

The Influence of Civic Education on Conflict Resolution among Nigeria Youth

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ABSTRACT

This study uses a systematic review and qualitative meta-analysis of secondary data to explore how civic education affects Nigerian youth dispute resolution. Violence, ethno-religious disputes, farmer-herder problems, insurgency, and banditry threaten Nigeria's stability, with youth disproportionately affected as victims and offenders. The qualitative meta-analysis and documentary research study uses peer-reviewed journal publications, policy documents, institutional reports, and news media. Thematic synthesis and document analysis triangulated data for validity. The research follows functionalist sociology. Civic education improves Nigerian young conflict management abilities like mediation, negotiation, teamwork, tolerance, and diversity. Civic education improves conflict resolution knowledge, attitudes, and violent rejection among students. However, huge class numbers, limited teacher training, evaluation procedures that prioritise cognitive knowledge over practical skills, insufficient resources, and recent curricular modifications marginalising Civic Education limit efficacy. The 2025 merging of Civic Education into "Citizenship and Heritage Studies" has been criticised by the House of Representatives. The "Efficacy-Trust Paradox" shows that civic education increases students' sense of agency, but they still turn to adults for high-stakes conflict resolution, emphasising the need for "protected laboratories" like Peace Clubs and peer mediation programs. The potential Safe Nigeria Initiative (2026) integrates civic education, vocational training, livelihoods support, and psychosocial treatment. The study found that civic education has peace building potential but is limited by pedagogical, curricular, and resource issues. Policymakers, educators, teachers, public society, parents, and communities receive comprehensive advice. Nigeria's peace, stability, and development depend on civic education.

KEYWORDS

Civic Education, Conflict Resolution, Nigerian Youth, Peace Education, Efficacy-Trust Paradox, Curriculum Reform

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has over 250 ethnic groups, a near-even Muslim-Christian split, and a varied range of languages and cultures (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Diversity has great possibilities, but it has also caused recurrent and frequently violent confrontations. The nation has repeatedly faced ethno-religious clashes, communal disputes over land and resources, the Boko Haram insurgency, farmer-herder crises, and youth unrest, which threatens democratic consolidation and sustainable development. Recently, violent extremism, banditry, and organised crime have exacerbated these issues, emphasising the need for non-kinetic intervention measures.

Nigeria's youth population drives its problems and solutions. Nigerian youth, with a median age of 18, are disproportionately affected by conflict as victims and perpetrators (UNFPA, 2023). Unemployment, poverty, social marginalisation, and violence make young people vulnerable to armed and extremist recruitment. This group is also the nation's best hope for peace and change. Policymakers, civil society organisations, and educators are realising that sustained peace requires prevention, civic participation, and grassroots peace building. This realisation has made civic education a crucial tool for preparing young Nigerians for constructive conflict resolution and engaged citizenship.

Civic education, also known as citizenship education, teaches students civic information, skills, values, and democratic culture. Citizens' rights and responsibilities, respect for the rule of law and human rights, and collaborative deliberation and nonviolent problem-solving are its main goals. At the basic education level, Social Studies and Religious and National Values Education deliver civic-related content; at the secondary level, Civic Education is a core subject in the revised 2011 curriculum; and at the tertiary level, university students are required to take general studies courses like Peace St. These curriculum requirements aim to promote national integration, social harmony, and peace through education.

Civic education and conflict resolution among Nigerian young are theoretically and empirically linked. According to Durkheim (1956), education transmits the norms, values, and skills needed for social cohesion. Civic education intentionally shapes young people's attitudes toward civic responsibility, tolerance, and non-violent interaction with difference. Role-playing, debates, and group discussions are used to teach students conflict management skills like mediation, negotiation, teamwork, and compromise. Peace education initiatives like school-based peace clubs, peer mediation programs, and peace camps have become practical extensions of civic education, creating "laboratories" where young people can practise conflict resolution in real life.

Civic education has great potential to help Nigerian young resolve conflicts, but it faces several obstacles. Adebayo and Olaniyi (2022) found an "Efficacy-Trust Paradox": civic education raises students' critical consciousness and sense of agency as change agents, but young people often rely on adults to resolve high-stakes conflicts, reflecting a structural educational bottleneck. The current emphasis on assessing cognitive knowledge rather than affective and behavioural outcomes, inadequate teacher training in interactive methods, low credit allocation for civic-related courses, and poor teaching and learning conditions all limit civic education's ability to transform knowledge into peaceful action. These issues suggest a gap between the formal curriculum and the lived reality of conflict among young Nigerians, raising questions about civic education's peace building potential.

