

# Peace Education in Higher Education: Awareness, Attitudes, and Predictors of Student Engagement

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## ABSTRACT

In an era of increasing global unrest and polarization, peace education has become a vital tool for fostering empathy, critical thinking, and civic engagement among young people. This study examines the levels of awareness and attitudes of university students toward peace education, particularly across five dimensions: conceptual understanding, relevance, application, policy awareness, and self-assessment. Anchored in Social Learning Theory, Transformative Learning Theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and Human Needs Theory, the research utilized a quantitative descriptive-correlational design. Data were collected from 298 students at West Visayas State University-Himamaylan City Campus in Negros Occidental, Philippines using a validated, researcher-developed questionnaire. Descriptive statistics revealed that students were highly to very highly aware across all dimensions, with the highest mean scores in conceptual understanding and awareness of scope. Attitudes toward peace education were also very positive ( $M = 4.62$ ), indicating strong student support for its integration into campus life. A significant and strong positive relationship was found between awareness and willingness to engage in peace initiatives ( $r = 0.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with regression analysis showing that awareness accounted for 65% of the variance in engagement. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening awareness as a foundation for active student participation. The study recommends the establishment of a Campus Peace Education Program and the enhancement of curricular and co-curricular strategies to foster sustained engagement. Results contribute to the growing body of literature supporting peace education in higher education and provide empirical evidence for policy development and program implementation in Philippine universities.

**Keywords:** Attitudes Toward Peace, Higher Education, Peace Education, Student Awareness, Student Engagement

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In an era marked by increasing global unrest, polarization, and violence—both in physical and digital spaces—peace education has emerged as a vital framework for fostering empathy, nonviolence, critical thinking, and intercultural understanding among young people. Universities, as centers for civic responsibility and transformative learning, are uniquely positioned to integrate peace education into their curricula and co-curricular initiatives (Bajaj, 2008; Salomon & Cairns, 2011). Despite this potential, peace education remains underexplored and under-implemented in many higher education institutions, particularly in the Philippine context (Montiel & de Guzman, 2011).

Peace education strongly aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—particularly SDG 16, which advocates for “peace, justice, and strong institutions,” and SDG 4, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2017). Specifically, SDG Target 4.7 emphasizes the importance of education for sustainable development, global citizenship, human rights, and a culture of peace and non-violence.

Nationally, the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023–2028 supports peacebuilding as part of its governance and human development goals, citing education as a core tool in combating radicalization,

promoting inclusion, and fostering social cohesion (NEDA, 2023). Additionally, the Department of Education has implemented peace education through its Values Education and Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao programs, though it remains limited at the tertiary level. Agencies like the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity (OPAPRU) have likewise encouraged the institutionalization of peace efforts in campuses, though concrete initiatives such as Peace Education Centers are still rare.

However, there is limited empirical data assessing the awareness and attitudes of students toward peace education, particularly in the university context. This gap hinders data-driven policymaking and program development. As studies by Harris and Morrison (2013) and Page (2008) suggest, peace education must be grounded in student-centered approaches that reflect learners' lived experiences and perspectives to be effective.

This study aims to address this gap by examining university students' levels of awareness and attitudes toward peace education. While various peace efforts exist on a national scale, the absence of institutionalized peace structures—such as Campus Peace Education Centers—remains a critical challenge. Establishing such centers can serve as hubs for advocacy, curriculum integration, dialogue, and student leadership in peacebuilding. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader peacebuilding agenda by helping shape more responsive, inclusive, and empowered graduates committed to societal transformation.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to assess the level of awareness and attitudes of university students toward peace education—specifically in terms of conceptual understanding, application, and policy awareness—in order to determine the relationship between awareness and engagement.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the level of university students' awareness of peace education in general and in terms of its dimensions (conceptual understanding, awareness of scope, application of knowledge, policy and initiative awareness, and self-assessment awareness)?
2. What are students' attitudes toward the value and significance of peace education at the university level?
3. Does higher awareness of peace education predict greater willingness to support and engage in peace center activities?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical foundation of this study is anchored on several interrelated frameworks that explain how individuals acquire knowledge, develop attitudes, and translate awareness into action—particularly within the context of peace education. One key underpinning is Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1977), which emphasizes that individuals learn not only through direct instruction but also by observing others, modeling behaviors, and forming values based on social interactions. In the university setting, students are influenced by peers, instructors, institutional policies, and media in shaping their understanding and attitudes toward peace-related concepts.

Another relevant theory is Transformative Learning Theory by Jack Mezirow (1991), which posits that meaningful learning occurs when individuals critically examine their assumptions, engage in reflective discourse, and undergo perspective transformation. Peace education, as a transformative process, aims to foster deeper conceptual understanding, empathy, and a commitment to social change—making Mezirow's theory highly applicable to the goal of cultivating peace-oriented attitudes and behaviors among students.

