



SOCIAL STUDIES STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AVOIDANCE AS A CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGY IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION, NORTH-CENTRAL, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Conflict is an inevitable feature of human interaction, particularly within educational institutions where diverse interests and values intersect. This study examines social studies students' perceptions of avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy in Colleges of Education in North-Central Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted, targeting a population of 19,367 students, from which a sample of 649 respondents was selected using random sampling techniques. Data were collected, and a structured questionnaire based on a four-point Likert scale was used to analyse mean scores and t-test statistics. The findings reveal that students generally perceive avoidance as an effective short-term strategy for managing conflict, particularly through mechanisms such as postponement, withdrawal, and counselling. However, the study also identifies significant locational differences in perceptions between urban and rural students ($p < 0.05$), indicating that contextual factors influence attitudes towards avoidance. While avoidance contributes to temporary stability, it does not necessarily resolve underlying issues. The study concludes that avoidance should be applied cautiously and integrated with more proactive conflict resolution approaches to achieve sustainable peace within educational institutions. Based on the outcome of the study, it was recommended that educational institutions should integrate multiple conflict management strategies rather than relying solely on avoidance; conflict resolution training programmes should be introduced for students and staff; counselling services should be strengthened to support non-confrontational conflict management; and policymakers should consider contextual differences (urban vs rural) when designing conflict management frameworks.

Keywords: Conflict Management; Avoidance Strategy; Social Studies Students' Perception

Introduction

Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of society, particularly where individuals hold differing interests and perspectives. However, the manner in which conflicts are handled largely determines how effectively they are resolved (Agbo, Ayuba, & Yaro, 2020; Ertürk, 2022; Igbinoba et al., 2023). One commonly used approach to conflict management is avoidance. This strategy is characterised by a passive response, where individuals choose to evade or withdraw from conflict rather than confront it directly.

According to Achot & Kithinji (2021), avoidance can be an appropriate strategy in

situations where conflicts are minor or where the potential costs of confrontation outweigh the expected benefits (Rahim, 2021). However, they also argue that overreliance on avoidance may result in unresolved issues, which can foster long-term resentment and reduce overall effectiveness (Alotaibi, Mohamad, Jana Saim & Zakaria 2020).). Similarly, the Harvard School (2022) suggests that avoidance is most suitable in circumstances where both the importance of the relationship and the desired outcome are low. In workplace settings, avoiding minor disagreements may help to reduce unnecessary tension (Humaans, 2022). Nevertheless, Gary, (2021) maintain that



avoidance can still serve as a useful strategy for managing and resolving conflict in society, which forms the central focus of this study.

Although conflict resolution and management have been widely researched, little attention has been given to examining social studies students' perceptions of avoidance as a conflict management strategy in Colleges of Education in North-Central Nigeria. Previous studies, including those by Almito and Oriangi (2023), Sniras (2023), Mekkah (2023), Agbo (2021), Zembylas and Bekerman (2019), and Leslie et al. (2013), have explored various aspects of conflict management. Additional contributions have been made by Chibinidze (2014), Abubakar, Agbo, and Gana (2020), Gbadamosi (2015), Francis (2015), Shanka and Thuo (2017), Adesoji (2018), Nkomo (2020), Nkang and Uwah (2021), Ertürk (2022), and Mapolisa (2023). However, none of these studies specifically addresses the context of Colleges of Education in North-Central Nigeria.

For example, Leslie et al. (2013) investigated the effects of conflict management strategies on intra-group conflict in universities in the southern United States. Using a sample of 270 undergraduate students, the study employed variance analysis to test its hypotheses and found that the methods used to manage conflict significantly influence group outcomes. In a related study, Agbo et al. (2019) examined the influence of social studies education on religious tolerance among NCE students in Kaduna State. The study sampled 250 respondents drawn from a population of 940 students across two Colleges of Education, Federal College of Education, Zaria, and College of Education, Gidan Waya. The findings revealed a statistically significant difference between NCE II and NCE III students' perceptions, with a p-value of 0.006, indicating variation in how students perceive the role of social

studies education in promoting religious tolerance.

Similarly, Nkomo (2020) explored teachers' perceptions of conflict management in primary schools in Mberegwa District, Zimbabwe. The study found that poor communication, unfair treatment, inadequate resources, weak governance, and political affiliations were the main causes of conflict within schools. In another study, Ertürk (2022) reported that teachers experienced reduced fatigue and stress in conflict-free work environments, noting that the erosion of ethical values within schools was a major source of conflict. Despite these contributions, such studies have not examined avoidance as a specific conflict management strategy within Colleges of Education in North-Central Nigeria, thereby highlighting the relevance of the present study.

