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Developing Conflict Resolution Skills in Children

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of children's social interaction; however, the manner in which it is managed significantly influences social competence, classroom climate, and long-term behavioural outcomes. This paper presents a conceptual and practice-oriented framework for developing conflict resolution skills in early childhood within Nigerian school contexts. Drawing from social learning theory, socio-cultural perspectives, and peace education principles, the study synthesizes contemporary literature to examine the developmental foundations of conflict behaviour and constructive resolution strategies among young children. Unlike general discussions on school conflict, this paper situates skill development within culturally responsive and school-based pedagogical practices relevant to Nigerian classrooms. It proposes an integrated framework that emphasizes emotional regulation, communication competence, peer mediation, restorative dialogue, and teacher modelling as core components of early intervention. The paper further highlights the role of educators, families, and community structures in fostering sustainable peace competencies. By bridging theory and practice, this study contributes a context-sensitive model for embedding conflict resolution education into early childhood pedagogy, thereby supporting peaceful learning environments and long-term social development.

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inherent feature of human interaction and an unavoidable dimension of social life. From early childhood through adulthood, individuals encounter differences in opinions, interests, values, and expectations. These differences naturally generate tensions that may develop into conflict. Although conflict is often perceived negatively, it does not inevitably lead to destruction or relational breakdown. Rather, when constructively managed, it can promote understanding, strengthen relationships, and enhance social competence. As Carter (2023) observes, avoiding

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conflict at all costs may damage relationships in the long run, whereas learning to resolve disagreements respectfully can foster deeper connection and creativity.

At its core, conflict refers to a perceived or actual incompatibility of goals, interests, or values between two or more parties. The term originates from the Latin *conflictus*, meaning a clash or collision, reflecting the tension that arises when perspectives diverge. Scholars have defined conflict from multiple viewpoints. Jones and Kahn (2017) note that conflict is context-dependent and may be interpreted differently depending on the setting. Broadbear (2018) and Bohart, Elliott, and Greenberg (2019) describe it as emerging from misunderstandings, rivalry, competing interests, or efforts to assert influence. Bickmore (2018) views conflict as relational tension that disrupts social harmony, particularly when communication breaks down. Akinyemi (2019) further emphasizes its dynamic nature, explaining that conflict evolves based on how parties perceive and respond to opposing interests.

While some scholars conceptualize conflict as a struggle for power or scarce resources (Smith, 2021), others recognize its developmental significance. Killen and Turiel (1991) argue that conflict is a normal and even necessary aspect of children's moral and social growth. Similarly, Otite and Albert (1999) describe conflict as an inevitable and dynamic component of human existence across personal and societal domains. These perspectives highlight that conflict is not merely destructive but can serve as a catalyst for learning and transformation.

The dual nature of conflict is widely acknowledged in literature. Often symbolically described as containing elements of both "danger" and "opportunity," conflict carries the potential for either harm or growth depending on how it is handled. Harris (2020) emphasizes that conflict presents risk but also developmental possibility. Jones and Kahn (2020) argue that constructive engagement with differences can stimulate innovation and problem-solving. Brown (2019) maintains that respectfully managed disagreements may deepen trust and emotional resilience, while Williams and Thompson (2021) note that conflict situations provide opportunities to develop empathy, negotiation skills, and reflective thinking.

Within school environments, particularly in early childhood settings, conflict manifests in everyday interactions such as disputes over toys, disagreements during play, competition for teacher attention, and misunderstandings in cooperative tasks. Research in early childhood education indicates that peer conflicts are frequent and developmentally normative, serving as important contexts for social learning and moral development (Killen & Turiel, 1991; Bickmore, 2018). These encounters, though often perceived as minor disruptions, represent critical opportunities for the development of emotional regulation, perspective-taking, and problem-solving skills (Jones & Kahn, 2020). The ways in which teachers and caregivers respond to such situations significantly influence children's emerging conflict resolution competencies. Supportive adult mediation has been shown to foster prosocial behaviour and constructive communication, whereas punitive or authoritarian responses may suppress behaviour without promoting skill acquisition (Broadbear, 2018; Williams & Thompson, 2021). In many Nigerian classrooms, conflict management practices still rely heavily on directive discipline approaches, limiting opportunities for structured skill development in negotiation, empathy, and restorative dialogue (Akinyemi, 2019; Ojo, 2020). This underscores the need to intentionally embed conflict resolution instruction within early childhood pedagogy to promote sustainable peace competencies from the foundational years of schooling.

