieval of relevant studies, a combination of keywords and Boolean operators was used, including “peace education” AND “higher education,” “peace education” AND “curriculum integration,” “peace education” AND “policy” AND “universities,” “peace education” AND “teaching

strategies,” and “peace education” AND “inclusive learning” OR “lifelong learning.” The search was limited to studies published between 2020 and 2025 to ensure the inclusion of recent and relevant literature aligned with contemporary developments in higher education.

To maintain the quality and relevance of the review, predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Studies were included if they were peer-reviewed journal articles or conference papers published between 2020 and 2025, focused on higher education institutions, and addressed at least one of the following areas: institutional or national policies on peace education, curricular approaches and instructional strategies, implementation practices, and outcomes related to inclusive and lifelong learning. Studies were excluded if they focused on basic education, were not written in English, were opinion-based or non-empirical, or did not explicitly focus on peace education. The study selection process followed a systematic procedure guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, which included identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. Initially, relevant studies were identified through database searches, after which titles and abstracts were screened to remove duplicates and irrelevant articles. Full-text articles were then assessed based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, resulting in the final selection of studies for analysis.

Data from the selected studies were systematically extracted and organized into a structured matrix, capturing key information such as authors, year of publication, study context, research focus, methodology, and major findings related to policies, curricular strategies, implementation practices, and educational outcomes. The extracted data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, wherein findings were categorized into four major themes aligned with the objectives of the study: institutional and national policies, curricular approaches and instructional strategies, implementation practices, and outcomes related to inclusive and lifelong learning. This approach allowed for the identification of patterns, similarities, and differences across studies, providing a comprehensive synthesis of the literature. To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, the included studies were also assessed based on their methodological rigor, including the clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of research design, transparency of data collection and analysis, and credibility of conclusions. Studies demonstrating stronger methodological quality were given greater emphasis in the synthesis.

FINDINGS

The selected studies were analyzed and synthesized to identify key patterns related to the integration of peace education in higher education. Table 1 presents a summary of representative studies, highlighting their focus areas and key findings.

Table 1. Summary of Key Studies on Peace Education in Higher Education

Study	Focus Area	Key Findings
Bajaj & Hantzopoulos (2020)	Policy frameworks for peace education	Global and national policies significantly influence the integration of peace education, but implementation varies depending on institutional commitment and contextual factors.
Navarro-Castro & Nario-Galace (2021)	National policy (Philippines)	CHED policies promote peace education integration; however, implementation across HEIs is inconsistent and often dependent on institutional priorities.
Kester et al. (2022)	Policy and peacebuilding in HEIs	Institutional adaptation of peace education policies is crucial; policies alone are insufficient without contextualized implementation strategies.
Shehi et al. (2023)	Curriculum integration	Peace education is implemented through stand-alone courses and interdisciplinary approaches, with integration across disciplines increasing accessibility.
Zembylas (2021)	Pedagogical approaches	Dialogic and affective pedagogies foster empathy, ethical awareness, and inclusive learning environments.
Garcia et al. (2025)	Instructional strategies	Participatory and problem-based learning approaches enhance critical thinking, collaboration, and conflict resolution skills.
Brantmeier (2020)	Institutional practices	Universities implement peace education through programs such as peace centers, community engagement, and intercultural initiatives.

Leal Filho et al. (2021)	Community engagement	Service-learning and community-based programs strengthen students' practical peacebuilding competencies and social responsibility.
López López et al. (2021)	Teaching practices	Dialogical and reflective teaching methods support inclusive and participatory learning environments in higher education.
Millican (2021)	Institutional support	Faculty development, leadership support, and resource allocation are critical for sustaining peace education initiatives.
Fountain (2020)	Inclusive education outcomes	Peace education enhances intercultural understanding and promotes inclusive behaviors among students.
Danesh (2021)	Peace education outcomes	Development of a unity-based worldview supports inclusion and social cohesion in higher education settings.
Wals & Benavot (2021)	Lifelong learning outcomes	Peace education fosters lifelong learning competencies, including critical thinking and adaptability to global challenges.
Hantzopoulos & Bajaj (2021)	Civic engagement	Students exposed to peace education are more likely to engage in community service and peacebuilding initiatives.
Bar-Tal & Rosen (2021)	Conflict resolution outcomes	Peace education improves students' ability to manage conflict constructively and engage in dialogue across differences.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic review provide important insights into how peace education is integrated in higher education institutions (HEIs), revealing both significant progress and persistent challenges across policy, curriculum, implementation, and outcomes. Based on the synthesis of key studies, it is evident that while institutional and national policies serve as critical enablers of peace education, their effectiveness is largely contingent upon the degree of institutional commitment and contextual adaptation. Studies such as those by Bajaj and Hantzopoulos (2020) and Kester et al. (2022) highlight that policy frameworks alone are insufficient to guarantee meaningful integration, as institutions interpret and operationalize these mandates differently. This is further supported by Navarro-Castro and Nario-Galace (2021), whose findings in the Philippine setting demonstrate that despite strong policy directives, implementation remains uneven across HEIs. These patterns suggest the existence of a persistent policy–practice gap, where policies are present but not consistently translated into institutional action.

