EFFECTS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS TRAINING ON UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' HANDLING STYLES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study was carried out in order to determine the effects of conflict resolution skills training on university undergraduate students' conflict handling styles. Two research questions guided the study and four null hypotheses were tested. The design adopted in this study is the quasi-experimental research design. The population of the study was 430second year students enrolled in two programmes of the Faculty of Education, University of Abuja, Nigeria. The total sampling procedure was used, thus, all the 200 level students in the two programmes participated in the study. The instrument adapted and used to collect data in this study is the Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument (TKCMI), (1976) for assessing the conflict handling styles of students. The instrument was face and content validated. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the split-half method. The analysis yielded a reliability index of 0.72. The experimental procedure was executed in three stages, namely, Pre-test, Treatment and Post-test. The study used mean, standard deviations and t-test for data analysis. The results showed that students' conflict handling style before the training was less inspiring. Conflict resolution training was found to be effective in changing the conflict behaviour of students. The effectiveness of conflict resolution training was established in favour of a training conducted using Conflict Resolution Trainers' Manual by Hollier, Cornelius & Murray (2008) and less improvements when trained using the GST222 curriculum. Based on the findings, it was recommended that university authority evolved a training programme that can provide students with needed knowhow on conflict management. The study also recommended a review of the GST222 curriculum to meet contemporary needs and that conflict resolution skills training should be encouraged to enhance students' conflict handling styles.

Key Words: Conflict, Conflict Handling Styles, Conflict Resolution, Conflict Resolution Skills Training

Introduction

A number of conflict situations have arisen in Nigerian society ranging from interpersonal conflicts to communal crises as well as politically induced

conflict situation. A more monumental form of conflict in the form of insurgencies such as those perpetrated by the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Boko Haram and Niger Delta Militants and many more have erupted in the country under the guise of religion, politics, sharing of resources, self-determination to mention but a few. These conflicts pose significant security threat not only to the affected areas but to Nigeria as a whole, as well as to the international community.

Education is perceived as a catalyst for economic well-being, democracy and good governance, social justice, environmental preservation and peace building among others. The global task of any educational endeavour is well explained and understood in Article 26(ii) of the United Nation Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which states that:

> Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace (p7).

Education is therefore to be seen as a catalyst for tolerance, friendship and peace. A narrow interpretation of peace means freedom from war or civil disorder. It can also be described as non-violent, resolution of conflict and the establishment of universal values such as respects for life, human rights, liberty, equity and justice. It means the ability of all components of the population of a country such as Nigeria, to lead a decent and healthy life, in a safe and sustainable environment with opportunities for economic, educational, social and cultural development.

The peace of Nigeria as a nation is severely threatened. Salawu (2001) has identified ethnic tensions and conflict as one of the major factors hampering the stability and development of Nigeria and other countries of Africa since independence. In 2014, internal conflict and repression had generated over 60 million refugees worldwide (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (UNHCR), (2015). The report further showed that Africa alone now accounts for 26% of world's refugees. Nigeria is not left out of the challenges of refugees. People are displaced in various parts of the country because of ethnic, tribal and religious crisis.

In the face of all these, establishing a culture of peace has become a necessity in Nigeria. It is expected that higher education institutions where young professionals and future leaders are trained through various programmes and research activities should play a vital role in the establishment of peace and resolution of conflicts. As stated by Okoye and Igbo (2011), universities have become the leading intellectual force for re-conceptualizing and redesigning peace

and conflict resolution programs as well as in provoking new visions of a plurality of justice.

In playing a meaningful role in developing a culture of peace, universities can assist governments, communities, religious leaders and international organisations in achieving peaceful co-existence in all nations (Adetula, 2006). In recent times, many universities, including Nigerian Universities, have developed peace and conflict resolution programs, thereby making a significant contribution to the development of a culture of peace. An internet search showed over seventy functioning academic peace and conflict resolution programs in the United States, ten in Asia, thirty in Europe, and twenty in Africa (Uwazie, 2008). These peace education programmes engage students in research work, direct or indirect intervention service, both in theory and practice and across disciplines.

In summary, the role of universities in peace education cannot be overemphasized. At the 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, Arias as cited in Pettigrew (2002), insisted that:

> Universities have a natural leadership calling to promote a culture of peace and all academics should concern themselves with the pursuit of peace. The universities should be the enlightened consciousness of nations; and we cannot survive in the 21st Century with ethics of the 20th Century. Peace cannot be just taught; it must be practiced and transmitted (pp. 188-191).

