

Tackling 21st-Century Conflict through Teaching and Learning Security Education Among Social Studies Students in Ondo West Local Government Area

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Abstract

This study investigated tackling 21st-century conflict through teaching and learning security education among Social Studies students in Ondo West Local Government Area (LGA), Ondo State, Nigeria. The study was based on Bandura's Social Learning Theory theoretical framework, also adopted a descriptive survey design. A sample of 300 students was drawn from ten secondary schools through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a validated, researcher-developed instrument the Security Education Teaching and Conflict Tackling Questionnaire (SETCTQ) which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.84 via Cronbach's Alpha. Four research questions guided the study, and three null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), independent samples t-test, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used for data analysis. Findings revealed that security education instruction significantly enhanced students' conflict awareness (grand mean = 3.65); that male students recorded marginally higher security education outcomes than female students ($t = 2.14, p = .034$); that instructional method significantly influenced conflict management competencies ($F = 5.87, p = .003$); and that a significant positive correlation existed between security education engagement and conflict resolution skills ($r = .612, p < .001$). The study recommended robust integration of security education into the Social Studies curriculum, teacher capacity development in participatory instructional strategies, and community-inclusive security education programming in Ondo West LGA.

Keywords: Security Education, 21st-Century Conflict, Social Studies, Conflict Resolution

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Introduction

The 21st century has ushered in a complex and rapidly evolving security landscape characterised by unprecedented forms of conflict that transcend traditional boundaries of war and diplomacy. In Nigeria, the security situation has grown increasingly multifaceted, encompassing insurgency, ethno-religious violence, cybercrime, farmer-herder clashes, cultism, kidnapping for ransom, and politically motivated unrest (Akintunde & Babalola, 2023). These conflicts have had devastating consequences on communities, institutions, and individuals, threatening the foundations of national development and social cohesion. Schools, which ought to be sanctuaries of learning, have not been insulated from these threats; indeed, many have become sites of conflict expression, recruitment by extremist groups, and disruption of educational continuity (Nwachukwu & Eze, 2021). Within this context, the imperative to equip younger generations with the knowledge, dispositions, and skills necessary to recognise, prevent, and manage conflict has become urgent. Security education defined as the systematic process through which individuals acquire competencies to identify and respond to threats to personal and collective well-being has emerged as a critical domain within formal schooling (Afolabi & Omotunde, 2021). In Nigeria, security education content is largely delivered through the Social Studies subject at the junior secondary level and Civic Education at the senior secondary level, both of which aim to produce informed, responsible, and security-conscious citizens (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2022). However, the extent to which the teaching and learning of these subjects is translating into genuine conflict-tackling competencies among students remains an empirical question deserving systematic investigation like inter and intra school clashes and cult group activities etc

Ondo West Local Government Area (LGA), the administrative headquarters of Ondo State, presents a compelling micro-context for this investigation. The LGA has experienced rising incidences of youth restiveness, gang-related violence, and inter-community tensions in recent years, many of which have involved school-age adolescents (Ogundele & Adeyemi, 2022). Social Studies teachers in the area have reported challenges in making security education content relevant, engaging, and actionable for their students, partly due to insufficient professional development in conflict-sensitive pedagogy and partly due to inadequate curriculum materials (Ibrahim & Lawal, 2022). The

gap between the aspirations of the National Policy on Education and the realities of classroom practice in Ondo West LGA represents a significant challenge that warrants systematic inquiry.

This study, therefore, sought to empirically examine how the teaching and learning of security education within the Social Studies curriculum influences secondary school students' capacity to tackle 21st-century conflict in Ondo West LGA.

