



Audrezara Journal of Communication and Social Research (AJCSR), Vol. 2(2), 130-139, 2026.



AUDREZARA JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL RESEARCH (AJCSR)

Vol. 2, Issue 2, pp. 130-139, August, 2026.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22150194>

E-ISSN: 3121-9721

Conflict Resolution Preferences among Students of Nigeria Maritime University

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History: Received: May 12, 2026; Revised: June 27, 2026; Accepted: July 15, 2026.

Abstract

The study aimed at identifying students' preferred conflict resolution styles at Nigeria Maritime University, Okerenkoko, Delta State, Nigeria. The descriptive method was used. The data of the study were collected through the questionnaire. The sample of the study consisted of 60 students. Findings revealed that *competing* is the first with high mean followed by *accommodating*. The other three variables, *avoiding*, *compromising* and *collaborating* also maintain more than the average. In light of the study results, the researcher recommended providing educational programmes to students focusing on skills such as tolerance, critical thinking, teamwork, communication, negotiation, dialogue, decision making, problem solving and resilience to reduce the possibility for their resort to (*competing*) as a preferred conflict resolution style.

Keywords: conflict, resolution, preferences, Students, Nigeria Maritime University

Introduction

Conflict is an antagonistic interaction between two groups that causes misunderstanding of a situation in the community and also in the school environment. Conflict occurs in the family, in society and in the school environment. This conflict occurs because of differences of opinion or private interest and bullying. Conflict is a natural part of our lives. Among students, it is the result of a student's different individual and group desires, interests and perspectives. Many people think that conflict is always destructive or harmful. When someone mentions the word conflict, people think of negative circumstances or uncomfortable situations. Conflict is an important issue that needs to be considered in



the school environment. Conflict is an opportunity that can improve positive behaviour (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2021).

Some of the situations that can trigger conflict in schools are bullying and harassment, disputes between Students, teacher-learner conflict, academic performance competition, unfair evaluation of students by lecturers and hike in school fee.

Conflict resolution is the process of solving problems in a competitive and effective manner. Conflict resolution is a competitive process for both parties in conflict to resolve through effective communication to determine which party is right and which one is wrong (Deutsch et al., 2018). The results of conflict resolution from both parties are good because of the cooperative and constructive process of the mediator and both parties to make a good and satisfactory conflict resolution (Deutsch et al., 2018; Widiyastuti et al., 2024).

To make a good intervention in a conflict, is to give good guidance to the parties to the conflict to facilitate a constructive resolution (Paramitha, 2017). Constructive conflict resolution is a resolution in which parties involved in the conflict accept each other, as the case may be, with peace, love and forgiveness (Deutsch et al., 2018). The objective of conflict resolution is to help the parties to the conflict to find a good and satisfactory solution. A good and satisfactory solution is a solution that both parties accept which does not hurt or benefit any party or give constructive sanctions. Constructive sanctions are sanctions given to the wrong party to reflect on the wrong behaviour to change thoughts and attitudes and recultivate a good self-concept in the mind and heart not to repeat bad behaviour capable of causing conflict (Deutsch et al., 2018).

Therefore, conflict resolution is important in the society because it creates a peaceful and reconciling situation for those involved in conflict, reduces conflicts that occur in the community, helps individuals create peace in the community and school, creates good relationships between people in the community and school, creates good relationships with teachers, creates healthy relationships in the community, eliminates people's hatred and resentment towards each other, creates fair resolution strategies and makes people more obedient to the norms established in the community. In a nutshell, conflict resolution creates a harmonious society, a peaceful society, a friendly society and a loving society (Khoerunisa, 2023; Deutsch et al., 2018).

Conflict is an important issue that needs to be considered in the school environment. In the school environment, there are several conflict situations between lecturers and students and among students. It is therefore necessary to define each conflict that occurs in the school environment (Rojuli, 2019). In the school environment, students act to dispute each other because they are not satisfied with the ideas of their colleagues. This causes disputes among students. Dispute usually occurs in the school environment where students take a classmate's belongings and the classmate does not accept the action, thus causing dispute between them in school (Jones, 2000). Bullying and harassment are types of conflict that occur in the school environment. This leads to violence, threats and physical violence among students. With this, students begin to form small groups and create conflict in the school environment (Deutsch et al., 2018). Performance competition is a positive issue in the school environment but there are fraudulent actions where some students are upset and dissatisfied with the performance of others. This action pushes students who have good or bad results to do unimaginable things to their fellow classmates at school (Jones, 2000).

However, researchers have constructed models and measures of conflict resolution styles to help define and understand responses to everyday conflict. The most widely used models and measures have been



developed by Blake and Mouton (1964), Hall (1969), Putnam and Wilson (1982) and Rahim (1983). But for the purpose of this study, Thomas-Kilmann's five styles of conflict resolution: competitive, collaborative, compromising, accommodating and avoiding shall be majorly used.

