Predictors Of Youth Conflict In Ebonyi State: The Perspective Of Christian Religion On The Conflict Managements

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Abstract.

Conflict is an integral part of day- to-day life because when people live, associate and work together as a group, conflict is inevitable. The study determined predictors of youth's conflict in ebonyi state and the perspective of Christian religion on the conflict managements. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. The population of the study comprised all the youths in the affected communities of the State, while a total of three hundred (300) youths were selected using purposive sampling technique. Structured questionnaire were the instrument used for data collection. The analysis of data were done using mean and standard deviation. The findings reveals overall mean scores of ($\bar{x}$ = 3.1), which revealed that the items studied are high predictors of youth conflict in Ebonyi State. The result further shows the overall mean scores of ($\bar{x}$ = 3.2), which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, which indicated that conflict among the youth could be resolved/managed through Christian Religion education. The study concluded that the government at all levels and the concerned stakeholder of the communities should as a matter of fact imbibe and make the teaching and learning of Christian Religion studies compulsory in schools.

Keywords: Conflict, Predictors, Conflicts Management, Christian Religion Studies and Ebonyi.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an integral part of day- to-day life. Thus, when people live, associate and work together as a group, conflict abound (Oachesu, 2016; Aleke, Alo, Nwafor, & Ochiaka, 2023). Conflict is one of the most predictable outcomes in people's live hence underscores the need to be managed the same way we live in a house, cleans it regularly to avoid dust. Conflicts need to be worked and managed every time in our day-to-day activities. Conversely, several reports have indicated conflicts as one of the most common problems ravaging every part of the world especially in developing countries including Nigeria (Kvitashvili 2005; Ezemenaka, 2021). Adolescents and youth are bearing the brunt as they are growing in societies that lack stable government, poor economic growth, unemployment, insecurity, and lack of basic material (Kvitashvili, 2005; Oachesu, 2016; Ezemenaka, 2021). In such scenarios, youth often turn away from the authority and ideology of older generations and seek to mobilize their own generation in search of solutions. Research has documented that when young people are jobless, intolerant, alienated, and have few opportunities for positive engagement, they become a willing tools, and can easily be recruited by an individual or groups seeking to mobilize for violence (Kvitashvili 2005). This is evidence in many places across the globe especially in Nigeria and Ebonyi state in particular where the prevalent socioeconomic and political structures have deprive youth of viable opportunities to attain their potentials and expose them to violent tendencies leading to conflict (Kvitashvili 2005; Ezemenaka, 2021).

Conflict refers to friction, disagreement, and misunderstanding between two individual, group or communities (Njoku, 2011; Oachesu, 2016). In other words, conflict is a social interaction in which individuals, group of people or communities struggle with each other for some commonly prized object or value (Donald, Light & Suzanne Keller 1975). In the word of Federico conflicts involves competition in which people or group seek not only to undo the rival but also to either eliminate them completely, injure, control, or to deprive them of something against their will (Ronald, 1979). From the definitions above, conflict could be described as a state of misunderstanding, hostility, quarrels, fighting, friction, bullying, strife, fracas and disagreement between two parties. Studies have revealed that conflicts among the youth in Nigeria is stirred by grievances based on political rights, cultural rights, religious rights and minority rights, among others (Ezemenaka, 2021). For instance, in some part of Nigeria, the high rate of kidnapping in South South and South East Nigeria, as well as bombings in some South South states such as Bayelsa in Nigeria, is attributed to venting of grievances for their livelihood needs and adequate representation of their interest in the federal government character, since major natural resources that fuel the economy of the nation come from their regions (Ukeje 2005; Ezemenaka, 2021). The combination of the process of violence created by social groups, economic systems and political structures threatens human security to a large extent. Nevertheless, all youth are not the same, nor is their experience, behaviour and the concept of youth itself under contention.