This study examines how civic education affects Nigerian youth's attitudes toward violence, confidence in peaceful conflict resolution, and willingness to build peace in their communities. It examines how civic education's mediation, negotiation, tolerance, and democratic engagement abilities apply to young conflicts in schools, communities, and Nigerian society. This research examines the theoretical potential and practical limitations of civic education in Nigeria to better understand how education can be used to address conflict and empower young Nigerians as agents of peace and democratic resilience.

A. *The Concept of Conflict*

Conflict is unavoidable in human society. Conflict is complex, thus scholars have conceptualised it from several angles. Nnoli calls conflict the "basic unit for understanding social existence," whereas Best (2006a) calls it the pursuit of incompatible interests and aims by various groups. More broadly, conflict is a struggle over values, status, power, and scarce resources, with parties seeking to neutralise, injure, or eliminate rivals.

Conflict is disagreements or misunderstandings between people or institutions in society, according to Ezeodo (2025). Orhero defines conflict as a social fight for interest and aim allocation rooted in inequality and human needs. Conflict arises from incompatible group or individual interests, such as rivalry for limited resources, diverse values, and conflicting goals.

Nigerian conflict has several causes and is interrelated. Economic variables like poverty, unemployment, and resource competitiveness generate conflict. Political instability, governance problems, electoral fraud, and weak state institutions escalate violence. Nigeria's nearly 250 ethnic groupings and near-even Muslim-Christian population split generate ethnic-religious fault lines for communal conflict. Communities and oil companies have fought over Niger Delta oil spills. Institutional elements including university staff union strikes, community boundary conflicts, and the northeast Boko Haram insurgency exacerbate Nigeria's conflict landscape.

The conflict can be direct or indirect. Political and economic violence causes physical misery and deprivation, including the destruction of lives, properties, and armed conflict-related famine. In contrast, indirect conflict protests cultural norms, injustice, prejudice, and inequality. This distinction is crucial to understanding how civic education can address overt violence and structural imbalances that sustain conflict.

B. *Conceptualizing Civic Education*

Citizenship education, also known as civic education, teaches students civic information, skills, values, and democratic culture. Ezeodo (2025) describes Civic Education as conscious education that instills civic skills, values, and democratic culture to meet socialisation demands in the interests of the individual, civic society, and the rule of law. Sele defines Civic Education as teaching essential values for improved citizenship and preparing young people to take on community duties.

Importantly, civic education is not limited to formal schools. Citizenship socialisation is taught by families, governments, religions, and the media at every age. Civic Education in schools focuses on creating well-informed, responsible citizens to create a civil society. Civic Education is integrated into Nigerian education through many methods. In basic education, Social Studies and Religious and National Values Education teach civics. Civic Education is a core subject in the redesigned national secondary curriculum launched in September 2011. Universities require general studies courses like Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution and Nigerian Peoples and Culture. This multi-level curriculum aims to promote national integration, social cohesion, and democratic principles through education.

Civic Education prepares pupils for democratic life by teaching them civic skills and ideals. The curriculum teaches civic skills and citizen contributions to development. It clarifies government functions and citizen rights, duties, and obligations. Sofadekan notes that the revised senior secondary school Civic Education curriculum has placed significant demands on educators, particularly secondary school teachers, who must have adequate competence, content knowledge, and pedagogical skills to achieve the curriculum's lofty goals.

Nigerian schools' Civic Education, Citizenship Education, and General Study's courses foster national integration amid the countries religiously, geographically, and ethnically varied population, according to Ladan and Bello (2024). These classes teach young students' diversity, patriotism, cooperation, and tolerance.

C. Conflict Management and Resolution Skills

Dispute management includes dispute resolution approaches. Conflict management is a structured procedure for identifying, resolving, and preventing future conflicts, according to Dimelu, Salifu, Enwelu, and Igbokwe. Conflict management is a way to resolve and end conflicts, according to Egobueze. Conflict management is an intermediary method for resolving conflicts that uses skills to create effective strategies.

Conflict management is key to organisational success. Mediation, arbitration, competition, collaboration, compromise, accommodation, and avoidance are conflict management skills. These tactics have diverse results depending on the conflict. Dike and Dike (2017) list five ways to handle conflict: avoidance (e.g., psychologically tuning off), accommodation (giving the other party what they want and expecting little in return), competition ("my way or nothing," "I win, you lose"), compromise ("I will meet you in the middle"), and collaboration ("our way," "win/win"). Parent, teacher, and administrator responsibilities include teaching secondary school children conflict management. Students learn problem-solving abilities early on that can be used in the classroom and society to promote sustainability. Civic education aims to teach students peace, unity, mediation, and peaceful collaboration for social development.

