

INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES ON PEER CONFLICT RESOLUTION AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN PANKSHIN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, PLATEAU STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of Christian Religious Teaching (CRT) on peer conflict resolution among secondary school students in Pankshin Local Government Area, Plateau State. The study was guided by three objectives, three research questions, and one null hypothesis. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The target population comprised 5,218 senior secondary school students across 12 public secondary schools in Pankshin LGA. A sample size of 372 students was determined using Taro Yamane's sampling technique. A structured questionnaire titled "Christian Studies Teaching and Peer Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (CRSPCRQ)" with 15 items (5 items per objective) was validated by three experts and achieved a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.84. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for research questions, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) for the hypothesis at 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that CRS significantly influences students' understanding of forgiveness, empathy, and non-violent communication in peer conflicts. The null hypothesis had r -cal as 0.612 with p -value of 0.001 which was rejected, indicating a significant positive relationship between exposure to CRS and effective peer conflict resolution skills. Challenges identified were from informal comments such as inadequate application of biblical principles in real-life disputes and lack of structured peer mediation programmes. The study recommended among others that Plateau State Ministry of Education should formally support the House of Representatives' resolution to separate CRS and IRS from the Religion and National Values (RNV) curriculum and restore Christian Religious Teaching as a distinct subject, as demanded by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

Keywords: Christian Religious Studies, Peer Conflict Resolution, Secondary School Students, Influence

Introduction

Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK) remains a core subject in Nigerian secondary schools, intended not only to transmit biblical knowledge but also to shape moral and social behaviours. In Plateau State, where ethno-religious tensions have historically challenged peaceful coexistence, the role of Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in fostering conflict resolution skills among students becomes particularly significant. Pankshin Local Government Area, a predominantly Christian locality with numerous secondary schools, provides a unique context to examine how classroom religious instruction translates into interpersonal behaviour among adolescents. Peer conflict among secondary school students is a growing concern globally and locally. Disagreements, bullying, social exclusion and physical altercations disrupt the learning environment and hinder academic achievement (Ogunsanwo & Ogunyemi, 2019). In Pankshin, cases of student fights, ethnic slurs and jealousy-induced conflicts have been reported by school guidance counselors. Christian Religious Teaching, which emphasizes principles such as forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15), love for neighbors (Mark 12:31) and peacemaking (Matthew 5:9) has the potential to equip students with non-violent approaches to resolving disputes.

However, the extent to which CRS actually influences students' conflict resolution behaviours remains underexplored. Studies have examined the moral impact of religious education (Egwu, 2020), but few have focused specifically on peer conflict resolution in rural or semi-urban settings like Pankshin. Related research on Christian ethics and moral decline among Nigerian youth (Okafor & Nwosu, 2025) has addressed broad behavioural outcomes, while a European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) study on peace education in Nigerian faith-based schools in the Middle Belt (Adeyemi & John, 2024) highlighted curricular interventions without quantifying peer-level outcomes. Similarly, a recent investigation into Christian education and youth behaviour change in Lagos following kidnapping incidents (Balogun, 2025) focused on crisis response rather than everyday peer disagreements. Furthermore, while many students can recite biblical verses on peace, their ability to apply these teachings during real-life peer disagreements is questionable. This gap between knowledge and practice necessitates empirical investigation. The present study is anchored on Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that behaviours are learned through observation, imitation and reinforcement. In the context of CRS, students observe teachers modeling forgiveness, hear biblical stories of reconciliation (e.g., Joseph and his brothers, the Prodigal Son) and are reinforced when they demonstrate peaceful behaviours. Thus, repeated exposure to CRS should theoretically enhance peer conflict resolution skills. Previous research by Umar and Abdullah (2020) on teacher competency in inclusive settings highlighted that value-laden subjects like CRS require practical application strategies. Similarly, Chia (2021) found that internet has caused a great harm among students and moral instruction through social media influenced student behaviour, suggesting that the medium and method of teaching matter.

