The Role of Multidisciplinary Approach in Peace and Conflict Studies

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Abstract

The study explored the role of multidisciplinary approach in peace and conflict studies. The study was anchored on systems Theory. It adopted qualitative research design. The study found that adopting a multidisciplinary approach significantly enhances the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and sustainability of conflict-related interventions. Based on the findings, the study recommends among others that governments, peacebuilding organizations, conflict management agencies and academic institutions should institutionalize multidisciplinary teams comprising experts in other fields such as political science, sociology, psychology, economics, law and communication, to ensure that conflict interventions address the multiple dimensions of conflicts comprehensively rather than focusing on isolated factors. It concluded that multidisciplinary approaches are highly relevant in strengthening peacebuilding initiatives and ensuring sustainable conflict resolution in Nigeria.

Keyword: *Conflict , Peace, multidisciplinary approach, system theory, Nigeria*

Introduction

Peace studies is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry animated by a desire to build sustainable peace at all levels of society through policy-relevant research and practice on a broad range of pressing topics, including concepts and processes that demand justice, promote healing, and create more equitable societies; the root causes of violence in all its forms, including physical, structural, cultural, and environmental; strategies to prevent, end, and transform violent conflict through nonviolent means; and approaches to promote structural and institutional change at local, national, and global levels (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, 2026). The field of peace studies recognizes that conflict is inherent in human behavior and seeks to harness conflict through nonviolent means to reduce violence and transform societies. Conflict Studies on the other hand is an academic field that focuses on the systematic study of the causes, dynamics, processes, and resolution of conflicts in human societies. It examines conflicts that occur at different levels, including interpersonal, community, national, and international conflicts, with the aim of understanding them and developing strategies for their peaceful management or resolution (Ramsbotham et al., 2016).

Peace and conflict studies therefore is a field that examines why conflicts occur in society and how peaceful solutions can be developed to resolve them and promote harmony (Lederach, 2003). It has developed into an important field of scholarly inquiry concerned with understanding the causes of conflict and identifying sustainable pathways to peace. The field

emerged prominently in the mid-twentieth century in response to the devastating consequences of global conflicts and the increasing need for systematic approaches to conflict prevention and resolution. Peace and conflict have remained central issues in human societies throughout history. Conflicts occur in different forms, ranging from interpersonal disputes and communal clashes to civil wars and international confrontations. As societies become more complex, the nature and causes of conflicts have also become increasingly dynamic, involving political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors. Consequently, the study of peace and conflict has developed into an important academic field aimed at understanding the causes of conflict and identifying effective strategies for conflict prevention, management, and resolution (Ramsbotham et al., 2016).

Over time, it became evident that conflicts cannot be adequately understood or resolved through a single disciplinary lens. Political factors such as governance and power struggles, economic issues like inequality and resource competition, social dynamics including identity and ethnicity, and psychological factors such as perceptions and attitudes all interact to shape conflict situations. As a result, Peace and Conflict Studies increasingly adopted a multidisciplinary orientation that integrates insights from fields such as political science, sociology, psychology, history, anthropology, communication studies, and international relations (Kriesberg, 2007). This multidisciplinary approach allows scholars and practitioners to examine conflicts more comprehensively and to develop more effective strategies for conflict resolution.

The importance of a multidisciplinary approach is particularly evident in contemporary conflicts, which are often complex and interconnected. Modern conflicts frequently involve issues such as ethnic tensions, political instability, economic marginalization, environmental pressures, and misinformation spread through digital media. Understanding these dynamics requires collaboration among experts from different academic backgrounds and professional fields. As noted by Lederach (2003), sustainable peacebuilding requires the integration of diverse perspectives and knowledge systems that address both the immediate causes and the deeper structural roots of conflict.

