KEY MILESTONES IN PEACE STUDIES IN NIGERIA: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT
Peace studies in Nigeria have evolved in response to the country's long history of socio-political conflicts. This paper examines key milestones in peace studies, highlighting Nigeria's contributions to peacekeeping efforts, the development of academic programs, and scholarly contributions to conflict resolution. The study further explores emerging trends, such as technological innovations in peace education and critical pedagogy, which enhance research and learning in the field. Additionally, the paper discusses the integration of modern conflict resolution strategies with indigenous practices to create culturally relevant and effective peacebuilding mechanisms. By adopting a holistic approach that blends traditional and contemporary models, peace studies in Nigeria can contribute to sustainable conflict resolution. The prospects for the discipline lie in further leveraging technology, expanding interdisciplinary research, and promoting the synergy between academic theories and indigenous peace mechanisms.

I. Introduction

Nigeria's socio-political landscape is a tapestry of over 250 ethnic groups, including the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo, each with distinct cultural and religious identities. This diversity, while a source of richness, has also fueled tensions rooted in colonial legacies and post-independence governance failures. British colonial rule (1900–1960) entrenched artificial borders that ignored pre-existing ethnic and territorial divisions, creating a "geographic expression" rather than a cohesive nation-state (Osaghae, 2005). The post-independence era saw the 1967–1970 Nigerian Civil War (Biafra War), a catastrophic conflict driven by ethnic

secessionist aspirations and resource control, which entrenched mistrust between northern and southern regions (Falola, 1999).

Decades later, Nigeria's political economy remains shaped by competition over oil resources in the Niger Delta, religious divides between Muslims and Christians, and ethno-regional power struggles. Nigeria's recurring conflicts are deeply intertwined with systemic inequities that perpetuate marginalization and exclusion. For instance, the Niger Delta's oil-rich communities, such as the Ogoni and Ijaw, have long suffered environmental degradation and poverty despite generating over 70% of Nigeria's revenue. This "resource curse" has fueled militancy, as articulated by Ikelegbe (2006), who argues that state neglect and corporate exploitation created a "political economy of grievance," pushing groups like MEND to weaponize sabotage as a form of protest. Similarly, ethno-religious imbalances in political representation and federal resource allocation such as the contentious "derivation formula" for oil revenues have entrenched perceptions of northern hegemony among southern groups, reigniting separatist movements like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) (Mustapha, 2014).

Weak institutions further exacerbate these tensions, as Nigeria's governance structures lack the capacity or legitimacy to mediate disputes or deliver justice. The police and judiciary, for example, are often perceived as corrupt or complicit in elite interests. Agbiboa (2015) notes that Boko Haram's rise in the northeast was partly enabled by state security forces' brutal crackdowns on civilians, which alienated communities and deepened distrust in governance. Likewise, the absence of robust land tenure systems has intensified farmer-herder violence in the Middle Belt. Higazi (2016) explains that climate-driven migration of herders into farmlands is mismanaged by weak local governments, leaving communities to resort to vigilante groups like the Yoruba "Amotekun" or Hausa "Yan Banga" for protection, often escalating cycles of retaliation.

Underpinning these issues are historical grievances rooted in Nigeria's colonial and post-independence past. British colonialism's "divide-and-rule" tactics politicized ethnic identities, embedding a legacy of competition over state power (Osaghae, 2005). The 1967–1970 Civil War, which killed over a million people, remains a psychological wound, particularly for Igbo communities, who perceive ongoing exclusion from national leadership (Falola, 1999). Even pre-colonial rivalries, such as the Sokoto Caliphate's 19th-century jihadist expansion into Middle Belt territories, are invoked in contemporary ethno-religious clashes, illustrating how historical memory shapes modern distrust (Higazi, 2016). Critically, these factors are not silo but interact dynamically. For example, systemic inequities in education and employment drive youth into groups like Boko Haram or IPOB, while weak institutions fail to address their demands, and historical narratives of marginalization legitimize their resistance. As Albert (2001) observes, Nigeria's conflicts are thus "layered crises" each stratum of injustice compounding the others, creating a vortex of violence that defies simplistic solutions.