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UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND THE NEED FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS

According to Liller (2021), it is essential to recognize that conflict is a natural and daily occurrence in childhood settings. These conflicts are a natural part of childhood development. Childhood is a critical period for developing attitudes toward others, particularly through communication and interaction with peers. Laursen & Pursell (2009) described conflict as a situation when two children encounter one another with opposing views or disagreement. Akinboye (2020) submits that by the end of preschool, children typically develop a distinct attitude toward their peers, which can either facilitate healthy communication and cooperation or lead to difficulties and frequent conflicts. When conflicts arise, they can give rise to negative emotions such as resentment, envy, and anger. Such experiences, if unresolved, may become sources of significant interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges in adulthood (Smirnova & Holmogorova, 2010).

Conflicts among children are prevalent and come from a multitude of variables, with understanding these causes being vital for effective intervention. Disagreements during play, such as arguments over roles, are a key cause, especially in preschool settings where communication skills are still developing (Ibrahim & Adeyemi, 2021; Teasley & Caron, 2023; Derrick, 2024). Another typical form of conflict is arguments over the interpretation of game rules, which is sometimes amplified by young children's limited ability to compromise and see different views (Suleiman, 2024). Additionally, weak communication skills contribute to misunderstandings, since young children typically lack the vocabulary to articulate needs, resulting to dissatisfaction and disruptive conduct (Okafor, 2018).

Conflicts are a common part of childhood, often arising wherever children congregate, such as in homes, classrooms, school buses, playgrounds, or even religious spaces (Ogunsanwo, 2016). Children frequently find themselves in challenging situations that escalate disputes with peers, siblings, or friends. These conflicts, while sometimes minor and short-lived, provide opportunities for children to develop social and problem-solving skills (Bickmore, 2021). Minor conflicts can stem from immediate needs, like sharing toys or taking turns, which are part of everyday interactions. However, interpersonal relationships among children are often complex and not always harmonious, leading to frequent misunderstandings or disputes (Killen & Turiel, 1991).

Emotional and cognitive conflicts differ in nature but are both integral to social learning. Emotional conflicts may arise from feelings of jealousy, anger, or frustration, such as when a child feels left out or seeks to assert control over others, often due to underlying insecurities. These can sometimes manifest as aggressive behaviour, influenced by family dynamics or media exposure (Adebayo, 2022; Olawale, 2023). In contrast, cognitive conflicts emerge from differing opinions, such as during group activities where children may disagree on how to complete a task, necessitating skills in active listening and constructive discussion (Akinboye, 2020). Conflicts, both emotional and cognitive, provide children with a crucial space to practice negotiation, compromise, and understanding others' viewpoints, skills essential for healthy social development.

Developing conflict resolution skills in children does not only help them navigate their immediate social circles but also equips them with lifelong skills that contribute to their emotional and social

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well-being. Developing conflict resolution for children is about more than just preventing fights, it builds critical life skills. Teaching children how to resolve conflict in a peaceful way can help reduce incidents of violence and criminal mischief. Teaching conflict resolution strategies at a young age sets the foundation for stronger relationships, better communication, and a more positive approach to problem-solving (Ogunsanwo, 2016; Ibrahim & Adeyemi, 2019; Astor, Benbenishty, & Estrada; 2019; Jones & Kahn, 2022).

The importance of CR has been proved by literature. Constructive conflict resolution strategies are essential for children's social development and future relationships (Akintola & Afolabi, 2021; Adekunle, 2023; Agnew, 2024). Salman et al., (2016) opine that CR skills among children are crucial for creating and maintaining healthy relationships with peers and adults because they allow children to participate in a range of social situations. Okafor (2018) also submits that children with CR skills may successfully navigate complex emotional environments and form social connections. They develop empathy which enables them to manage their emotions while also understanding the feelings of others, and respond to issues appropriately. According to Okafor (2018), this ability to empathize is key for successful social interactions and navigating complex emotional landscapes.