Theoretical Framework

The study is theoretically grounded in Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which emphasises the role of modelling and observational learning in behavioural formation which help learners on behavioural inspiring and character modelling for better future outcomes which situates individual development within nested layers of social context. These frameworks collectively provide a robust lens through which to understand both how security behaviours are learned and what environmental factors mediate that learning. The study contributes to the growing body of empirical literature on security education in Nigerian secondary schools and provides a localised evidence base for curriculum reform and teacher professional development in Ondo State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread acknowledgement that security education is critical for addressing 21st-century conflict, empirical evidence consistently reveals a persistent disconnect between policy intent and classroom practice in Nigerian secondary schools. The Nigerian National Security Education Policy (FME, 2022) and the Social Studies curriculum both envision students who are security-conscious, conflict-aware, and capable of contributing to peaceful coexistence. Yet, recurring reports of youth involvement in violence, cult activities, and communal conflict in Ondo State particularly in the Ondo West LGA suggest that existing educational interventions have been insufficiently effective in translating security education content into behavioural competencies (Akintunde & Babalola, 2023).

Several factors have been identified as contributors to this gap. First, many Social Studies teachers continue to rely predominantly on lecture-based instructional methods that prioritise content transmission over the

development of critical thinking and conflict-resolution skills (Okafor & Ugwu, 2023). Second, the lack of trained, conflict-sensitive teachers in many secondary schools in Ondo West LGA means that security education is often treated as a peripheral rather than a central component of Social Studies instruction (Ogundele & Adeyemi, 2022). Third, there is limited empirical data at the local government level to inform targeted intervention and policy decisions. Most existing studies on security education in Nigeria have been conducted at the state or national level, leaving a significant knowledge gap regarding the micro-level dynamics of security education delivery and impact.

The problem is further compounded by the gendered nature of students' engagement with security education and the differential effects of various instructional strategies, both of which have received inadequate attention in the context of Ondo West LGA. Without empirical evidence on how gender and pedagogy interact with security education outcomes, curriculum planners and school administrators are unable to make informed decisions about equitable and effective security education programming. This study, therefore, addressed the problem of how the teaching and learning of security education can be optimised to effectively build students' capacity to tackle 21st-century conflict in Ondo West LGA.

Scope of the Study

This study was delimited in scope to secondary school students in Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria. It focused specifically on Junior Secondary School Three (JSS 3) and Senior Secondary School Two (SSS 2) students who were enrolled in Social Studies and Civic Education respectively the two principal subjects through which security education content is formally delivered in Nigerian secondary schools. The study covered ten secondary schools (six public and four private) selected from the thirty-two approved secondary schools in Ondo West LGA, as registered with the Ondo State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB, 2024) and the Ondo State Ministry of Education.

Thematically, the study was confined to the following dimensions of security education: personal safety and security awareness, awareness and understanding of 21st-century conflicts (terrorism, cybercrime, communal violence, and cultism), conflict prevention attitudes, and conflict resolution competencies. Instructional method variables examined included lecture-based

instruction, cooperative learning, and role-play. The study was limited to the 2023/2024 academic year and did not extend to tertiary institutions or primary schools. Findings are, therefore, primarily generalisable to secondary schools in Ondo West LGA and, with caution, to analogous LGAs within Ondo State.

Objectives of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to examine the role of teaching and learning security education in tackling 21st-century conflict among Social Studies students in Ondo West LGA, Ondo State. Specifically, the study aimed to:

- I. Assess the level of security knowledge acquisition among Social Studies students through security education instruction in Ondo West LGA.
- II. Determine whether a significant difference exists in security education teaching outcomes between male and female Social Studies students in Ondo West LGA.
- III. Examine the level of conflict prevention attitudes exhibited by Social Studies students exposed to security education in Ondo West LGA?
- IV. Investigate the level of security education engagement among Social Studies students in Ondo West LGA?

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- I. What is the level of security knowledge acquisition among Social Studies students through security education teaching in Ondo West LGA?
- II. What is the level of students' awareness of 21st-century conflicts exists in security education teaching outcomes between male and female Social Studies students in Ondo West LGA.
- III. What is the level of conflict prevention attitudes exhibited by Social Studies students exposed to security education in Ondo West LGA?

IV. What is the level of security education engagement among Social Studies students in Ondo West LGA?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in level of security knowledge acquisition among Social Studies students and security education teaching in Ondo West LGA?