The study looked at conflict handling styles and adopted the work of Thomas-Kilmann on conflict where five modes on managing conflict were identified. The five modes are located on two axes of assertiveness and cooperativeness. The five identified modes of managing conflict include the following:

i. **Collaborating:** Assertive and cooperative, people using this mode try mutual problem solving to satisfy both parties.
ii. **Compromising:** Individual using this mode is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperation. They try to exchange concessions to resolve conflict.
iii. **Competing:** Persons using this mode are assertive and uncooperative and they try to win their own position.
iv. **Accommodating:** Individuals who use this mode are unassertive and cooperative; they try to satisfy other people's goals.
v. **Avoiding:** People using this mode are unassertive and uncooperative. They usually postpone or avoid any unpleasant issues when dealing with others (Thomas, 1976).

Improving students' conflict handling styles may lend itself more to a teaching approach or curriculum that is more focused on the acquisition of 'problem solving skills' rather than on providing historical information and theoretical skills. The content of Peace and Conflict Resolution (GST222) course curriculum in the University of Abuja, Nigeria appears to be more of materials that are theoretical and somewhat historical in nature. This content seems to have failed to address practical conflict issues that can translate to obvious transformation in the conflict orientation and handling styles of students. The researchers therefore wonder how this curriculum content can achieve the aim of rescuing the future and the youth from vicious cycle of toxic emotions, equip the youth with peace education, and imbibe in them knowledge, competence, and ability to discern fundamental values of peace.

The Conflict Resolution Trainer's Manual (CRTM) by Holier, Cornelius and Murray which is the alternative training mode explored in this study is focused on providing or posting visuals that teachers and students can refer to over and over again, like peaceful problem-solving options and conflict resolution sentence stems. The CRTM lessons are presented based on the premise that conflict happens everywhere, and the best learning happens in context. It therefore creates opportunities to coach and model conflict resolution every day, all over the school using practical approaches.

This study therefore, investigated the comparative effectiveness of the GST222 Curriculum and the Alternative Conflict Resolution Trainer's Manual by Holier, Cornelius and Murray, (2008) in changing students' conflict handling styles. The concern of this study was to determine the effect of conflict resolution skills training on conflict handling styles of university undergraduate students.

The global concern about violence and conflict as a serious contemporary issue is stimulating reflections and research on how best to address the issue in Nigeria. Violence and conflict can be felt in every segment of the society including homes, communities and educational institutions.

The youths, including university students, are very significant in conflict management because they are the direct victims of conflict situations and at the same time they are used as agents of conflict. Unfortunately, young people tend to be at the forefront of conflict today. If they are not used as tools for promoting conflict (especially violent ones), they are often easy victims of conflict. Politicians, armed gangs and cultists often desire the strength and volatility of young people finding them easy targets (Mudasiru & Fatai, 2020).

Students therefore need to know how to manage and resolve conflicts so that they can become responsible and promote a culture of peace. Some educators suggest that competency in conflict resolution can lead to increased social and academic achievement in the short term and a more harmonious world in the long term (Van-Slyck & Stern, 1991).

Observations and interactions with the youth also indicate that they do not acquire the knowledge on conflict resolution on their own or from their families. This suggests that by the time the youths commence schooling, little is known about conflict resolution. The implication is that the burden of training youths in the art of conflict resolution is on the school as the next agent of socialization.

University undergraduates are required to undertake a course on peace and conflict resolution (GST222). Although this course has been taught over the years, it has not had serious impact on students' conflict orientation and handling styles. There is evidence that incidences of conflicts are on the increase in Nigeria today as seen in interpersonal conflicts, communal crises as well as political conflicts. This has compelled the researcher to carry out this study in order to determine the effectiveness of trainings on conflict resolution as provided using the GST222 curriculum and an alternative training module (Conflict Resolution Trainers' Manual by Hollier, Cornelius & Murray, 2008). The concern of this study is therefore to determine if the teaching of conflict resolution skills to university students using these two modes has an effect on students' conflict handling styles.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the conflict handling styles of university undergraduate students before the commencement of conflict resolution skills training?
2. What are the conflict handling styles of university undergraduate students after training on conflict resolution skills using GST222 curriculum and Conflict Resolution Trainers' Manual by Hollier, Cornelius & Murray (2008)?

Four null hypotheses were also tested, at 0.05 level of significance, namely:.

H_{o1}: There is no significant difference in conflict handling styles of university undergraduate students in experimental and control groups before conflict resolution skills training.

H_{o2}: There is no significant difference in conflict handling styles of university undergraduate students in experimental and control groups after conflict resolution skills training.

H_{o3}: There is no significant difference in conflict handling styles of university undergraduate students in the experimental group before and after training on conflict resolution skills.