Statement of Problem

In North-Central Nigeria, many Colleges of Education have experienced recurring conflicts arising from the enforcement of disciplinary measures and campus regulations, labour and union disputes, as well as broader challenges such as institutional restructuring and rising living costs. These conflicts have resulted in significant consequences, including loss of lives and property, damage to institutional facilities, temporary closures of schools, and disruptions to academic activities.

In efforts to address these challenges, various conflict management strategies, including avoidance, have been adopted to restore order and stability within the system. However, such measures have often provided only temporary relief, as conflicts tend to re-emerge shortly after periods of calm. This recurring pattern of instability underscores the need for a more critical examination of



conflict management approaches in the study area.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine social studies students' perceptions of the use of avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy in Colleges of Education in North-Central Nigeria. To achieve this aim, the study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To identify the causes of conflict affecting social studies students in Colleges of Education in North-Central Nigeria
2. To assess students' perceptions of avoidance as a strategy for conflict resolution and management in Colleges of Education within the region.
3. To examine how students' location influences their perceptions of the use of avoidance as a conflict management strategy in the study area.

Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the main causes of conflict among social studies students in Colleges of Education in North-Central Nigeria?
2. How do social studies students perceive avoidance as a strategy for conflict resolution and management in Colleges of Education in North-Central Nigeria?
3. To what extent does students' location influence their perceptions of the use of avoidance as a conflict management strategy in the study area?

Hypothesis

To address the research questions, the following hypothesis was formulated and tested:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference based on location in social studies students' perceptions of the use of avoidance as a conflict resolution and management strategy in North-Central Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

This study is both timely and highly relevant, given that more than half of the Colleges of Education in North-Central Nigeria have experienced at least one form of conflict. In many cases, avoidance has been adopted, in varying degrees, as a strategy for managing these situations. These conflicts occur across different groups, including disputes between academic staff and college management, students and academic staff, students and institutional authorities, and non-teaching staff and students. Such tensions have significantly disrupted the smooth, effective, and efficient conduct of academic activities, while also fostering distrust and hostility among stakeholders.

Against this backdrop, the study provides valuable insights for key stakeholders, students, staff, and institutional management on the role of avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy within the educational system. It offers a clearer understanding of the nature of conflicts within these institutions and proposes ways in which they may be managed more effectively over time. Furthermore, the study serves as a useful resource for policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels, informing the development and application of conflict management strategies. Ultimately, it contributes to the broader goal of promoting peace, stability, and sustainable development in Nigeria, particularly in the context of increasing security challenges across the country.



Literature Review

Conflicts in Contemporary Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the high frequency and intensity of both actual and potential violent conflicts stem from a combination of political, socio-economic, ethnic, and religious tensions, as well as everyday social inequalities. Since the return to democratic governance in 1999, these conflicts have not diminished; rather, they have increased in both scale and severity (Heinrich, 2008). Various conflict management approaches have been identified, including persuasive, collaborative, compromising, avoidance, coercive, and accommodating strategies (Ramin, 2011). When effectively applied, these strategies can reduce the adverse effects of conflict, foster trust, strengthen interpersonal relationships, promote peaceful coexistence, and support economic growth and national development (Ramin, 2011).

In examining contemporary Nigeria, characterised by diverse political, religious, and ethnic conflicts across different regions, it is important to question the effectiveness of existing conflict management approaches. Despite concerted efforts by the government to address these challenges, particularly those rooted in ethnic and religious divisions, conflict-related issues persist. This suggests that current strategies have not achieved the desired outcomes, as crises continue to affect the country's political and socio-economic stability.

Although several mechanisms have been introduced to manage conflict in Nigeria, they have largely failed to eliminate or significantly reduce its occurrence. In many cases, conflicts have escalated due to ineffective management systems and a lack of genuine commitment by government institutions and their representatives (Dike, 1999). While the government is constitutionally responsible for maintaining peace and ensuring citizens' safety, it is often

perceived as contributing to, or even exacerbating, conflict situations within the country.

Historically, successive Nigerian governments have relied heavily on coercive and often unproductive measures to address conflicts. For example, during General Sani Abacha's administration, military and police forces were deployed to manage the Ife-Modakeke crisis in 1997, with limited success until external mediation by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID/OTI). Similarly, under President Olusegun Obasanjo, military intervention was used to address the Arogbu Ijaw-Ugbo Ilaje conflict in 1999, as well as the Niger Delta crisis through the Joint Task Force (JTF) under the initiative 'Operation Restore Hope'. In many cases, such interventions focused on restoring temporary order rather than achieving lasting peace among the affected groups (Albert, 2003). Consequently, these coercive approaches have yielded minimal long-term success in resolving Nigeria's complex socio-political and ethno-religious conflicts.

