

EFFECTS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS TRAINING ON UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' CONFLICT ORIENTATION

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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 orientation. The design adopted in this study is the quasi-experimental research design. The population of the study was all four hundred and thirty (430) students enrolled in two programmes of the Faculty of Education. All 200 level students in the two programmes were selected. This sampling procedure is called total population sampling procedure where the entire population is used. The instrument adapted for the purpose of data collection is called the Conflict Orientation Survey (COS) to assess the conflict orientation of students. The face and content validity of the instrument was established. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the split-half method. The analysis yielded a reliability index of 0.77. The data collection in this study was in three stages, namely, Pre-test, Treatment and Post-test. The researcher used mean, standard deviations and t-test for data analysis. The results showed that students' conflict orientation 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 and less improvements when trained using the GST222 curriculum. It is therefore recommended that university authority evolve a training programme that can provide students with needed knowhow on conflict management. The study called for a review of the GST222 curriculum to meet contemporary needs. Conflict training should be encouraged as even inherited conflict orientations may be redirected.

Key Words: Conflict, Conflict Orientation, Conflict Resolution, Conflict Resolution Skills Training

Introduction

The diversity in Nigeria is reflected in ethnicity, culture, religion and the people's social class. This diversity has its negative effects culminating in the difficulties in coming to agreement on many national issues. A number of conflict situations therefore arise from time to time in the form of insurgencies such as Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Boko Haram and Niger Delta Militants and many more which have erupted in the country under the guise of religion, politics, sharing of resources and so on. Many lives have been lost as a result of these disruptions. Today, kidnapping and hostage-taking have become the order of the day.

Nigeria like any other country in Africa is where peace 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. Isiramen (2003) noted that development is unattainable in an atmosphere where conflict is in frequent occurrence. People who should be living a healthy life and contributing productively to the development of the system where they belong are often made to flee from their homes as refugees. In 2014, internal conflict and repression had generated over 60 million refugees worldwide (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 educational 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. The role of universities in advancing peace is clearly amplified, especially in the light of the significant increase in conflicts and terrorism, the widening socio-economic gap among countries, and youth restiveness, in many parts of Africa (Pettigrew, 2002).

Education may be seen as a catalyst for tolerance, friendship and peace. In recent time, 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 US, ten in Asia, thirty in Europe, and twenty in Africa (Uwazie, 2008). These programmes engage students in research work, direct or indirect intervention service, both in theory and practice and across disciplines. These courses are offered at various levels of studies, with a combination of class lectures, simulations, practicum/internship experiences and service-learning modules.

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.

People view conflict in a variety of ways. Conflict orientation can be seen as the different ways people conduct themselves in hypothetical conflict scenarios. An important theory on this subject is based upon Morton Deutsch’s work of positive and negative conflict. Deutsch (1973) was of the view that at the extremes, people demonstrate a positive orientation or negative orientation, with many shades in between. Positively oriented, non-violent methods of conflict resolution might include talking, cooperating, caring, and thinking about the relationship. Negatively oriented, more violent methods of conflict resolution might include the use of physical force, humiliation, or shaming. The researcher has also observed these extremes in interacting with university students but intend to empirically determine the actual nature of the phenomenon among the study population and to see if training as proposed in this study can alter this orientation in a way that may be beneficial to society. This study therefore is an effort to determine the effect of conflict resolution skills training on conflict orientation 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 are 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. In fact, young people tend to be at the forefront of conflict today. Where 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.

Students therefore need to know how to manage and resolve conflicts so that they can become responsible and promote a culture of peace. More so that many young people do not acquire the knowledge on conflict resolution on their own or from their families. This suggests that by the time young people commence schooling, little is known about conflict resolution. The implication is that the burden of training young people in the art of conflict resolution is on the school as the next agent of socialization.

In view of the need to ensure that young people are armed with the knowledge of conflict resolution, teaching of conflict resolution has been introduced into the curriculum of universities. Peace education is taught especially to those whose field of studies is related to criminal justice, security, diplomacy, law, business, government, and human rights. The question is to what extent does training in conflict resolution translate to greater awareness and avoidance or even resolution of conflict?