Although, Some studies conceptualized youth to favour biological markers, in which youth is the period between puberty and parenthood, while others conceived youth with regards to cultural markers, with a distinct social status and specific roles, rituals, and relationships (Youth Survey 2003; Kramer, et al., 2010). According to the United Nations definition of youth, it is period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence (United Nations 2008). The body further noted that youth can be better understood when classified and defined in terms of age category. This is because youth is more fluid than other fixed age-groups. Hence, age is the easiest way to define this group, particularly in relation to education and employment, because 'youth' is often referred to a person between the ages of leaving compulsory education, and finding their first job (United Nations 2008). The concept of youth changes with circumstances, especially with the changes in demographic, financial, economic and socio-cultural settings; however, the definition that uses 15- 24 age cohort as youth fairly serves its statistical purposes for assessing the needs of the young people and providing guidelines for youth development and the associated conflict and conflict management among youth (UNDESA, 2008). In the societies subject to crises or upheaval, the concept of youth may radically alter as adolescents are forced to take on adult responsibilities at a very young age. Adolescents and youth who are never integrated into community and social structures, or who never acquire the skills needed for peaceful and constructive adult lives, are at high risk of conflict. This is because, a deprived, frustrated, or traumatized youth cohort, if left without help, can continue to foment conflict in the community for decades (Oachesu, 2016). Conflict varies from personal, political, religious, class, racism/ethnicity, and cultural. It is an escalation of disagreement which could be caused by lack of understanding, envy and emotion.

Conflict can be escalated by uncertainty and commitment, perception and misperception, irritation and anger, or misattribution (Oachesu, 2016; Uduabo 2019).Management involves identification and handling of conflict related matters sensibly, fairly and efficiently (People Hum 2022). In other words, Conflict management is a planning measure to avoid conflict when possible, and taking rapid and effective step towards resolving it when it arises. Conflict management according to knowledgehub is the process by which disputes are resolved; where negative results are minimized and positive results are prioritized (Ivan, 2021). Moreover, conflict management includes accommodation, avoidance, compromise, competing and collaboration (Webmaster Daily Trust 2012). Those five principles are well spelt out in the teachings of Christian religion and managements of conflicts. Religion be it Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or others is an integral part of human society. There is no society without religion because of its major contribution to human development, sustenance and peace advocacy (Fadi, 2022). Religion came to be as a result of man's search for peace and understanding of himself. Thus, religion originated out of man's curiosity to find out who he is and to solve the conflicting issues surrounding him. It is a well-known facts that religion is a

unifying factor that unites adherents with the environment into a single moral community. The foundation of religion was the moral community that is; the idea of a society is the soul of religion. This is because religion creates and celebrates community. By this, religion sustains community by offering answers and rules about life. Religion does this by explaining human rights as a part of a divine scheme and by following the divine laid down rules' men are assured victory and best wishes in life (Kazimoto, 2013; Fisher, 2000; Evans, 2013).

In Ebonyi State, many factors have contribuxted to conflict ranging from incompatibility of interest, land dispute, misinterpretation of views, poverty, unhealthy competition, leadership tussle, political dividend, envy and jealousy, communication gap to mention but a few. In the past few years, Ebonyi State has suffered setbacks in economy due to political and communal conflict caused by lack of understanding, greed and misinterpretation of views. It is evident that about 60% of the communities in Ebonyi are fighting either with its neighboring village or within themselves (Njoku, 2011). For instance, the crises between Ezza and Ezilo, Enyibichiri, Ikwo and Enyigba, Izzi, Abomege and Isinkwo, Ochaenyim and Adadama, Ohankwo, Ikwo and Amana, Ezza, Igbudu and Inyimagu, Okpomaka and Inyimagu and Mgbo versus Ezza in Mgbo, were all caused by clash of interest, misunderstanding, greed, poverty, cultural variations and lack of communication to mention but a few among youth of the area. These have resulted to fighting, discrimination, killing of innocent citizens, and disruption of civil works/school activities in the area.This has affected development in the state in that most resources are channeled into settling conflicts and rebuilding structures damaged as a result of communal fights/clash. This ugly trend has eaten deep into the state to the extent that boundaries are dug to demarcate some villages and communities in Ebonyi State. Recently, the state government of Ebonyi State has handed over the conflict resolution to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Ebonyi State. Based on the above scenario, this study attempt to determine the predictors of youth conflict in ebonyi state and the perspective of Christian religion on resolving/managements of conflict.