Importantly, the present study is set against a backdrop of national policy controversy. The Federal Government's decision to merge CRS into the broader Religion and National Values (RNV) curriculum has drawn sharp criticism from the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), which described the merger as "an ill-wind that blows nobody any good" (CAN, 2024). This policy shift raises critical questions about whether CRS influence on peer conflict resolution may be diluted if Christian teachings are no longer delivered as a distinct subject. However, no known study has specifically quantified the influence of CRS on peer conflict resolution among students in Pankshin secondary schools, nor has any study examined this influence in light of the ongoing RNV merger debates. Therefore, this study investigated the influence of Christian Studies

Teaching on peer conflict resolution among secondary school students in Pankshin Local Government Area, Plateau State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite CRS emphasis on peace, forgiveness and reconciliation, secondary schools in Pankshin LGA still experience peer conflicts (fights, verbal abuse, cyberbullying, denominational/ethnic antagonisms). This reflects a broader regional crisis: the Middle Belt faces school attacks and child violations while ethno-religious bloodshed is daily in Nigeria. Students perform well in CRS exams but their behavioural responses to provocation contradict biblical teachings raising the question of whether CRS has any practical impact. Existing empirical studies have addressed related issues (urban youth moral behaviour, kidnapping contexts) but none have specifically quantified peer conflict resolution behaviours in semi-urban/rural settings like Pankshin amid documented ethno-religious tensions. This lack of context-specific evidence prevents targeted interventions.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine the influence of Christian Religious Teaching on peer conflict resolution among secondary school students in Pankshin Local Government Area, Plateau State. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. examine the influence of CRT on students' use of forgiveness as a peer conflict resolution strategy.
2. assess the influence of CRT on students' application of empathy in resolving peer disagreements.
3. determine the influence of CRT on students' preference for non-violent communication during peer conflicts.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study:

1. What is the influence of Christian Religious Teaching on students' use of forgiveness as a peer conflict resolution strategy in secondary schools in Pankshin LGA?
2. How does Christian Religious Teaching influence students' application of empathy in resolving peer disagreements in secondary schools in Pankshin LGA?
3. To what extent does Christian Religious Teaching influence students' preference for non-violent communication during peer conflicts in secondary schools in Pankshin LGA?

Research Hypothesis

A null hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between exposure to Christian Religious Teaching and peer conflict resolution skills among secondary school students in Pankshin LGA, Plateau State.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design, which is appropriate for collecting data from a sample representing a larger population without manipulating variables. The target population comprised all senior secondary school (SSS 2) students in public secondary schools in Pankshin LGA. The total population is 5,218 SSS 2 students in the study area. SSS 2 was chosen because they have received at least five years of consistent CRS (from JSS1 to SSS2) and can meaningfully reflect on conflict resolution. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1967): $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$, where $N = 5,218$, $e = 0.05$ (margin of error). This gave: $n = 5218 / (1 + 5218 \times 0.0025) = 5218 / (1 + 13.045) = 5218 / 14.045 \approx 371.5$. Thus, 372 students were sampled. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed: first, stratified sampling

by school type (co-educational vs. single-sex) to ensure representation; second, simple random sampling within each stratum using the lottery method. Six schools were randomly selected and from each school, 62 students were randomly drawn, totaling 372.

The researchers developed a structured questionnaire titled "Christian Religious Studies and Peer Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (CRSPCRQ)." Section A collected demographic data (school, gender, religious affiliation). Section B contained 15 items distributed across three objectives (5 items per objective), measured on a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was face-validated by three experts: one in CRS education, one in Educational Foundations and one in Guidance and Counselling, Federal University of Education, Pankshin. Reliability was established through a pilot test on 30 students from a non-participating school in neighbouring Mangu LGA. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.84 exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70. To further validate the factorability of the 15-item instrument, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were computed. The KMO value was 0.81, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.60 and Bartlett's test was significant ($\chi^2 = 892.14$, $df = 105$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis and that the items shared sufficient variance to measure the underlying construct of peer conflict resolution.

The researchers obtained official permission from the selected schools to conduct the study. Questionnaires were administered during school hours by the researcher and two trained research assistants. Students completed the questionnaires in 25 minutes and all 372 copies were retrieved with 360 valid for analysis (96.8% response rate). Research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. The criterion mean for a 4-point scale was 2.50. Any item mean ≥ 2.50 was considered positive influence/agreement; < 2.50 was considered negative influence/disagreement. The null hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) at $\alpha = 0.05$, using SPSS version 28.0. Although the raw data originated from Likert-scale responses, the total scores for "exposure to CRS" and "conflict resolution skills" were treated as continuous interval data, a practice that is widely accepted in educational research when composite scores are used. PPMC was therefore appropriate because both aggregated variables were measured on continuous scales.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 360)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	192	53.33
	Female	168	46.67
School Type	Co-educational	240	66.67
	Single-sex (Girls)	72	20.00
	Single-sex (Boys)	48	13.33
Years of CRS Exposure	5 years	210	58.33
	6 years	150	41.67

Table 1 shows that male students (53.33%) slightly outnumbered females. The majority (66.67%) attended co-educational schools. All respondents had at least 5 years of CRT exposure, indicating sufficient familiarity with biblical teachings on conflict.

