

EFFECTIVENESS OF COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS TRAINING AS AN INTERVENTION FOR ENHANCING CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES AMONG MEMBERS OF THE LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION

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Abstract

*This study examined the effectiveness of Collaborative Problem-Solving (CPS) skills training as an intervention for enhancing conflict resolution strategies among members of the Lagos State University Students' Union. A quasi experimental one group pre and post-test design was adopted, involving 35 participants selected through purposive and simple random sampling based on leadership involvement and conflict experience. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI; $\alpha = 0.81$) was used to assess participants' conflict resolution strategies and CPS skills before and after an 8-week training programme. Data was analysed using paired samples *t*-tests with SPSS (version 25) at a significance level of $p < .05$. Findings revealed a significant increase in the use of collaborative strategies and a corresponding decrease in avoidant and confrontational approaches. The study concluded that CPS training is an effective intervention for improving conflict resolution strategies among student leaders. It is recommended that university counselling units institutionalise CPS training for student union officials, while future studies should include multiple campuses to enhance generalisability.*

Keywords: Collaborative problem-solving, conflict resolution, students' union, intervention, university students

Word Counts: 173

Introduction

Student Unions (SUs) often serve as a small-scale version of broader societal structure, encompassing persons with diverse backgrounds, opinions, and interests. It is a student campus-based body within tertiary institutions, such as the Lagos State University Students' Union that is guided by rules. These unions function as organised bodies responsible for representing, protecting, and advancing students' welfare within the academic community. Student Unions

rooted in the principles of labour unionism, provide a platform for collective engagement, advocacy, and leadership development. Through active participation, students develop and nurture resilience, leadership competence, and self-confidence to express different opinions on institutional and social issues (Asma & Rauf, 2023). However, the dynamic and pluralistic nature of student unions inherently creates conditions for interpersonal and group conflicts. Differences in values, interests, leadership styles, and decision-making approaches frequently generate tension among members. Ogunbodede et al. (2020) agreed that conflict is an inevitable and functional aspect of social interaction, particularly within institutional settings where individuals must negotiate roles, responsibilities, and expectations. In this setting, the effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies becomes imperative to maintaining organisational cohesion, dialogue, promoting constructive criticism and ensuring administrative efficiency within student unions.

Despite the importance of effective conflict management, empirical observations indicate that many student leaders often adopt maladaptive conflict resolution approaches, such as avoidance, confrontation, domination, or authoritarian decision-making (Adewale & Okafor, 2021). These approaches tend to escalate disputes, reduce trust, and hinder collaborative governance. This challenge highlights the need for structured psychological and counselling-based interventions that can equip student leaders with adaptive interpersonal and problem-solving competencies. One such intervention is Collaborative Problem-Solving (CPS) Skills Training, which serves as the independent variable in this study. CPS is a structured, interactive, and skill-based approach that emphasises joint problem definition, perspective-taking, emotional regulation, and the co-construction of mutually beneficial solutions (Anderson & Davidson, 2022; Aslam et al., 2025). Rather than imposing solutions, CPS promotes active listening, empathy, and shared responsibility in resolving conflicts. It is grounded in cognitive-behavioural and social learning principles, which posit that individuals can acquire more adaptive behaviours through guided practice, modelling, and feedback. In counselling situations, CPS has been shown to enhance communication skills, reduce aggression, and improve interpersonal relationships.

The dependent variable in this study is conflict resolution strategies, which refers to the behavioural and cognitive approaches individuals employ in managing interpersonal disagreements. These strategies may be categorised into constructive (for instance, collaboration, compromise, negotiation and so on) and destructive (such as avoidance, aggression, domination) styles. Effective conflict resolution strategies are characterised by mutual respect, open communication, and problem-focused engagement, while ineffective strategies often involve emotional reactivity, poor communication, and win-lose outcomes.