II.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to have a better knowledge and understanding of the youth conflicts, the present study was anchored on conflict theory/model propounded by Karl Marx.

2.1   Youth Conflict theory by Karl Marx

This Conflict theory by Karl Marx describes human settings as chaotic due to the fact that individuals are continuously competing for scarce materials and resources. This conflict theory views youth conflict and crime as a social predicament arising from lack of opportunities, misappropriation of resources, historical injustices, and absence of initiatives to empower them. Proponents of conflict theory examine societies as entities characterized by the bourgeois and the proletarian. The rulers formulate most of the decisions while dictating the amount of resources and opportunities available to the working class. In the modern world, conflict continues to exist since government leaders are capable of misappropriating resources intended for the poor. Additionally, Sadovnikova et al. (2019) observe that the implemented projects and systems fail to tackle most of the challenges many people face, including poor health outcomes, poverty, and reduced employment opportunities. Moreover, the competition, misunderstanding and conflicts recorded in different communities across the globe both the developed and the developing countries was fuelled due to gap between the rich and the poor leading to youth conflicts (Sadovnikova et al. 2019). The attributes of conflict theory make it possible for more people to learn more about the modern society (Symbaluk and Bereska 2019).

The forces of capitalism and how they trigger new versions of conflicts like governments and those in power who have found themselves at loggerheads with a wide range of religious and social groups. It was observed that the inability of leaders to support equitable allocation of resources, maintain federal characters especially in Nigeria and South east in particular amounts to poverty among the underrepresented and marginalized. The injustices and cases of discrimination have led to the development of systems that fail to empower the less fortunate in the wider society (Symbaluk and Bereska 2019). Moreover, inability to institute practical mechanisms to minimize cases of inequality, denial of basic human right, less privilege and poverty, empower more people to pursue their goals and take their future into their hands leading to conflicts

among them. The tenets of this conflict theory indicates thus, to promote and sustain social order, peace, conflict resolutions and conflict managements in communities, power and domination are critical aspect that must be checked. Also, the gap between the rich and poor, and denial of basic human right by those in authority. All these must be tackled by creating job, engaging the youth in positive employment. This is because when the less fortunate and the oppressed come together, chances of engaging in violence, riots, revolts increases leading to social unrest, youth crime, kidnapping for ransom among others. All these triggers must be tackled to combat youth conflicts.
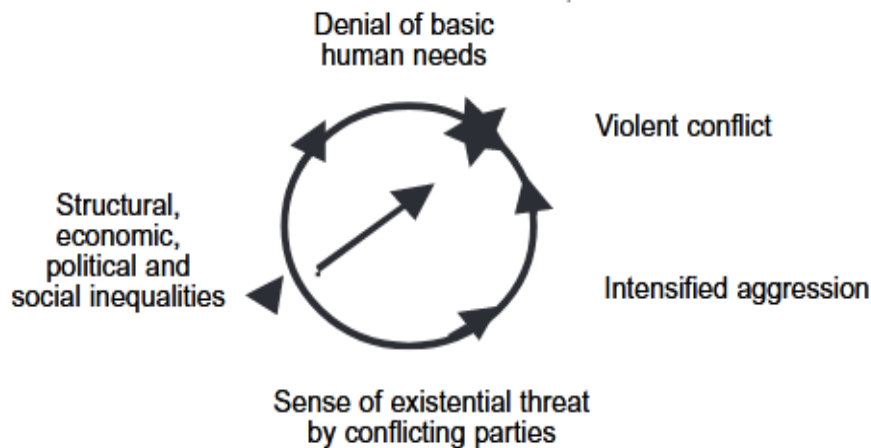

Fig 1. Factors Influencing Youth Conflicts. *Source:* World Youth Report, (2003).

