

***Impact of Communal Conflicts on Students' Academic Adjustment in Secondary Schools in Benue State***

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**Abstract**

*The study, guided by a research question and one hypothesis, investigated impact of communal conflicts on students' academic adjustment in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of this study was made up of all 2923 teaching staff from the 34 public secondary schools in Benue State. The sample size of the study was 400 teachers. Communal Conflict and Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (CCAAQ) was developed and administered to gather data. The data were analyzed based on the research question using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation, while the hypothesis was tested using the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) goodness of fit test at .05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that communal conflicts have significant impact on class participation of secondary school students. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that communal conflicts have significant impact on students' academic adjustment in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria. It was recommended, among others, that education policymakers, school administrators, teachers, social workers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should formulate strategies for addressing the ills of communal conflicts and encourage socially inclusive intervention mechanisms.*

**Keyword:** impact, communal, conflict, academic, adjustment

## **Introduction**

Man is a universally accepted social being as demonstrated by the kind of social institutions as well as the communities he belongs. In spite of the need and involvement in the establishment of social institutions and the need to interact, man is never without his individual differences even among the monozygotic twins. The differences cut across age, physical appearances, intellectual capabilities, temperaments, religion, socio-economic positions and interests as well as perceptions of social values. All these affects man's decision to agree or disagree with one another. The agreement and disagreement in the relationship could culminate to intimate love, hatred or desires to harm. The individual's desire to harm could generate into a group affair and constitute communal conflict.

Communal conflict is one devastating challenge confronting transitional societies such as Nigeria (Attah et al., 2018). Communal conflict was considered by Azuonwu (2012) as a conflict that occurs between two or more communities. Oboh and Hyande (2016) described communal conflict as involving two or more communities engaging themselves in disagreement or act of violence over issues such as claims for land ownership, religious and political difference leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties. Communal violence (sometimes called inter-communal violence) is a situation where violence is perpetuated across ethnic lines, and victims are chosen based upon ethnic group membership (Horowitz, 2010). Dzurgba (2016) was of the opinion that communistic violence is that which occurs between two or more communities over territorial land, farmland and territorial water for fishing. These definitions revealed that communal conflict is more or less community conflict or ethnic conflict. This is not surprising because communal by its interpretation is a phenomenon that is common to a particular group, community or ethnicity (Oji et al., 2014).

Communal conflict is a social conflict that relates to a group or groups in a society. When it occurs within a group, it is known as intra-communal conflict, but inter-communal conflict when it occurs between groups. It is worth noting that these groups have common social ties, which may make the competition that may ensue to be fierce. The point is that the misuse or unequal distribution of the available resources that should be jointly enjoyed by a group will produce conflict. Many communal conflicts are fought based on different claims ranging from land issues, chieftaincy and resources allocation. Varvar (2010) in Oji et al. (2014) opined that increased demand for land for agriculture, unemployment, rural hunger, and poverty impoverishment trigger communal conflict. Deprivation, exploitation and domination of minority groups by major ethnic groups and leadership problem were highlighted by Angya and Doki (2006) as factors that can ignite communal crisis. Equally, religious differences, competition for livelihood resources and traditional chieftaincy tussles were enumerated by Oboh and Hyande (2016) as potential communal conflict triggers in the country. Competitions for land and chieftaincy tussle are the major causes of communal conflict in the North (Oji et al., 2014).

Conflict is abundantly present in every society. Over half of the world's countries have participated in at least one conflict since the end of World War II (UNESCO, 2013). Every conflict has a unique set of circumstances and causal factors that contribute to its onset. Prolonged, high-intensity conflicts have profound consequences for human development, leaving deep marks on the economy, political systems and social fabric of the countries ravaged by them. Conflict in whatever form can result to violence, and communal conflicts are no exception. The most common consequences as seen in the destruction of lives and property are just a minimal of what bedevils a conflict society because, conflicts affect all social systems including education.

According to Omoeva et al. (2018), the effects of conflict on education systems are well documented - one does not need to go deep in the research literature to understand the effect of damaged school infrastructure, loss of human capacity and the risks to safety and security of students and staff in a situation of active conflict. Characterized as development in reverse, internal conflict disrupts educational access and provision and consequently, can affect human capital stocks in the long-term. Cross-national analyses have established that educational participation often wanes during periods of conflict (UNESCO, 2013). Conflict affects education in many ways. Most tragically, it results in the death or displacement of teachers, staff and students. As well, conflict results in decreased access to school, preventing the opening of schools, threatening children's security while travelling to school and attending classes, and increasing teacher absenteeism.

