

ROLE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS IN PREDICTING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND INVOLVEMENT IN ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY AT YABATECH'S EPE CAMPUS IN LAGOS STATE

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Abstract:

This study investigated conflict resolution abilities as indicators of academic success and involvement in academic disagreement among undergraduate students at Yabatech's Epe Campus in Lagos State. The study used a cross-sectional survey design and was based on the Constructive Controversy Theory, which was created by David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson. Using proportionate sampling, a sample of 333 pupils was chosen from a population of 2,000. Academic performance was evaluated using self-reported CGPA categories, and data were gathered using validated four-point Likert-scale instruments measuring academic dispute engagement and conflict resolution abilities. Multiple regression and hierarchical regression analyses were used, and reliability coefficients varied between .86 and .88. The results showed that academic controversy engagement ($\beta = .62$, $p < .001$) and academic performance ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$) were significantly predicted by dispute resolution abilities.

Academic controversy engagement also significantly predicted academic performance ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$) and partially mediated the relationship between conflict resolution skills and academic performance. The study concludes that constructive conflict management enhances cognitive engagement and academic success. Recommendations for curriculum integration of conflict resolution training are discussed.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, Academic controversy, Academic performance

Introduction

Student conflict is a widespread issue in schools that, if not effectively monitored and managed, can hinder the school's ability to meet its goals and objectives and negatively affect the school climate. Given that human beings are social and political creatures, disputes are inevitable in any human gathering. Schools serve as structured communities and are inevitably places of both collaboration and conflict because each individual will always assert to be both social and politically relevant. Academic controversy is defined as organized intellectual conflict among students with the goal of fostering critical thinking, deeper comprehension, and cognitive growth. It can contribute significantly to personal development in ways like enhanced academic performance, community development, and democratic education.

Constructive Controversy Theory was originally propounded by David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson in 1979 and further elaborated in subsequent works (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). The theory posits that structured intellectual disagreement within cooperative contexts promotes higher-order reasoning and academic achievement. Students who are exposed to different points of view and participate in organized academic debate encounter cognitive conflict, which fosters deeper comprehension, perspective-taking, and critical thinking, as long as the dispute is handled well. One can simply put in this way, cooperation plus conflict equals learning growth.

Professional guidance and counselling's nature enables practitioners to offer clients specialized services in pursuit of their overall welfare and personal, social, and psychological modifications. Guidance and counselling services, whether individualized or generalized, typically seek to offer people or groups of individual's progressive support so they can identify and enhance their abilities for adjustment, problem-solving, adaption, and peace. In professional guidance and counselling, where practitioners regularly handle interpersonal and group conflicts, conflict resolution is still a crucial subject. Wallensteen (2023) highlights its ongoing significance in international mediation, pointing out that effective negotiation is supported by cooperative tactics. He attempted to extend and reinforce Deutsch's (1973) theory on the dynamics of constructive and destructive conflict. Deutsch asserts that whereas competition breeds mistrust and escalation, cooperation promotes trust and mutual problem-solving. In a similar vein, Coleman (2021) uses the model to address current polarization challenges and suggests transformational strategies to go from rivalry to collaboration. However, there is proof that disagreement can lead to a number of beneficial effects, including boosting learning motivation and innovative thinking (Johnson & Johnson, 2003).

In Academic Controversy, students gain knowledge while learning how to interact with others on factual, definitional, and ethical disputes using language and information. Academic Controversy deserves praise for allowing students to engage with opposing viewpoints and going beyond merely exposing them to them. This is because Academic Controversy demands participants to role-play, share opinions, and assess if what other people are saying calls for them to rethink their own convictions. Students must go through the following steps in order to

participate in a controversy: (a) research and prepare a position; (b) present and advocate their position; (c) participate in a general discussion where they defend their position and refute attacks on it; (d) reverse viewpoints by putting forth the strongest argument for the opposing position; and (e) create a synthesis that all group members can agree upon. Additionally, educators need to be aware of their own biases and convictions when determining whether to portray a topic on which they have already formed an opinion as controversial (Hess & McAvoy, 2015).

Despite this, academic controversy is worthwhile since it relates to both disciplinary content and skill objectives as well as civic learning outcomes. In addition to being unavoidable, academic controversies are frequently essential to the growth of knowledge. They have the power to change disciplines, raise ethical standards, and broaden public awareness, but they may also be disruptive or even harmful if not handled properly. Academic controversy is a method of instruction as well as a discourse structure. Johnson and Johnson begin by pointing out that conflicts between students' preferences and points of view are likely to arise when they are placed in small groups and asked to engage with one another while they are learning. Academic controversy mobilizes such conflict as a learning opportunity rather than avoiding it. According to the Johnsons (2009), "Intellectual conflict is not only very desirable but also a crucial teaching tool that motivates students to learn." Without intellectual struggle, ideas in the classroom are lifeless. When two students try to come to an agreement when one of their ideas, facts, conclusions, theories, and opinions is incompatible with the other, there is academic disagreement. In order to resolve disputes, people engage in what Aristotle referred to as deliberate conversation, which involves discussing the benefits and drawbacks of suggested courses of action in order to synthesize innovative ideas, or creative problem solving.

