

Impact of Christian Religious Studies (CRS) on Conflict Resolution in Enugu Communities

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ABSTRACT

Christian Religious Studies (CRS) occupies a distinctive place in Nigeria's formal education system as a faith-based subject intended to form moral character, civic responsibility, and social harmony. This article examines the impact of CRS on conflict resolution in Enugu communities, a predominantly Christian, Igbo sociocultural setting in southeastern Nigeria that nonetheless experiences communal land disputes, farmer-herder confrontations, youth restiveness, and occasional ethno-religious tension. Drawing on curriculum documents of the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), published empirical studies on religious education and peacebuilding, and documented cases from Enugu (including Nimbo, Oruku-Umuode, and intra-community disputes), the paper argues that CRS contributes to conflict resolution through four interrelated pathways: (a) internalization of biblical ethics of forgiveness, empathy, and non-retaliation; (b) formation of teachers and church-based mediators who operate as local peace actors; (c) reinforcement of Igbo hospitality norms toward strangers; and (d) school-community linkages that transmit peace values beyond the classroom. The analysis also identifies constraints: a predominantly confessional curriculum with limited interreligious literacy, uneven teacher capacity, weak integration of structured peer-mediation practice, and the persistence of structural drivers of conflict (land, political patronage, and youth unemployment) that education alone cannot dissolve. The article concludes that CRS is a necessary but insufficient instrument of peacebuilding in Enugu. Curriculum reform that embeds dialogic pedagogy, local case studies, and school-church-traditional-institution partnerships would strengthen the subject's contribution to durable community conflict resolution. Implications are offered for education policy, diocesan peace commissions, and community stakeholders.

Keywords: *Christian Religious Studies, conflict resolution, Enugu, peace education, religious education, Nigeria, communal conflict*

INTRODUCTION

Conflict remains a defining feature of Nigeria's social and political landscape. Although the southeastern geopolitical zone has, since the end of the Nigerian Civil War, been comparatively less marked by large-scale inter-ethnic pogroms than some other regions, Enugu State has not been insulated from destructive communal clashes, land disputes, farmer-herder violence, and youth-related insecurity (Aja, 2019; Udeani, 2024). The April 2016 attacks on Nimbo in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area, in which worshippers were killed and a Catholic church was burned, remain a stark reminder that even a majority-Christian state can experience lethal violence with religious and ethnic overtones (Udeani, 2024). Parallel intra-Igbo communal conflicts, notably the protracted Oruku-Umuode dispute in Nkanu East, have similarly demonstrated how kinship, land, and political recognition can generate cycles of displacement and retaliation despite shared ethnicity and faith (Aja, 2019).

Education is widely regarded as a long-horizon instrument for transforming such cycles. Within the Nigerian school system, Christian Religious Studies (CRS) is the principal curricular vehicle through which Christian moral theology, biblical narrative, and ethical formation are transmitted to children and adolescents. Federal curriculum policy continues to retain CRS as a distinct offering for Christian learners at basic and senior secondary levels, alongside Islamic Studies for Muslim learners, and frames the revised curricula as intending to promote peaceful coexistence, religious tolerance, and unity in diversity (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2025; Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council [NERDC], 2025). At the teacher-education level, the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) Minimum Standards for CRS include courses on the sociology of religion, African Traditional Religion, Islam, ecumenism, and religious dialogue (NCCE, 2021; Ajibola et al., 2022).

The central research problem addressed in this article is whether, and through what mechanisms, CRS as taught and lived in Enugu communities actually contributes to conflict resolution, or whether its confessional design, classroom practice, and weak articulation with community mediation systems limit that contribution. The problem is both scholarly and practical. Scholarly literature on religious education and peacebuilding in Nigeria is growing, yet much of it is either national in scope or focused on the Middle Belt and the North, where Christian-Muslim polarization is more acute (Ajibola, 2018; Ushe, 2012; Nwaka, 2019). Enugu-specific work has examined religion and peace (Udeani, 2024), church involvement in