The integration of peace studies into Nigeria's educational framework reflects a broader commitment to fostering a culture of peace and preparing future leaders to navigate the nation's complex socio-political challenges. Peace studies in Nigeria emerged as both an academic discipline and a pragmatic framework to address the country's cyclical violence. Scholars like John Paul Lederach (1997) emphasize the importance of "conflict transformation" over mere resolution, advocating for structural and cultural changes to address root causes. Nigerian academics have localized these theories, stressing the need for indigenous peacebuilding mechanisms. For example, Albert (2001) highlights the role of traditional institutions, such as the Yoruba *Ajọbi-Ajọgbẹ* (kinship councils), in mediating communal disputes. Similarly, Ojakorotu (2019) critiques the militarization of conflict response in the Niger Delta, advocating for participatory dialogue and restorative justice.

The field gained momentum in the 2000s as universities, such as the Modibbo Adama University of Technology Yola, University of Ibadan and Bayero University Kano, established peace and conflict studies programs. These initiatives integrate global theories with local realities, drawing on Johan Galtung's (1969) concept of "positive peace" to address structural violence in Nigeria's governance and resource allocation (Durosaro, 2012). Practical efforts, like the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), which fosters Christian-Muslim collaboration,

further reflect the application of peace studies principles (Uzodike & Maiangwa, 2013). In essence, Nigeria's peace studies field is a dynamic response to its complex conflict history, blending global scholarship with grassroots insights to forge sustainable solutions.

Purpose Statement

This study aims to critically evaluate the evolution of peace studies in Nigeria by analyzing key milestones, such as the establishment of academic programs and grassroots peacebuilding initiatives; discussing major achievements, including the integration of indigenous conflict-resolution mechanisms and interfaith collaboration frameworks; and highlighting ongoing challenges rooted in systemic inequities, institutional fragility, and unresolved historical grievances, ultimately contributing to a nuanced understanding of the field's progress and limitations in fostering sustainable conflict transformation.

This paper is structured into several key sections. Following this introduction, the Contextual Background provides an overview of Nigeria's diverse socio-political landscape and the historical conflicts that have shaped its trajectory. The next section, Evolution of Peace Studies in Nigeria, explores how the field emerged in response to the country's persistent conflicts, highlighting key milestones and institutional developments. The Challenges and Prospects of Peace Studies section examines obstacles such as political instability, funding constraints, and cultural resistance while also discussing opportunities for growth and effectiveness in conflict resolution. The final section, Conclusion and Recommendations, summarizes the key insights and proposes strategies for strengthening peace studies as a tool for sustainable conflict resolution in Nigeria.

Historical Background and Evolution of Peace Studies in Nigeria

Nigeria's peace studies landscape is deeply rooted in pre-colonial indigenous conflict resolution systems, which emphasized restorative justice, communal dialogue, and kinship-based mediation. For instance, the Yoruba *Ajọbi-Ajọgbẹ* councils, Igbo *umunna* (kinship assemblies), and Tiv *kwav* lineage assemblies prioritized reconciliation over punishment, fostering social cohesion through consensus-building (Albert, 2001; Oyeshola, 2005). These systems were disrupted by colonialism, which imposed indirect rule, centralized authority, and adversarial legal frameworks, eroding traditional mechanisms. British administrators favored ethnic hierarchies (e.g., privileging Hausa-Fulani elites in the north) and codified divisions through policies like the 1914 amalgamation, sowing seeds of structural imbalance (Osaghae, 2005; Falola, 1999). Colonialism also introduced a retributive justice model, sidelining indigenous restorative practices and exacerbating intergroup tensions, as seen in the politicization of land disputes and religious identities (Nwolise, 2007).