Asserting to the fact that conflicts affect education, Justino (2014) maintained that violent conflicts have severe adverse effects on the education system and the supply of education in particular, in three important ways. First, armed fighting is associated with the destruction of infrastructure and resources needed to maintain functioning education systems. Second, violent conflict leads to the breakdown of communities as a result of people fleeing (or being forced to flee) areas of violence, which affects how children are educated and under which circumstances. Third, violent conflicts often lead to distributional and equity effects in terms of who accesses which type of education that may prevent many from attending school. The quality of education also suffers due to shortages in basic necessities, such as food and water and school materials, especially in areas bordering the conflict that may experience an influx of refugee or internally-displaced students. As it is often the case, the academic year may be interrupted or shortened due to conflict (UNESCO, 2013).

Yawe and Apase (2019) indicated that the key problems of education emanating from communal conflicts include but not limited to low education attainment among indigenes, poor enrolment and attendance in schools; poor academic performance; insecurity of students and teachers in schools; poor educational facilities and amenities notably electricity, portable water; high rate of school drop-out; high illiteracy among women;

paucity of study aids including laboratories, libraries. Over half of the world's primary-aged children out of school are estimated to live in conflict-affected fragile states.

Class participation refers to students' inclination to participate in daily class activities such as regularity, timely submission of homework and following teachers' instructions in class (Fakhra et al., 2018). Effective learning process occurs when both teachers and students interact and participate in the learning activities. Participatory type of learning process will encourage mutual exchange of information, stimulate interest as well as recognition of respect among the teachers and students (Abdullah et al., 2011). In any learning contexts, both educator and learner are the main actors. As the main actors, educators be it lecturers or teachers and learners, that is, students, play complementing role in the process of learning. According to Abdullah et al. (2011), participation between lecturers and students is integral in the process of learning. There are several reasons why participation is important in the process of learning. Active participation of students with discussions in the classroom is important for the purpose of achieving effective learning and plays an important role in the success of education and personal development of students in the future. Class participation is one thing that would be difficult to achieve and develop in students in communal conflict prone areas. First off, the students and teachers might not even have the opportunity to sit in class because of displacement and the security threat that accompany violent conflicts.

Students' educational attainment is also compromised by exposure to violence. Advancement in academics is hampered by communal conflicts as the closure of schools often results to the cancelation of academic calendars and postponement of promotional and external examinations. Conflict-affected countries include over 20% of all children of primary school age, but account for around half of all out-of-school children of primary school age (UNESCO, 2013). The likelihood of young children dropping out of school is also significantly higher in conflict-affected countries than elsewhere in the world.

The generally negative effect of violent conflicts on enrolment and school attendance rates in turn results from a number of causes: the requisite educational facilities have been destroyed, plundered or damaged; there are no teachers available; parents prefer to keep their children at home given the dangers of travelling to school and the risk of attacks on schools; the economic situation of the family does not permit a child to attend school; priorities have shifted given the task of ensuring survival; educational facilities are no longer accessible as people have taken flight and so on. Thus, alongside the negative impact on enrolment rates and school attendance levels, in an analysis of the implications of violent conflicts on education systems, a number of other factors, which in part are closely inter-linked, also have to be considered.

Opiki and Adeleke (2015) stated that aside the loss of life and property and the displacement of people usually associated with communal clashes, the effects on

schooling and learning achievement are noteworthy. They found in their study that school enrolment and attendance had reduced drastically in areas that have been affected by communal clashes but the opposite was found to take place in areas that were not affected by clashes.

### **Statement of the problem**

Conflict has, undoubtedly, extremely destructive consequences on various life outcomes for the people affected by it, at least in the short run. There is scarcely any community in Nigeria which has not been involved in boundary and communal disputes and Benue State is no exception. The conflicts in the area have been violent and confrontational and have resulted to losses in lives and properties and a stall in social activities, with development of the education system also taking the backlash. Conflict affects education in many ways. Most tragically, it results in the death or displacement of teachers, staff and students. Also, conflict results in decreased access to school, preventing the opening of schools, threatening children's security while travelling to school and attending classes, and increasing teacher absenteeism. Access issues are also critical for refugee or internally displaced children, who may lack the appropriate documentation or language skills to participate in new schools.

For children who do attend school, conflict can have a negative effect on educational attainment, increasing dropout and reducing educational survival rates due to displacement, military recruitment, or economic hardship. Educational attainment beyond primary school suffers the most during conflict, perhaps due to the greater specialization needed for these levels, as well as the increased likelihood for youth involvement in the military, the workforce or marriage.

Benue State being a geographical location that has been hit by conflicts is likely to face similar impacts on its education system. The education system would be affected in terms of enrolment into schools mostly since the thick in the conflicts in 2018. The educational advancement of students in the area would also be a concern as it was difficult for some schools in the local government to conduct promotional examinations and also register students for external examinations like West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO). The foregoing might just be assumptions but, however, it is on the premise of the foregoing discussion that the current study aimed at ascertaining the impact of communal conflicts on students' academic adjustment in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of communal conflicts on students' academic adjustment in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the impact of communal conflicts on students' class participation in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria.

### **Research question**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How does communal conflict impact on students' class participation in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria?