In this study, conflict resolution strategies are operationalised as measurable changes in students' ability to:

- ◆ Engage in collaborative dialogue
- ◆ Demonstrate empathy and perspective-taking
- ◆ Apply problem-solving techniques
- ◆ Reduce reliance on maladaptive conflict behaviours

The central assumption underpinning this research is that exposure to CPS skills training will significantly improve the quality and effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies among student union members. This assumption aligns with social-cognitive theory, which emphasises that behaviour change occurs through skill acquisition, cognitive restructuring, and environmental reinforcement.

By focusing on members of the Lagos State University Students' Union, this study situates itself within a real-world Nigerian university setting, thereby addressing the practical need for evidence-based counselling interventions in student leadership and governance.

Literature Review

Student leaders must manage diverse perspectives and competing demands. According to Eze and Aladejana (2021), unresolved conflicts in student unions can lead to campus violence and administrative paralysis. It was also agreed that conflict is a natural and recurring feature of student leadership, arising from the diversity of opinions, interests, and goals within student populations. How student leaders manage and resolve conflicts significantly influences the overall climate and functionality of student unions and campus governance structures (Adewale & Okafor, 2021). Student leadership positions often expose individuals to interpersonal, ideological, and structural conflicts (Rachel & Odey, 2017). These may stem from disagreements over decision-making processes, competition for influence, resource allocation, and conflicts of interest among union members. When improperly managed, such conflicts can escalate into protests, administrative disruptions, and strained relationships among students and between students and management (Ogunleye & Bamidele, 2020). Unfortunately, many students' leaders approach conflict using authoritarian or confrontational styles that fail to address the root causes of disputes and instead intensify divisions.

Research by Bakare and Oladeji (2022) found that student leaders with exposure to structured conflict management training displayed better negotiation, communication, and emotional regulation skills. They were also more likely to use collaborative (or integrative) and compromising strategies, which emphasise mutual understanding and shared solutions. Collaborative conflict resolution, in particular, has been identified as one of the most effective strategy in educational environments because it encourages openness, respect for differing views, and the pursuit of win-win outcomes (Ajayi & Fasanya, 2021). Effective conflict resolution involves understanding the root causes of disagreements and responding in ways that preserve relationships and group goals.

The development of conflict resolution skills in student leadership contributes to broader institutional goals, including campus peace building and the promotion of democratic

citizenship. According to Onuoha & Ibe (2023), training student leaders in problem-solving techniques could lead to more inclusive leadership styles and enhance trust among peers. These skills are particularly valuable in multi-ethnic and diverse student environments where miscommunication or misunderstanding can easily give rise to conflict.

In sum, the literature stresses the need for proactive conflict resolution training as an integral part of student leadership development. This is especially important in environments like Nigeria's tertiary institutions, where sociopolitical and economic tensions may further strain student interactions. Collaborative approaches to conflict resolution are increasingly recommended as one of the best practice models to prepare student leaders for the complexities of contemporary campus life and governance.

CPS is rooted in social constructivism, which views learning as a collaborative process (Vygotsky, 1978). The CPS approach encourages parties to articulate their concerns, understand others' perspectives, and generate mutually acceptable solutions (Roseth et al., 2021). It emphasises empathy, communication, and cooperation skills essential for student leaders. CPS is also recognised as an essential skill in education, leadership, and organisational settings, particularly in managing interpersonal challenges and group conflicts. CPS refers to the process by which individuals work together to define a problem, share understanding, and co-construct mutually beneficial solutions (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development {OECD}, 2021). The process involves active listening, open dialogue, empathy, and mutual goal-setting, making it a useful framework for conflict resolution in student leadership situations. Roseth et al. (2021) agreed that students trained in CPS demonstrate increased cooperation, reduced reliance on competitive conflict styles, and better academic and interpersonal outcomes. The authors emphasise that CPS helps individuals shift from adversarial thinking to collaborative mindsets, especially in group-based settings such as student unions, classrooms, and project teams.

