

The Role of Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in Promoting Peace and Conflict Resolution in Eha-Amufu Communities, Enugu State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in promoting peace and conflict resolution in the Eha-Amufu communities of Isi-Uzo Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria. Eha-Amufu, an agrarian border cluster adjoining Benue and Ebonyi States, has experienced layered conflicts: nineteenth-century boundary wars, Civil War displacement, the 2006 Christian–traditionalist confrontations associated with the destruction of Odo and Omaba shrines, internal leadership and land disputes, and recurrent farmer–herder violence that peaked between 2020 and 2022. Drawing on Galtung's distinction between negative and positive peace, Lederach's conflict-transformation framework, and Nigerian curriculum policy, the study employs qualitative documentary analysis of NERDC CRS objectives, peer-reviewed research on religious education and peacebuilding, historical studies of Eha-Amufu, and contemporaneous reportage. Findings indicate that CRS, as specified in national policy, is explicitly mandated to instil tolerance, reconciliation, non-violence, and respect for human life. Churches, the Anglican Diocese of Eha-Amufu, the Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu, and community Christian associations have at times mediated local disputes and preached reconciliation. However, confessional pedagogy, aggressive evangelism, weak interreligious content, politicisation of insecurity, and the structural character of farmer–herder and boundary conflicts limit what classroom CRS can achieve unaided. The article argues that CRS is a necessary but insufficient instrument of peace. It recommends curriculum enrichment toward interreligious literacy and justpeace competencies, school–community peace clubs, teacher capacity-building, and coordinated engagement among clergy, traditional institutions, and security stakeholders. The study contributes to African peace education scholarship by locating a national school subject in a specific, multi-layered conflict ecology.

Keywords: *Christian Religious Studies, peace education, conflict resolution, Eha-Amufu, Enugu State, farmer–herder conflict, religious education, justpeace*

INTRODUCTION

Peace remains one of the most contested public goods in contemporary Nigeria. Successive national development plans and the National Policy on Education have treated moral and religious instruction as instruments for social cohesion, yet communities continue to experience communal, religious, political, and resource-based violence (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2013; Ani, 2025). In the south-east, insecurity has increasingly taken the form of farmer–herder clashes, kidnapping, and intra-communal political contestation, rather than the Christian–Muslim riots more commonly associated with the Middle Belt and the north (Udeani, 2024). Eha-Amufu, the largest settlement cluster in Isi-Uzo Local Government Area of Enugu State, illustrates this complexity with unusual clarity.

Eha-Amufu occupies a strategic corridor linking Enugu to Benue and Ebonyi States. It hosts the Federal College of Education (Technical), Eha-Amufu, an Anglican missionary diocese created in 2009, numerous Catholic and Pentecostal congregations, and a still-living memory of Igbo traditional religion, particularly the Odo and Omaba cults (Nmah & Agbo, 2026; Wikipedia contributors, 2026). The community's conflict history is layered rather than singular: a boundary war with Nkalaha in 1829–1831 resolved by a blood covenant; Civil War logistics and refugee flows; a 2006 Christian-led destruction of traditional shrines described locally as Operation Nkpochea Nzacha; intra-clan leadership and land disputes; and, from about 2018 and especially 2020–2022, armed attacks on farm settlements (Ndiagu) that produced mass displacement, contested casualty figures, and successive peace and security interventions by state governments and community–Miyetti Allah committees (The Guardian, 2022; Vanguard, 2022; Nmah & Agbo, 2026).