H_{o4}: There is no significant difference in conflict handling styles of university undergraduate students in the control group before and after training on conflict resolution skills.

Method

The design of the study was the quasi-experimental research design. The independent variable consists of two conditions: (1) and experimental condition in which students received conflict resolutions skills training using the Conflict Resolution Trainers' Manual by Hollier, Cornelius & Murray (2008) and (2) a control condition in which students received training using the traditional GST222 curriculum. The population of the study was all the 430 students enrolled in two programmes of the Faculty of Education, University of Abuja, namely, Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) Guidance and Counselling and Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), Social Studies. Based on the population size of 430 students which was considered not too large, the researcher made use of all the students in the two programmes. This method of sampling is called total sampling technique.The two groups were thereafter randomly assigned to experimental and control groups respectively.Students from B.Ed., Guidance and Counselling were randomly assigned to the experimental group while students of B.Ed., Social Studies were randomly assigned to the control group.

The Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument (TKCMI) was adopted and used for assessing the conflict handling styles of students before and after treatment. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKCMI) measures conflict handling styles of individuals (Thomas, 1977). The TKCMI is adopted by the researcher. The TKCMI consists of 30 paired items, which makes a total of 60 statements. Participants will be asked to choose the response from each pair of that statement that best describes the way one usually behaves in conflict situations.

The original TKCMI was face validated by having the instrument reviewed by conflict resolution trainers and had an agreement rate of 80%. Cronbach's alpha was also reported as .74 by Kmitta (1996) in Pakistan. The present researcher however needed to revalidate the TKCMI although adopted due to geographical differences in the area of study.

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the researchers employed the expertise of experts in tests and measurements in the University of Abuja to determine the content and face validity of the instrument. During this process, the scoring pattern was changed and certain vague and ambiguous items were made simple and clear. Thus, validity of the instrument was established.

To determine the reliability of the items on instruments, a pilot test was conducted on 30 respondents from Nasarawa State University in Nigeria that did not participate in the main study. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the split-half method. The analysis yielded a reliability index of 0.72 for the TKC-Mode.

The experimental procedure was in three stages. During the first stage, the TKCMI was administered on all participants to establish their conflict handling styles before commencement of training on conflict resolution. During the second stage, the researcher provided training on conflict handling styles to the students

who are in the experimental group using the second segment of the Conflict Orientation and Handling Styles Trainers Manual (COHSTM). The second segment addressed conflict handling styles such as Collaborating, Compromising, Competing, Accommodating and Avoiding. The control group on the other hand were exposed to training using the traditional GST222 Curriculum. There were seven (7) training sessions which lasted for 4 weeks (2 sessions per week). The duration for each session was one hour.

Thereafter, the researcher conducted a Post-test on both the experimental group and the control group by re-administering the TKCMI instruments. The post-test was administered in order to determine the effects of the training on conflict handling styles of students.

The researcher used mean and standard deviations to answer research questions. For a decision to be made, a mean response of 2.50 was used as a cut off point for decision making. Statements that were 2.50 and above were considered positive while any statement below 2.50 was considered negative. The t-test statistic was used to test all hypotheses in this study as they border on test of difference between two groups. All tests of hypotheses were conducted at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Results

Research Question One: What are the conflict handling styles of university undergraduate students before the commencement of conflict resolution skills training?

Table 1: Conflict Handling Styles of Students before Training

Group	Control		Experimental	
Conflict Handling Style	**Mean**	**Decision**	**Mean**	**Decision**
1. Competing	7.05	Prevalent	7.07	Prevalent
2. Collaborating	4.38	Scarcely Prevalent	4.34	Scarcely Prevalent
3. Compromising	5.22	Moderately Prevalent	5.37	Moderately Prevalent
4. Avoiding	8.68	Highly Prevalent	8.67	Highly Prevalent
5. Accommodating	5.59	Moderately Prevalent	5.77	Moderately Prevalent

Table 1 shows prevailing conflict handling styles of students before exposure to training on conflict resolution skills. It can be seen from the data analysed and presented that students from the two groups are similar in terms of conflict handling styles with most of the students preferring to employ avoidance, competing, accommodating, compromising and collaborating in decreasing order of use.

Research Question Two: What are the conflict handling styles of university undergraduate students after training on conflict resolution skills?