III.   METHODS

This research is a descriptive cross sectional research design conducted between June to December 2023, to investigate the predictors of youth conflict in Ebonyi state and the perspective of Christian religion on the conflict managements. Ebonyi State is one of the Igbo states in the Southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria with the projected population of 1,244,671 youth aged 15-24 years in 2016 and a total landmass of 5,533km2 (National Bureau of Statistics 2017).

3.1 Study Population

The population of the study comprised of all the Youths in the war ravaged local government areas in Ebonyi State, Nigeria which includes, Ikwo LGA, Ezza North LGA., Ezza South LGA., Ishielu LGA., Izzi LGA and Ohaukwu LGA with the target population of thirty thousand (30000) youths (National Bureau of Statistics 2017).

3.2 Sample and Sampling Procedures

A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted for the study. At the first stage, Ebonyi State of Nigeria was clustered into 13 Local Governments Areas. At the second stage, Six (6) local government area was selected from the thirteen (13) local government of Ebonyi state, using purposive sampling technique. The purposive type of non-probability sampling technique (where the odds of any member being selected for a sample cannot be calculated) was adopted to enable the research select those affected LGA in Ebonyi State. At the third stage, disproportionate and purposive sampling techniques was used to draw 50 participants from each of the affected LGA. At the end a total of 300 participants was drawn for the study.Though the focus was on youth, the purposeful non-probability technique ensures that respondents targeted were selected on convenience and ease to access to information.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument and Measures

Questionnaire was the only instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire was entitled - "Youths Conflict and Christian Religion (YCCR)". The instrument was face validated by five experts drawn from the department of religion, measurement and evaluation Hume kinetics and Health Education of Ebonyi state university Abakaliki. The YCCR was written in English language and were bundled into one package for the convenience of the participants. The instrument was administered to 30 other youth different from the sample of the study. After which it was subjected to a reliability test using test-re-test. The reliability test

yielded a strong internal consistency of 0.85. Prior to the distribution of questionnaires, formal introduction of the study was given by the researchers and informed consent obtained from all the prospective participants before the study commenced. The researchers administered the questionnaire to all the participants and collected it back on the spot. The items of the questionnaire were organized to elicit responses from the participants without any bias.

3.4 Data Analysis

After a critical cross-check of the returned copies of the questionnaire for completeness of responses, the quantitative data generated was entered into Microsoft Excel and then exported to SPSS 21 for detailed analysis. Mean and Standard Deviation were the statistical tools used for data analysis and also, in determining the predictors of youth conflict in ebonyi state and the perspective of Christian religion on the conflict managements. Mean was used to analyze data and the criterion mean was 2.50 and above was interpreted as high predictors of youth conflict while mean scores below 2.50 was interpreted as low predictors of youth conflict. The findings were presented using tables.

IV.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Table 1. Mean scores on the Predictors of Youth Conflict in Ebonyi State (n=300)

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1	Unhealthy Competition	125	95	25	55	2.9	High
2	Political tussle	121	160	10	9	3.3	High
3	Inferiority Complex/Status Threat	10	80	90	120	1.9	Low
4	Favoritism /Discrimination	110	150	11	29	3.1	High
5	Hostility	121	75	79	25	2.9	High
6	Frustration	130	120	58	92	3.6	High
7	Misunderstanding/Misinterpretation	150	149	-	1	3.4	High
8	Poverty and lack	105	150	20	25	3.0	High
9	Envy and Jealousy	101	150	26	23	3.0	High
10	Lack of Trust	85	120	18	77	2.7	High
11	Bad Leadership	190	92	10	8	3.4	High
12	Communication Gap	129	102	51	18	3.1	High
13	Land boundary Dispute	210	90	-	-	3.7	High
14	Injustice	130	110	35	25	3.1	High
15	Nigerian economy	150	130	11	9	3.4	High
	Overall Mean $\bar{x}$					**3.1**	

Key: Mean of 2.50 and above is High Predictors of Youth Conflict; Less than 2.50 is Low predictors of Youth Conflicts

Data in Table 1 shows overall mean scores of ($\bar{x}$ = 3.1). This indicated high predictors of youth conflict in Ebonyi State. Moreover, all the items except item 3 on the predictors of youth conflict had a mean score above 2.50 and above. This suggested that all the items except item 3, is a high predictors of youth conflict in Ebonyi State. However, item 3 indicated a low predictor of youth conflict in Ebonyi State.