Against this background, Christian Religious Studies occupies an ambiguous position. On one hand, CRS is a statutory school subject whose official objectives include humility, love, justice, tolerance, reconciliation, peaceful coexistence, and non-violence (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council [NERDC], 2013; FRN, 2013). Teacher-education programmes in Colleges of Education include CRS courses on African Traditional Religion, introduction to Islam, ecumenism, and religious dialogue that, at least on paper, can support interreligious peace (Ajibola et al., 2022; Ajibola & Musa, 2024). On the other hand, scholars of Nigerian religious education have repeatedly shown that CRS remains predominantly confessional, thinly resourced, and weakly connected to civic and peace competencies (Ajibola et al., 2022; IQRO analysis, 2026). In Eha-Amufu itself, Christian

mobilisation was implicated in the 2006 shrine destructions even as later clerical voices, including the Anglican Bishop of Eha-Amufu, have publicly supported reconciliation committees and cautioned against politicising insecurity (Nmah & Agbo, 2026; Vanguard, 2022; Daily Post, 2025).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative documentary and historical-analytical design. The approach is appropriate where the research questions concern meanings, institutions, and processes rather than the estimation of a population parameter, and where primary survey access to a recently insecure border community is ethically and practically constrained (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Three bodies of evidence were triangulated. First, curriculum and policy documents: the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), NERDC CRS curriculum statements, NCE minimum standards discussions in published studies, and senior-school CRS syllabus aims. Second, peer-reviewed and thesis literature on religious education, peacebuilding, and Enugu/Eha-Amufu (Ajibola et al., 2022; Ajibola & Musa, 2024; Ezeugwu, 2024; Nmah & Agbo, 2026; Nnorom, 2023; Udeani, 2024; IQRO, 2026; Njobati, 2025; Oyetoro, 2025; Reni, 2014; Dada, 2019; Gwaza & Ochogwu, 2024). Third, contemporaneous public-record sources on Eha-Amufu conflicts and peace initiatives (The Guardian, Vanguard, Punch, Independent, ThisDay, New Telegraph, Daily Post, diocesan materials).

Analysis proceeded in three stages: (a) reconstruction of the conflict ecology; (b) content analysis of CRS peace-related objectives and of documented Christian institutional actions; (c) interpretive assessment against Galtung's and Lederach's criteria. Source credibility was weighed by independence, recency, and corroboration; contested casualty figures and partisan political narratives were treated as claims rather than as settled facts. The study does not purport to present new household-survey statistics. Its validity claim is documentary saturation and theoretical coherence. Limitations include absence of original classroom observation in Eha-Amufu secondary schools and the fast-moving character of local security narratives after 2022.

Findings and Discussion

Finding 1: CRS Has an Explicit Peace Mandate That Is Under-Operationalised

Documentary analysis confirms that Nigerian CRS is not a theologically empty civics course, nor is it only a Sunday-school replica. Its written objectives name tolerance, reconciliation, non-violence, and respect for human life (NERDC, 2013). Teacher-education standards include ATR and Islamic introductions and dialogue courses (Ajibola et al., 2022). Teachers in comparable Nigerian settings report that religious education contributes to peaceful coexistence and to reducing violence in multi-cultural societies (Ezeugwu, 2024). The constraint is operational: confessional examination cultures, thin instructional materials, and inadequate teacher preparation for dialogical methods (Ajibola & Musa, 2024; IQRO, 2026). In Eha-Amufu this means the peace mandate exists on paper in every junior secondary classroom that offers CRS, but there is no published evidence that local schemes of work systematically connect, for example, the Joseph reconciliation cycle or the Sermon on the Mount to Odo memory, town-union factionalism, or farmer–herder ethics.

Finding 2: Christian Agency in Eha-Amufu Has Been Both Conflictual and Conciliatory

The 2006 episode is the cautionary finding. Christian crusade energy, youth mobilisation, and a discourse of cleansing traditional "evils" produced a community-wide destruction of sacred objects (Nmah & Agbo, 2026). That history refutes any naïve claim that "more CRS" automatically yields peace. Uncritical CRS that equates traditional religion with demonic pollution can incubate the next Operation Nkpochena Nzacha. Conversely, later clerical participation in inter-group meetings, episcopal appeals against politicising graves, diocesan language about unjust structures, and the Believers' Association's unifying brief show the conciliatory face of the same Christian field (Nmah & Agbo, 2026; Vanguard, 2022; ThisDay, 2022). Ambivalence is not a theoretical ornament; it is the local record.