Research Question 1: What is the influence of Christian Religious Teaching on students’ use of forgiveness as a peer conflict resolution strategy in secondary schools in Pankshin LGA?

Table 2: Mean and SD on Forgiveness as a Conflict Resolution Strategy (N=360)

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	CRT teaches me that forgiving a peer who offends me is a command from God (Matthew 6:14-15)	3.67	0.58	Positive
2	I have personally forgiven a classmate after a dispute because of what I learned in CRT	3.42	0.71	Positive
3	Learning about Joseph forgiving his brothers encourages me to let go of grudges against peers	3.51	0.64	Positive
4	I believe that refusing to forgive worsens peer conflicts	3.28	0.82	Positive
5	CRT has changed my attitude from revenge-seeking to forgiveness-seeking in peer disagreements	3.15	0.79	Positive
Cluster mean		3.41	0.71	Positive

Table 2 indicates that all items had mean scores (3.67; 3.42; 2.51; 3.28 and 3.15) above the 2.50 criterion. The cluster mean of 3.41 (SD=0.71) suggests a strong positive influence of CRT on students’ use of forgiveness to resolve peer conflicts. The highest influence (mean=3.67) was the understanding that forgiveness is a divine command.

Research Question 2: How does Christian Religious Teaching influence students’ application of empathy in resolving peer disagreements in secondary schools in Pankshin LGA?

Table 3: Mean and SD on Empathy Application (N=360)

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
6	The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) teaches me to feel compassion for peers in distress	3.58	0.60	Positive
7	When a peer hurts me, I try to understand their feelings because of CRT lessons	3.31	0.74	Positive
8	CRT has helped me to apologize sincerely when I hurt a peer	3.44	0.68	Positive
9	I can put myself in a peer’s shoes during a disagreement because of biblical teachings	3.22	0.77	Positive
10	Learning about Jesus weeping with Mary (John 11:35) encourages me to show empathy to sad classmates	3.49	0.63	Positive
Cluster mean		3.41	0.68	Positive

Table 3 on empathy application shows that all items (6-10) with mean scores of 3.58, 3.31, 3.44, 3.22 and 3.49 were above 3.20 with a cluster mean of 3.41. This indicates that CRT positively influences students’ ability to apply empathy during peer disagreements. The highest-rated item (3.58) was the Good Samaritan parable as an empathy model.

Research Question 3: To what extent does Christian Religious Teaching influence students’ preference for non-violent communication during peer conflicts in secondary schools in Pankshin LGA?

Table 4: Mean and SD on Non-violent Communication Preference (N=360)

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
11	CRT teaches that “a soft answer turns away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1), so I speak calmly during conflicts	3.38	0.72	Positive
12	Instead of fighting, I discuss problems with peers because of Christian teachings on peacemaking	3.25	0.76	Positive
13	I encourage my friends to talk rather than fight when they disagree, based on Bible lessons	3.47	0.65	Positive
14	CRT has reduced my tendency to insult or physically fight peers when offended	3.11	0.81	Positive
15	The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:9) “Blessed are the peacemakers” motivates me to resolve conflicts without violence	3.54	0.59	Positive
Cluster mean		3.35	0.71	Positive

Table 4 on non-violence communication preference reveals a cluster mean of 3.35, indicating a positive influence of CRT on preference for non-violent communication. The highest influence (mean=3.54) came from the Beatitudes. However, item 14 had the lowest mean (3.11) among all items, suggesting that while CRT reduces violence tendency, some students still struggle with complete elimination of physical or verbal aggression.

