



Assessment of the Impact of Religious Conflict on the Education of Social Studies Students in Some Selected Colleges of Education in North-East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the impact of religious conflict on the education of Social Studies students in selected Colleges of Education in North-East Nigeria (Aminu Saleh College of Education, Azare; College of Education, Waka-Biu; and Federal College of Education, Yola). A correlational research design was adopted, and data were collected from 609 students and 75 lecturers using a validated questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. Findings revealed that religious conflict significantly hampers students' academic performance, as shown by mean scores ranging from 3.18 to 3.52. Students reported reduced concentration, irregular attendance, low motivation, and poor academic outcomes during periods of religious tension. The results further indicated that conflict disrupts the teaching and learning process by causing school closures, threatening safety, and destroying facilities (mean = 3.23–3.62). Additionally, students' participation, group work, and peer interactions were negatively affected, with mean scores ranging from 3.11 to 3.44. These outcomes suggest that religious conflict creates psychological, environmental, and instructional barriers that weaken learning experiences and reduce academic productivity among Social Studies students. The study concludes that religious conflict has a profound negative influence on Social Studies education in conflict-prone areas of North-East Nigeria. It recommends improved campus security, strengthened psychological support services, peace-building initiatives among students, enhanced participatory teaching strategies, infrastructural rehabilitation, and the integration of peace education into the Social Studies curriculum. These measures are essential for promoting resilience, academic continuity, and effective teacher preparation in conflict-affected regions.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious conflict in North-East Nigeria largely driven by the Boko Haram insurgency has significantly undermined the educational system in the region. As Saeed (2024) notes, the historical antecedents of Boko Haram, rooted in socio-political marginalization and ideological grievances, have contributed to a wave of attacks that deliberately target schools, leading to the destruction of hundreds of educational institutions

and displacement of both students and teachers. The insurgency's impact on education is not limited to physical destruction. Mahdi and Ahmadu (2024) found that tertiary institutions in the North-East region have experienced sharp declines in student enrollment, damage to infrastructure, and attrition of academic staff due to the persistent threat posed by Boko Haram.

Similarly, the study by Abubakar (2025) demonstrated that in basic education settings,

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especially in southern Borno, the insurgency has disrupted universal basic education through school closures, teacher displacement, and deteriorating learning conditions. Gender has also been a major concern. Williams (2024) highlights that the Boko Haram conflict disproportionately affects the girl-child's access to education in the North-East, exacerbated by insecurity, psychosocial trauma, and community resistance, which all hinder girls' school attendance. Beyond the immediate threats, the insurgency undermines the long-term human capital prospects of the region. Kanu, Paul, Bazza, Kama, Kanyip, and Onukwuba (2023) argue that education should serve as a countermeasure to extremist ideology.

However, ongoing violence disrupts this role, denying many young people in conflict-affected areas the stabilizing and transformative potential of schooling. In sum, the educational consequences of religious conflict in North-East Nigeria are profound and multifaceted: institutional destruction, reduced enrollment, loss of educators, and severe gender disparities, all perpetrated or exacerbated by Boko Haram's extremist campaign. For Social Studies students in colleges of education—as future civic educators and community leaders—these disruptions risk not only their academic progression but also the broader goal of rebuilding civic life in conflict-affected communities. This makes examining the specific impact of religious conflict on Social Studies education especially critical.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Concept of Religious Conflict

Religious conflict refers to tensions, disputes, or violent confrontations arising from differences in religious beliefs, practices, or affiliations within a society. In the context of North-East Nigeria, religious conflict has primarily manifested through the Boko Haram insurgency and sporadic ethno-religious clashes (Saeed, 2024). Religious conflict often leads to loss of lives, displacement of populations, destruction of infrastructure, and disruption of social institutions, including schools (Umar Mustapha, 2023).