The university environment, where an increasing number of students live, inevitably brings with it a wide range of problems. It can therefore be said that conflict resolution is an important aspect of everyday life (Dincyurek & Civelek, 2008; Waithaka et al., 2015). The spread of students' violence on some campuses in Nigerian universities is as a result of academic, social and moral failure. Many university students' fights were triggered by trivial causes, but the wrong methods of dealing with them turned them into dangerous violence. Based on the foregoing, it is highly important to be familiar with the conflict resolution styles used by students in tackling conflicts at their various levels. Unethical behaviours arising from students in universities is something that is paid with little or no attention by authorities concerned but its effects on the students, the entire university community and the larger society is quiet alarming.

However, this research is imperative at this moment when there are increasing cases of conflict arising among students and between students and their lecturers in Nigerian universities. Some Students who are desperate about such situations do set their lecturers up through their nefarious cult groups. In some parts of the world, lecturers who are involved in such matters were either assassinated or wounded by their students. Instances of such conflict stem out from bullying among students, disputes between students, lecturer-students' conflict, academic performance competition, unfair lecturers evaluation, among others (Joaquina, 2025). It is important at this juncture to make explorations into the likely conflict situations that students might face and to further proffer amicable solutions to such problems.

Conflict is nothing but a product of incompatibility of goals and it arises from opposing interests. Conflict situations students experience with fellow human beings is a common phenomenon in both past and present generations. Most of these are caused by lecturers' high-handedness to their students and on the other hand, students' wrong perceptions of their lecturers. It was however observed that, there was a growing awareness among students that they have a measure of power and that they can wield some influences in social and political matters in school. The discovery of this latent power finds expression in various ways that could be constructive or destructive. Therefore, if conflict is to be reduced, research into the causes, management strategies and solution driven approaches aimed at nipping it in the bud are crucial.

Nevertheless, previous studies are quite silent on this phenomenon that might have negative consequences in our university system, hence, the researcher's interest is to investigate the conflict resolution preferences of students of Nigeria Maritime University, Okerenkoko, Delta State, Nigeria, and come up with solutions, using Thomas-Kilmann's conflict mode instruments.

Research Objectives

The basic objective of the study is to identify the predominant conflict resolution styles among students of Nigeria Maritime University.

Theoretical Framework

Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode Instrument (TKI)

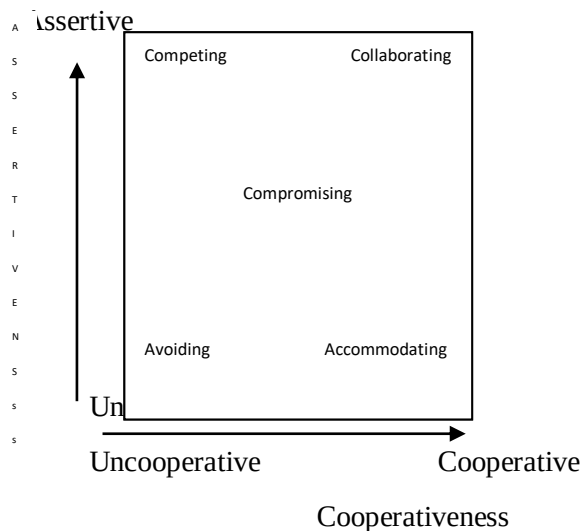
Researches on conflict management dates to the mid-20th century and several models have been developed. Conflict management is based on the principle that conflicts, although unavoidable, can be managed and thus brings positive results. Effective management requires an assessment of the possible consequences of an action and an understanding of one's own and other parties' motivations. There is a huge literature on conflict management, Golubeva (2023) finds that the study of conflict resolution and



communication styles is an interdisciplinary topic that is explored in various fields of research, including psychology, business management and communication studies. The Thomas-Kilmann model using its well-established categories, which is one of the best known, however, was created in 1974 by Kenneth L. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann, both professors of management at the University of Pittsburgh. They created a new method of conflict management called the Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode Instrument (Kilmann and Thomas, 1977; Thomas and Kilmann, 2012).