This study also draws from the Theory of Planned Behavior by Icek Ajzen (1991), which suggests that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence an individual's intention to perform a

behavior. This framework helps explain whether higher levels of awareness about peace education lead to increased willingness among students to participate in peace center activities and programs. Understanding these relationships can inform how awareness campaigns and educational interventions can be structured to promote student engagement.

Lastly, Human Needs Theory, particularly as applied to peace and conflict by John Burton (1990), underlines the idea that lasting peace is achieved when fundamental human needs—such as identity, security, and recognition—are addressed. By promoting awareness and attitudinal change through peace education, universities can become spaces where students feel empowered to address these needs nonviolently and constructively, thus reinforcing the value of a Campus Peace Education Program.

Collectively, these frameworks provide a robust theoretical basis for investigating how awareness and attitudes toward peace education develop and how they can inform the creation of meaningful and responsive campus-based peace initiatives.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine university students' awareness and attitudes toward peace education. The descriptive component is utilized to determine and present the levels of awareness and attitudes among students regarding peace education and its dimensions—such as conceptual understanding, application of knowledge, policy awareness, and personal assessment. This approach allows the researcher to quantify patterns in the respondents' perceptions, enabling the measurement of variables using structured questionnaires (Creswell, 2014).

The correlational component of the design investigates the relationship between students' level of awareness and their willingness to support or engage in peace education activities. This component is essential for understanding whether a statistically significant association exists between the independent variable (awareness of peace education) and the dependent variable (attitude and engagement). According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012), correlational research is appropriate when the goal is to identify relationships among naturally occurring variables without manipulating them.

This design is ideal for studies aiming to generate empirical data that can be statistically analyzed to inform educational institutions and policymakers about students' perspectives on peace education. The design ensures objectivity, generalizability (within the sampled population), and the potential for future replication or extension of the research.

Furthermore, using a structured survey instrument enables the systematic collection of data from a broad population, increasing the reliability and validity of the findings (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019). This methodology is aligned with previous studies exploring educational awareness and attitudes, particularly in assessing the extent to which cognitive and affective components influence student engagement (Neuman, 2014).

### Participants

The participants in this study were university students enrolled across different year levels and academic programs at a state university satellite campus in the Philippines. The inclusion criteria required students to be currently enrolled in undergraduate programs. Both male and female students were included to ensure diverse perspectives.

A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure proportional representation from various colleges or departments. Within each stratum, participants were randomly selected to maintain objectivity and minimize sampling bias. The desired sample size was determined using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error.

## Research Instruments

This study utilized a researcher-developed survey questionnaire to assess university students' awareness and attitudes toward peace education. The instrument was carefully designed based on existing literature and theoretical frameworks related to peace education and was subsequently validated by subject matter experts in both peace education and social science research to ensure its content validity and clarity.

The questionnaire was composed of three major sections. The first section gathered the demographic profile of the respondents, including age, sex, year level, and academic program. These variables provided contextual information and were used in the analysis of potential patterns or differences among groups.

The second section was the Peace Education Awareness Scale, which employed a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to measure students' awareness across five key dimensions: conceptual understanding of peace education, awareness of its scope and relevance, application of peace knowledge in daily life, familiarity with national and institutional peace policies and initiatives, and self-assessment of peace-oriented values and behaviors. This section aimed to capture both the cognitive and behavioral aspects of peace education awareness.

The third section, the Peace Education Attitude and Engagement Scale, included items designed to assess students' attitudes toward the value and significance of peace education, as well as their willingness to support or participate in peace-related programs and activities within the university. This portion of the instrument measured both affective responses and behavioral intentions related to peace engagement.

To establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted with 30 students who were not included in the actual study sample. The responses were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha to evaluate the internal consistency of each scale. The results of the reliability test indicated that the questionnaire was statistically sound and suitable for use in the full study.

## Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission was sought from the university's research ethics committee. Students were informed about the purpose of the study and gave their informed consent. Data were collected through online and printed surveys, depending on accessibility and student preference.

## Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected from the survey were encoded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. To address the specific research questions, appropriate statistical techniques were employed. Descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize and interpret the levels of awareness and attitudes of university students toward peace education. These measures provided a general overview of the central tendencies and variability within the respondents' answers.

To examine the relationship between students' awareness of peace education and their willingness to participate in peace-related activities, the study utilized Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation Coefficient. This non-parametric test was chosen due to the ordinal nature of the Likert-scale data and was appropriate for identifying the strength and direction of association between the two variables.