University undergraduates are required to undertake a course on peace and conflict resolution (GST222). Although this course has been taught students over the years, it is not clear what effect it has had on students' conflict orientation. Rather than conflict reduction in and out of the University environments, there is preponderance of evidence that shows escalation of conflict. This has compelled the researchers 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). The concern of this study was therefore to determine the effectiveness of teaching conflict resolution skills to university students using these two modes as measured by improvements in students' conflict orientation.

The following questions and hypothesis were raised to guide the research:

- What is the conflict orientation of university undergraduate students before the commencement of conflict resolution skills training?
- What is the conflict orientation of university undergraduate students after training on conflict resolution skills using GST222 curriculum and Conflict Resolution Trainers' Manual by Hollier, Cornelius & Murray?
- There is no significant difference in conflict orientation of university undergraduate students in experimental and control groups before conflict resolution skills training.
- There is no significant difference in conflict orientation of university undergraduate students in experimental and control groups after conflict resolution skills training.

- There is no significant difference in conflict orientation of university undergraduate students in experimental group before and after conflict resolution skills training.
- There is no significant difference in conflict orientation of university undergraduate students in control group before and after conflict resolution skills training.

Method

The design adopted in this 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, and (2) a control condition in which students received training using the traditional GST222 curriculum. The population of the study was all four hundred and thirty (430) students enrolled in two programmes of the Faculty of Education namely, B.Ed., Guidance and Counselling and 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 selected. This sampling procedure is called total population sampling procedure where the entire population is used. The participants were randomly assigned into control group (B.Ed., Social Studies) and experimental group (B.Ed., Guidance and Counselling).

The Conflict Orientation Survey (COS) was adapted and used to assess the conflict orientation of students before and after treatment. The Conflict Orientation Survey (COS) has 12 items. The original COS is an instrument structured along a five-point Likert scale to elicit students' orientation on conflict.

The adapted version is a 4-point scale which excludes the 'sometimes true' option. The response pattern was also changed from never true (1), rarely (2), often (3), always true (4) to strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3) and strongly disagree (4) respectively.

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. To determine the reliability of the instrument, 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 0.77 for the COS. This shows that the instrument is reliable for the study.

The experimental procedure was in three stages. The first stage was to administer the pre-training survey (COS) which established the conflict orientation of participants before the training. During the second stage, the researcher provided training on conflict resolution skills to the students who are in the experimental group using the Conflict Orientation and Handling Styles Trainers Manual (COHSTM). The COS component of the module addressed the nature of conflict with focus on conflict orientation. The control group on the 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). Thereafter, the researcher conducted a Post-test on both the experimental group and the control group by administering Post-training survey (COS) instrument.

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.

Result

Table 1: Conflict Orientation of University Undergraduates before Conflict Resolution Training

S/N	Items	Experimental		Control	
		Mean	Decision	Mean	Decision
1.	I am careful to avoid attacking a person’s intelligence when I critique their ideas.	2.41	Disagree	2.42	Disagree
2.	When someone is stubborn, I often use insults to soften the stubbornness.	2.56	Agree	2.48	Disagree
3.	If a person I am trying to influence really deserves it, I attack their character.	2.31	Disagree	2.32	Disagree
4.	When I critique a person’s ideas, I try not to damage their self-concept.	1.99	Disagree	2.03	Disagree
5.	When people do things that are mean or cruel, I attack their character in order to correct their behaviour.	1.64	Disagree	1.63	Disagree
6.	When nothing seems to work in trying to influence someone, I yell and scream in order to get some movement from them.	1.65	Disagree	1.58	Disagree
7.	I am not threatened by conflict.	2.19	Disagree	2.22	Disagree
8.	When people have conflicts, they should try to work with the other person to solve it.	2.43	Disagree	2.48	Disagree

9.	Physical fighting is an effective way to deal with conflict.	1.87	Disagree	1.79	Disagree
10.	When I have a conflict with someone, I always discuss it with them as soon as possible.	2.29	Disagree	2.32	Disagree
11.	Overall, I think I handle conflicts effectively.	2.34	Disagree	2.40	Disagree
12.	Sometimes physically fighting it out is healthy.	1.55	Disagree	1.48	Disagree
Sectional Mean		2.09		2.10	

The analysis of data presented on Table 1 shows the conflict orientation of students before the commencement of conflict resolution skills training. The mean of 2.09 and 2.10 for students in the experimental and control groups respectively indicates that they exhibited negative orientation towards conflict before the commencement of the study (mean below the midpoint of 2.50). It was found in this study therefore that students harboured negative orientation towards conflict before the commencement of training.