Table 2. Mean scores of Christian Religion Perspective on Conflict Management (n=300).

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Decision
16	Inculcate good morals through modelling.	129	150	11	10	3.3	Accepted
17	Admonish young adults using Christian moral principles and precepts	70	139	41	50	2.7	Accepted
18	Use of Christian religion virtues in counseling young people	110	98	42	50	2.8	Accepted
19	Speak out on bad leadership and imperialistic wars	150	101	30	19	3.2	Accepted
20	Spell out the aims and objectives of CRS during class teachings	210	56	24	10	3.5	Accepted
21	Strong emphasis on the moral lessons of every lesson delivered	241	37	10	2	3.7	Accepted
22	Implementation of effective Teaching of CRS in Schools	96	160	29	15	3.4	Accepted
23	Motivation of Students towards the study of	101	25	100	74	2.5	Accepted

	CRS						
24	Encourage young adult through fellowship about spiritual perfection	112	99	50	39	2.9	Accepted
25	Emphasis on peace, unity and love for all.	111	180	5	4	3.3	Accepted
26	Sensitization of the young through open programs like crusade/enlightenment campaign	110	120	20	50	3.8	Accepted
27	Emphasis on hard work, self-discipline and transparent living as not only virtues but way to salvation	151	130	8	10	3.4	Accepted
28	Accommodation of others through negotiation, compromise and tolerance	180	120	-	-	3.6	Accepted
	Overall Mean					**3.2**	

Data in Table 2 shows overall mean scores of ($\bar{x}$ = 3.2), which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that respondents agreed that conflict could be managed through the perceptive of Christian Religion education. Specifically, all the clusters mean score in the table shows is greater that the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that Christian Religion perspective can be used for conflict management

Discussion

5.1 The Predictors of Youth Conflict in Ebonyi State

The study revealed some predictors of youth conflict in Ebonyi State. These ranges from bad leadership, land dispute, communication gap, unhealthy competition, envy, jealousy, misunderstanding, hostility, discrimination towards the nation's economy to mention but a few. The finding is quite interesting, in that most cases of conflict reported in Ebonyi were caused by political clash, land boundary dispute and misconception of ideas and misinterpretation of facts. For instance, Ikwo clash with Izzi was as a result of land dispute and misinterpretation of facts. While that of Ezilo and Ezza, Effium and Ezza were due to misunderstanding, leadership tussle between two clans, discrimination and greed. In likewise, the crises in Isinkwo and Abomege axis were due to frustration in the part of the youth, land dispute, unhealthy competition between Isinkwo youths and Abomege youths. These two communities had common boundaries and have been living in harmony with each other not until status threat and spirit of competition engulfs them. This resulted into conflict that claimed many lives in the area. The finding of the present study is in agreement with studies who reported that factors like political tussle, ethnic discrimination, communication gap, misconception and misinterpretation of ideas were the leading cause of conflict among youth in various communities (Kvitashvili 205; Oachesu, 2016; Ezemenaka, 2021).