urban land conflict (Ikechukwu & colleagues, 2025), adult-education strategies for communal clashes (Imo, 2023), and inter-ethnic harmony in Enugu city (Onyima, 2010). Relatively little work has synthesized these strands around the school subject of CRS itself.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative documentary and conceptual analysis appropriate to a synthesis article when new primary survey data cannot be collected across Enugu's 17 local government areas within the scope of a single paper. Sources comprised: (a) official curriculum and policy texts (NCCE Minimum Standards, 2021; FME/NERDC curriculum communications, 2025); (b) peer-reviewed and professionally published studies on CRS, religious education, and peacebuilding in Nigeria from 2010 to 2026; (c) Enugu-focused studies and institutional documents on communal conflict, church mediation, and inter-ethnic relations; and (d) textbook-content reviews that quote CRS peace themes. Inclusion criteria required topical relevance to CRS, Christian education, conflict resolution, or Enugu/Southeast Nigeria, and sufficient bibliographic identifiability for verification.

Analysis proceeded in four steps. First, the Enugu conflict ecology was mapped by conflict type (land/communal, farmer-herder, intra-faith/traditional-religion tension, urban stranger relations). Second, CRS curriculum objectives and topics were coded for explicit or implicit conflict-resolution content (forgiveness, justice, dialogue, other-religion literacy, social ethics). Third, reported empirical associations between CRS/Christian schooling and peace outcomes were extracted. Fourth, mechanisms and constraints were synthesized against the theoretical framework. Limitations are acknowledged: documentary synthesis cannot substitute for a new household or school survey in Enugu; some cited studies were conducted in Plateau, Kaduna, Nasarawa, or Imo and are used comparatively rather than as direct Enugu measurements; and publication quality in the Nigerian education journal ecosystem is uneven. Findings are therefore framed as analytically warranted inferences, not as experimentally established causal effects.

Findings

The Conflict Ecology of Enugu Communities

Three patterns dominate the documentary record. First, many high-intensity conflicts in Enugu are intra-Igbo communal struggles over land, identity recognition, and political entitlements rather than Christian-Muslim wars. Oruku-Umuode is emblematic: shared

ethnicity and widespread Christianity did not prevent destructive conflict, and both government and Catholic Church interventions struggled when perceived as partisan (Aja, 2019). This finding is theoretically important. It shows that CRS-transmitted ethics, even if widely shared, do not automatically resolve conflicts whose immediate stakes are material and political.

Second, some violence has an ethno-religious edge. The Nimbo attacks of 2016 linked pastoralist-farmer competition to lethal targeting of Christian worshippers and church property (Udeani, 2024). In such cases, Christian identity is a vulnerability as well as a resource. CRS that only catechizes in-group piety without preparing learners for intergroup threat, rumor management, and principled non-retaliation will be incomplete.

Third, everyday peace in Enugu city has been comparatively robust. Onyima (2010) traces this to customary stranger-hospitality, ethnic-union dispute settlement, state security framing of ethnic incidents, and Christian norms against bloodshed and revenge. CRS, as the school subject that systematizes those Christian norms for children, is plausibly one cultural-reproduction mechanism of that everyday peace, even if it is rarely named in political analyses of the city.

Peace-Relevant Content in CRS

Curriculum documents and schemes of work contain multiple peace-relevant strands. Biblical social ethics, especially prophetic denunciations of oppression (Amos) and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, supply a vocabulary of justice, mercy, and peacemaking. New Testament teaching on forgiveness, enemy-love, and reconciliation supplies interpersonal conflict scripts. Church-history and contemporary-church topics can, if taught well, include ecumenism and inter-church dispute. NCE courses explicitly introduce other religions and religious dialogue (NCCE, 2021; Ajibola et al., 2022). Textbook language reviewed by IMPACT-se (2024/2026) includes anti-war statements and the doctrinal claim that love of God is inseparable from love of brothers and sisters.

What the curriculum less consistently supplies is structured skill practice: peer mediation protocols, analysis of local Enugu case studies, joint projects with IRS or Social Studies classes, and assessment of conflict-resolution competencies rather than recall of biblical plots. Several authors therefore describe a gap between confessional content that could support peace and pedagogical designs that actually produce transferable skills (Timve et al., 2021; IQRO, 2026; Unuane & Chukwudebelu, 2025).