A notable shift occurred during the administration of the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, who adopted a more conciliatory approach to resolving the Niger Delta crisis. Through the establishment of the Niger Delta Ministry and the introduction of an amnesty programme for militants, the government achieved measurable progress, leading to a relative improvement in peace and stability within the region (Afongu, 2019).

However, from the administration of Goodluck Jonathan to the present, conflicts have persisted across the country, driven largely by ongoing competition among ethnic and religious groups for dominance. Issues such as the activities of Fulani herdsman and the Boko Haram insurgency in northern



Nigeria continue to fuel instability. Despite efforts involving dialogue and negotiation, tensions remain widespread, indicating that existing conflict management strategies have not been sufficiently effective.

Since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999, farmer–herder conflicts have resulted in thousands of deaths and widespread displacement. In response to insecurity, many communities have formed self-defence groups and ethnic militias, which have further intensified violence. These clashes, often involving Muslim Fulani herders and predominantly Christian farming communities, have deepened ethno-religious divisions across the country.

Currently, Nigeria faces increasingly complex security challenges. In the North-East, the Boko Haram insurgency remains a significant threat, while in the North-Central region, violent attacks by armed herdsmen continue to affect rural communities. In the South-South, various militant groups including the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), and the Niger Delta Volunteers (NDV), have contributed to ongoing instability. Similarly, in the South-East, separatist movements such as the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) have intensified demands for self-determination.

Taken together, these developments reflect a nation grappling with widespread dissatisfaction and unrest. The persistence and escalation of conflicts across different regions indicate that Nigeria continues to face significant challenges in achieving lasting peace and stability.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey research design. This approach involves examining a group within a population in its natural setting, allowing for the collection of data as events occur without manipulation. In this context, social studies students in Colleges of Education in North-Central Nigeria constitute the target population, situated within their everyday academic environment, where surrounding conditions directly influence their well-being. Conflict represents one of the key issues affecting students within these institutions and therefore warrants systematic investigation.

In order to obtain a representative subset of the population, a sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table. For a population ranging between 15,000 and 20,000, a sample size of approximately 3.20% to 3.50% is considered adequate for reliable representation. Based on this guideline, a sample of 649 students was selected for the study. A simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure that each member of the population had an equal chance of being included in the sample. This method was considered appropriate as it reduces selection bias and enhances the generalisability of the findings. Questionnaires were administered directly to the selected respondents across the Colleges of Education within the study area.

Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The instrument consisted of ten items designed to capture students' perceptions of conflict and the use of avoidance as a conflict management strategy. The questionnaire was structured on a four-point Likert scale, comprising: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). This scaling format enabled respondents to express varying degrees of agreement with each statement. To



ensure the reliability of the instrument, appropriate statistical measures were applied, and the instrument was considered suitable for the study at a 0.05 level of significance.

Data collected from the respondents were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to answer the research questions and summarise respondents' views. Inferential statistics, specifically the t-

test, were employed to test the hypothesis regarding differences in students' perceptions based on location. All analyses were conducted at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One: What are the Causes of Conflict among Social Studies Students in Colleges of Education in North-central, Nigeria?

Table 1: The Social Studies Students' Perception of the Causes of Conflict in Colleges of Education for a Peaceful Learning Environment N = 648.74

S/n Items	Mean	Std. D	Decision
Competition for inadequate resources causes conflicts	3.65	.554	Agreed
Contra polity value system causes conflicts	3.60	.620	Agreed
Conflict is caused by the psychological needs of groups and individuals	3.63	.558	Agreed
Arguments with other people about accepting one's opinion led to conflict.	3.58	.647	Agreed
Negative influence on other students causes conflict.	3.63	.585	Agreed
Conflict is caused by an inadequate supply of basic amenities in schools.	3.61	.646	Agreed
Standing on one's ground on an issue leads to crises	3.62	.609	Agreed
Average Mean Score and Std. Dev.	3.62	.603	Agreed

Table 1 indicates that students generally agreed that all the identified factors contribute to conflicts in Colleges of Education in North-Central Nigeria. This is evidenced by the overall mean score of 3.62, which reflects a high level of agreement among respondents. Specifically, students identified competition for limited resources, conflicting value systems, the psychological needs of individuals and groups, disagreements over differing opinions, negative peer influence, inadequate provision of basic amenities, and rigid adherence to personal views as key causes of conflict within the institutions.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that competition for limited resources was

perceived as the most significant cause of conflict, with the highest mean score of 3.65. In contrast, factors such as standing firmly on one's position, inadequate provision of basic amenities, conflicting value systems, and disagreements arising from attempts to impose one's views recorded comparatively lower mean scores of 3.62, 3.61, 3.60, and 3.58, respectively. Although these factors were ranked lower, they were still acknowledged as contributing to conflicts within the study area (see Table 1).

Research Question One: What are Social Studies Students' Perception of Avoidance as a Conflict Resolution Tool in Colleges of Education, North-Central, Nigeria?