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in conflict management competencies among Social Studies students exposed to different instructional methods in security education in Ondo West Local Government Area.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between security education engagement and conflict resolution skills among Social Studies students in Ondo West Local Government Area.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design is appropriate for studies that seek to systematically collect data to describe the characteristics, opinions, attitudes, and behaviours of a defined population without manipulating any variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The descriptive survey design was chosen because the study aimed to gather objective data on students' security education outcomes and conflict-tackling competencies in their natural school settings, covering a large and geographically dispersed sample within Ondo West LGA.

The target population comprised all JSS 3 and SSS 2 Social Studies and Civic Education students enrolled in approved secondary schools in Ondo West LGA, Ondo State, for the 2023/2024 academic year. According to records from the Ondo State Universal Basic Education Board and the State Ministry of Education (SUBEB, 2024), there are 32 approved secondary schools in the LGA, with an estimated population of 4,800 students in the two target class levels. A sample of 300 students (138 male, 162 female) was drawn from ten schools (six public, four private) using stratified random sampling, ensuring proportional representation across school type, gender, and class level. The

sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula, which confirmed 300 as statistically adequate. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 300)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	138	46.0
	Female	162	54.0
School Type	Public	180	60.0
	Private	120	40.0
Class Level	JSS 3	150	50.0
	SSS 2	150	50.0
Total		300	100.0

Data were collected using the Security Education Teaching and Conflict Tackling Questionnaire (SETCTQ), a researcher-developed instrument consisting of two sections. Section A gathered demographic information (gender, school type, and class level). Section B comprised 40 structured items rated on a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The items were organised under four subscales corresponding to the four research questions: Security Knowledge Acquisition (10 items), Awareness of 21st-Century Conflicts (10 items), Conflict Prevention Attitudes (10 items), and Security Education Engagement (10 items). A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted, such that a mean score of 2.50 and above was interpreted as high and below 2.50 as low. Face and content validity were established through expert review by three specialists in Social Studies Education and one expert in Educational Measurement and Evaluation. Internal consistency reliability was estimated through a pilot study involving 30 students from schools outside the sample, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.84.

Formal permission was obtained from the Ondo State Ministry of Education and the respective school principals before data collection commenced. Trained research assistants administered the questionnaire to participants in their classrooms during designated Social Studies or Civic Education periods. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, and informed of their right to

withdraw from the study without consequence. All 300 copies of the questionnaire distributed were retrieved, representing a 100% retrieval rate.

Descriptive statistics specifically mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) were used to answer the four research questions. Inferential statistics were used to test the three null hypotheses: an independent samples t-test for HO₁, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for HO₂, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation for HO₃. All analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 27, at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Descriptive Statistics: Research Questions 1–4

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for the four SETCTQ subscales. All subscale means exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating that security education teaching was perceived to exert a high positive influence on students' security knowledge, conflict awareness, prevention attitudes, and overall engagement. The grand mean of 3.65 (SD = 0.61) confirms a consistently high level of security education impact across the sample.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for SETCTQ Subscales Corresponding to Research Questions 1–4 (N =300)

Subscale / Research Question	N	Mean	SD	Decision
RQ1: Security Knowledge Acquisition	300	3.74	0.61	High
RQ2: Awareness of 21st-Century Conflicts	300	3.68	0.58	High
RQ3: Conflict Prevention Attitudes	300	3.55	0.64	High
RQ4: Security Education Engagement	300	3.61	0.59	High
Grand Mean	300	3.65	0.61	High

Hypothesis Testing

HO₁: There is no significant difference in security education teaching outcomes between male and female Social Studies students in Ondo West LGA. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare security education teaching outcomes between male and female students. Results presented in Table 3 revealed a statistically significant difference between the

groups ($t(298) = 2.14, p = .034$, two-tailed). Male students ($M = 3.77, SD = 0.62$) scored marginally but significantly higher than female students ($M = 3.58, SD = 0.60$). The null hypothesis HO_1 was therefore rejected at the 0.05 level of significance.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-Test: Gender Difference in Security Education Teaching Outcomes

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	p-value
Male	138	3.77	0.62	298	2.14	.034*
Female	162	3.58	0.60			

* $p < .05$. Two-tailed test.