The post-colonial era saw a fraught transition toward formalized peace studies, driven by the need to address conflicts rooted in colonial legacies, such as the 1967–1970 Civil War and recurring ethno-religious violence. Academic institutions like the University of Ibadan and Bayero University Kano pioneered peace and conflict studies programs in the 2000s, blending global theories (e.g., Lederach's conflict transformation) with localized practices (Durosaro, 2012). Scholars such as Albert (2001) advocated for hybrid frameworks integrating traditional mediation (e.g., *Ndi Nze* councils in Igboland) with modern state institutions. However, challenges persist: state-centric approaches often marginalize grassroots voices, and institutional fragility undermines trust in formal peace processes (Higazi, 2016). The rise of interfaith initiatives like the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) reflects progress, yet systemic inequities and politicized historical grievances continue to hinder sustainable peace (Uzodike & Maiangwa, 2013; Ojakorotu, 2019).

Key Milestones in Peace Studies in Nigeria

The evolution of peace studies in Nigeria is marked by critical milestones shaped by historical, cultural, and institutional developments. Nigeria's commitment to peace and conflict resolution has evolved through significant milestones, both in academic development and practical engagement.

Early Peacekeeping Efforts: Nigeria began its peacekeeping journey in the 1960s by participating in the United Nations Operation in

the Congo (ONUC). Nigerian troops played a crucial role in stabilizing the region during the Congo crisis, setting the stage for the country's ongoing contributions to global peace efforts (Muhammad, n.d.).

Formation of ECOMOG: A pivotal moment in Nigeria's peacekeeping history was its leadership in the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) during the 1990s. Nigerian forces led missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, intervening in civil wars to restore order and stability (Adebayo, 2012). These interventions demonstrated Nigeria's growing influence in regional peacekeeping efforts.

Academic Advancements in Peace Studies: Recognizing the need for structured peace education, Nigerian academic institutions have made significant strides. The University of Jos offers a Postgraduate Diploma in Conflict Management and Peace Studies, equipping students with theoretical and practical skills to analyze and prevent conflicts (Best, 2006). Similarly, Modibbo Adama University of Technology Yola, University of Ibadan and Bayero University Kano, established peace and conflict studies programs. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) established its Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, offering comprehensive programs from Bachelor's to Doctoral levels (NOUN, 2019).

Scholarly Contributions: Nigerian scholars have been instrumental in advancing peace studies. Professor Chukwuma Okoye, for instance, has focused on inter-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, emphasizing the importance of dialogue and community-driven initiatives in fostering harmonious coexistence (Okoye, 2020). Research in peace studies continues to evolve, with scholars advocating for alternative dispute resolution mechanisms tailored to Nigeria's socio-political landscape. These milestones reflect Nigeria's multifaceted approach to peacebuilding, combining practical interventions with academic and scholarly efforts to address and resolve conflicts.

Achievements in Peace Studies

Impact on National Policy: Peace studies in Nigeria have increasingly influenced government strategies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. For instance, the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), launched in 2019, drew on scholarly critiques of pastoralist-farmer violence to propose land reform and dialogue-based solutions, though implementation remains uneven (Maiangwa, 2019). Similarly, the Nigerian government's adoption of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs for ex-militants in the Niger Delta and former Boko Haram combatants reflects academic advocacy for non-military approaches to insurgency (Onuoha & Oyewole, 2020). The 2017 National Peace Policy also institutionalized conflict-sensitive governance, emphasizing inclusivity in resource allocation—a shift informed by peace scholars' critiques of systemic inequities (Nwozor, 2020).

Academic and Research Contributions: Nigerian scholars have advanced theoretical frameworks that blend global peace theories with local realities. For example, Ogbonnaya and Eke (2021) developed the concept of "strategic nonviolence" to analyze youth-led protests like the #EndSARS movement, challenging state repression through organized civil resistance. Additionally, Maiangwa (2019) redefined "hybrid peacebuilding" by advocating for the integration of traditional institutions (e.g., Igbo *Ndi Nze* councils) with formal state mechanisms. Research on gender-inclusive peace processes has also gained traction, with Nwankpa (2018) highlighting women's roles in mediating Boko Haram-related conflicts in the Northeast. These contributions have reshaped national discourse, emphasizing structural reforms over militarization.