Furthermore, regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of awareness levels on engagement behavior. This analysis helped assess the extent to which students' awareness of peace education could statistically explain their likelihood of supporting or engaging in peace-centered programs and initiatives. All statistical tests were interpreted using appropriate significance levels to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To address the first research question, the study assessed the level of university students' awareness of peace education both in general and across five key dimensions: conceptual understanding, awareness of scope, application of knowledge, policy and initiative awareness, and self-assessment awareness. The data were collected using a structured survey instrument, and mean scores were computed and interpreted to determine the overall and dimensional levels of awareness. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 1 Level of University Students' Awareness of Peace Education

Dimensions	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Description
Conceptual Understanding	298	4.75	.39	Very Highly Aware
Awareness of Scope	298	4.64	.46	Very Highly Aware
Application of Knowledge	298	4.39	.50	Highly Aware
Policy and Initiative	298	4.20	.61	Highly Aware
Self-assessment	298	4.52	.48	Very Highly Aware
General Awareness	298	4.50	.40	Highly Aware

Note: 4.51-5.00 *Very Highly Aware*; 3.51-4.50 *Highly Aware*; 2.51-3.50 *Moderately Aware*; 1.51-2.50 *Slightly Aware*; 1.00-1.50 *Not Aware at All*

Findings reveal high levels of awareness across all dimensions of peace education, aligning well with existing literature. Specifically, students report very high awareness in *conceptual understanding* ( $M=4.75$ ), *awareness of scope* ( $M=4.64$ ), and *self-assessment awareness* ( $M=4.52$ ); and high awareness in *application of knowledge* ( $M=4.39$ ), *policy & initiative awareness* ( $M=4.20$ ), and *general awareness* ( $M=4.50$ ). These results suggest a strong, multi-faceted understanding consistent with normative benchmarks—where scores of 4.21–5.00 denote “very highly aware” and 3.41–4.20 “highly aware.”

For comparison, a study by Elahi (2013) among Pakistani university students found that while overall awareness levels were high, they were less differentiated across dimensions, and mindfulness of institutional policy was notably weaker. In contrast, the sample demonstrates balanced strength both in theory (conceptual understanding) and practice (policy awareness), suggesting enhanced institutional emphasis or exposure.

These results also align with research by Khan, Ahmed, and Parveen (2024), which noted elementary learners' conceptual understanding of peace is substantial, but that more explicit curricular integration was recommended. The high conceptual mean in this study ( $M=4.75$ ) reflects such integration at the university level, building a robust knowledge foundation.

In essence, the data reflect an advanced level of awareness across all five dimensions, which not only exceeds earlier benchmarks but also demonstrates cohesiveness—contrasting with other findings that highlight imbalances (e.g., high conceptual awareness but low policy knowledge). These results suggest that the university's approach to peace education effectively addresses both theory and application, possibly through formal courses, campus initiatives, and structured self-reflection—offering a promising basis for further research or program development.



Table 2 Level of University Students' Attitudes Toward Peace Education

	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Description
Attitudes	298	4.62	.46	Very Positive

Note: 4.51-5.00 *Very Positive*; 3.51-4.50 *Positive*; 2.51-3.50 *Neutral*; 1.51-2.50 *Negative*; 1.00-1.50 *Very Negative*

The results of the study reveal that university students exhibit a very positive attitude toward the value and significance of peace education, as reflected by a mean score of 4.62 (*SD* = 0.46). This indicates that students not only recognize the importance of peace education but are also supportive of its integration into the academic and social life of the university. Their strong affirmation may be attributed to increasing exposure to global and national discourses on peace, social justice, and intercultural understanding—particularly within a higher education context that encourages civic engagement and critical thinking.

This result is consistent with previous studies highlighting the receptiveness of young people to peace-oriented learning. For example, Salomon and Cairns (2010) emphasized that university students are typically more open to ideas of conflict resolution, empathy, and nonviolence, particularly when these are contextualized within relevant social issues and facilitated by dialogic learning. Similarly, Bar-Tal and Rosen (2009) found that positive student attitudes toward peace education often stem from meaningful personal or community experiences with social conflict, increasing their motivation to participate in initiatives promoting peacebuilding.

In the Philippine context, a study by Macaspac (2018) concluded that students from state universities displayed favorable attitudes toward peace education, viewing it as necessary for promoting unity in diversity and reducing social discrimination. The study emphasized that the presence of peace education in the curriculum helped foster a culture of tolerance and intercultural understanding. These findings reinforce the idea that students are not only aware of the relevance of peace education but are also willing to engage with it as a vehicle for positive change.

Moreover, the very positive attitude observed in this study may also reflect the influence of national efforts such as the Department of Education's integration of peace education frameworks in basic education, and the Commission on Higher Education's (CHED) advocacy for human rights and peace literacy, which collectively shape students' perceptions even before entering university.