**Table 2: The Social Studies Students' Perception of Avoidance as a Conflict Resolution Tool in Colleges of Education in North-Central, Nigeria** N = 648.74

S/n Items	Mean	Std. D	Decision
Postponing action can resolve conflicts.	3.57	.632	Agreed
Withdrawing from a situation, thereby satisfying no one by preventing unpleasantness for oneself, can solve the conflict.	3.58	.614	Agreed
Recognizing the needs of the people that may be affected by conflict by avoiding it can facilitate a peaceful learning environment.	3.61	.575	Agreed
Abstaining from conflicting issues can facilitate a peaceful learning environment	3.55	.639	Agreed
Seeking counselling instead of engaging in conflicts can facilitate a peaceful learning environment	3.53	.719	Agreed
Average Mean Score and Std. Dev.	3.57	.636	Agreed

Table 2 indicates that students generally agreed that avoidance is an effective strategy for conflict resolution within the study area. This is reflected in the overall mean score of 3.57, suggesting a positive perception of avoidance as a useful approach to managing conflict in Colleges of Education in North-Central Nigeria.

The results further show that specific avoidance-related practices were also positively rated by the students. These include postponing action (mean = 3.57), withdrawing from conflict situations to prevent unpleasantness (mean = 3.58), recognising the needs of those affected by

conflict (mean = 3.61), abstaining from contentious issues (mean = 3.55), and seeking counselling rather than engaging in conflict (mean = 3.53). These findings indicate that students perceive these strategies as effective means of maintaining a peaceful learning environment and managing conflict within the institutions.

Hypothesis Testing

Ho: There is no significant locational difference in social studies students' perception of the use of avoidance as a tool for conflict resolution and management in North-Central, Nigeria

Table 3: t-test Analysis of the Locational Differences of Social Studies Students' Perception of Avoidance as a Tool for Conflict Resolution and Management in North-Central, Nigeria

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	P	Decision
Urban Setting	60.676	3.37	0.94	97	96.342	.001	Rejected
Rural Setting	54.089	3.18	0.70				

The results presented in Table 3 reveal a significant locational difference in social studies students' perceptions of the use of avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy. Specifically, there is a clear distinction between the views of students from urban and rural backgrounds regarding the effectiveness of this approach. This

conclusion is supported by the t-test result ($t = 96.342$, $p = 0.001$), which is statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that location plays a meaningful role in shaping students' perceptions of avoidance as a conflict management tool.



Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. While the overall findings suggest that students generally view avoidance as an effective strategy for managing conflict, the significant differences observed between urban and rural respondents highlight varying perspectives based on geographical background. This suggests that, despite the general acceptance of avoidance, some students, particularly when comparing rural and urban contexts, hold differing opinions and may express reservations about its effectiveness as a conflict resolution strategy.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study indicate a significant locational difference in students' perceptions, suggesting that individuals from urban and rural backgrounds hold differing views on the use of avoidance as a conflict resolution and management strategy. Although avoidance is generally accepted as a useful approach, variations in perception based on geographical location reveal that some students remain sceptical about its effectiveness.

This finding is consistent with previous studies by Ofobruku (2022), Sniras (2023), Mekkah (2023), and Zembylas and Bekerman (2019), which suggest that avoidance represents a middle-ground strategy in conflict management, allowing some parties to concede or suppress their interests to reach a temporary resolution. In this context, the observed locational differences highlight disparities in how students from urban and rural settings interpret and apply the strategy.

Furthermore, the notion that avoidance may compel parties to overlook or relinquish less critical issues aligns with the work of Chaudhary and Arora (2023), Alotaibi (2020), and Valente and Lorenzo (2020). These studies argue that, while avoidance

may reduce immediate tension, it often fails to provide a lasting solution, as underlying issues remain unresolved and may resurface over time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that social studies students in North-Central Nigeria generally perceive avoidance as an effective conflict management strategy. However, significant locational differences indicate that perceptions are shaped by contextual factors. While avoidance can contribute to short-term peace, it does not provide a comprehensive solution to conflict. Therefore, it should be used in conjunction with more proactive and collaborative strategies to achieve sustainable conflict resolution within educational institutions.

Recommendations

1. Educational institutions should integrate multiple conflict management strategies rather than relying solely on avoidance.
2. Conflict resolution training programmes should be introduced for students and staff.
3. Counselling services should be strengthened to support non-confrontational conflict management.
4. Policymakers should consider contextual differences (urban vs rural) when designing conflict management frameworks.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on conflict management by providing empirical evidence on students' perceptions of avoidance within Nigerian Colleges of Education. It highlights the importance of contextual factors in shaping conflict management strategies and underscores the limitations of avoidance as a standalone approach.



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