Finding 3: The Dominant Contemporary Conflict Exceeds Doctrinal CRS

Farmer–herder violence, boundary disputes with Benue communities, kidnapping economies, and intra-Eha-Amufu political struggles over land, timber, and office are not primarily debates about the Trinity or the Odo masquerade (The Guardian, 2022; ThisDay, 2022, 2025; Independent, 2022). They are conflicts over livelihood, territory, and power, with religious identity available as a mobilising overlay. CRS that stays inside biblical narrative without crossing into civic skills, listening, interest-based negotiation, rumour discipline, trauma awareness, and the ethics of armed self-help, will under-perform. Galtung's structural violence and Lederach's multi-level transformation are the relevant diagnostics: classrooms can humanise, churches can convene, but roads, security architecture, land law, and elite

restraint lie outside the CRS period. Udeani (2024) is therefore right that religion in Enugu is a possible remedy, not a sufficient one; inter-religious dialogue as a governmental as well as ecclesial initiative remains necessary.

Finding 4: Schools and the College Are Under-Used Peace Platforms

Eha-Amufu is unusual in hosting both the conflict and a federal teacher-education institution. Peace-education literature urges school–community partnerships and dialogic pedagogy (IQRO, 2026; Njobati, 2025; Ani, 2025). There is little public documentation that FCE Eha-Amufu or Isi-Uzo secondary schools have institutionalised peace clubs linking CRS, civic education, and town-union youth wings, or that CRS micro-teaching routinely uses local case material (2006 shrine crisis; 2022 farm-settlement attacks; the 2022 joint task force). The infrastructure is geographically present; the pedagogical use of that geography appears weak. This is a finding of omission, consistent with national implementation studies rather than a claim that no individual teacher is innovating.

Finding 5: Women and Hybrid Institutions Matter as Much as the CRS Timetable

Implications for Theory and Practice

CONCLUSION

Christian Religious Studies has a legitimate and policy-recognised role in promoting peace and conflict resolution in Eha-Amufu communities. The written curriculum names the virtues that a violent border agrarian society needs: tolerance, reconciliation, non-violence, and respect for human life. Teacher education, churches, an Anglican diocese led by a bishop trained in peace and conflict resolution, Catholic justice structures, and community Christian associations constitute a dense moral infrastructure. At their best, these instruments have convened enemies, restrained rumour, and kept alive a language of living "in peace like before."

At their worst, Christian zeal without dialogical discipline helped desecrate communal sacred worlds in 2006, and classroom CRS has remained too confessional and too examination-driven to match the structural violence of land, boundary, and pastoralist–farmer relations. CRS is therefore necessary and insufficient. Peace in Eha-Amufu will not be preached into existence in a forty-minute double period, nor will it be secured only by battalions on the Ogbete axis. It will require justpeace: repaired relationships, fair access to

farmland, disciplined politics, interreligious and intra-religious literacy, and educational practice that treats the community's own wounds as the text through which Scripture is read.

Recommendations

First, NERDC and the Enugu State Ministry of Education should enrich CRS schemes of work for Isi-Uzo with locally grounded peace modules: Christian–ATR relations after 2006; ethics of land and grazing; rumour and hate speech; forgiveness and justice held together. Examination items should reward applied peace reasoning, not only verse recall.

Second, the Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu, should make ecumenism, ATR, and interreligious dialogue courses compulsory practicum sites, partnering with schools, Umuada, town unions, and herder representatives for supervised community projects.

Third, churches and the Anglican and Catholic authorities should continue middle-range mediation but explicitly reject crusade rhetorics that frame neighbours as pollution. Diocesan justice-and-peace desks should be linked to school peace clubs.

Fourth, state and local government should treat CRS reform as complementary to, not a substitute for, security deployments, all-weather access roads to Ndiagu, transparent land administration, and depoliticisation of community leadership disputes.

Fifth, further research should include classroom ethnography in Eha-Amufu secondary schools, survey of CRS teachers' conflict-related self-efficacy, and comparative study with other Enugu flashpoints such as Nimbo. Mixed-methods work of that kind would test the documentary inferences offered here.

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