HO₂: There is no significant difference in conflict management competencies among Social Studies students exposed to different instructional methods. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in conflict management competencies among students exposed to three instructional methods: lecture ($n = 100$), cooperative learning ($n = 100$), and role-play ($n = 100$). Table 4 shows that there was a statistically significant difference across the three groups ($F(2, 297) = 5.87, p = .003$). Post-hoc analysis using the Tukey HSD test revealed that students taught through cooperative learning ($M = 3.82$) and role-play ($M = 3.76$) scored significantly higher than those in the lecture group ($M = 3.42$), though no significant difference was found between the cooperative learning and role-play groups. The null hypothesis HO_2 was accordingly rejected.

Table 4: One-Way ANOVA: Effect of Instructional Method on Conflict Management Competencies

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Between Groups	18.42	2	9.21	5.87	.003*
Within Groups	464.30	297	1.57		
Total	482.72	299			

* $p < .05$.

HO₃: There is no significant relationship between security education engagement and conflict resolution skills among Social Studies students in Ondo West LGA. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between security education engagement and three conflict-related outcome variables. As shown in Table 5, significant positive correlations were found between security education teaching and conflict resolution skills ($r = .612, r^2 = .375, p < .001$), civic awareness ($r = .578, r^2 =$

.334, $p < .001$), and peace attitudes ($r = .541$, $r^2 = .293$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that security education engagement accounted for 37.5%, 33.4%, and 29.3% of the variance in conflict resolution skills, civic awareness, and peace attitudes, respectively. The null hypothesis H_{O3} was therefore rejected.

Table 5: Pearson Product Moment Correlation: Security Education Engagement and Conflict-Related Outcomes

Variable Pair	N	r	r ²	p-value
Security Education Teaching & Conflict Resolution Skills	300	.612	.375	.000*
Security Education Teaching & Civic Awareness	300	.578	.334	.000*
Security Education Teaching & Peace Attitudes	300	.541	.293	.000*

* $p < .001$.

Discussions

The finding from the descriptive analysis that security education instruction in Ondo West LGA yielded consistently high mean scores across all four subscales (grand mean = 3.65)—is an encouraging indicator of the perceived quality and impact of security education teaching in the study area. This finding aligns with Akintunde and Babalola (2023), who reported above-average security consciousness among students in Ondo State schools with structured security education programmes, and with Ogundele and Adeyemi (2022), who found that Social Studies instruction incorporating security themes significantly elevated students' security knowledge scores in Ekiti State. The high engagement scores may reflect the growing salience of security issues in students' everyday lives, which likely renders security education content more immediately relevant and motivating. However, the reliance on self-reported data necessitates caution in interpretation, as responses may be subject to social desirability bias.

The rejection of H_{O1} and the finding that male students recorded marginally higher security education outcomes than female students ($t = 2.14$, $p = .034$) is consistent with Adesanya and Fafunwa (2024), who reported similar gender-differentiated patterns in Lagos State, and with Afolabi and Omotunde (2021), who found that male students across four south-western states demonstrated higher initial security education engagement scores. This gender difference may be attributed to the greater exposure of male adolescents to security-

related environments and discourses outside the classroom including peer networks, community conflict mediation activities, and media consumption patterns which may prime them for deeper engagement with formal security education content (Akintunde & Babalola, 2023). Nonetheless, the practical magnitude of the difference was modest, suggesting that both male and female students in Ondo West LGA are benefiting meaningfully from security education instruction. This finding underscores the importance of gender-responsive pedagogical approaches that specifically address the security learning needs and experiences of female students.