Community-Level Successes: Localized peace initiatives have achieved measurable success in reducing tensions. In Plateau State, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) facilitated inter-ethnic dialogues between Berom farmers and Fulani herders, reducing violence by 40% between 2018 and 2020 through land-sharing agreements (Best & Idris, 2020). Similarly, faith-based organizations like the Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC) in Kaduna reconciled conflicting Christian and Muslim communities by co-opting religious leaders into joint peace councils (Asuni & Akinyele, 2019). In the Niger Delta, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) brokered localized truces between militants and oil firms, linking ceasefire agreements to community development projects (Ukiwo & Isumonah, 2020). These

efforts underscore the efficacy of culturally grounded, participatory approaches

Challenges in the Field

Funding and Resource Limitations: Peace studies programs in Nigeria face persistent underfunding, which stifles research, training, and grassroots initiatives. For instance, academic institutions like Bayero University Kano struggle to sustain peacebuilding curricula due to inadequate budgetary allocations, relying instead on unstable international donor funding (Nwozor, 2020). The Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR), despite its mandate, has been hampered by poor infrastructure and a lack of modern conflict analysis tools, limiting its capacity to address emerging crises like banditry in the Northwest (Onuoha & Oyewole, 2020). Civil society organizations, such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), often scale back community mediation projects due to erratic funding, as seen in the Niger Delta, where localized truces collapse without sustained investment (Ukiwo & Isumonah, 2020). This financial precarity undermines long-term conflict transformation efforts.

Political and Security Constraints: Ongoing political instability and militarized governance impede the practical application of peace studies. The government's preference for military solutions over dialogue, as seen in the heavy-handed response to Boko Haram and separatist movements like IPOB, often exacerbates cycles of violence (Maiangwa, 2019). For example, the **2017 Operation Python Dance** in Southeast Nigeria, aimed at quelling pro-Biafra agitations, deepened distrust in state-led peace processes (Ogbonnaya & Eke, 2021). Similarly, politicized resource allocation—such as bias in the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)—fuels grievances, as communities perceive peace programs as tools of elite appeasement rather than justice (Nwozor, 2020). In conflict zones like the Middle Belt, insecurity restricts access for researchers and practitioners, hindering data collection and intervention design (Best & Idris, 2020).

Institutional Barriers: Bureaucratic inertia and siloed approaches within Nigerian institutions stifle innovation in peace studies. Universities often resist interdisciplinary collaboration, isolating peace programs from fields like environmental science or economics, despite the climate-conflict nexus in farmer-herder violence (Higazi, 2016; Nwankpa, 2018). State agencies, such as the IPCR, face bureaucratic delays in approving community-led initiatives, as seen in the slow adoption of the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) (Maiangwa, 2019). Furthermore, there is persistent resistance to integrating indigenous conflict-resolution methods, such as the Igbo *Ndi Nze* councils, into formal frameworks, privileging Western models over culturally grounded practices (Asuni & Akinyele, 2019). This institutional rigidity marginalizes local knowledge and perpetuates top-down, ineffective peacebuilding.

Prospects and Future Directions

The field of peace studies is continually evolving, embracing new methodologies and integrating diverse approaches to address complex conflicts.

Emerging Trends in Peace Studies: Recent advancements in peace studies highlight the integration of digital technologies, the application of critical pedagogy, and the emphasis on decolonization.

- **Digital Peace Education and Peacebuilding**: The advent of digital platforms has expanded the reach of peace education, utilizing online tools, virtual reality, and e-learning to make peace education more accessible. This digital shift not only broadens participation but also introduces innovative ways to engage learners in peacebuilding processes.

- **Critical Pedagogy**: Incorporating critical pedagogy into peace education encourages learners to question existing power structures and societal norms, fostering a deeper understanding of peace beyond the mere absence of violence. This approach promotes transformative learning, empowering individuals to become active agents of change in their communities. Nicoson, Teixeira, and Mårtensson (2023) suggest that using critical pedagogy in peace and conflict studies addresses calls for a greater understanding of peace beyond the

absence of violence, fostering active engagement in peacebuilding efforts.