Furthermore, the multidisciplinary nature of Peace and Conflict Studies enhances both theoretical understanding and practical application. By combining theories and methods from various disciplines, researchers are better equipped to analyze conflict dynamics, design conflict management strategies, and implement peacebuilding initiatives. For instance, political science contributes insights into governance and power relations, sociology examines social structures and group interactions, psychology explores human behavior and perceptions, while communication studies focus on dialogue, negotiation, and mediation processes. In addition, the growing complexity of global and local conflicts has reinforced the need for collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches in research, policy formulation, and peacebuilding practices. Scholars argue that multidisciplinary engagement promotes holistic analysis and encourages innovative solutions to persistent conflicts (Ramsbotham et al., 2016). Consequently, Peace and Conflict Studies continues to evolve as a field that integrates diverse disciplinary perspectives in order to better understand the dynamics of conflict and promote sustainable peace.

Therefore, the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach has become a fundamental aspect of Peace and Conflict Studies. This study therefore seeks to examine the role of a multidisciplinary approach in enhancing the effectiveness and relevance of Peace and Conflict Studies in addressing contemporary conflict situations.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria currently faces a multifaceted security crisis that threatens its corporate existence. From the protracted insurgency in the Northeast and banditry in the Northwest to the farmer-herder conflicts in the Middle Belt and secessionist agitations in the Southeast, militancy in the Niger Delta, and communal disputes in different regions depicts the Nigerian state is a theater of diverse and interconnected conflicts. Such conflicts are often driven by a combination of political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors, making them difficult to fully understand and address through a single disciplinary approach (Ramsbotham et al., 2016).

Over the years, scholars and practitioners in Peace and Conflict Studies have made efforts to analyze the causes and consequences of conflicts in Nigeria and to propose strategies for conflict prevention and resolution. However, many of these efforts have often been approached from limited disciplinary perspectives, such as political science, sociology, or security studies. While these approaches provide valuable insights, they may not adequately capture the complex and multidimensional nature of conflicts in Nigeria, which are influenced by historical grievances, socio-economic inequalities, cultural identities, psychological perceptions, and communication breakdowns.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of multidisciplinary perspectives in conflict analysis and resolution, it appears that there is still limited emphasis on how effectively these disciplinary approaches are integrated in the study and practice of Peace and Conflict Studies in Nigeria. Hence, this study seeks to address the perceived insufficient integration of multidisciplinary perspectives in the analysis and management of conflicts within the field of Peace and Conflict Studies in Nigeria by examining the role of a multidisciplinary approach in enhancing the understanding of conflict dynamics and improving the effectiveness of peacebuilding strategies in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on systems theory. The Systems Theory, originally developed by Bertalanffy in the 1950s, views society as a complex system made up of interconnected and interdependent parts. Each component of the system influences and is influenced by others. In the context of peace and conflict studies, conflict situations are understood as outcomes of interactions among political, social, economic, cultural, and psychological factors.

This theory is particularly relevant because peace and conflict issues cannot be fully understood through a single disciplinary perspective. Instead, they require insights from multiple fields such as political science, sociology, psychology, economics, law, and anthropology. Systems Theory therefore provides a holistic framework that allows researchers to analyze how these different dimensions interact to produce conflict or promote peace.

Applying Systems Theory to the study emphasizes that conflict is not caused by a single factor but by the interaction of multiple elements within a system. Consequently, effective conflict management and peacebuilding strategies require collaboration across disciplines to address the root causes and structural conditions of conflict. For example, political analysis may explain power struggles, sociology may examine social inequalities, psychology may explore perceptions and attitudes, while economics may highlight resource distribution issues.

Thus, the multidisciplinary approach advocated in peace and conflict studies aligns closely with the assumptions of Systems Theory, which encourages integrated analysis and coordinated responses to complex social problems. By adopting this theoretical framework, the study can demonstrate how combining perspectives from different disciplines leads to a more comprehensive understanding of conflicts and more sustainable peacebuilding strategies.