The integration of CPS in educational institutions has also been supported by studies highlighting its alignment with 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, social-emotional learning, and digital literacy (Anderson & Davidson, 2022). In particular, CPS training encourages reflective communication, tolerance for differing perspectives, and a structured method for engaging in dialogue, which are crucial in pluralistic student environments. By addressing conflict as a shared problem rather than a personal attack, CPS nurtures a culture of inclusion and shared responsibility. CPS aligns well with restorative practices in education, which emphasise repairing harm through inclusive dialogue rather than punishment. A study by Ali & Banjo (2021) reported that student leaders who engaged in CPS-focused interventions developed stronger relationships, clearer communication boundaries, and a higher capacity for emotional regulation. This is especially critical in student unions, where leadership often requires balancing advocacy with diplomacy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of collaborative problem-solving skills training in improving conflict resolution strategies in Lagos State University Students' Union members.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of collaborative problem-solving training on integrative conflict resolution strategies?
2. Does the collaborative problem-solving training reduce the use of avoidant and confrontational conflict strategies?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the use of collaborative strategies before and after CPS training.
2. There is no significant difference in the use of avoidant and confrontational strategies before and after CPS training.

Methodology

Research Design

A quasi-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design was adopted to determine the effectiveness of collaborative problem-solving training.

Participants

The participants for this study comprised 35 members of the Lagos State University Students' Union. A purposive sampling technique was initially used to identify students actively involved in campus unionism. Subsequently, a simple random sampling technique was used to select the final participants (35 members) from this group. This selection was based on participants' active involvement in leadership roles and their prior experience with intra-union conflicts, ensuring that only individuals with relevant exposure to the study variables were included.

Instrumentation

The Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI), adapted from Kurdek (1994) and was used as a research instrument. It measures collaborative, avoidant, confrontational, and compromising strategies. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81.

Procedure

The pre-test and post-test employed in this study was standardised self-report assessment instruments designed to measure participants' conflict resolution strategies and collaborative problem-solving (CPS) skills. The pre-test, administered before the intervention, served as a

baseline measure to assess participants with the existing level of:

- i. Conflict resolution skills
- ii. Ability to identify conflict triggers
- iii. Communication skills (especially active listening and empathy)
- iv. Problem-solving abilities
- v. Negotiation and compromise skills

Following the 8-week CPS training programme, a post-test, which was structurally similar to the pre-test, was administered to evaluate changes or improvements in these abilities.

- ◆ Both the pre-test and post-test were specifically assessed:
- ◆ Participants' awareness and understanding of conflict situations
- ◆ Their use of constructive conflict resolution strategies
- ◆ Level of collaborative problem-solving skills
- ◆ Communication effectiveness, including empathy and active listening
- ◆ Ability to generate solutions and reach compromises

The comparison between pre-test and post-test scores enabled the researcher to determine the effectiveness of the CPS training intervention in enhancing conflict resolution strategies among members of the students' union.

Data Analysis

The study was analysed using paired sample t-tests to test for significant differences between pretest and posttest scores using SPSS (version 25). Significance level was determined at $p < .05$.

Results

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the use of Collaborative strategies before and after CPS training.

Table 1: Paired Samples t-test on Collaborative Strategies

Measure	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	t	df	P
Collaborative	3.21(0.55)	4.10(0.48)	0.89	6.89	34	<.001

Note: N = 35. Mean Difference = Post-test – Pre-test. $p < .05$

Table 1 presents paired samples t-test that was conducted to examine the effectiveness of Collaborative Problem-Solving (CPS) training on participants' conflict resolution strategies. The results demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in the use of collaborative conflict

resolution strategies following the intervention. As shown in Table 1, the mean score for integrative strategies increased from $M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.55$ at pre-test to $M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.48$ at post-test, $t(34) = 6.89$, $p < .001$. This suggests that after participating in the CPS training, student union members were more likely to adopt collaborative approaches that include problem-solving, mutual respect and collaboration.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the use of avoidant and confrontational strategies before and after CPS training.