D. Functionalist Sociological Perspective

The connection between civic education and conflict resolution can be theoretically grounded in the functionalist sociological approach expressed by Durkheim (1956). This perspective implies that education has a crucial socialising function, transferring the norms, values and abilities which are essential for the continuity and cohesion of society. Civic education, in this sense, is a method of citizenship socialisation, consciously moulding young people's inclinations towards civic responsibility, tolerance and non-violent interaction with difference. The theoretical link between the citizenship socialisation courses and the promotion of national integration in Nigeria is established using the functionalist perspective by Ladan and Bello (2024). They contend that courses and subjects at basic, secondary and tertiary levels are designed to generate democratic principles and civic obligations, and eventually serve as tools of social cohesion in a varied and fractured society. This theoretical lens highlights the potential for education to change individual attitudes and behaviours in ways that promote wider social harmony.

Ladan and Bello (2024) however, also point to major restrictions on the extent to which citizenship socialisation courses promote national integration. The obstacles include assessment techniques that test cognitive rather than emotive ability, little funding for education, big class sizes, poor teaching and learning circumstances, and small credit units for citizenship socialisation courses. These practical restrictions reveal the difference between the theoretical potential and the practical implementation.

E. Formal Curricular Provision and Pedagogical Practices

The updated Nigerian Civic Education curriculum, launched in September 2011, formalises the government's commitment to peace building and national integration through education. Class discussions, enquiry, role plays, and computer-assisted instruction meet curriculum objectives for learning outcomes and activities. Students study conflict management skills in the program.

Ezeodo (2025) surveyed secondary school pupils in Njikoka Local Government Area, Anambra State, to assess how Civic Education promotes conflict management. A structured questionnaire and mean and standard deviation were used to analyse data from 1,056 secondary school students. The findings showed that Civic Education helps pupils manage conflict. Based on these findings, Ezeodo (2025) advised Civic Education teachers to use role-playing, debates, and group discussions to educate student's conflict resolution in practice.

Ladan and Bello (2024) evaluate citizenship socialisation courses in Nigeria's Civic Education, General Studies (Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution), and Nigerian Peoples and Culture levels. These courses have the potential to boost national integration, but they face considerable limitations. Assessing cognitive rather than emotive skills limits the development of real civic competencies. Other issues include limited funding, huge class sizes, poor teaching and learning conditions, and low credit units for relevant courses. These findings imply that the formal curriculum has peace building potential, but systemic implementation issues limit its impact.

F. Experiential and Co-Curricular Interventions

Experiential and co-curricular interventions are crucial for turning civic education into conflict resolution skills. Undie, Aboh, and Omang (2025) suggest using civic education to reform, resocialise, and resensitise youngsters to stop disruptive, retaliatory, and violent acts that undermine Nigeria's sovereignty. Citizenship education produces citizens with the right psyche, consciousness, and disposition to uphold democratic ideals, promote human rights, appreciate diversity, and actively build a peaceful and prosperous society, they claim. The Centre for Human Development and Social Transformation (CHDST) in Nigeria has effectively promoted civic and peace education (Peace Insight, 2021). The Centre has trained 185 teachers in conflict transformation, formed the "Network of Civic and Peace Education Teachers," started Peace Clubs in 53 Rivers and Delta schools, and held yearly peace camps for over 1,000 youth. These programs teach conflict resolution and peer mediation in structured settings. Conflict transformation seminars have reached over 1,000 people, proving its scalability when suitably resourced.

In Northern Nigeria, NULAI's "Young Persons in Peace and Conflict Transformation" (YPPCT) project offers similar activities. Young people from five university law clinics and 15 secondary schools learn conflict transformation and peacebuilding skills to facilitate peaceful discussion (AAA-ICDR Foundation, n.d.). This project shows that educational institutions and civil society organisations may collaborate on peace education.

Nafziger (2022) found qualitative evidence that educational programs transform. A two-year youth history and culture study in religiously and ethnically divided Jos, Nigeria, involved 42 18–22-year-olds from four metropolitan areas. Despite having little or no formal history instruction, youth formed a sense of historical consciousness from parents and community members, often absorbing negative views of other religious and ethnic groups. These ideas were disrupted by collaborative history-making experiences where youth interrogated their own understandings of conflict history, documented community histories, and formed more tolerant and respectful friendships and civic identities across ethnic and religious lines. Transformative education can change negative attitudes learned through informal socialisation.