This widely used instrument measures the conflict management style of individuals and classifies individuals into two dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness in assessing conflict (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977). Five ways of dealing with interpersonal conflict have been identified: Competition, cooperation, compromise, avoidance and accommodation (Riasi & Asadzadeh, 2015), which is in line with the framework proposed by Blake and Mouton (1994). It is typical of the Collaborating (WIN: WIN) style that people who use this method seek mutual problem-solving so that both parties are satisfied (Nischal, 2014). According to Meier (2024), this style is usually used in complex situations where a novel solution is sought to resolve the conflict. Compromising (“WIN: WIN”) style is when individuals using this mode are intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperation. They try to exchange concessions to resolve the conflict and present this situation as two friends want to choose a film to watch (Meier, 2024). The theory talks about Competing (WIN: LOSE) style when individuals who use this mode are assertive and uncooperative and seek to assert their own position. Meier (2024) believes this approach may be appropriate for emergencies when time is of the essence. In the case of Accommodating (LOSE: WIN) style, people are non-assertive and cooperative and they try to satisfy the other person’s goals. This style is like being the “peacemaker” (Meier, 2024). People using Avoiding (LOSE: LOSE) style are non-assertive and non-cooperative (Nischal, 2014). They usually postpone or avoid unpleasant issues when dealing with others. According to Meier (2024), when you choose to avoid a conflict, you essentially sidestep the issue. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Model Instrument serves as the theoretical foundation for understanding and interpreting students’ conflict resolution preferences, making it highly relevant to a study on conflict resolution among students of Nigeria Maritime University.

TK MODE FRAMEWORK



Sources: Thomas & Kilmann (1974)



Methods

Given the research objectives and questions, this study used the survey research approach which involves the use of the questionnaire. This method became necessary because it afforded the researcher the opportunity to examine the inter-relationship among variables and help to develop explanatory inference. This method also afforded the researcher opportunity to meet face-to-face with the respondents in the field. The sample for this research was drawn from students of Nigeria Maritime University, Okerenkoko, Delta State, Nigeria. This study also adopted simple random sampling. Since the school has only three faculties, all the three faculties were selected for the study. More so, a department was selected from each faculty using purposive sampling technique and the following departments were selected: Mechanical Engineering, Transport and Logistics and Environmental Management and Pollution Control. A total of 60 respondents were selected using the simple random sampling technique, a form of probability sampling. Specifically, 20 participants were purposively chosen from each of the three departments from the three faculties of the institution. The reliability data for Thomas-Kilmann instrument have been reported as ranging from 0.61-0.68 (test-retest) and 0.43-0.71 (Cronbach alpha), which shows the reliability of the device for this kind of assessment (Rahim, 2001; cited by Brahnem. The collected data were subjected to a thorough statistical analysis, using ANOVA and T-test techniques. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) programme was being deployed in making the analysis.

The respondents were then selected using convenience sampling technique. In other words, sixty students were randomly investigated on their most preferred conflict resolution styles of accommodating, competing, collaborating, avoiding and compromising. Section A includes social and personal questions about gender, age group, marital status, level of study, semester of study, religion, etc. Section B includes sixty-One statements (61) to examine the five styles of conflict resolution. Thirteen (13) statements were adopted about avoiding, twelve (12) statements about compromising, twelve (12) statements collaborating, twelve statements (12) about competing and twelve (12) statements about compromising. The questionnaire consists of closed-ended questions using a 5 point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree) to present the problem. Data were collected from sixty students through simple random selection at the Nigeria Maritime University. The timeframe for this study spanned a period of 3 month; between 14 December, 2025 and 15th March, 2026. All respondents were told that their participation in the survey was voluntary and that their responses would be completely confidential. Regarding the ethical consideration, the researchers ensured full adherence to principles of research ethics in the course of this study.

Findings

Descriptive Analysis

For the purpose of this research, only descriptive analysis of section A and B were made.

Descriptive Analysis for Section A

Table 1: Distribution of Sex

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	49	81.7
	Female	11	18.3
	Total	60	100.0

26 **Field Study, 15th March, 2026**

According to the table 1, 81.7% of the respondents were male, which is an indication that there were more male in the study than female.

Table 2: Age of the respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Valid less than 20	6	10.0
20-25	27	45.0
26-30	21	35.0
31-35	5	8.3
36-40	1	1.7
Total	60	100.0

Field Study, 15th March, 2026

According to table 2, 45.0% of respondents were undergraduate students between the ages of 22 and 25. This is reflective of the fact that they were more in universities doing undergraduate programmes.

Table 3: Marital Status of the respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Single	48	80.0
Married	10	16.7
Divorced	1	1.7
Partnered	1	1.7
Total	60	100.0

Field Study, 15th March, 2026

According to table 3, 80.0% of respondents were single. This is an indication that there were more students who were not married undertaking undergraduate programmes.

Table 4: Level of study of the respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Year 1	5	8.3
Year 2	41	68.3
Year 3	5	8.3
Year 4	2	3.3
Year 5	7	11.7
Total	60	100.0

Field Study, 15th March, 2026

According to table 4, 68.3% of respondents were in Year 2. This is an indication that there were more Year 2 students than others.

Table 5: Religion of the respondent

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Islam	11	18.3
Christian	47	78.3
Others	2	3.3
Total	60	100.0

Field Study, 15th March, 2026

According to table 5, 78.3% were Christian. This is an indication that there more students with Christian background than other faiths.