Developing conflict resolution skills (CRS) in children is crucial not only for individual growth but also for fostering positive social environments in homes, schools, and communities. By learning skills such as effective communication, empathy, and cooperative problem-solving, children are better prepared to handle conflicts constructively, reducing the likelihood of escalated disputes. Ibrahim & Adeyemi, 2019; Astor, Akintola & Afolabi, 2021; Jones & Kahn, 2022; Agnew, 2024). Through activities like talking through disagreements, identifying shared solutions, and practicing conciliation, children develop practical abilities in communication, anger management, and decision-making. These skills promote a more peaceful atmosphere in various settings, leading to decreased incidents of disruptive behaviour, fewer school absences, and reduced disciplinary referrals and suspensions in schools and juvenile justice settings

Additionally, CRS has been shown to enhance children's self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect, as they gain experience in managing conflicts independently and positively. Ibrahim and Adeyemi (2019) emphasize that conflict resolution fosters critical problem-solving abilities, encouraging children to think creatively and analytically when facing challenges. As noted by Olawale (2017) and Bickmore (2019), the benefits of CRS extend well into adulthood, influencing individuals' capacity to manage relationships, collaborate professionally, and handle workplace disputes. Teaching children these strategies early also serves a preventive role, helping them to manage conflicts without resorting to aggression, as noted by Akinola and Bakare (2020). This proactive approach supports a more harmonious environment, reducing the chance of conflict escalation.

Moreover, CRS promotes resilience in children, equipping them with skills to navigate setbacks and recover from challenges, contributing to their emotional well-being and self-confidence (Ogundele & Salawu, 2021). Conflict resolution also fosters empathy by encouraging children to understand others' perspectives and reflect on the outcomes of their actions. Empathy is essential in building inclusive communities where individuals respect each other's feelings and viewpoints, creating a cohesive social environment (Eze, 2019). Ultimately, these conflict resolution skills are

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foundational for children's growth, leading to healthier relationships, enhanced self-assurance, and improved life outcomes.

Conflict Resolution includes a spectrum of processes that utilize communication skills and creative thinking to develop voluntary solutions that are acceptable to those concerned in a dispute. The cornerstone of effective conflict resolution is a set of essential skills that people, particularly children, need to learn in order to handle conflicts in a healthy way. Among these, emotional intelligence and empathy are essential. Understanding and sharing the emotions of others is made possible by empathy, which is crucial for realising how one's actions affect one's peers (Okafor, 2018; Cherry, 2023). Children with emotional awareness are able to react correctly in conflict situations by being able to identify their own emotions as well as those of others. According to research, helping children develop empathy can result in better social interactions and less aggressiveness (Kesteren et al., 2020). Carers and educators may foster an environment where emotional intelligence flourishes and promote healthy interpersonal dynamics by educating children to recognise and express their emotions.

Another essential element of conflict resolution is effective communication and attentive listening. In order to communicate effectively, one must pay attention to what other people are saying in addition to clearly expressing themselves. Active listening involves more than just hearing what is being said; it also calls on people to actively participate by demonstrating their attention and comprehension. Children who engage in active listening have the ability to validate the thoughts and feelings of others, which is crucial for reducing conflict and encouraging group problem-solving (Ramsden et al., 2022).

In order to resolve conflicts, problem-solving and decision-making techniques are also essential. Youngsters need to be taught how to assess a situation, find potential solutions, and balance the advantages and disadvantages of each choice. Children who are taught to think critically about situations are more likely to look beyond their first emotional responses and weigh the bigger picture when making decisions. Children can approach problems with a methodical mindset and produce better results by using structured problem-solving models, such as the "Identify, Evaluate, and Decide" framework (Teasley & Caron, 2023). Teachers enable children to become proactive problem solvers rather than passive participants in disputes by incorporating these tactics into the classroom.