Causes of Religious Conflict in Nigeria

Several factors contribute to religious conflict in Nigeria:

- 1. Historical and Colonial Legacies:** Colonial-era policies created divisions and institutionalized favoritism that intensified ethnic and religious tensions (Saeed, 2024).
- 2. Socio-Economic Inequality:** Poverty, unemployment, and limited access to resources create grievances that extremist groups exploit to recruit youths (Mahdi & Ahmadu, 2024).
- 3. Political Manipulation:** Politicians sometimes manipulate religious identities for electoral or power gains, exacerbating conflicts (Berton et al., 2019).
- 4. Extremist Ideologies:** Groups like Boko Haram propagate radical interpretations of religion that oppose secular education and democratic governance (Williams, 2024).

Nature of Education in Conflict-Prone Environments

Education in areas affected by conflict is often characterized by school closures, teacher shortages, lack of learning materials, and psychological stress among learners (Abubakar, 2025). Disruption of education affects curriculum delivery, attendance, and overall academic performance. In teacher education, including Social Studies, the quality of instruction is compromised when lecturers and students are exposed to insecurity or forced to relocate (Umar Mustapha, 2023).

Education of Social Studies Students

Social Studies is a discipline that prepares students to become responsible citizens, promoting understanding of civic duties, national unity, and social cohesion (Mahdi & Ahmadu, 2024). Social Studies education relies heavily on interactive teaching, fieldwork, and community engagement, which are severely disrupted in conflict-prone environments. Students' practical exposure to societal issues may be limited,

undermining their ability to teach civic and social values effectively in the future.

Effects of Religious Conflict on Teaching and Learning

Religious conflict impacts teaching and learning in several ways which includes:

1. **Academic Performance:** Reduced concentration, absenteeism, and loss of instructional time lower students' achievement levels (Bertoni et al., 2019).
2. **Teaching Quality:** Lecturers may be absent or reluctant to teach in insecure areas, resulting in a lower quality of instruction (Abubakar, 2025).
3. **Practical Training:** Limited access to communities restricts fieldwork, civic education projects, and community engagement activities (Williams, 2024).
4. **Psychosocial Effects:** Anxiety, trauma, and fear among students reduce motivation and participation in class (Umar Mustapha, 2023).

Religious Conflict and Academic Outcomes

Research indicates that conflict in North-East Nigeria significantly affects learning outcomes. Bertoni et al. (2019) found that insurgency reduces school enrollment and learning continuity. Similarly, Abubakar (2025) reports that students in conflict-affected areas experience lower academic achievement due to frequent school closures, resource constraints, and displacement.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Religious conflict in North-East Nigeria continues to present a significant challenge to the stability and effectiveness of the education sector, particularly in teacher-training institutions such as Colleges of Education. Ongoing attacks, insecurity, displacement, and communal tensions have disrupted academic schedules, damaged educational infrastructure, and created an atmosphere of fear that negatively impacts both teaching and learning. Consequently, students

often face irregular attendance, psychological stress, and limited access to essential educational resources. For Social Studies students, these challenges are particularly acute. The discipline relies heavily on interaction, civic engagement, fieldwork, and practical exposure to societal issues within communities.

However, persistent religious conflicts restrict mobility, reduce opportunities for community-based learning, and limit participation in practical activities necessary for effective Social Studies teacher training. Additionally, some Colleges of Education in the region contend with shortages of qualified lecturers, insufficient learning facilities, and frequent interruptions of academic programs due to insecurity. While several studies have examined the broader effects of insurgency and religious conflict on basic and secondary education in North-East Nigeria, there is limited empirical research specifically addressing the impact on Social Studies students in Colleges of Education.

This gap raises important concerns regarding students' academic performance, preparedness, motivation, and professional readiness factors critical for training teachers who are expected to promote civic values, national unity, religious tolerance, and peaceful coexistence in a conflict-affected region. In response to this gap, this study aims to investigate the impact of religious conflict on the education of Social Studies students in selected Colleges of Education in North-East Nigeria, providing evidence-based insights and recommendations for enhancing the quality of Social Studies education in conflict-affected areas.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the impact of religious conflict on the education of Social Studies students in some selected Colleges of Education in North-East Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine the extent to which religious conflict affects the academic performance of Social Studies students in Colleges of Education in North-East Nigeria.