Conceptual Review

Overview of Peace and Conflict Studies

***Concept of Peace*:** Peace can simply be described as the absence of violent conflict and the presence of respect and understanding between people and communities (Mustafa, Jamshed, Nawaz, Arslan & Ahmad, 2023). According to studies of International Relations, peace is the elimination of war in the state. Negotiation, compromise, and cooperation among groups with different interests and viewpoints are frequently necessary to bring about peace. The advancement of human rights, social justice, and sustainable development are all dependent on the pursuit of peace. Although achieving permanent peace is a difficult and varied process, it can be aided by a number of strategies, including diplomacy, mediation, conflict resolution, and the encouragement of communication and reconciliation. According to Mustafa et al (2023), to create a harmonious world, peace can be attained through strategic peace building path, restorative justice system and peace circle, conflict transformation and dialogue.

According to Johan Galtung there are two types of peace: positive peace and negative peace.
Positive Peace refers to a social condition in which exploitation is minimized or eliminated and in which there is neither overt violence nor the more subtle phenomenon of underlying structural violence. It denotes the continuing presence of an equitable and just social order as well as ecological harmony. It is a type of peace that is difficult to achieve because it combines human attitude, annexation of (governing) system and (governing) institutions for the progress of societies, and also the inclusion of diverse groups of people for making one nation (and not try to harm the diversity of these groups for unity). So, positive peace is some kind of which only achieve by the "Inner Peace".

Negative peace usually denotes the absence of war. It is a condition in which no active, organized military violence is taking place. It is easy to achieve by the states and people because negative peace is the absence of violence, extremism, and war. In negative peace, the borders of the state are secure and no one touching the sovereignty of the state while government and population are suffering (Dijkema & d'Heres, 2007).

Concept of Conflict: Conflict is defined as an antagonistic state of opposition, disagreement or incompatibility between two or more parties (Patzak, 2012 & Wilmont and Hocker, 2001). Conrad (1991) indicated that conflicts happen as a result of interactions among

interdependent people who perceive that their interests are incompatible, inconsistent or in tension; Lewis Coser, (1956), an American sociologist, defined conflict as the clash of values and interests, the tension between that is and what some groups feel ought to be. Regarding this definition, conflict has the functions of pushing societies and leads to new economic systems, technologies, institutions; his contribution is that he determined the functional and dysfunctional roles that can be played by the conflict. Moreover, Robbins (2005) has defined conflict as a process that begins where one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that the first party cares about. This definition emphasizes that conflict is about perceptions, not necessarily real hard facts. Differences among individuals including ideas, goals, and competition for resources can lead to conflict (Fleetwood & Karen, 1987).

Conflict can be classified into types according to its levels, directions, organization and planned conflict (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2008; Green, 2012). The basic types of conflict include (a) intrapersonal: conflict within the individual/organisation/nation (for example, who cannot make decisions) (b) interpersonal: conflict among two or more individuals/organisations/nations (for example, an argument between the two parties). (c) intragroup: conflict within the members of same group. (d) intergroup: conflict between two or more groups (for example, between two different camps of groups or nations). (e) intra-Organizational (f) inter-organizational conflict.

(g) National Conflict: This refers to conflicts within a nation, involving different groups within the nation. This could be interethnic, inter-religious, or competition for resources. (h) International Conflict: This refers to conflicts between nations. This could be for ideological reasons, territorial claims, and political competition.

Peace and conflict studies is one of the fast-emerging interdisciplinary subjects in the academic universe of the 21st century. The subject is the outcome of sagacity that it is not necessary that human decisions and resources should be invested in mutual destruction by engaging millions of humans in fighting wars and killing one another (Stanley, 1963). The decisions and resources should be devoted for mass construction by peaceful means of dialogues, negotiations and reconciliations. This approach is effective and productive in converting hostility into a peaceful society in national and international relations. It is a challenging issue before the world community that how to encourage states to use the decisions for peace in warlike situations (Benjamin, 2003). It is not a new concern as peace and war are born twins in human relations and one is as old as the other. But war is a greater threat to the human life and has swallowed millions of lives throughout the course of human history. This discourse has directed the intellectuals to develop scholarship on the issues of peace and conflict in national and international relations. This approach has led to the emergence of peace and conflict studies as a subject of the essence in the world (Kriesberg (2009). The main intention of developing this cross-disciplinary subject is to promote understanding of the disastrous consequences of war and violence by evaluating and measuring the sufferings of war.