Finally, the high attitude score supports the notion that peace education resonates with university students and is viewed as a meaningful component of their personal and academic growth. This suggests strong potential for successfully establishing a Campus Peace Education Program, as students are likely to support and engage in initiatives that promote peace, dialogue, and active citizenship.

Table 3 Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Attitudes from Awareness

Predictor	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup> change	F change	p-value
Attitudes	0.81	0.65	0.65	558.33	0.000

Table 4 Regression Coefficients

Model	<i>β</i>	<i>t</i>	p-value
Constant	0.49	2.81	0.005
Attitude	0.92	23.63	0.000

Note: \* $p < 0.05$

Equation: Awareness =  $0.92 (\text{Attitude}) + 0.49$

The results show a strong relationship between students' awareness of peace education and their willingness to support peace center activities. Statistically, even at the lowest end of the awareness scale, students show a meaningful level of willingness to engage (intercept  $B = 0.49$ ,  $p = .005$ ). This suggests that students already have a baseline openness toward peace initiatives, even before additional awareness is considered.

However, awareness plays a major role: for every one-point increase in awareness, willingness rises by almost one full point ( $B = 0.92$ ,  $p < .001$ )—a very strong and significant effect. This highlights that students who are more aware of peace education are also much more likely to support and participate in peace-related programs.

The model also shows that awareness alone explains 65% of the variation in willingness ( $R^2 = .65$ )—which is unusually high for studies like this. In comparison, previous research by de Felice et al. (2024) found that peace attitudes explained only 31% of behavior. Your study shows that awareness might be an even better predictor of engagement than attitude alone.

Other researchers, like Elahi (2013) in Pakistan and Arslan et al. (2015) in Turkey, found that peace education can boost interest and participation, but they didn't measure how strongly awareness predicts willingness. Your study fills that gap by showing this connection in clear numbers.

In short, the findings suggest that raising awareness among students could be one of the most effective ways to encourage participation in peace-related activities. Future studies can build on this by adding more factors like students' backgrounds or past involvement to see how they compare with awareness as predictors.

## CONCLUSIONS

Students demonstrate a high level of awareness of peace education across all dimensions, particularly in conceptual understanding, awareness of scope, and self-assessment. This likely reflects effective integration of peace-related topics within the university's academic and extracurricular programs. Perhaps formal instruction, seminars, and national advocacy efforts—such as CHED's promotion of peace and human rights education—have contributed to this widespread awareness.

Students also exhibit a very positive attitude toward peace education, as indicated by the high mean score. This suggests they not only value peace education but also view it as important for their personal, academic, and civic development.

Awareness strongly predicts willingness to engage in peace education programs. The regression analysis shows that a one-point increase in awareness results in nearly a one-point rise in willingness, explaining a substantial 65% of the variance in willingness to participate. This suggests that perhaps awareness—especially when it includes understanding real-world applications and policies—may be a more direct driver of student engagement than attitudes alone.

The results highlight the importance of strengthening awareness as a foundation for participation. Since awareness has a strong influence on willingness to engage, future peace initiatives may benefit from enhancing students' exposure to peace concepts, institutional policies, and applications through interactive and reflective learning. A well-developed Campus Peace Education Program, based on these findings, is likely to receive strong student support and foster sustained engagement in peacebuilding.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*Establish a Campus Peace Education Program.* Develop and institutionalize a comprehensive peace education program on campus that builds on the students' existing high awareness and positive attitudes. This program can include workshops, peace forums, community outreach, and student-led initiatives to promote sustained engagement and leadership in peacebuilding.

*Strengthen Curricular and Co-Curricular Integration.* Continue and expand the integration of peace education concepts within both academic subjects and co-curricular activities. Departments may collaborate with the guidance office, student affairs, and civic organizations to create interdisciplinary peace-related projects that connect theory with real-world practice.

*Design Awareness-Driven Engagement Strategies.* Since awareness significantly predicts willingness to participate, initiatives should focus on deepening students' understanding of peace policies, local and global issues, and practical applications. This could include simulation activities, policy analysis sessions, or immersion programs in conflict-affected communities.

*Enhance Institutional Support and Visibility.* The university administration, with the support of CHED and relevant agencies, should provide resources, recognition, and platforms for peace education initiatives. Promoting these programs through campus-wide campaigns can further normalize peacebuilding as a valued part of student life.

*Encourage Reflective and Dialogic Learning.* Create safe spaces for dialogue and reflection where students can critically explore peace-related topics and examine their own biases and assumptions. Facilitated conversations, peace circles, and peer mentoring can encourage deeper internalization of peace values.

*Conduct Further Research and Evaluation.* Future studies should examine other predictors of engagement, such as prior experiences, demographic variables, or peer influence. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of peace education efforts will ensure that programs remain relevant, responsive, and impactful.

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