Mechanisms Linking CRS to Conflict Resolution

Four mechanisms emerge from the synthesis.

Mechanism 1: Moral internalization and peer practice. Studies of secondary students in Plateau and of Christian schools in the South East report that CRS exposure is associated with greater endorsement of forgiveness, empathy, and non-violent communication, and that Christian schools significantly promote peace education in conflict-affected settings (Impact International Journals, 2026; Unuane & Chukwudebelu, 2025). Social learning theory predicts this outcome when teachers narrate biblical conflict stories as models and when peer disputes in school are interpreted through those models. In Enugu secondary schools, where CRS is a familiar subject for Christian-majority classrooms, this mechanism is likely operative for ordinary peer and family disputes even if it is rarely measured locally.

Mechanism 2: Teacher and church-mediator formation. NCE and university CRS programmes produce the teachers who staff Enugu schools and, often, the catechists and lay leaders who sit on parish peace committees. Where those programmes include sociology of religion, ATR, Islam, and ecumenism, graduates are better equipped for plural settings (Ajibola et al., 2022). The Enugu Diocesan Conflict Resolution Commission and parish-level arbitration practices illustrate the downstream institutional pathway from Christian formation to formal mediation (Catholic Diocese of Enugu, n.d.; Ikechukwu et al., 2025). CRS is thus not only a pupil subject; it is part of the human-capital pipeline of faith-based mediation.

Mechanism 3: Cultural reinforcement of Igbo-Christian hospitality. Onyima's (2010) account of Enugu city harmony treats Christianity as amplifying an older Igbo ethic that forbids shedding strangers' blood. CRS lessons on the Good Samaritan, hospitality, and the imago Dei provide a scriptural warrant for that ethic among school-age cohorts. This mechanism is most relevant to urban multi-ethnic markets, campuses, and neighborhoods rather than to intra-village land wars.

Mechanism 4: School-community and church linkages. Adult-education research in Enugu lists liaison with churches, youth groups (Boys' Brigade, Girls' Guild, YMCA/YWCA analogues), and multicultural gatherings as clash-amelioration strategies (Imo, 2023). CRS classrooms that connect with these groups extend peace messages beyond examinations. Conversely, when CRS remains an examination subject detached from parish and village institutions, the transmission chain breaks.

Constraints and Contradictory Evidence

Several constraints limit impact. First, confessional design can privilege in-group piety over interreligious competence. Analyses of senior-secondary CRS note insufficient study of other religions in ways that would support dialogue (Timve et al., 2021). In Enugu this matters at the Christian-ATR boundary (Eha-Amufu-type tensions) and in encounters with Muslim minorities and migrant pastoralists (Nmah, 2025; Udeani, 2024).

Second, implementation resources and pedagogy are uneven. Ajibola et al. (2022) found curriculum potential undercut by inadequate resources in Kaduna NCE settings; similar resource constraints are characteristic of many public schools in Enugu's rural LGAs. Rote teaching does not produce mediation skill.

Third, structural conflict drivers overwhelm classroom ethics. Land governance failures, contested white papers, youth instrumentalization, and weak criminal justice recur in Enugu clash reporting (Aja, 2019; The Nation, 2024). Galtung's framework implies that CRS can at best reduce cultural violence and supply mediators; it cannot substitute for just land administration.

Fourth, church mediation itself can fail or be perceived as biased, as in Oruku-Umuode (Aja, 2019). Appleby's ambivalence thesis applies inside the Church: Christian actors may calm or inflame depending on partisanship, training, and incentives. CRS that does not critically examine Christian complicity in conflict will over-claim the tradition's pacific credentials.

Fifth, national curriculum politics periodically unsettle CRS as a distinct subject (debates over Religion and National Values versus stand-alone CRS/IRS). Uncertainty about subject status can weaken teacher commitment and instructional time (Impact International Journals, 2026; FME, 2025).