Concept of Academic Performance: According to Rono, Onderi, and Owino (2014), students' academic performance is the main characteristic of education and one of its main objectives. While Narad and Abdullah, (2016), said that it can be characterized as the knowledge that students acquire and is evaluated by teachers using grades and/or educational objectives that students and teachers set to be accomplished over a given time period. The primary goal of educational institutions is to help students achieve academic greatness by helping them demonstrate improved academic performance (Adeyemo, 2001). Furthermore, for everyone who is concerned about education, academic success is a very important factor (Osiki, 2001).

Students' Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA), which offers an objective and cumulative measure of academic achievement across semesters, is used to operationalize academic performance in this study. CGPA is still a standardized and institutionally verified indicator of performance in postsecondary education settings, despite the existence of subjective metrics like self-reported academic success.

The cumulative grade point average (CGPA), which is frequently used to gauge academic performance, shows how well student's understand the material and meet requirements.

Academic success is impacted by interpersonal and psychosocial characteristics in addition to cognitive capacity, according to recent studies. It has been demonstrated that classroom participation, peer contact, and collaborative learning environments all positively correlate with academic success. Better exam results and a deeper conceptual comprehension are displayed by students who actively engage in discussions and critical debates. Students who successfully manage conflict and engage in structured intellectual arguments are likely to perform better academically, as constructive academic controversy fosters deeper cognitive involvement.

Few studies have empirically investigated the mediating role of academic controversy in the relationship between conflict resolution and academic achievement, particularly within Nigerian tertiary institutions, despite the fact that earlier research has looked at cooperative learning and academic performance. Conflict resolution abilities seem to be a fundamental competency that influences the caliber of academic relationships, according to the examined literature. When intellectual disagreement is handled well, it can develop into a productive academic debate that promotes deeper thinking and better academic results. Nevertheless, there is still a dearth of empirical data exploring these connections in Nigerian higher education settings. The purpose of this study is to close this gap by examining the direct and indirect connections between academic success, academic dispute, and conflict resolution.

Research Questions:

1. How well do conflict resolution abilities predict participation in academic controversy?

H₀₁: Academic controversy engagement is not significantly predicted by conflict resolution abilities.

2. How well do conflict resolution abilities predict CGPA for undergraduate students?

H₀₂: The CGPA of undergraduate students is not significantly predicted by conflict resolution abilities.

3. To what degree is the CGPA of undergraduate students significantly predicted by academic controversy engagement?

H₀₃: The CGPA of undergraduate students is not considerably predicted by academic controversy participation.

4. Does academic controversy participation act as a mediator in the relationship between undergraduate students' CGPA and their ability to resolve conflicts?

H₀₄: The association between dispute resolution abilities and undergraduate students' CGPA is not substantially mediated by academic controversy engagement.

Methodology:

Research Design

In order to investigate dispute resolution abilities as determinants of academic controversy participation and academic achievement among undergraduate students at Yabatech, Epe

Campus, Lagos State, a cross-sectional survey approach was used. Participants were two thousand undergraduate students who made up the population. A minimum sample size of 333 students was established using Yamane's (1967) formula with a 5% margin of error. Representation across departments and academic levels was guaranteed by proportionate stratified random sampling.

In other to measure Conflict Resolution Techniques (CRS), six items on a four-point Likert scale, were 1 denoting strongly disagree and 4 denoting strongly agree, were used for the measurement. Higher scores are indicative of more effective conflict resolution techniques. .86 is Cronbach's α . Participation in Academic Controversy (ACE), were assessed using six Likert-scale measures that gauge intellectual disagreement in a constructive way. Cronbach's alpha is .88.

Academic Results (CGPA), were assessed using a five-point grading system (coded 1–5) based on self-reported CGPA categories. For parametric analysis, CGPA was treated as roughly continuous, despite its ordinal form, which represents an underlying continuous academic notion.

Before any data was collected, institutional and ethical approval was secured. Participation was anonymous and voluntary.

Analysis of Data:

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data, while descriptive Statistics included,

- Mean
- The typical deviation
- Coefficients of reliability

Inferential statistics measured;

1. relationships between variables, and Pearson correlation analysis was used.
2. multiple linear regression, was used to test for predictive correlations,.
3. to investigate the mediating function of academic controversy engagement, hierarchical regression is used.