Table 6: The most preferred conflict resolution style used by students of Nigeria Maritime University

	N	Mean
Competing	60	3.7028
Collaborating	60	3.6542
Accommodating	60	3.6000
Avoiding	60	3.5833
Compromising	60	3.4542
Valid N (listwise)	60	

Field Study, 15th March, 2026

According to the Descriptive Statistics, competing is the first with the highest mean which is 3.70, followed by collaborating with 3.65 and accommodating with 3.6. The other two variables, avoiding and compromising also maintain more than the average but less than 3.60.

Discussion

The socio-demographic data show that the sample is predominantly male (81.7%), young (80% between 20–30 years), single (80%) and largely in Year 2 of study (68.3%). This suggests that the findings mainly reflect the perspectives of relatively young, unmarried students who are at an intermediate stage in their academic programmes at the Nigeria Maritime University, Okerenkoko, Delta State. The dominance of Year 2 students indicates that the results are influenced by respondents who have already had some



exposure to university life but are not yet at the final stages of their studies. Religiously, the majority are Christian (78.3%), with Muslims (18.3%) and other religions (3.3%) forming smaller proportions. This religious distribution may shape the social and cultural norms within which interaction and conflict management occur, as religious values can influence attitudes towards cooperation, respect and conflict resolution.

Regarding the main study variables, Competing recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.70$). This suggests that they are relatively open, communicative and willing to engage with others. Collaborating ($M = 3.65$) also have relatively high means, implying that respondents use both assertive and cooperative approaches in handling disagreements. The prominence of the competing style indicates a tendency towards defending personal viewpoints, while the relatively high collaborating score suggests that many respondents also value joint problem-solving and mutually beneficial outcomes. Accommodating ($M = 3.60$), Avoiding ($M = 3.58$) and Compromising ($M = 3.45$) are all above the scale midpoint, which implies that respondents draw on a range of conflict management strategies rather than relying on a single style. The moderate level of avoiding and compromising suggests that, while they sometimes withdraw from or settle conflicts, these are not their dominant strategies.

Serne and Martin (2020) examined the conflict management of construction students and found that the construction industry attracts uncooperative people regardless of gender. If students can experience and learn different conflict management styles, they may be better prepared to work in diverse teams that support the development of a collaborative industry before entering the industry. Mahajan and Sutar (2022) in their study found that 18–21 years old undergraduate male students have a more competing and avoiding style than female students, however, female students are stronger than their male counterparts in collaborating, compromising and accommodating styles. Kovaç and Ceyhan (2022) studied nearly 600 university students and concluded, among others, that the participants in the study tended to show more positive behaviour and to use a compromise style more in conflicts with younger peers than in other conflicts. Riasi and Asadzadeh (2015) believe that educational organizations need to pay particular attention to conflict management and to be aware of how to manage these conflicts effectively to engender rancour free academic environments.

Taken together, the findings suggest a student population that is socially active and relatively assertive in interpersonal situations, with a mixed use of cooperative and yielding strategies in conflict. The demographic pattern, especially the concentration of young, single, Year 2 students of the Nigeria Maritime University, Okerenkoko, Delta State, Nigeria, a predominantly Christian background, should be considered when generalizing these findings, as they may not fully represent older students, those at other levels of study, or groups with different religious or marital profiles.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conflict resolution strategies are important in the school environment to help develop and change students' positive behaviour. Conflict resolution helps students understand and appreciate differences, promotes tolerance and creates a friendly, safe and productive environment to foster learning in the school environment. Resolution strategies of conflict can contribute to a positive school culture that fosters respect, empathy, responsibility and peaceful conflict resolution to build positive relationships among students and between students and lecturers in the school environment. Drawing from Thomas-Kilmann five styles of conflict resolution, the average table showed that students of Nigeria Maritime University prefer *competing* conflict resolution strategy than other styles.

In light of the results from the research, the study recommends as follows:



1. To reduce the possibility for resorting to (competing) as a preferred conflict resolution style among students of Nigeria Maritime University, educational programmes consisting of skills such as tolerance, critical thinking, teamwork, communication, negotiation, dialogue, decision making, problem solving and resilience should be provided to students.
2. The Directorate of Guidance and Counselling of the Nigeria Maritime University, Okerenkoko, Delta State, Nigeria, should inculcate in the students the ability to control their emotions and take responsibility for resolving their conflicts.

Acknowledgements: We acknowledge Henrietta Chiburuoma Otonnah and Sandra Akoje for their assistance in sourcing the needed materials for the study. We equally appreciate the University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, library staff for their cooperation and support.

Funding: The study was self-funded.

Conflict of interest: There was no conflict of interest

How to Cite: Akoje, T.P. & Victor, O.F. (2026). Conflict resolution preferences of students of Nigeria Maritime University. *Audrezara Journal of Communication and Social Research (AJCSR)*, 2(2),130-139. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22150194>

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