DISCUSSION

Read together, the findings support a qualified thesis: CRS has a positive but partial and context-dependent impact on conflict resolution in Enugu communities. The strongest warranted claim is at the level of cultural and interpersonal peace, shaping dispositions of forgiveness, non-retaliation, and hospitality among students and supplying a moral vocabulary that churches and families already use. This claim is consistent with student-level

correlations elsewhere in Nigeria, with textbook peace language, with Enugu city's post-war inter-ethnic calm, and with diocesan investment in conflict commissions.

The weakest warranted claim is that CRS, as currently taught, systematically resolves high-stakes communal conflicts. Those conflicts are driven by land, recognition, and political economy. Christian majority status in Enugu did not prevent Nimbo or Oruku-Umuode. Lederach's conflict-transformation lens is therefore more appropriate than a simple "teach CRS, get peace" model. CRS should be understood as one node in a web that must also include traditional institutions (Igwe-in-council, Umuada), state justice and land agencies, youth livelihoods, and trained, non-partisan church mediators.

Theoretically, the Enugu case refines Appleby's ambivalence thesis for a Christian-majority state. Ambivalence here is less about Christian-Muslim polarization in the classroom and more about whether Christian ethics are applied to intra-Christian and Christian-traditionalist disputes, and whether they discipline political and land actors who share the same pews. Values-education and social-learning theories explain micro-level gains; they do not license macro-level optimism without complementary structural reforms.

Comparatively, Enugu may enjoy more favorable conditions for CRS-based peace education than Kaduna or Plateau because classrooms are less polarized by faith. That advantage can become a blind spot if CRS never trains learners to analyze farmer-herder rumor, hate speech, or the ethics of reprisal. Curriculum reform should therefore treat Enugu's Christian majority not as a reason to keep CRS purely catechetical, but as a reason to add applied peace modules that use local cases.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the impact of Christian Religious Studies on conflict resolution in Enugu communities through documentary synthesis grounded in curriculum policy, Nigerian religious-education research, and Enugu-specific conflict studies. CRS contributes to conflict resolution primarily by forming moral dispositions, preparing teachers and church mediators, reinforcing hospitality norms, and linking schools to church youth structures. These contributions are real and consistent with biblical peace ethics and with empirical patterns reported in other Nigerian states. They are not, however, sufficient to resolve structurally driven communal wars. A confessional curriculum that under-teaches other religions,

classrooms that privilege recall over practice, and mediation efforts that lose neutrality all blunt impact.

The appropriate policy stance is therefore neither dismissal of CRS as irrelevant to peace nor romanticization of CRS as a panacea. CRS should be retained, professionally taught, and deliberately articulated to Enugu's conflict ecology through case-based pedagogy, teacher development, and school-church-traditional-institution partnerships. Future research should move from synthesis to measurement in Enugu schools and communities.

Recommendations

1. Curriculum and pedagogy. Enugu State Ministry of Education, in collaboration with NERDC and relevant church education secretariats, should issue a state supplement to the national CRS scheme that includes locally grounded modules on communal land ethics, farmer-herder relations, rumor and hate-speech discernment, and structured peer mediation. Assessment should include performance tasks, not only paper-and-pencil recall.

2. Teacher education. Colleges of education and universities serving Enugu should treat NCCE courses on other religions, sociology of religion, and ecumenism as core peace-capacity courses, with practicum placements in parish conflict desks and community mediation settings (Ajibola et al., 2022; NCCE, 2021).

3. School-community architecture. Schools should formalize links with diocesan and denominational conflict-resolution commissions, town unions, and Umuada groups for guest mediation clinics and supervised student observation, building on existing church and adult-education channels (Catholic Diocese of Enugu, n.d.; Imo, 2023; Nmah, 2025).

4. Structural complementarity. Education interventions must be paired with impartial land administration, early-warning response, youth livelihood programmes, and non-partisan third-party mediation in hotspots such as Nkanu East and Uzo-Uwani (Aja, 2019; The Nation, 2024).

5. Research. Faculties of education and peace studies in Enugu (including the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Enugu State University of Science and Technology) should commission mixed-methods evaluations of CRS impact on student conflict behavior, with ethics approval and community participation.

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