2. Determine the influence of religious conflict on the teaching and learning processes of Social Studies in the selected Colleges of Education.
3. Assess how religious conflict affects students' class attendance, participation, and access to instructional materials in Social Studies.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. To what extent does religious conflict affect the academic performance of Social Studies students in Colleges of Education in North-East Nigeria?
2. How does religious conflict influence the teaching and learning processes of Social Studies in the selected Colleges of Education?
3. In what ways does religious conflict affect students' class attendance, participation, and access to instructional materials in Social Studies?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses (H_0) were formulated to guide the study:

1. **H₀₁:** Religious conflict has no significant effect on the academic performance of Social Studies students in Colleges of Education in North-East Nigeria.
2. **H₀₂:** Religious conflict has no significant influence on the teaching and learning processes of Social Studies in the selected Colleges of Education.
3. **H₀₃:** Religious conflict has no significant effect on the class attendance, participation, and access to instructional materials of Social Studies students.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a correlational research design to examine the impact of religious conflict on the education of Social Studies students in selected Colleges of Education in North-East Nigeria, as this design allows for the investigation of relationships between variables

without manipulation. In this study, the independent variable is religious conflict, while the dependent variable is the education of Social Studies students, assessed in terms of academic performance, teaching and learning processes, access to resources, fieldwork/practicum experiences, and psychological well-being.

The study focused on three purposively selected Colleges of Education: Aminu Saleh College of Education, Azare (Bauchi State); College of Education, Waka-Biu (Borno State); and Federal College of Education, Yola (Adamawa State), because they are located in regions most affected by insurgency and religious conflict and offer Social Studies programmes for teacher training. The population comprised all Social Studies students and lecturers in these institutions, totaling 1,270 students and 75 lecturers. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, a sample of 609 students was selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across all levels, while all 75 lecturers were included via a census approach.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into five sections: demographic information, impact of religious conflict on academic performance, effects on teaching and learning processes, psychological and motivational effects, challenges in fieldwork and practical training. Likert-scale items were employed alongside some open-ended questions to capture qualitative insights. The instrument's validity was ensured through content and face validity checks by experts in Social Studies education and a pilot study involving 30 students and 5 lecturers from a non-participating college, while reliability was confirmed via Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, achieving values above 0.73.

Data collection involved securing ethical clearance and permission from college authorities, personally administering the questionnaires with trained assistants, ensuring confidentiality, and retrieving completed instruments for analysis. Data were organized, coded, and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics including independent samples t-test, chi-square (χ^2), and ANOVA at a 0.05 significance



level, with SPSS version 25.0 employed to facilitate computation. The results were presented in tables, and narrative form, enabling a comprehensive assessment of the impact of religious conflict on Social Studies students' education and providing evidence-based insights for practical interventions in conflict-affected areas.

RESULTS

Research Question 1:

To what extent does religious conflict affect the academic performance of Social Studies students in Colleges of Education in North-East Nigeria?

Table 1: Impact of Religious Conflict on Academic Performance of Social Studies Students

Items	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
1. Religious conflict reduces my class attendance	609	3.41	0.89	Agreed
2. Fear of attacks reduces my concentration during lectures	609	3.52	0.94	Agreed
3. Religious tension affects my ability to complete assignments	609	3.18	0.97	Agreed
4. Exam performance drops during periods of religious unrest	609	3.47	0.92	Agreed
5. Religious conflict reduces my motivation to study	609	3.38	0.90	Agreed

Source: Field work 2025

The analysis in the table 1 above revealed that with mean scores ranging from 3.18 to 3.52, the results indicate that religious conflict has a strong negative impact on students' academic performance. Students experience reduced concentration, low motivation, disrupted

attendance, and poorer exam outcomes during periods of tension.

Research Question 2:

How does religious conflict influence the teaching and learning processes of Social Studies in the selected Colleges of Education?