Table 2: Conflict Orientation of University Undergraduates after Conflict Resolution Training

SN	Items	Experimental		Control	
		Mean	Decision	Mean	Decision
1.	I am not threatened by conflict.	2.65	Agree	2.47	Disagree
2.	When people have conflict, they should try to work with the other person to solve it.	1.47	Disagree	2.56	Agree
3.	Physical fighting is an effective way to deal with conflict.	2.84	Agree	2.49	Disagree
4.	When I have a conflict with someone, I always discuss it with them as soon as possible.	3.21	Agree	2.09	Disagree
5.	In overall I think I handle conflicts effectively.	1.89	Disagree	2.05	Disagree
6.	Sometimes physically fighting it out is healthy.	2.74	Agree	2.41	Disagree
7.	I am careful to avoid attacking a person's intelligence when I critique their ideas.	3.53	Disagree	2.35	Disagree
8.	When someone is stubborn, I often use insults to soften the stubbornness.	2.37	Agree	2.05	Disagree
9.	If a person I am trying to influence really deserves it, I attack their character.	3.06	Agree	3.27	Agree
10.	When I critique a person's ideas, I try not to damage their self-concept.	2.90	Disagree	2.48	Disagree
11.	When people do things that are mean or cruel, I attack their character in order to correct their behaviour	2.29	Agree	2.42	Disagree
12.	When nothing seems to work in trying to influence someone, I yell and scream in order to get some movement from them.	2.60	Agree	2.41	Disagree
Sectional Mean		2.63		2.42	

The analysis of data presented on Table 2 shows the conflict orientation of students after training on conflict resolution skills. The mean of 2.63 for students in the experimental group indicates that they exhibited positive orientation towards conflict after training on conflict resolution skills (mean above the midpoint of 2.50). The mean of 2.42 for students in the control group indicates that they still exhibited negative orientation towards conflict after training on conflict resolution skills (mean below the midpoint of 2.50). It was found in this study therefore, that students in the experimental group improved in their conflict orientation (positive orientation) while those in the control group still exhibited negative orientation towards conflict after training.

Table 3: t-test on Difference in Conflict Orientation between the Experimental and Control Group Before Treatment

Group	Number	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Experimental	204	2.09	.323	-.165	410	.869	Accepted
Control	208	2.10	.318				

The analysis on Table 3 was carried out to establish whether there is significant difference in conflict orientation of students in the experimental and control groups before the commencement of treatment. With a significant value of .869 (more than the 0.05 level of significance), the hypothesis is accepted. It is therefore concluded that there is no significant difference in conflict orientation of students in the experimental and control groups before the commencement of treatment. Students therefore did not differ significantly in their conflict orientation from the onset of the experiment.

Table 4: t-test on Difference in Conflict Orientation between the Experimental and Control Group After Treatment

Group	Number	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Experimental	204	2.63	.205	11.64	410	.000	Rejected
Control	208	2.42	.185				

The analysis on Table 4 was carried out to establish whether there is significant difference in conflict orientation of students in the experimental and control groups after the treatment. With a significant value of .000 (less

than the 0.05 level of significance), the hypothesis is rejected which implies that students in the experimental and control differ significantly in their conflict orientation after the treatment. It is therefore concluded that there is significant difference in conflict orientation of students in the experimental and control groups after treatment in favour of students in the experimental group. Students in the experimental group therefore showed improved positive orientation on conflict as compared with those in the control group who maintained a negative posture in their orientation towards conflict.