Table 2: Paired Samples *t*-test Showing Differences in Avoidant and Confrontational Conflict Resolution Strategies before and after CPS Training

Measure	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	Mean difference	t	df	p
Avoidant	3.45 (0.61)	2.71 (0.50)	-0.74	-5.62	34	<.001
Confrontational	3.34 (0.67)	2.49 (0.52)	-0.85	-6.12	34	<.001

Note: $N = 35$. Mean Difference = Post-test – Pre-test. $p < .05$.

Table 2 shows a statistically significant reduction in the use of both avoidant and confrontational conflict resolution strategies. For avoidant strategies, the mean score decreased from $M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.61$ to $M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.50$, $t(34) = -5.62$, $p < .001$. Similarly, confrontational strategy usage declined from $M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.67$ at pre-test to $M = 2.49$, $SD = 0.52$ at post-test, $t(34) = -6.12$, $p < .001$.

These findings indicate that participants were significantly less likely to avoid conflict or use aggressive methods to resolve disputes after undergoing the training. Also, the findings demonstrate that CPS training significantly improved constructive conflict resolution behaviours among student union members, characterised by an increase in collaborative strategies and a decrease in avoidant and confrontational approaches.

Discussion of Findings

The results indicate that CPS training significantly improved participants' use of collaborative strategies and reduced reliance on avoidant and confrontational approaches. This aligns with the findings of Adewale and Okafor (2021); Roseth et al. (2021) documented enhanced interpersonal functioning among students trained in CPS methods. The shift toward collaborative strategies suggests the intervention helped participants reframe conflicts from zero-sum contests to joint problem-solving opportunities.

The results presented in Table 1 showed a statistically significant increase in the use of collaborative conflict resolution strategies following the CPS intervention. This result indicates that after participating in the CPS training, student union members became significantly more

inclined to collaborative strategies that emphasise mutual understanding, collaboration, open communication, and win-win solutions. These findings are in line with the literature suggesting that collaborative training enhances individuals' ability to manage interpersonal conflict constructively (Ali & Banjo, 2021; Ogunbodede et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the results in Table 2 demonstrate a statistically significant reduction in the use of avoidant and confrontational conflict strategies. These declines suggest that after the training, participants were significantly less likely to withdraw from conflict situations (avoidance) or respond with hostility and aggression (confrontation).

These findings suggest that CPS training was effective in reshaping how participants approach interpersonal conflict. It not only promoted constructive engagement through collaborative strategies but also discouraged unproductive patterns, such as avoidance and confrontation. This outcome supports the effectiveness of structured, skills-based interventions in enhancing emotional intelligence, perspective-taking, and collaborative communication among young adults, especially those in leadership roles in collaboration to the statements of (Bakare & Oladeji, 2022; Onuoha & Ibe, 2023).

In summary, the study provides empirical support for the implementation of CPS training as a viable approach to improving conflict resolution behaviours among student leaders in tertiary institutions. The dual effect of enhancing constructive responses while reducing negative ones achieves the all-inclusive impact of the intervention.

Implications for Counselling Practice

The findings provide strong support for integrating CPS training into university leadership development programmes. Counsellors and psychologists in higher institutions can collaborate with student affairs divisions to deliver ongoing CPS workshops. The training also holds promise for broader applications in peer mediation, staff-student conflict, and group counselling sessions.

Conclusion

Collaborative problem-solving training is an effective intervention for enhancing conflict resolution strategies among student leaders. The intervention helped participants adopt more constructive approaches to conflict, improving group dynamics and leadership effectiveness.

Recommendations

University counselling units should institutionalise CPS training for all student union officials.

Future studies should expand the sample to include participants from other campuses to enhance the generalisability and broader applicability of the research findings.

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