G. The Efficacy-Trust Paradox and Youth Agency

Recent research has found the "Efficacy-Trust Paradox" in teenage civic engagement. Frontiers in Political Science (2026) provides a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study (N=761) on how Peace Education programs affect Southern Nigerian teenagers' conflict resolution preferences and civic involvement. Peace Education improves students' critical consciousness and perceived capacity as change agents, but they still rely on adults for high-stakes conflict resolution. This reliance highlights a structural bottleneck where adult intervention is the only trusted mechanism for physical protection and institutional order.

The study reveals that Peace Education facilitates "Action-Civics," turning the school into a Deweyan "micro-society" where democratic habits are performed rather than memorised. Empowering student self-efficacy in relational disagreements and institutionalising "protected laboratories" like student-led Peace Clubs are needed to bridge the gap between latent agency and active engagement, according to the authors. This suggests that practical, experiencing learning in controlled situations is necessary to translate cognitive information into autonomous conflict resolution behaviour, which has major implications for civic education programs.

H. International Comparative Evidence

Comparative evidence from similar circumstances is useful. A cluster randomised controlled trial (RCT) incorporated in the Youth Connect program in Niger by Mercy Corps (2026) examined whether conflict resolution in economic and civic programming reduced violence. A comparison was made between villages getting Youth Connect just, Youth Connect with IBMN training, and control villages receiving no intervention.

IBMN lowered youth violence support in Youth Connect, according to the study. Youth in villages receiving the combined intervention were less likely to support political violence, rationalise violent responses to daily disputes, or accept violence in their communities.

Critically, Youth Connect alone had little impact on violence-related attitudes, showing that economic and civic programming may not be enough to change violence norms and behaviours without addressing conflict dynamics. IBMN had a greater impact on economically challenged communities, and geo-referenced conflict data revealed less violent occurrences in intervention areas.

These findings are relevant to Nigeria because they show that youth programming that integrates livelihoods, civic involvement, and targeted conflict management can reduce violence better than solo approaches. A comprehensive study shows that civic education and conflict resolution training may be added to youth programs to improve peace building.

I. Challenges to Effective Civic Education

Civic education has been shown to resolve conflicts, but Nigeria faces severe obstacles. Ladan and Bello (2024) say assessment approaches that focus on cognitive rather than emotive outcomes impede the development of peaceful dispute resolution attitudes and values. Insufficient funding, huge class sizes, and poor teaching and learning circumstances lower civic education quality. The low credit allocation to civic socialisation courses compared to other subjects suggests inadequate institutional prioritisation.

Civic Education teachers must have competency, topic knowledge, and pedagogical abilities to teach conflict resolution, according to Ezeodo (2025). Teacher training programs have not always trained educators to use interactive, participatory methods. Poor teacher preparation and lack of teaching materials hinder curriculum goals. The study recommends Civic Education teachers use role-playing, debates, and group discussions to help students understand, practise, and develop conflict resolution skills in practical contexts, recognising that pedagogical approaches are as important as curricular content.

Citizenship education is plagued by a shortage of competent teachers, instructional materials, and educator dedication, according to Undie, Aboh, and Omang (2025). Nigeria's instability and declining trust in governance institutions exacerbate these issues. Curricular reform, teacher preparation, resource provision, and institutional support are needed to improve citizenship education.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nigerian civic education has evolved tremendously due to policy. A substantial primary and secondary school curriculum overhaul were announced by the Federal Government in September 2025. The government integrated Civic Education, Nigerian History, and Social Studies into senior high school "Citizenship and Heritage Studies". This reform sparked controversy and doubt. The House of Representatives demanded that the curriculum reform policy be rescinded immediately, fearing that eliminating Civic Education, Computer Studies, and other essential topics from the WAEC platform would hurt 2026 West African Senior School Certificate Examination Motion Sponsor Rep. Oboku Oforji asked:

"Why should we remove Civic Education from our curriculum when the National Orientation Agency teaches citizens about their civic duties as good Nigerians?" (2025 House of Representatives, para. 4). Civic Education's marginalisation in the curriculum may reduce its ability to resolve conflicts and foster peace, affecting the study's emphasis.

Secondary research strongly suggests civic education teaches Nigerian youth conflict management. Ezeodo (2025) asked secondary school students in Anambra State, Nigeria, about Civic Education and conflict management. Civic Education enhances conflict management through mediation, healthy relationship-building, and collaborative problem-solving, according to research of 399 students and a standard questionnaire.