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

Experimental Group	Number	Mean	S.D	t-value	df	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Pre-test	204	2.09	.323	-19.87	406	.000	Rejected
Post-test	204	2.61	.205				

The analysis on Table 5 was carried out to establish whether there is significant difference in conflict orientation of students in the experimental group before and after the treatment. A significant value of .000 (less than the 0.05 level of significance), implies that the hypothesis is rejected. Students in the experimental group therefore differ significantly in their orientations toward conflict in favour of the post-test. This indicates effectiveness of the treatment for the experimental group as students became positive in their orientation towards conflict.

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

Control Group	Number	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Pre-test	208	2.10	.318	-.13.01	414	.000	Rejected
post-test	208	2.42	.155				

The analysis on Table 6 was carried out to establish whether there is significant difference in conflict orientation of students in the control group before and after the treatment. With a significant value of .000 (less than the 0.05 level of significance), the hypothesis is rejected. It is therefore concluded that there is significant difference in conflict orientation of students in the control group before and after treatment. The difference however did not show

mean that is above 2.5, thus students in the control group still maintained a negative outlook in their orientation towards conflict.

Discussion

This study found students in the experimental and control groups to exhibit negative orientation towards conflict rather than positive orientation towards conflict before the commencement of training. Further statistical analysis indicated that there was no significant difference in conflict orientation of students in the experimental and control groups before the commencement of treatment. First, this puts the two groups in the same state before the treatment began thus giving the researcher the confidence that any changes noticed after the treatment can be attributed to the effect of the training provided by researcher. Second, this finding underscores the issue of observed poor conflict orientation among undergraduates for who numerous in-fighting have been reported. The Students' Affairs Division of Universities are often over-burdened with cases of conflicts where students opted to get violent rather than use alternative approaches to resolve conflicts among them.

Another significant finding in this study was that after training, students in the experimental group exhibited positive orientation towards conflict while students in the control group remained negative in their orientation towards conflict. This shows the effectiveness of the training provided the students in the experimental group over those in the control group in improving their orientation towards conflict.

This study found that positive orientation is reported among students in the experimental group. This implies that the training strategy (as provided using the Conflict Resolution Trainers' Manual by Hollier, Cornelius & Murray) was more effective in improving conflict orientation of students than the traditional GST222 curriculum. This is a pointer to needed review in the current GST222 curriculum which appear to be defective and overloaded with theoretical/historical concepts that do not clearly address best practices in conflict resolution. The study therefore reports that there is significant difference in conflict orientation of students in the experimental and control groups after treatment in favour of students in the experimental group.

This finding is in line with Woodworth and Bodine (2001) who found that of the school districts that received technical assistance and showed a decrease in suspension rates, more than half experienced at least a 20-percent decrease in their suspension rates (the highest drop was 83 percent). Information from principals indicates that disciplinary referrals are down in PST classrooms compared with other classrooms in the same school.

The PST initiative therefore shows positive effects on students. Teachers and counsellors who have responded to recent PST surveys have indicated that students who learn peaceable skills exhibit improved cooperation and communication. Grossman, et al (2007) however found that change in conflict orientation of students did not differ significantly between the intervention and control schools for any of the parent-reported or teacher-reported behaviour scales. However, the behaviour observations did reveal an overall decrease 2 weeks after the curriculum in physical aggression and an increase in neutral/prosocial behaviour in the intervention group compared with the control group. The effectiveness of conflict resolution training in changing students' conflict orientation and handling styles therefore has been firmly established in this study.

This study also found that students in the experimental group differed significantly in their orientation toward conflict in favour of the post-test which indicate the effectiveness of the treatment for the experimental group as there is reduction in negative orientation. This study has shown that conflict orientations can be altered from one polarity to the other. The bottom line is that, providing students with practical, workable training on conflict resolution works better than a curriculum that teaches history and theories of conflict. This is important because even though minimal improvements were reported among students in the control group after the training with the GST222 curriculum, higher improvements were reported among those in the experimental group.

Conclusion

Based on findings, the study concludes that students' conflict orientation before the training was less inspiring thus accounting 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.

Recommendations

1. Concerted effort of the university authority must be invested to evolve a training programme that can provide students with know-how on conflict management.

2. There is need to review of the existing GST222 curriculum to meet contemporary needs.
3. Conflict training should be encouraged since inherited conflict orientations may be redirected.

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