- **Decolonization**: A significant trend in contemporary peace research is the focus on decolonization, which involves unlearning and challenging existing power structures and epistemologies. This process encourages a critical examination of whose voices are centered in peace studies and aims to create a more inclusive and equitable discourse. Aldawood (2020) critiques Eurocentric approaches in human rights and peace education, advocating for the inclusion of non-Western epistemologies to create a more inclusive and equitable discourse.

Integrating Modern and Traditional Approaches: Combining modern conflict resolution strategies with traditional practices can lead to more effective and culturally resonant solutions.

- **Synergizing Strategies**: Traditional conflict resolution methods, deeply rooted in cultural norms and values, offer community-based approaches that emphasize reconciliation and social harmony. Integrating these with contemporary techniques, such as mediation and negotiation, can enhance the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts. This synergy allows for solutions that are both contextually relevant and informed by global best practices. Akinwale (2010) examines the modalities for integrating traditional and modern conflict management strategies in Nigeria, highlighting the potential for synergizing these approaches to enhance peacebuilding efforts.

- **Case Studies in Integration**: Research indicates that in regions like Nigeria, blending traditional mechanisms with modern frameworks has been successful in addressing conflicts. For instance, incorporating indigenous dispute resolution methods within formal legal systems has led to more sustainable peace outcomes, as these methods are often more trusted and accepted by local communities. Akinwale (2010) discusses how traditional institutions in Nigeria play a critical role in resolving conflicts and how their integration with state mechanisms can lead to more effective conflict management.

The future of peace studies lies in embracing technological innovations, adopting critical and decolonial perspectives, and harmonizing modern methodologies with traditional wisdom. This comprehensive approach promises more effective and inclusive strategies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Conclusion

The evolution of peace studies in Nigeria reflects the country's commitment to addressing its historical and contemporary conflicts through academic inquiry, institutional development, and practical interventions. From the early reliance on indigenous conflict resolution methods to the formal establishment of peace studies programs in Nigerian universities, significant strides have been made in fostering a culture of peace. Key milestones, such as Nigeria's leadership in regional peacekeeping efforts, the establishment of dedicated research centers, and the integration of traditional knowledge into modern peace practices, underscore the growing recognition of peace studies as a critical field. Despite these achievements, the discipline continues to face notable challenges, including inadequate funding, political instability, and institutional barriers that hinder interdisciplinary collaboration and the full integration of indigenous practices. Furthermore, the lack of consistent policy implementation and limited access to resources constrain the impact of peace education and research in shaping national conflict resolution strategies.

However, the future of peace studies in Nigeria remains promising. Emerging trends such as the adoption of technology in peace education, the expansion of interdisciplinary research, and the fusion of modern and traditional conflict resolution methods provide new opportunities for advancing the field. To ensure sustainable progress, policymakers, academic institutions, and community leaders must collaborate to strengthen peace studies

through increased funding, policy support, and grassroots engagement. Ultimately, peace studies in Nigeria must continue to evolve, adapting to the nation's changing socio-political landscape while maintaining its commitment to fostering sustainable peace.

Recommendations

The study recommends as follows:

1. Government, private sector, and international organizations should allocate more resources to peace studies programs in universities and research institutions.

2. Scholarships and grants should be made available for students and researchers to enhance academic contributions to peacebuilding.

3. The Nigerian government should ensure that peace studies research informs national policies on conflict resolution and security.

4. Academic institutions should incorporate traditional conflict resolution methods into peace studies curricula, ensuring a balanced approach to peacebuilding.

5. Local community leaders and indigenous mediators should be actively involved in formal conflict resolution frameworks to enhance effectiveness.

6. Universities and research institutions should adopt digital learning platforms, artificial intelligence, and data analytics for conflict analysis and resolution.

7. The use of social media and mobile applications for peace awareness campaigns can help bridge the gap between academic research and grassroots implementation.

8. Peace studies should be integrated with disciplines such as political science, sociology, psychology, and law to provide a more holistic understanding of conflict dynamics.

9. Media organizations should be encouraged to highlight successful peacebuilding efforts to foster a national culture of peace.

10. Public campaigns promoting non-violent conflict resolution should be intensified in schools, workplaces, and communities.

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