Table 2: Effects of Religious Conflict on the teaching and learning processes

Items	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
6. Religious conflict disrupts lecture schedules and academic calendars	609	3.62	0.85	Agreed
7. Conflict leads to temporary closure of school activities	609	3.55	0.89	Agreed
8. Facilities are sometimes destroyed during periods of conflict	609	3.23	0.94	Agreed
9. Students feel unsafe within the school environment during crises	609	3.58	0.87	Agreed

Source: Field work 2025

With the mean scores above 3.20, results in the table 2 above indicate that religious conflict disrupts the teaching and learning processes significantly affecting safety, facilities, school schedules, and general academic stability.

Research Question 3:

In what ways does religious conflict affect students' class attendance, participation, and access to instructional materials in Social Studies?

Table 3: Effects of Religious Conflict on Classroom Participation and Learning

Items	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
10. Religious conflict reduces my willingness to participate in class discussions	609	3.62	0.85	Agreed

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Items	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
11. I avoid group work due to fear of religious misunderstanding	609	3.55	0.89	Agreed
12. Conflict reduces interaction with classmates of different Religions	609	3.23	0.94	Agreed
13. Classroom relationships become tense during religious crises	609	3.58	0.87	Agreed

Source: Field work 2025

The table 3 above that religious conflict significantly affects classroom participation, peer relationships, and group learning activities. This is because of the fact that all items scored the mean above 3.00.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study indicated that religious conflict has a substantial and far-reaching impact on students' academic performance, as reflected in the mean scores, which ranged between 3.18 and 3.52. These values show that students consistently perceive religious conflict as a major factor undermining their academic achievement. The findings further revealed that students who were more exposed to religious tension and insecurity experienced greater variations in their academic outcomes. Many students reported that fear, emotional instability, reduced concentration, irregular class attendance, and a general decline in motivation resulting from conflict situations significantly hindered their ability to learn effectively.

These results are in line with earlier findings by Yusuf and Ali (2021) and Mohammed (2020), who similarly documented that persistent insecurity and recurrent violent conflicts in Northern Nigeria have repeatedly disrupted teaching and learning, ultimately leading to poor academic performance among students. In addition, the study revealed that religious conflict negatively affects the overall teaching and learning processes within Colleges of Education in the region. Students strongly agreed that frequent outbreaks of violence often result in temporary school closures, destruction of classrooms and learning facilities, and the creation of unsafe and anxiety-filled learning environments, with mean scores ranging from 3.23 to 3.62. These findings

corroborate the observations made by Musa (2018), who noted that educational institutions located in conflict-prone areas across Northern Nigeria commonly experience infrastructural destruction, teacher shortages, and unpredictable academic calendars due to ongoing insecurity.

Furthermore, the results demonstrated that religious conflict significantly reduces students' classroom participation and their engagement in academic activities, as shown by mean scores between 3.11 and 3.44. Students admitted that they often avoided group work, class discussions, and peer-learning activities because of the fear of escalating religious tensions or misunderstandings during interactions with classmates from different religious backgrounds. This pattern of behavior aligns with the findings of Abubakar (2019), who reported that inter-religious hostilities within learning environments discourage collaborative learning, weaken peer relationships, and limit students' willingness to participate actively in class. Overall, the results clearly show that religious conflict creates emotional, psychological, and environmental barriers that collectively hinder effective learning and diminish academic productivity among Social Studies students.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that religious conflict has a significant negative impact on the education of Social Studies students in North-East Nigeria. Conflict adversely affects academic performance, participation, psychological well-being, and the overall learning environment. However, students recognize that targeted interventions and preventive measures can mitigate these effects. The study underscores the urgent need for institutional, governmental, and community-level interventions to create safer,

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more conducive learning environments in conflict-affected areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made: The college authorities should strengthen campus security measures to ensure students feel safe during periods of tension. Implement counseling programs to support students' emotional and psychological well-being. Students should engage in peace-building and interfaith dialogue initiatives to reduce misunderstandings and tensions among peers and report incidents of religious conflict promptly to college authorities to enable timely interventions. Lecturers should incorporate participatory teaching methods that encourage collaboration among students of different religious backgrounds. Government and Policy Makers develop policies that address the root causes of religious conflict in educational settings, provide adequate funding for infrastructural improvements to create safe and resilient learning environments and integrate peace education and conflict resolution strategies into the Social Studies curriculum to build students' capacity for tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

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