The following specifications applied to the regression models:

$[ACE = \beta_0 + \beta_1(CRS) + \epsilon]$ $[CGPA = \beta_0 + \beta_1(CRS) + \epsilon]$
 $[CGPA = \beta_0 + \beta_1(CRS) + \epsilon]$ The threshold for statistical significance was fixed at $p < .05$.

Regression Assumptions

The following presumptions were examined before analysis: Linearity, residuals' normality. Homoscedasticity and $VIF < 5$ indicates multicollinearity. Initial diagnostics revealed no

significant infractions.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Study Variables (N = 333)

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Conflict Resolution Skills (CRS)	3.21	0.54	.86
Academic Controversy Engagement (ACE)	3.18	0.51	.88
Academic Performance (CGPA category)	3.74	0.82	—

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree.

Interpretation: The mean scores indicate high levels of conflict resolution skills and academic controversy engagement among respondents. Reliability coefficients exceeded the .70 threshold, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. CRS	—		
2. ACE	.62**	—	
3. CGPA	.41**	.48**	—

$p < .01$

Interpretation: Conflict resolution skills showed a strong positive relationship with academic controversy engagement ($r = .62$, $p < .01$) and a moderate positive relationship with CGPA ($r = .41$, $p < .01$). Academic controversy engagement was also positively associated with CGPA ($r = .48$, $p < .01$).

Table 3: Regression Analysis Predicting Academic Controversy Engagement

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	P
Constant	0.87	0.24	—	3.63	.000
CRS	0.68	0.05	.62	13.41	.000

Model Summary:

$R^2 = .38$

$F(1, 331) = 179.82$

$p < .001$

Interpretation: Conflict resolution skills significantly predicted academic controversy engagement, explaining 38% of the variance.

Table 4: Hierarchical Regression Predicting CGPA (Mediation Model)

Model 1: CRS → CGPA

Predictor	B	T	p
CRS	.41	8.12	.000

$R^2 = .17$

Model 2: CRS and ACE → CGPA

Predictor	B	T	p
CRS	.19	3.12	.002
ACE	.38	6.45	.000

$R^2 = .29$

$\Delta R^2 = .12$

Interpretation: When academic controversy engagement was introduced, the effect of conflict resolution skills decreased but remained significant, indicating partial mediation.

Discussion of Findings:

Overall, the results show that undergraduate students' academic controversy engagement is significantly predicted by their conflict resolution skills. This finding is consistent with Constructive Controversy Theory, which holds that when structured disagreement is handled well, it fosters deeper cognitive processing. Students who exhibit cooperative problem-solving, active listening, and emotional control seem to be better able to participate in fruitful intellectual discussion. Additionally, academic performance was found to be significantly predicted by conflict resolution abilities. This implies that academic progress may be directly impacted by the capacity to resolve conflicts in the classroom, which goes beyond interpersonal skills. The idea that constructive intellectual conflict improves comprehension and critical thinking is further supported by the positive correlation between academic debate engagement and CGPA.

The association between conflict resolution abilities and academic performance was found to be somewhat mediated by academic controversy engagement, according to the mediation study. According to this research, conflict resolution abilities may raise academic performance both directly and indirectly by fostering greater intellectual discourse. Overall, by offering empirical support within the context of higher education in Nigeria, the study expands on the theoretical claims made by Johnson and Johnson.

Conclusion

This study investigated conflict resolution skills as predictors of academic controversy engagement and academic performance among undergraduate students in Yabatech, Epe Campus, Lagos State. Anchored on Constructive Controversy Theory, the findings demonstrate

that conflict resolution skills significantly enhance students' engagement in academic controversy and positively predict academic performance. Furthermore, academic controversy engagement partially mediates the relationship between conflict resolution skills and academic performance, suggesting that constructive intellectual disagreement serves as a mechanism through which conflict management competencies translate into improved academic outcomes.

The findings affirm that structured academic disagreement, when managed effectively, promotes deeper cognitive engagement and academic success. The study therefore provides empirical support for integrating conflict resolution training within higher education pedagogy.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Curriculum Integration:** Conflict resolution training should be incorporated into general studies or entrepreneurship courses to enhance students' intellectual engagement skills.
2. **Structured Academic Debate:** Lecturers should design classroom activities that promote structured academic controversy rather than avoid intellectual disagreement.
3. **Workshops and Seminars:** Institutions should organize workshops on emotional regulation, negotiation, and collaborative communication for undergraduate students.
4. **Assessment Innovation:** Educators should assess students not only on content mastery but also on the quality of argumentation and evidence-based reasoning during academic discussions.
5. **Policy Implication:** Academic institutions should recognize conflict resolution skills as core graduate competencies essential for both academic success and workplace readiness

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