Techniques for compromise and negotiation are equally vital because they teach children how to come up with solutions that both parties can agree on. Discussing opposing points of view and cooperating to find a solution that pleases everyone is the goal of negotiation. Children must be adaptable and willing to give up certain aspects of their opinions in order to reach a compromise. These abilities not only help children resolve conflicts amicably but also get them ready for interactions in a variety of social and professional settings in the future (McMahon et al., 2023). Teachers and parents may assist children develop a sense of community and cooperation by encouraging compromise and negotiation in contentious situations. This will help them realise the importance of working together to achieve common objectives.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION MODELS FOR CHILDREN

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Several models and programmes used to teach conflict resolution to children are grounded in established theories of social learning and child development. For example, the 4Rs model (Recognize, Reflect, Respond, Resolve) encourages children to identify conflicts, reflect on emotions and causes, respond through respectful communication, and collaboratively resolve disagreements. This model aligns with Social Cognitive Theory proposed by Albert Bandura, which emphasizes that children learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and self-regulation within social contexts. Similarly, peer mediation programmes used in schools are informed by Conflict Transformation Theory, which views conflict as an opportunity for dialogue, mutual understanding, and relationship improvement rather than merely a problem to eliminate. Studies indicate that when students participate in mediation processes, they develop stronger communication, negotiation, and empathy skills that contribute to more peaceful school environments (Garthe et al., 2022; Ojo, 2020; Oladipo & Shittu, 2022).

In addition, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks and cooperative learning strategies are widely used to promote constructive conflict management among children. SEL programmes draw strongly from Sociocultural Theory developed by Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes that children develop social and emotional competencies through interaction and guided participation within their social environments. Classroom activities such as role-playing, group discussions, and reflective exercises allow children to practise empathy, emotional regulation, and responsible decision-making. Likewise, cooperative learning strategies are rooted in Social Interdependence Theory advanced by Johnson and Johnson, which suggests that positive interdependence within groups encourages cooperation and constructive problem solving. Through collaborative tasks and shared responsibilities, children learn to negotiate differences, appreciate diverse perspectives, and resolve disagreements in ways that strengthen peer relationships (Adekunle, 2023; Valente & Lourenço, 2020; Udo, 2022).

STRATEGIES AND KEY SOCIAL INFLUENCES IN DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS

Developing conflict resolution skills among children requires deliberate guidance from adults and the use of structured learning experiences that help children manage disagreements constructively. Several authors have advocated for a proactive approach to teaching children how to handle conflicts. Some of these include steps while some are techniques to adopt and activities to engage children in developing conflict resolution skills. Both steps, techniques and activities all work towards building in children empathy, emotional intelligence, and constructive communication, ultimately fostering healthier relationships and constructive conflict resolution skills (Agnew, 2024). By integrating these strategies, using 4 Rs of conflict resolution, teaching communication, using cooperative games, modeling resolution techniques, and establishing safe spaces, children can develop the skills needed to resolve conflicts on their own. This approach not only empowers children to manage their relationships but also nurtures important social, emotional, and problem-solving skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.

1. To develop Conflict Resolution Skills (CRS) in children, 4 Rs of Conflict Resolution: Recognize, Reflect, Respond, and Resolve can be very effective. Teaching children these four steps helps them approach conflicts thoughtfully and constructively. Children who regularly

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practise these four Rs gain vital conflict resolution skills that they may use in real-world scenarios, enabling them to handle interpersonal difficulties with poise and compassion.

***Recognize the Conflict*:** Encourage children to recognize when a conflict arises. This means paying attention to signs of disagreement or frustration and understanding that a problem needs to be addressed. Children should be encouraged to notice both their own feelings and the reactions of others, fostering awareness and empathy as they identify the situation.

Reflect on the Causes and Impact: Teach children to reflect on what caused the conflict and consider how it affects them and others involved. Reflection involves thinking about why the conflict happened and acknowledging the emotions it stirs up. By understanding the underlying issues and the impact on everyone, children learn to consider different perspectives and take responsibility for their role in the conflict.

Respond in a Constructive Manner: Guide children to respond constructively, encouraging them to communicate their feelings openly without blaming or attacking others. Teach them to use "I" statements (e.g., "I feel hurt when...") and practice active listening. Constructive responses show respect and consideration, helping to keep the conversation calm and focused on resolution.

Resolve by Working Together: Finally, encourage children to resolve the conflict by working together to find a solution that benefits everyone. This might involve brainstorming ideas, compromising, or finding a fair way to make things right. Children learn that resolution is about finding a peaceful and satisfying end to the conflict, allowing everyone to move forward.