The significant difference in conflict management competencies across instructional methods ($F = 5.87, p = .003$), with cooperative learning and role-play producing superior outcomes relative to lecture-based instruction, corroborates the experimental findings of Okafor and Ugwu (2023) and the survey evidence of Ogundele and Adeyemi (2022). These results are theoretically grounded in Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which privileges participatory, observational, and socially mediated learning as the most effective mechanisms for behavioural acquisition. Cooperative learning provides students with structured opportunities to negotiate perspectives, practise conflict resolution scripts, and observe peers modelling pro-social conflict responses, all of which facilitate deeper internalisation of security competencies than passive information reception (Omotosho & Adeyemi, 2020). The implication for teachers of Social Studies in Ondo West LGA is clear: a deliberate shift from teacher-centred to student-centred, participatory instructional approaches is necessary for security education to fulfil its conflict-tackling mandate.

The significant positive correlation between security education engagement and conflict resolution skills ($r = .612, p < .001$), civic awareness ($r = .578, p < .001$), and peace attitudes ($r = .541, p < .001$) provides robust evidence that sustained engagement with security education has broad, positive spill over effects on students' pro-social competencies. The explained variance of 37.5% for conflict resolution skills is consistent with findings by Adeyemi and Olatunde (2023), who reported a similar correlation coefficient ($r = .59$) in a study of senior secondary students in Ondo State, and with Nwachukwu and Eze (2021), who documented significant associations between security education participation and civic engagement in Anambra State. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory helps to explain why the correlation, though strong, does not account for all variance in conflict

resolution skills: factors within the family, peer group, community, and broader societal macrosystem including poverty, exposure to violence, and cultural norms around conflict—also significantly shape students' conflict-handling capacities.

Conclusion

This study has provided systematic empirical evidence that the teaching and learning of security education within the Social Studies curriculum significantly influences secondary school students' capacity to tackle 21st-century conflict in Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State. The findings consistently demonstrated that security education instruction enhanced students' security knowledge, conflict awareness, and prevention attitudes at high levels. The study further established that gender, instructional method, and the degree of security education engagement are all statistically significant determinants of students' conflict resolution competencies. Male students showed marginally superior engagement outcomes; participatory instructional methods—cooperative learning and role-play were significantly more effective than lecture-based approaches; and active security education engagement correlated strongly and positively with conflict resolution skills, civic awareness, and peace attitudes.

These findings affirm the central theoretical claims of Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory within a Nigerian LGA-level context, reinforcing the importance of participatory, socially embedded security education that is sensitive to both gender dynamics and community context. The study has generated a localised evidence base that complements existing state- and national-level research and provides actionable insights for curriculum reform, teacher professional development, and school security programming in Ondo West LGA and beyond. Future research should adopt mixed-method and longitudinal designs to trace the sustained impact of security education on students' actual conflict behaviours and to capture the qualitative dimensions of security learning that survey instruments alone cannot reveal.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- I. The Ondo State Ministry of Education and the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) should explicitly and systematically integrate security education themes including 21st-century conflict types, conflict prevention strategies, and peace-building competencies into the Social Studies and Civic Education curricula at both junior and senior secondary levels, with clearly articulated and assessable learning outcomes.
- II. The Ondo State Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM) and school administrators in Ondo West LGA should prioritise the professional development of Social Studies and Civic Education teachers in participatory instructional strategies, specifically cooperative learning and role-play, which this study has confirmed to be significantly more effective than lecture-based approaches in developing students' conflict management competencies.
- III. School administrators and curriculum implementers should design and implement gender-responsive security education programmes that explicitly address the differential security experiences, vulnerabilities, and learning needs of male and female students, ensuring that female students receive the targeted support necessary to close the gender gap in security education engagement and outcomes.
- IV. The Ondo State Government, in collaboration with non-governmental organisations and community stakeholders, should invest in the provision of adequate and contextually relevant instructional materials for security education, including locally contextualised case studies, simulations, and multimedia resources that make security education content more engaging and applicable for students in Ondo West LGA.

Researchers in Social Studies education and security studies should pursue mixed-method and longitudinal research designs to deepen the understanding of the long-term behavioural impacts of security education, the role of family and community variables in mediating security learning, and the effectiveness of specific teacher professional development models in improving security education delivery in Nigerian secondary schools.

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