Multidisciplinary Approaches

Conflicts are part and parcel of human society and they are rooted in multidimensional complexity. They are intricate system with patterns interwoven within dynamic frames and

network structures. Conflicts are often driven by several factors; from political, socio-psychological, and economic domains. Körppen, Schmelzle, and Wils cited in Knowledge management Fund (2024) opined that these drivers are inherently linked, hence need for mutual reciprocity. Therefore, to promote lasting, positive peace, an optimal environment for human potential to flourish, all factors that breed conflict must be addressed holistically. This means that one pillar of conflict management must be integrated into and coordinated with efforts undertaken in the other pillars (Knowledge management Fund, 2024).

Multidisciplinary approaches are essential in contemporary societies for improving conflict prevention, management, and resolution by moving beyond traditional, single-perspective methods to address the root causes and complex, multi-layered nature of modern conflicts. By integrating expertise from fields such as psychology, sociology, economics, international relations, and technology, these approaches create more sustainable, holistic and inclusive peace strategies (Canetti, Khatib, Rubin, & Wayne, 2019). Their blend of expertise will not only allow for more comprehensive conflict analysis but also bring innovative methods of trust-building, scenario planning, and entrepreneurship into conflict management. Also, exploring the connections between conflict management and other sectors can uncover valuable opportunities, one such examples is the intersection of urban planning and post-conflict reconstruction.

The idea of working multidisciplinary is not unique, the approach is routinely applied in other sectors such as healthcare, security, and technology, finance, and marketing companies. Think, for example, of partnerships between law enforcement, prosecution, medical centers, and mental healthcare for abuse recovery cases. In these sectors such an approach is commonly endorsed as main mechanism and seen as essential to recognize the complexity of situations (IEP, Positive Peace Report 2022 cited in Knowledge management Fund, 2024). What is unique, is the implementation of the multidisciplinary approach in conflict management.

The multidisciplinary approach is results-oriented and flexible, meaning it can be meaningfully applied to a number of cases to enhance the impact of conflict management measures. Due to its multidisciplinary nature, the approach can be used in many different types of conflicts. For instance: ***Socio-Psychological Approach:*** The importance of applying socio-psychological techniques during conflict management can never be emphasized. Contrary to common belief, our human capacity for rational judgment is much shallower than research tells us. Electroencephalogram and hormonal testing for example reveal that our intuitive/emotive thinking is faster and more influential than the more rational part of our mind, especially in times of tension. It is often our emotive thinking, as opposed to rational considerations, that informs and drives our decision making. This results in several perceptual and cognitive constraints that conflict management strategies should consider, not as a separate track, as is until now, if at all, often the case, but as part of the resolution process (Knowledge Management Fund, 2024). Thus, understanding the rationale of conflict parties requires an examination of their backgrounds and the socio-psychological context in which their statements are made.

Socio-psychological considerations are not only crucial at a political decision-making level but play a role at civil society level as well. A certain level of healing, that is, restoring a sense of

safety, identity, dignity, and trust in oneself and the other, is necessary for a positive change to take place. Failure to address these issues keeps the brain in survival mode, even after the peak of violence has passed. This inhibits empathy, leads to a lower quality of life, and reduces civil society engagement, which feeds into negative feedback loops that increase the risk of future outbreaks of violence (Funk, Good & Berry, 2020).

Economic approach: Economic aspects of fostering peace are an important yet often under-valued component of conflict management (Wennmann, 2007). One significant force that shapes conflict is the control and distribution of economic resources. Access to public funds and opportunities for corruption have consistently motivated parties to contest for power at local and national levels. These funds are frequently embedded with patronage systems that reward and incentivize violence and disruption. The politicized economy not only acts as a driver of conflict but also hinders the path to peace. Thus, there is a need to develop economic incentives that support lasting peace agreements and that will create a closer connection between peace and business investments (Knowledge Management Fund, 2024).