2. Further, feeling and showing empathy is a skill that every child must learn to be able to manage conflict. Teaching empathy to children makes them to understand and appreciate the thoughts, feelings and experiences of others. Children should be encouraged to understand and consider others' feelings. Teaching them to put themselves in others shoes, think and talk of how others feel, make others a priority are all behaviours that help them develop empathy, which is a crucial skill for resolving conflicts peacefully.

3. Also, one of the most important strategies is teaching effective communication. Effective communication is a core component of conflict resolution. Teaching children simple activities like active listening, talking through disagreements, expressing thoughts and feelings clearly and expressing their feelings without blaming others are all essential for conflict resolution. Teaching children phrases such as "I feel" or "I need" can help them communicate more effectively, reducing misunderstandings and promoting mutual respect (Adebayo, 2022). Children become better equipped to resolve disagreements in a constructive and empathetic manner. Also, encouraging children to articulate their emotions and opinions, helps them to develop negotiation skills that are essential for resolving conflicts. Active listening techniques fosters a respectful dialogue between those involved in the conflict. Learning to articulate their emotions clearly and listen to others' perspectives, not only aids in conflict resolution but also enhances their overall communication skills, which are essential in both academic and social settings.

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4. Modelling conflict resolution is one of the most powerful strategies for assisting children in handling conflicts independently. Adult around them should set an example of conflict resolution. Children should be taught how to resolve conflicts amicably and with patience by their parents and teachers, who should also set an example of positive behaviour (Bickmore, 2018;). Children learn through observation, so providing an example of how to resolve conflicts amicably is important. They are more likely to imitate adults who resolve conflicts in a composed and kind manner when they are interacting with their peers. Parents and teachers can demonstrate how to resolve conflicts by practicing these techniques in their own lives, especially during conflicts with the children themselves. For instance, explain the procedures they are using to settle a dispute in front of children, teach them how to listen intently, talk quietly, and come up with solutions that benefit all parties, and provide a clear illustration of how to deal with challenging circumstances. This real-life demonstration helps children internalize the process, showing them that conflict resolution is not just a theoretical concept but a practical, everyday skill. Additionally, this approach teaches children that conflicts are normal in relationships and can be settled amicably (Berkowitz, & Grych, 2021; Bolarinwa & Adekunle, 2021).

5. Encouraging children to develop problem-solving strategies is also crucial. When faced with a conflict, they should be guided to brainstorm multiple solutions and critically evaluate the pros and cons of each option. This practice of considering different perspectives and working towards mutually beneficial outcomes fosters critical thinking and teaches the importance of compromise in resolving disputes. Through this process, children learn that conflicts can often be resolved in a way that satisfies both parties (Olawale, 2023). Once a resolution has been agreed upon, it is essential for children to follow through with the action plan. Ensuring that they stick to the agreed-upon solution reinforces the entire conflict resolution process and builds trust in their ability to handle disputes. It also provides a valuable lesson in accountability and the importance of keeping promises, which contributes to the development of strong social relationships (Johnson & Johnso, 2012;

6. Use of peer mediation also provides children the tools and skills to resolve conflicts non-violently. The introduction of peer mediation programmes in schools and community-serving organizations is based on a model of education that empowers individuals to prevent, resolve, and transform violent and nonviolent conflict by developing the ***values, attitudes, skills and knowledge*** to envision alternative options for action towards building peace. Evidence shows that peer mediation fosters self-regulation, self-esteem and self-discipline in youth (Turnuklu et al., 2010). Another positive outcome of peer mediation training is the ability of trained youth to transfer mediation skills to a variety of settings including family and neighborhood conflicts, helping youth to become better problem solvers and more responsible citizens (Turnuklu, et al., 2010). Research supports the finding that a sense of belonging is a very important factor in preventing violence in schools. A school peer mediation program promotes critical thinking and builds decision-making skills, develops healthy standards of relationship within the school community and supports student self-determination.