### **Hypothesis**

The following hypothesis was formulated and tested at a .05 level of significance:

**Ho1:** Communal conflicts have no significant impact on students' class participation in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

Descriptive survey design was used for this study. This study was carried out in Benue State of Nigeria. The population of this study was made up of all teachers in public secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria. The population comprised of 2,923 teaching staff from the 34 public secondary schools in the area. The choice of teaching staff was based on the premise that they were better informed and free to give information concerning the activities of communal conflicts on the educational development of the State. The sample size of the study was 400 or 14% of teachers sampled from 20 or 59% of public secondary schools. This is in line with Emaikwu (2015) who asserts that where the population is as high as 1000 and above, 10% or above is considered suitable as a sample for a study.

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled Communal Conflicts and Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (CCAAQ). The instrument consisted of items in one cluster which provided answers to the research question. The cluster had five (5) items. The questionnaire followed the Likert modified four-point rating scale in which respondents indicated their levels of agreement with the statements made by ticking any of the four options of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD)=1. Communal Conflicts and Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (CCAAQ) was administered to gather data about the impact of militia force on educational development. The researchers were assisted by 3 research assistants in the administration of the questionnaires to the respondents. Detailed explanation was given to the assistants and same given to the respondents. Copies of the questionnaire were administered and collected immediately to ensure high return rate. Where it was not possible, the respondents were given four days to complete it and submit back.

The researchers used mean and standard deviation to answer the research question. Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistic was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The choice of using Chi-square for the study was because Chi-square is

used when nominal data is generated from a study (Emaikwu, 2015). Any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted, while the mean score of below 2.50 was rejected.

## Presentation of results

**Research question 1:** How does communal conflict impact on students' class participation in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria?

**Table 1:** Analysis of impact of communal conflict on students' class participation in Secondary Schools in Benue State of Nigeria

S/N	Item Description	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1.	Students have been less attentive in classes since the conflicts	320	60	20	0	3.75	.54	Accepted
2.	Lessons are teacher-dominated now, students are not enthusiastic	160	180	40	20	3.20	.81	Accepted
3.	Sometimes teachers go to class and end up talking for the whole lesson.	128	120	80	72	2.76	1.09	Accepted
4.	Students show less zeal for learning now	120	240	32	8	3.18	.66	Accepted
5.	Some of the students usually look absent-minded in class	140	164	56	40	3.01	.95	Accepted
<b>Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation</b>						<b>3.18</b>	<b>.81</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

Table 1 indicates that the mean ratings of respondents' responses for items 1 to 5 are 3.75, 3.20, 2.76, 3.18, and 3.01 with corresponding standard deviation scores of .54, .81, 1.09, .66, and .95. Respondents rated all items above the 2.50 cut-off point. The cluster mean of 3.18, with the cluster standard deviation of .81, is above the cut-off point of 2.50 which indicates that communal conflict has impact on students' class participation in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria.

**H01:** Communal conflicts have no significant impact on students' class participation in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria.

**Table 2:** Chi-square test of impact of communal conflicts on students' class participation in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria

Response	O	E	Df	Level of Sign.	$\chi^2_{cal}$	P-value	Decision
SA	160	100.0					
A	180	100.0	3	.05	200.00	.000	Sig.
D	40	100.0					
SD	20	100.0					
Total	<b>400</b>						

Table 2 revealed that  $\chi^2 = 200.00$ ,  $df = 3$  and  $p = 0.00$ . Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than the set alpha-value of 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ) at 3 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis which states that communal conflicts have no significant impact on students' class participation in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria is therefore, not accepted. This implies that communal conflicts have significant impact on students' class participation in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria.

### **Discussion of the findings**

The discussion of the findings of this research is organized around the research question and hypothesis for ease of reading and comprehension. The null hypothesis that was postulated and tested was accepted.

The finding of the study revealed that communal conflicts have significant impact on students' class participation in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria. This implies that the violent confrontations between communities in the state affected class participation in secondary schools. The respondents averred that students were found to be absent-minded since the conflict, and also that teachers have been dominating classes while students tend to be less attentive. The relationship between students' participation in the classroom and students' academic achievement is undeniable. The level of participation of senior secondary school students was found by the study to be influenced by the situation of the area. Yawe and Apase (2019) conducted a study on the impact of Boko Haram insurgency on the development of tertiary education in North-East Nigeria. The researcher found a rising record of poor academic performances. Academic performance is measured in terms of students' participation in class, and situations of violent conflicts affect the attentiveness and participation of students in class.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that communal conflicts have significant impact on students' academic adjustment in secondary schools in Benue State of Nigeria.



## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Education policymakers, school administrators, teachers, local administrators, social workers and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) should formulate strategies for addressing the ills of communal conflicts and encourage socially inclusive intervention mechanisms.
2. Mental and psychological help or services should be provided for children who have been exposed to communal conflicts from episodes of domestic violence.

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