Table 2: Conflict Handling Styles of Students after Training

Group	Control		Experimental	
Conflict Handling Style	**Mean**	**Decision**	**Mean**	**Decision**
1. Competing	7.31	Prevalent	6.37	Prevalent
2. Collaborating	4.59	Scarcely Prevalent	6.10	Scarcely Prevalent
3. Compromising	5.27	Moderately Prevalent	5.80	Moderately Prevalent
4. Avoiding	8.71	Highly Prevalent	6.98	Highly Prevalent
5. Accommodating	5.61	Moderately Prevalent	7.46	Moderately Prevalent

Table 2 shows prevailing conflict handling styles of students after exposure to training on conflict resolution skills. The data analysed showed that students from the control group preferred to employ avoiding, competing, accommodating, compromising and collaborating in decreasing order of use. Thus, students from the control group exhibited no change in preferred conflict handling styles. On the other hand, students in the experimental group, exhibited changes in their preferred handling styles in decreasing order of use from accommodating, avoiding, competing, collaborating to compromising.

H_{o1}: There is no significant difference in conflict handling styles of university undergraduate students in experimental and control groups before conflict resolution skills training.

Table 3: t-test on Difference in Conflict Handling Styles of Students in the Experimental and Control Groups Before Treatment

Handling Style	Group	Number	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Competing	Experimental	204	7.07	1.52	.173	410	.863	Accepted
	Control	208	7.05	1.47				
Collaborating	Experimental	204	4.34	1.32	-.245	410	.807	Accepted
	Control	208	4.38	1.32				
Compromising	Experimental	204	5.37	1.55	1.000	410	.318	Accepted
	Control	208	5.22	1.52				
Avoiding	Experimental	204	8.67	1.42	-.045	410	.964	Accepted
	Control	208	8.68	1.41				
Accommodating	Experimental	204	5.77	1.33	1.432	410	.153	Accepted
	Control	208	5.59	1.20				

The analysis on Table 3 showed significant values of .863, .807, .318, .964 and .153 (more than the 0.05 level of significance) for Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding and Accommodating respectively. The hypothesis is accepted. It is therefore concluded that there is no significant difference in conflict

handling styles of students in the experimental and control groups before treatment.

H_{o2}: There is no significant difference in conflict handling styles of university undergraduate students in experimental and control groups after conflict resolution skills training.

Table 4: t-test on Difference in Conflict Handling Styles of Students in the Experimental and Control Groups after Treatment

Handling Style	Group	Number	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Competing	Experimental	204	6.37	1.54	-6.46	410	.000	Rejected
	Control	208	7.32	1.42				
Collaborating	Experimental	204	6.10	1.36	8.82	410	.000	Rejected
	Control	208	4.59	2.05				
Compromising	Experimental	204	5.80	1.20	3.51	410	.000	Rejected
	Control	208	5.27	1.77				
Avoiding	Experimental	204	6.98	1.40	-12.4	410	.000	Rejected
	Control	208	8.71	1.42				
Accommodating	Experimental	204	7.46	1.23	10.08	410	.000	Rejected
	Control	208	5.62	2.30				

The analysis on Table 4 indicated a significant value of .000 (less than the 0.05 level of significance) for Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, avoiding and accommodating, the hypothesis is rejected. It is therefore concluded that there is significant difference in conflict handling styles of students in the experimental and control groups after treatment.

H_{o3}: There is no significant difference in conflict handling styles of university undergraduate students in the experimental group before and after training on conflict resolution skills.

Table 5: t-test on Difference in Conflict Handling Styles of Students in the Experimental Group Before and After Treatment

Handling Style	Group	Number	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Competing	Pre-test	204	7.07	1.52	4.62	406	.000	Rejected
	Post-test	204	6.37	1.54				
Collaborating	Pre-test	204	4.34	1.32	-13.26	406	.000	Rejected
	Post-test	204	6.10	1.36				
Compromising	Pre-test	204	5.37	1.55	-3.10	406	.000	Rejected
	Post-test	204	5.80	1.20				
Avoiding	Pre-test	204	8.67	1.42	12.11	406	.000	Rejected
	Post-test	204	6.98	1.40				
Accommodating	Pre-test	204	5.77	1.33	-	406	.000	Rejected
	Post-test	204	7.46	1.23	13.29			

The analysis on Table 5 indicated a significant value of .000 (less than the 0.05 level of significance) in Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, avoiding and accommodating for students in the experimental group, the hypothesis is rejected. It is therefore concluded that there is significant difference in conflict handling styles of students in the experimental group before and after treatment.

H_{o4}: There is no significant difference in conflict handling styles of university undergraduate students in the control group before and after training on conflict resolution skills.