7. Engaging children in role-playing and storytelling activities is also valuable approach to helping them develop conflict resolution skills. By involving them in role-playing scenarios or discussing stories from books, educators and parents can guide children through the process of practicing empathy and communication. These stories present relatable contexts where children

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can explore alternative actions and feelings, encouraging them to reflect on how conflicts can be resolved in a constructive manner (Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2021). Role-playing not only helps children understand how others might feel in a conflict but also enables them to experiment with different solutions in a safe environment.

8. Art-based expression is another effective method for helping children explore and manage emotions related to conflict. Activities such as drawing or creating puppets provide children with a hands-on way to express their emotions and visualize the conflict resolution process. This creative outlet allows them to externalize their feelings, helping them process conflicts in a less verbal and more tactile way, which is particularly beneficial for younger children or those who struggle with verbal communication (Okafor & Babalola, 2022).

9. Another valuable tool for fostering conflict resolution is the use of interactive games. Games that promote cooperation and teamwork can help children understand the importance of working together to achieve common goals. Through these games, children learn to navigate differences and disagreements in a constructive way. Cooperative activities such as group puzzles, team sports, or collaborative storytelling exercises create opportunities for children to practice resolving conflicts in real-time, offering them a chance to build these essential life skills (Ojo, 2020; Olawale, 2023).

10. Creating safe spaces for play is another critical component in promoting independent conflict resolution. When children feel secure in their environment, they are more likely to express themselves openly and work through conflicts without needing adult intervention. A safe space allows children the freedom to navigate disagreements, test different solutions, and learn from their experiences. Establishing such environments, whether in the classroom or at home, can involve creating clear rules about respectful behaviour, ensuring adequate supervision without over-intervention, and providing resources like quiet areas where children can cool down before returning to resolve a conflict (Suleiman, 2024).

In developing conflict resolution skills in children, teachers, parents and community have collective responsibility and influence in fostering children's abilities to manage conflicts constructively.

Teachers: Teachers play a crucial role in nurturing conflict resolution skills by fostering a classroom environment that values respect, empathy, and open communication. Through Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programmes, they teach children how to recognize emotions, consider different perspectives, and apply problem-solving techniques, all of which are vital for effective conflict management (Valente & Lourenço, 2020; Udo, 2022).). By modeling these behaviours and guiding students through exercises like role-playing and group discussions, teachers equip children with practical tools for handling disagreements constructively. For example, teaching the use of “I” statements during conflicts helps children express their emotions without assigning blame, promoting respectful communication. Peer mediation programmes, where older students assist younger peers in conflict resolution, further reinforce these skills and foster a supportive school culture (Frey, Fisher, & Smith, 2019; Ojo, 2020).

Parents: Parents provide the foundational setting where children first learn about handling conflicts (Berkowitz & Gryh, 2022). By modeling constructive conflict resolution behaviours, such as active

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listening and effective communication, parents teach children essential skills that they can apply in various social contexts. Collaborative efforts between schools and families amplify these skills, as parents who reinforce SEL strategies from the classroom create consistency at home (Adekunle, 2023). Schools can involve parents through workshops or family engagement sessions, teaching the same techniques used in classrooms to support a unified approach. When children receive clear and consistent messages at home and in school, they gain confidence and adaptability in conflict situations, improving their social interactions in all environments (Garthe et al., 2022).

Community: The community also plays a significant role in shaping children's conflict resolution abilities, providing a culturally grounded framework for handling disagreements. In many cultures, including Nigeria, traditional conflict resolution methods involve community leaders who emphasize dialogue and reconciliation (Oladele & Abubakar, 2020). When schools integrate these practices, children gain a consistent, culturally relevant understanding of conflict management that aligns with both family and community values. Community involvement in school-based conflict resolution programmes reinforces the message that peaceful conflict resolution is a shared responsibility. This engagement helps build a safer school environment and establishes a support network that extends beyond school, preparing children to be empathetic and responsible members of society (Bolarinwa, 2021; Oladipo & Shittu, 2022).

CHALLENGES

Research in early childhood education suggests that developing conflict resolution skills can contribute to positive peer relationships and more peaceful learning environments.