Hypothesis Testing: There is no significant relationship between exposure to Christian Religious Teaching and peer conflict resolution skills among secondary school students in Pankshin LGA.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Between CRT Exposure and Peer Conflict Resolution Skills

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r-cal	p-value	Decision
CRT Exposure (Total CRT score)	360	51.42	6.85	0.612	0.001	Reject Ho
Peer Conflict Resolution Skills (Total PCR score)	360	50.85	7.12			

Critical r at $df=358, \alpha=0.05 = 0.104$ (one-tailed)

Table 5 shows a calculated Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.612, with a p-value of 0.001, which is less than the 0.05 significance level. Since the p-value (0.001) < 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates a moderate to strong positive significant relationship between exposure to Christian Religious Teaching and peer conflict resolution skills among the students.

Discussion

The first objective examined the influence of Christian Studies Teaching on forgiveness as a peer conflict resolution strategy among secondary school students in Pankshin LGA. Findings revealed a strong positive influence with students particularly acknowledging that biblical commands to forgive like Matthew 6: 14-15 directly shape their responses to peer offenses. The findings also indicated that students view forgiveness not merely as a social virtue but as a divine obligation. This implies the significant weight of the theological framing of forgiveness in CRS. This finding agrees with Adelakun and Oyewole (2018) who found that religious education significantly promotes forgiving behaviors among adolescents in Oyo State. However, the present study extends their work by demonstrating that in a semi-urban, predominantly Christian context like Pankshin, the scriptural basis of forgiveness (e.g., Joseph forgiving his brothers, the parable of the unmerciful servant) is not only cognitively recalled but actively applied in peer relationships.

Similarly, Egwu (2020) reported that students who regularly participate in Christian religious activities are more likely to forgive peers than those who do not.

The present study corroborates this while adding that the frequency of CRS lessons (minimum five years of exposure) create a cumulative effect, where repeated reinforcement of forgiveness narratives gradually transforms interpersonal habits. Furthermore, the results showed that forgiveness as a conflict resolution strategy is uniformly emphasized across different schools and teachers in Pankshin. This uniformity is attributed to the centralized CRS curriculum used in Plateau State secondary schools that prioritizes Old and New Testament narratives of reconciliation. The null hypothesis was rejected, confirming a significant positive relationship between CRS exposure and peer conflict resolution skills among secondary school students in Pankshin LGA. The correlation coefficient indicated a moderate-to-strong relationship, meaning that a substantial proportion of the variance in peer conflict resolution skills can be explained by CRS exposure. This finding is consistent with Chia (2021) who found a positive correlation between moral instruction via social media and behavioural outcomes among students with hearing impairment. However, the present study extends Chia's work by demonstrating that traditional classroom-based religious instruction can achieve similar effect sizes when the content is relevant and delivered consistently over multiple years. The strength of correlation suggests that CRS is a substantial predictor but not the only factor; family background, peer influence, school climate, and individual personality traits also play important roles.

It is also worth noting that the correlation is positive but not perfect, indicating that some students with high CRS exposure still report poor conflict resolution skills. This may be due to what educational psychologists call "inert knowledge". Students may need cues or prompts (e.g., a teacher saying "Remember the Good Samaritan?") to transfer classroom learning to real-world conflicts. The KAICIID (2024) report observed that "engaging in dialogue is an important element of learning" and that teachers need specific training to facilitate application of religious teachings to everyday interpersonal situations. Without such dialogic skills, teachers may present biblical principles as abstract propositions rather than as tools for real-time conflict navigation. Additionally, the ECER (2024) study found that in Nigerian faith-based schools, "peace clubs offer safe spaces for mediation" but "further professional development for educational leaders is needed" to bridge the gap between curriculum content and student behaviour (Adeyemi & John, 2024). The absence of such structured clubs and trained facilitators in Pankshin schools may partially explain the knowledge-practice gap observed in the present study. Alternatively, assessment method may play a role: self-reported conflict resolution skills may differ from observed behaviour.

The study also assessed the influence of CRS on students' application of empathy in resolving peer disagreements. The findings indicated that biblical parables and narratives effectively cultivate empathetic responses. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke chapter 10:25-37) received the highest rating by respondents. This signifies that this particular story serves as a powerful cognitive and emotional script for students. When a peer is in distress whether due to academic failure, social exclusion or family problems, students reported being more likely to offer help because they mentally reference the Samaritan's compassion. This finding supports Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, as students observe and internalize empathetic models from biblical stories, then reproduce those behaviors in real-life peer contexts. The process is not merely imitation but what Bandura termed "vicarious reinforcement". Students see the Samaritan rewarded and therefore adopt similar behaviours. Moreover, the finding that learning about Jesus weeping with Mary encourages students to show empathy to sad classmates scored highly. This