Table 6: t-test on Difference in Conflict Handling Styles of Students in the Control Group Before and After Treatment

Handling Style	Group	Number	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Competing	Pre-test	208	7.05	1.47	4.62	414	.058	Accepted
	Post-test	208	7.32	1.42				
Collaborating	Pre-test	208	4.38	1.32	-13.26	414	.212	Accepted
	Post-test	208	4.38	2.05				
Compromising	Pre-test	208	5.22	1.52	-3.10	414	.744	Accepted
	Post-test	208	5.27	1.77				
Avoiding	Pre-test	208	8.68	1.41	12.11	414	.809	Accepted
	Post-test	208	8.71	1.42				
Accommodating	Pre-test	208	5.59	1.20	-13.29	414	.894	Accepted
	Post-test	208	5.62	2.30				

The analysis on Table 6 was carried out to establish whether there is significant difference in conflict handling styles of students in the control group before and after the treatment. With a significant value of .058, .212, .744, .809 and .894 (more than the 0.05 level of significance) in Competing, Collaborating,

Compromising, Avoiding and Accommodating respectively for students in the control group, the hypothesis is accepted. It is therefore concluded that there is no significant difference in conflict handling styles of students in the control group before and after treatment.

Discussion

The study found that students from the two groups (before the commencement of training) were similar in terms of conflict handling styles with most of the students preferring to employ avoiding, competing, accommodating, compromising and collaborating in decreasing order of use. There is no significant difference in conflict handling styles of students in the experimental and control groups before treatment. This posture indicates that students had poor choices of conflict handling styles. It was found that students preferred to first of all avoid each other when conflict emerges. Others engage the competing handling styles. Coming last in students' handling styles were accommodating and collaborating. This might have been the basis for the frequent conflict often reported among students as their approach to handling conflict appear to leave so much to be desired.

Furthermore, after training, it was found that students from the control group still preferred to employ avoiding, competing, accommodating, compromising and collaborating, providing no evidence of behavioural change (conflict handling styles) due to training. On the other hand, students in the experiment group, exhibited changes in their preferred handling styles such that accommodating, avoiding, competing, collaborating and compromising is the order. There was also significant difference in conflict handling styles of students in the experimental and control groups after treatment. The study has found evidence that improvement in the GST222 curriculum is needed having shown higher effectiveness with the Conflict Resolution Trainers' Manual by Hollier, Cornelius & Murray (2008). This position is corroborated by Aber, Brown, and Henrich (2009) who reported that the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) had a significant positive impact when teachers taught a high number of lessons from the RCCP curriculum. Aber, Brown, and Henrich (2009) further established that children receiving a high number of lessons on conflicts had significantly slower growth in self-reported hostile attributions, aggressive fantasies, and aggressive problem-solving strategies, as well as in teacher-reported aggressive behaviour, compared to children receiving a low number of lessons or no lessons at all.

Similar trend is applicable to conflict handling styles as there was significant difference in conflict handling styles of students in the experimental group before and after treatment. However, students in the control group showed no significant difference in conflict handling styles of students in the control group before and after treatment. The students might have benefit from the conflict trainings and could transfer the procedures and skills and apply them in real

conflicts among classmates. This is likely to reduce discipline problems that previously drained teachers' attention, time, and energy. In line with this finding is Graves, Frabutt and Vigliano (2007) who reported results which indicated middle and high school students show a decrease in their levels of relational aggression, and high schools students showing a decrease in their levels of physical aggression. Furthermore, high school students indicated an increase in their levels of effective communication while both middle and high school students exhibited an increase in their general knowledge regarding positive conflict resolution strategies. Waithaka, Shante and Gitimu (2015) on the other hand reported that conflict resolution skills training had no statistically significant impact on conflict handling styles but stated that paired sample test showed statistically significant difference on conflict orientation of the participants of the study. In nearly all cases reported therefore, students' orientation towards conflict improved with application of conflict resolution skills training when compared to traditional approaches to conflict training as typified in the GST222 curriculum.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that poor conflict handling styles among students before the training might have accounted for frequently reported conflicts amongst them. Conflict resolution skills' training using by the alternative curriculum was found to be more effective in changing the conflict behaviour of students. The effectiveness of conflict resolution training was established in favour of a practical, goal-oriented training material as opposed to traditional training materials that is laced with theoretical and historical concepts which mostly lack traction in contemporary conflict issues and resolution mechanisms. It is therefore clearly established that the current peace and conflict resolution curriculum for training of undergraduates is not adequately enhancing their conflict handling styles of students. Thus, a review is necessary in order to ensure that these students graduate with conflict handling styles that can impact positively on interpersonal relationships and their general capacity to relate in a wider social circle.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the following recommendations are made:

1. University authorities should review the GST222 curriculum to meet contemporary needs.
2. Conflict resolutions skills training should be encouraged to provide adequate information to students to effect changes in their conflict handling styles.
3. Co-curricular trainings should be provided in the form clubs and societies where practical approaches to understanding of conflict is provided.

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