Research shows civic education requires interactive teaching. Civic Education teachers should use role-playing, debates, and group discussions to teach conflict resolution, according to Ezeodo (2025). Curriculum requirements include discussions, inquiry, role plays, and computer-assisted instruction.

But the literature demonstrates substantial educational constraints. The curriculum is lecture-based due to large classrooms and little teacher preparation, limiting student dispute resolution (Ladan & Bello, 2024). Teachers need competency, content knowledge, and pedagogical skills to teach conflict resolution, but teacher training programmes have not always prepared them to employ interactive, participatory methods.

Recent research identified the "Efficacy-Trust Paradox" in young civic engagement. A mixed-methods study in *Frontiers in Political Science* (2026) examines how Peace Education programs improve Southern Nigerian teens' dispute resolution and civic engagement. Peace Education raises children's critical awareness and perceived change-making ability, but they still need adults to resolve high-stakes conflicts. This reliance shows a structural bottleneck where only adult involvement is trusted for physical safety and institutional order.

Peace Education promotes "Action-Civics," creating a Deweyan "micro-society" where democratic habits are performed rather than memorised, according to the study. To reconcile latent agency and active involvement, the authors suggest increasing student self-efficacy in relational conflicts and institutionalising "protected laboratories" like student-led Peace Clubs. Civic education is crucial for national integration and social cohesion in Nigeria's multi-ethnic society, according to the literature. Citizenship socialisation courses across Nigeria's three levels of education can foster respect for diversity, patriotism, and teamwork among young learners, enhancing national integration, according to Ladan and Bello.

Undie et al. (2025) advise employing civic education to reform, resocialise, and resensitise youth to prevent disruptive, retaliatory, and violent behaviours that threaten Nigeria's sovereignty. Citizenship education gives people the right psychology, conscience, and inclination to maintain democratic ideas, promote human rights, embrace diversity, and actively build a peaceful and successful society, according to Undie et al. Ashibekong and Essien (2026) investigate global citizenship sensitisation for multi-ethnic harmony in Nigeria's complex socio-political fabric. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with over 250 ethnic groups and a history of ethno-religious warfare, secessionist movements, and regional imbalances that undermine national unity, integration, and social cohesion.

A cosmopolitan civic identity founded on shared humanity, critical consciousness, empathy, and global responsibility is proposed in the study. In Nigeria's ethnically fractured nation, formal education, non-formal civic involvement, youth empowerment programmes, and media campaigns deconstruct local identity narratives and promote inclusive, pluralist principles.

III. CONCLUSION

Through comprehensive secondary data analysis, this study evaluated how civic education affects conflict resolution among Nigerian youth. Civic education promotes conflict management, peace, and national integration, according to the findings. However, pedagogical deficiencies, inadequate resources, assessment systems that prioritise cognitive knowledge over practical skills, and current governmental developments that marginalise civic education content limit civic education's effectiveness.

The "Efficacy-Trust Paradox" highlights the necessity for "protected laboratories" like student-led Peace Clubs and peer mediation programs where youngsters can safely practise autonomous conflict resolution. Experiential and co-curricular activities increase peace building in formal civic education.

This study offers policymakers, educational institutions, teachers, civil society organisations, parents, and communities a path for developing civic education and maximising its contribution to conflict resolution and peace building in Nigeria. The recent curriculum revision that merged Civic Education and other subjects shows the fragility of educational gains and the necessity for ongoing activism and attention.

Civic education won't solve Nigeria's complicated conflict issues. However, it is essential to a comprehensive, non-kinetic peace building approach that addresses the root causes of violence and equips young Nigerians, the nation's future leaders and citizens with the knowledge, skills, and values needed for peaceful coexistence, democratic participation, and national development. Civic education invests in Nigeria's peace and prosperity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Policymakers should revisit the recent merger of Civic Education into "Citizenship and Heritage Studies" to ensure that civic education curriculum is not side-lined.
- Schools should sustain and build on Peace Clubs and peer mediation programs as "safe laboratories" for students to practise conflict resolution skills
- Civic Education teachers should apply interactive teaching approaches such as role-plays, debates, group discussions and collaborative problem-solving activities
- Civil society organisations such as the Centre for Human Development and Social Transformation (CHDST), NULAI Nigeria and Search for Common Ground should continue and expand peace education interventions such as Peace Clubs, peace camps, teacher training and community peace building initiatives.

- Parents and community leaders should promote civic education ideals such as tolerance, respect for diversity, dialogue and non-violence in their dealings with young people.

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