Roles of Multidisciplinary Approaches

Drawing from Korylchuk, Pelykh, Nemyrovych, Didyk & Martsyniak (2024) approach in the study titled 'Challenges and benefits of a multidisciplinary approach to treatment in clinical medicine', the role of multidisciplinary approaches in improving strategies for conflict prevention, management, and resolution in contemporary societies include:

1. Addressing Root Causes and Complexity: Comtemporary conflicts often stem from deeply embedded structural inequalities, resource competition and historical injustices rather than mere political disputes. A multidisciplinary approach allows practitioners to address structural violence through economic reforms, sociological analysis of power dynamics and legal reforms simultaneously, providing a more durable resolution.
2. Integrating Socio-Psychological Dimensions: Effective conflict resolution must move beyond rational negotiation to address the 'socio-psychological barrier' (e.g., fear, trauma, identity issues) that block progress. By involving psychologists and social scientists, strategies can reform mindsets, narratives, and relationships, ensuring the sustainability of agreements.
3. Leveraging Economic Tools for Peace: The inclusion of economists and the private sector in conflict management helps create 'peace dividends.' Economic incentives, job creation, and rebuilding social capital are essential to prevent a return to conflict, particularly in post-conflict scenarios.
4. Enhancing Inclusivity and Social Cohesion: A multidisciplinary framework incorporates local knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and community participation. This ensures that solutions are rooted in local realities and empowering marginalized groups, which enhances legitimacy.
5. Leveraging Technology and Innovation: Modern conflict resolution utilizes digital tools, such as Artificial Intelligence for analysing conflict patterns and virtual reality for mediation, enhancing efficiency and accessibility.

Relevance of Multidisciplinary Approaches in Strengthening Peacebuilding Initiatives And Sustainable Conflict Resolution Efforts

The integration of multiple disciplinary perspectives enhances the analysis of conflicts by moving beyond single-cause explanations, offering a holistic understanding of complex, multi-layered phenomena. By combining insights from various fields of study such as sociology, psychology, political science, economics, environment science and communication, analysts can identify root cause, understand the behaviour of actors and develop more effective, sustainable peacebuilding strategies (Okpevra, 2024)

Adopting multidisciplinary approach can be relevant in conflict management in the modern society in several ways. First, combining diverse perspectives can help individuals better understand the full scope of a dispute, reducing the likelihood of oversight. For instance, Economics and political science analyse how inequality, resource scarcity, and poor governance contribute to conflict; psychology and sociology provide insights into how identity, trauma, ethnocentrism, and social categorization fuel intergroup violence; history provides the necessary background on long-standing grievances, while environmental studies highlight how resource competition drives dispute (Okpevra, 2024).

Second, integrating multidisciplinary will allow researchers to simultaneously evaluate interactions at the individual level (psychological) to the societal and international levels. Third, the integration of political science and behavioural studies will help analyse the motivations, power imbalances, and changing strategies of actors involved, including their perception of conflict as beneficial, as described by Wehr's Conflict Map or the ABC triangle (Herbert, 2017).

Forth, multidisciplinary approach tends to prioritize transformative methods such as restorative justice, dialogue circle and reconciliation processes that rebuild relationships, rather than just imposing legalistic or punitive solutions. Herbert (2017) opined that adoption of multidisciplinary approach aids in mapping conflict trajectories from emergence of escalation, de-escalation, and settlement, allowing for better identification of turning points.
Fifth, adoption of multidisciplinary approach will foster a 'win-win' situation via collaborative negotiation techniques such as interest-based relational approaches, resulting to higher commitment and lower chances of conflict recurrence. Finally, by integrating this approach, the contemporary society can better navigate complex disputes, moving from mere management of violent outbreaks towards sustainable, long-term peace. Herbert (2027) noted that by acknowledging the interconnectedness of different factors, this approach leads to more lasting peace agreements that address both the social, political, and economic drivers, avoiding the "tyranny of the single-cause" that often leads to relapse. Additionally, multidisciplinary approach allows for the development of peacebuilding programmes that are tailor-made to the specific cultural and social context.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the role of a multidisciplinary approach in enhancing the understanding of conflict dynamics and improving the effectiveness of peacebuilding strategies in Nigeria. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate as it allows for the in-depth exploration of social phenomena through descriptive and interpretive methods, which align with the theoretical and empirical concerns of the study

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study relied primarily on documentary analysis of secondary data sourced from books, academic journals, empirical case studies and credible institutional reports.

Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that adopting a multidisciplinary approach significantly enhances the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and sustainability of conflict-related interventions. First, the study found that integrating perspectives from diverse disciplines, such as political science, sociology, psychology, economics, law, and communication studies, provides a more comprehensive understanding of the root causes and dynamics of conflict. Contemporary conflicts are increasingly complex, often driven by overlapping political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological factors. A single-discipline approach tends to oversimplify these dynamics, leading to partial or ineffective solutions. In contrast, multidisciplinary frameworks enable stakeholders to address both structural and proximate causes of conflict simultaneously, thereby improving prevention strategies.

Second, the findings indicate that multidisciplinary approaches enhance conflict management by promoting collaboration among professionals from different fields. For instance, psychologists contribute insights into trauma healing and behavioral patterns, while legal experts ensure that interventions align with justice and human rights principles. Similarly, economists help design resource distribution mechanisms that reduce inequality, a common source of conflict. This collaborative synergy improves the design and implementation of conflict management strategies, making them more adaptive and context-specific.

Third, the study shows that conflict resolution efforts benefit significantly from multidisciplinary engagement through inclusive dialogue and participatory processes. Incorporating cultural anthropology and communication studies fosters better understanding of local contexts, norms, and values, which is critical for successful mediation and negotiation. This aligns with the view that sustainable peace is more likely when local knowledge systems and community voices are integrated into resolution processes. As a result, multidisciplinary approaches contribute to more legitimate and accepted outcomes. Finally, the findings highlight that multidisciplinary approaches strengthen early warning systems and conflict prevention mechanisms. By combining data from different sectors, such as economic indicators, social tensions, political instability, and environmental stressors, stakeholders can better anticipate potential conflicts and intervene proactively. This integrated approach enhances the timeliness and accuracy of preventive actions.

In relation to existing literature, the findings corroborate earlier studies by Okpevra (2024) and Herbert (2027) which emphasize that no single discipline can adequately address the complexities of modern conflicts. The results also support systems theory which advocate for holistic and integrative approaches to conflict analysis and resolution.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study affirms that multidisciplinary approaches are highly relevant in strengthening peacebuilding initiatives and ensuring sustainable conflict resolution in Nigeria. They promote inclusivity, enhance contextual understanding, address root causes of

conflict, and improve coordination among stakeholders. Therefore, there is a critical need for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in Nigeria to institutionalize multidisciplinary frameworks in peacebuilding processes to achieve enduring peace and development.

Recommendations

1. Governments, peacebuilding organizations, conflict management agencies and academic institutions should institutionalize multidisciplinary teams comprising experts in other fields such as political science, sociology, psychology, economics, law and communication, to ensure that conflict interventions address the multiple dimensions of conflicts comprehensively rather than focusing on isolated factors.
2. Policymakers should adopt multidisciplinary frameworks when developing conflict prevention, management, and resolution policies. This will facilitate the design of holistic strategies that simultaneously address political grievances, economic inequalities, social tensions, and psychological trauma that often fuel conflicts.
3. Academic institutions and professional organizations should develop training programmes that encourage interdisciplinary knowledge and skills among conflict practitioners. This will equip professionals with the capacity to work effectively across disciplinary boundaries and enhance the quality of conflict interventions.
4. Stakeholders involved in peacebuilding should incorporate local communities, traditional leaders, civil society organizations, and communication experts into mediation and negotiation processes. This will ensure that local realities, cultural values, and indigenous knowledge systems are adequately reflected in conflict resolution efforts, thereby improving legitimacy and acceptance of outcomes.

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