Several challenges hinder the effective teaching and acquisition of these skills among children. One of the most significant barriers is the prevalence of large class sizes, particularly in many developing countries such as Nigeria. Overcrowded classrooms limit teachers' ability to provide individualized attention and close supervision during peer interactions. Since conflict resolution learning often requires guided mediation, emotional coaching, and reflective dialogue, large pupil–teacher ratios reduce the opportunities for educators to engage children meaningfully in these processes. Studies have shown that overcrowded classrooms significantly affect the implementation of social-emotional learning programmes and weaken teachers' ability to support constructive peer interactions (UNESCO, 2021; Adekunle, 2023).

Another major challenge is the limited availability of resources and trained personnel required to support conflict resolution education in early childhood settings. Many schools lack structured programmes, teaching materials, and professional training that equip educators with the necessary knowledge to guide children through conflict situations effectively. Research indicates that teachers who have not received formal preparation in social-emotional learning or peace education may rely primarily on punitive disciplinary measures rather than constructive mediation approaches (Adebayo & Salami, 2022; UNICEF, 2023). As a result, conflicts among children may be suppressed rather than transformed into meaningful learning opportunities.

Cultural diversity within classrooms also presents important challenges for conflict resolution education. In multicultural societies such as Nigeria, children come from diverse ethnic, linguistic,

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and cultural backgrounds that shape their perceptions of authority, fairness, and appropriate responses to disagreements. These cultural differences can influence how children interpret conflict situations and the strategies they consider acceptable for resolving disputes. Bickmore (2021) notes that conflict behaviours are often shaped by social norms and cultural expectations, meaning that approaches to conflict resolution cannot always be universally applied without considering contextual differences. Similarly, Ogundele and Salawu (2021) observe that variations in cultural communication styles and conflict management traditions may create misunderstandings among children if these differences are not acknowledged within the learning environment.

Developmental limitations among young children also pose a significant challenge in teaching conflict resolution skills. Early childhood learners are still developing key cognitive, emotional, and linguistic abilities necessary for effective communication and self-regulation. For instance, many young children struggle to articulate their needs clearly, interpret the emotions of others, or regulate feelings such as anger and frustration during disagreements. These developmental constraints often lead to impulsive reactions, including crying, withdrawal, or physical aggression (Jones & Kahn, 2022; Teasley & Caron, 2023). Consequently, conflicts may escalate quickly when children lack the emotional awareness and language skills required to express themselves constructively.

Another challenge relates to inconsistent reinforcement of conflict resolution practices across children's social environments. While schools may attempt to promote peaceful communication and cooperative problem-solving, these values are not always reinforced within the home or broader community contexts. Research suggests that when children observe aggressive conflict management patterns in family or community settings, they may replicate similar behaviours during peer interactions (Ogundele & Salawu, 2021). Such inconsistencies can weaken the impact of school-based conflict resolution efforts and create confusion about acceptable ways of handling disagreements.

Furthermore, the dominance of traditional disciplinary practices in some educational settings presents an additional obstacle to developing conflict resolution skills among children. In many classrooms, conflicts are often addressed through authoritative control, punishment, or strict behavioural correction rather than through dialogue and mediation. While such approaches may temporarily stop disruptive behaviour, they rarely help children understand the underlying causes of conflict or learn constructive problem-solving strategies. Scholars argue that reliance on punitive discipline limits opportunities for children to practice empathy, negotiation, and collaborative decision-making, which are critical components of conflict resolution competence (Akinyemi, 2021; Bickmore, 2021).

Taken together, these challenges highlight the complex factors that affect the development of conflict resolution skills in early childhood. Structural issues such as overcrowded classrooms and inadequate resources, combined with cultural diversity, developmental limitations, and inconsistent social influences, create barriers that complicate efforts to teach children peaceful ways of managing disagreements. Recognizing these challenges is therefore essential for understanding the conditions that shape children's conflict experiences and the broader educational context in which conflict resolution skills must be developed.

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CONCLUSION

The literature reveals a consistent pattern in which conflict, although an inevitable part of children's social interactions, also provides valuable opportunities for learning and development. When guided appropriately by teachers, caregivers, and parents, conflict situations can become meaningful contexts for building essential life skills such as communication, empathy, negotiation, and cooperative problem-solving. Developing these competencies during early childhood therefore represents a crucial step toward fostering emotionally intelligent individuals and promoting peaceful social relationships.

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