In terms of curricular approaches, the findings indicate a shift toward more flexible and interdisciplinary models of integration. The coexistence of stand-alone courses and embedded curricular approaches, as identified by Shehi et al. (2023), reflects the diversity of strategies employed by institutions to incorporate peace education. However, the effectiveness of these approaches depends heavily on the instructional strategies used. Empirical studies in the table emphasize the importance of participatory, dialogic, and experiential pedagogies in fostering meaningful learning outcomes (Zembylas, 2021; Garcia et al., 2025). These approaches align with constructivist and transformative learning principles, as they encourage active engagement, critical reflection, and the co-construction of knowledge. Nevertheless, the reliance on such pedagogies also underscores the need for faculty preparedness and institutional support, without which curriculum integration may remain superficial.

The implementation of peace education in HEIs is shown to be multifaceted, extending beyond formal curriculum design to include institutional programs, community engagement, and teaching practices. Studies by Brantmeier (2020) and Leal Filho et al. (2021) demonstrate that universities increasingly adopt holistic approaches, incorporating peace education into extension activities, service-learning programs, and intercultural initiatives. These practices not only enhance students' learning experiences but also connect academic knowledge with real-world peacebuilding efforts. However, the findings also reveal that implementation is often fragmented and dependent on individual faculty initiatives rather than institutionalized systems, as noted by Millican (2021). This lack of systemic integration limits the sustainability and scalability of peace education initiatives, highlighting the need for stronger institutional frameworks and coordinated strategies.

With regard to outcomes, the studies consistently demonstrate that peace education contributes positively to the

promotion of inclusive and lifelong learning. The development of social-emotional competencies, such as empathy and intercultural understanding, is a recurring outcome across multiple studies (Fountain, 2020; Danesh, 2021). Additionally, peace education fosters critical thinking, civic engagement, and conflict resolution skills, which are essential for navigating complex and diverse social environments (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2021; Hantzopoulos & Bajaj, 2021). These findings reinforce the role of peace education in preparing students not only for academic success but also for active participation in society. However, as noted by Wals and Benavot (2021), the long-term impact of these outcomes remains difficult to measure, particularly in terms of behavioral change and societal contributions, suggesting a need for more longitudinal and outcome-based research.

The discussion highlights that while peace education holds significant potential in transforming higher education, its effectiveness depends on the alignment of policies, curricula, implementation practices, and institutional support. The findings suggest that a more integrated and systemic approach is necessary to bridge the gap between policy and practice, enhance curricular coherence, and ensure the sustainability of peace education initiatives. By addressing these challenges, higher education institutions can better fulfill their role in promoting inclusive, equitable, and peace-oriented learning environments.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review examined the integration of peace education in higher education curricula, focusing on institutional policies, curricular approaches, implementation practices, and educational outcomes. The findings reveal that while strong international and national policy frameworks support the inclusion of peace education, their translation into practice remains inconsistent across higher education institutions. Diverse curricular approaches and instructional strategies, particularly those grounded in participatory and transformative pedagogies, demonstrate significant potential in fostering meaningful learning experiences. However, the effectiveness of these approaches is largely dependent on institutional support, faculty preparedness, and the alignment of curriculum with policy directives. Furthermore, the implementation of peace education extends beyond formal instruction to include institutional programs and community engagement initiatives, although these efforts are often fragmented and lack systemic integration.

Importantly, the review highlights that peace education contributes positively to the development of inclusive and lifelong learning competencies, including empathy, critical thinking, intercultural understanding, and civic engagement. These outcomes underscore the relevance of peace education in preparing students to navigate complex and diverse social environments. Nonetheless, challenges such as the policy–practice gap, limited institutionalization, and difficulties in measuring long-term impact persist.

This study affirms that peace education is a vital component of higher education in promoting inclusive, equitable, and transformative learning. To maximize its potential, there is a need for a more coherent and systematic approach that aligns policies, curricula, and institutional practices. Strengthening these areas will enable higher education institutions to more effectively contribute to peacebuilding and sustainable development in an increasingly interconnected world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this systematic review, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen the integration of peace education in higher education institutions (HEIs).

First, policy makers and educational authorities should enhance the implementation and monitoring of peace education policies. While existing frameworks provide a strong foundation, there is a need for clearer guidelines, accountability mechanisms, and evaluation systems to ensure consistent and effective implementation across institutions. Policies should also be contextualized to reflect local realities and cultural diversity, particularly in regions with complex social and political dynamics.

Second, higher education institutions are encouraged to institutionalize peace education through comprehensive and integrated approaches. This includes embedding peace education across curricula rather than limiting it to stand-alone courses, as well as aligning institutional vision, mission, and strategic plans with peace-oriented

goals. Universities should also establish dedicated programs or centers that promote peace education, intercultural dialogue, and community engagement to ensure sustainability and coherence.

Third, faculty development and capacity-building initiatives should be prioritized to support educators in implementing peace education effectively. Training programs should focus on participatory, transformative, and inclusive pedagogies that foster critical thinking, empathy, and conflict resolution skills. Providing continuous professional development opportunities and access to instructional resources will enable educators to integrate peace education meaningfully into their teaching practices.

Fourth, curriculum designers and academic leaders should adopt interdisciplinary and flexible curricular frameworks that allow for the integration of peace education across different fields of study. Emphasis should be placed on experiential learning, problem-based learning, and community-based activities that connect theoretical concepts to real-world applications, thereby enhancing students' engagement and learning outcomes.

Last, future research should focus on evaluating the long-term impact of peace education in higher education, particularly in relation to behavioral change, civic engagement, and societal contributions. There is also a need for the development of standardized assessment tools and indicators that can effectively measure outcomes related to inclusive and lifelong learning.

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