5.2 Christian Religion Perspective on Conflict Management

Findings on Table 2 revealed the use of Christian religious principles and precepts in management and even resolution of conflict in Ebonyi state. From the study, it is obvious that the content, aims and objectives of Christian religion study is adequate and effective in management of conflict. The finding is quite understandable in that Christian Religion teaches peace, love, forgiveness, long suffering, and tolerance among others. In this case, the study of CRS provides training on peace making methodology citing Mathew 5:9; 6:12-15; 7:1-5. In these passages Jesus instructs believers to practice forgiveness, to live for and maintain peace and to take responsibility for their actions. Jesus also calls on political authorities to rule justly by recognizing the dignity of all. His teachings condemn social injustice. Peace making is a cardinal objective of Christian religion, no wonder Christians are called to forgive, promote justice and support every initiative to abolish conflict and war hence the message on peace making. Christian religion teaching encourage believers and all Christians to pursue peace with all their might/strength (Hebrews 12:14). Mathew 5:9 not only implies peacemaking as a means of being a child of God, but also emphasizes the idea that violence is morally wrong and therefore unjustifiable. The teaching on *"love your enemies and forgive your offenders"* is major precepts for healthy living which is expected of all living beings. The doctrine of forgiveness has implication for all, in that forgiveness of one's sins is tied to his ability to forgive others. The findings of the present study is in line with the several studies who reported that Religion came to be as a result of man's search for peace and understanding of himself.

Thus, religion originated out of man's curiosity to find out who he is and to solve the conflicting issues surrounding him/her (Kazimoto, 2013; Fisher, 2000; Evans, 2013) The study further revealed that

using Christian religious principles and precepts will help in management of conflict. It is interesting because the overall message of Jesus on earth is to show humanity the way of life. Teachings on healthy living are predominant in Christian religion. Christ's visit on earth is to reconcile man with God and to teach man how to relate with one another as a way of pleasing God and attaining (salvation). This offers adherents of Christian religion the opportunity to reconcile with others, love enemies, develop empathy for each other, as well as render help to the poor. Conflict results in the absence of peace and love. When every member of the society realizes the need for showing love to the enemy, empathy for the weak, willingness to reconcile and forgiveness of others; then it brings about harmony and understanding. This implies that effective teaching and studying of Christian principles and precepts will go a long way in conflict management and even resolution. No wonder the Christian scripture advocates for peace with self and others; so training and exposing the young adults to these principles and precepts will engender an invaluable and positive principles post conflict healing in Ebonyi State. The present findings supported the study who revealed that religion is a unifying factor that unites adherents with the environment into a single moral community (Fadi, 2022).

V.   CONCLUSION

Conflict is man-made and has been a problem to mankind. If conflict is not well managed or resolved it can escalate to war. Studies have revealed that it is too difficult to manage and resolve conflict in human society without religious teachings because, religion has been proven to offer succor to man's challenging problems. Both Islam and Christianity teach their adherents to practice Christ like behavior of forgiveness, tolerance, patience, kindness, empathy and peace amongst others. The present study has identified the predictors of youth conflicts in Ebonyi State and the role of CRS principles and perspective in conflicts management among the youth. The findings suggest the need for extensive study of the Christian religion. It implies that the teachers of CRS should expose the students to Christian religion principles and precepts as this will help them keep off from every conflict related matter. There is also the need for education policy makers to make the study of CRS compulsory, and ensure the effective and adequate teaching of the subject because of its major role in shaping human behavior and brings cohesion. Public enlightenment or sensitization on the negative effects of conflict using Christian religion principle is paramount. The general public should emphasize the use of dialogue/negotiation, compromise and tolerance whenever the need arises.

VI.   STUDY LIMITATIONS

This study focused only on youth conflict in Ebonyi state, and not in Nigeria in general. There was also evidence of youth conflict in other parts of Nigeria where the present study did not cover. The study also targeted the use of Christian religion only on the conflict managements.

7.1 Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies may consider studying youth conflict in other parts of Nigeria. Further study may also target other religion or strategies in the management of conflicts among youth.

Statements and Declarations. This was an original research work which aimed to determine the predictors of youth conflict in Ebonyi state. The study assessed the perspective of Christian religion as an intervention strategies in the prevention and/or managements of the conflicts among youth of Ebonyi State. This research received no external funding. The authors declare no conflict of interest. The researchers would like to thank the authorities and principal and teachers for their various contributions towards the completion of this study.

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