means that students are responsive to emotional modeling from the life of Jesus. Unlike abstract ethical principles, the embodied empathy of Jesus weeping, touching lepers, welcoming children provides concrete, relatable examples for adolescents. This is particularly relevant in Pankshin, where communal values already emphasize mutual care and CRS reinforces these existing cultural norms with a religious foundation. Umar and Abdullah (2020) concurred that value-laden subjects require narrative-based instruction to develop affective outcomes. CRS in Pankshin seems to achieve this through the strategic use of parables and gospel narratives. However, the ability to put oneself in a peer's shoes during a disagreement because of biblical teachings showed greater dispersion of responses.

The study focused on the influence of CRS on students' preference for non-violent communication during peer conflicts. The cluster mean confirms a positive influence, though the item measuring whether CRS has reduced students' tendency to insult or physically fight peers when offended had the lowest mean among all fifteen items. This is a critical finding. While students enthusiastically affirm peacemaking principles (e.g., the Beatitudes' "Blessed are the peacemakers" from Matthew chapter five, verse nine), the translation of these principles into behavioural inhibition of aggression appears weaker. This gap between knowledge and practice is not unique to Pankshin. The ECER (2024) study documented a persistent disconnect between peace education content and student behaviour in Middle Belt faith-based schools, concluding that "curricular peace messages often remain at the declarative level without transferring to procedural responses during real peer conflicts" (Adeyemi & John, 2024). Similarly, the KAICIID (2024) report emphasized that "engaging in dialogue is an important element of learning", yet many CRS classrooms prioritize content coverage over dialogic skill-building. Furthermore, Handan (2024) examined curriculum gaps in Christian religious education and observed that "Jesus taught his followers this new approach because he knew that those who were committed to following him would surely have enemies who would physically attack them". This acknowledgment that early Christians faced real, physical hostility implies that non-retaliation was taught not as an abstract ideal but as a practical survival strategy requiring rehearsal and communal support. The absence of such rehearsal opportunities in contemporary Pankshin classrooms may explain why students struggle to apply non-violent principles when provoked. This gap between verbal endorsement and behavioral control is consistent with Ogunsanwo and Ogunyemi (2019), who found that religious knowledge alone does not guarantee non-violent behaviour unless reinforced by school-wide conflict resolution programmes.

In Pankshin, where peer conflicts sometimes escalate into physical fights particularly between male students during break periods or after sporting events, the gap between knowledge and action remains a concern. Several explanations are plausible. First, adolescence is characterized by heightened emotional reactivity and impulsivity due to ongoing neurological development in the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for impulse control. Even students who cognitively know that "a soft answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs chapter 15: 1) may, in the heat of provocation, default to aggressive responses before reflective processes engage. Second, peer pressure and social status concerns may override religious teachings: in some student subcultures in Pankshin, backing down from a fight is perceived as cowardice, while physical retaliation is seen as strength. CRS may be competing with these powerful peer norms. As Thomas and Amaechi (2021) posited, instructional strategies often fail to build on experiential learning potentials, leaving students with declarative knowledge ("I know I should not fight") but not procedural knowledge ("I know how to calm myself and speak peacefully when angry").

Conclusion

CRT positively influences Pankshin secondary school students' conflict resolution skills (forgiveness, empathy, non-violent communication), but this influence is stronger on beliefs and attitudes than on actual behaviour (fighting reduction). Challenges include inadequate practical application and lack of peer mediation programs. Given the national policy context, NERDC's 2015 merger of CRS into RNV and ongoing legislative debates to reverse it. CAN calls the merger "an ill-wind that blows nobody any good." This study provides empirical evidence supporting the retention of separate CRS. Policymakers should retain CRT while addressing pedagogical gaps through teacher training and peer mediation programmes.

Recommendations

1. The Plateau State Ministry of Education should formally support the House of Representatives' resolution to separate CRS and IRS from the Religion and National Values (RNV) curriculum and restore Christian Religious Teaching as a distinct subject, as demanded by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).
2. The Plateau State Ministry of Education should integrate practical conflict resolution modules into the CRS curriculum to bridge the gap between cognitive knowledge and behavioural application.
3. School principals in Pankshin LGA should establish weekly Peace Clubs modeled for safe mediation spaces, while the Teaching Service Commission should provide in-service training for CRS teachers on restorative justice and non-violent communication techniques.

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