Conflict Resolution Styles, Educational Status, and Tendency to Forgive Among Residents of Jos North

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Abstract
This study investigated conflict resolution styles and educational status as predictors of the tendency to forgive among residents of Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. Grounded in Rahim's five-style conflict framework and the Heartland Forgiveness model, a cross-sectional survey design was adopted. Using a multistage sampling approach with field-level adaptations, data were collected from 615 adult respondents using the Conflict Resolution Styles Scale and the Heartland Forgiveness Scale Extended Version (HFS-E). Multiple regression analysis and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The results revealed that conflict resolution styles jointly and significantly predicted all dimensions of the tendency to forgive willingness, motivation, ability, and preference accounting for 16.6% to 34.5% of the variance. Specifically, integrating, obliging, and compromising styles emerged as positive predictors, with the integrating style serving as the strongest predictor. Conversely, educational status showed no statistically significant influence on the tendency to forgive. These findings highlight that behavioral and relational approaches to conflict management are far more critical to fostering forgiveness than formal educational attainment in post-conflict, socially diverse settings.

Introduction

Forgiveness is strongly associated with psychological well-being, reduced stress, improved emotional regulation, and enhanced relational functioning. Individuals with higher tendencies to forgive are more likely to experience lower levels of anger rumination, anxiety, and depressive

symptoms, while also maintaining healthier and more stable interpersonal relationships (McCullough et al., 1997; Berry et al., 2005; Worthington & Wade, 2020). These findings suggest that forgiveness plays a protective role in psychological adjustment and social harmony, particularly in contexts where interpersonal harm is frequent or chronic. Neuroscientific and cognitive research further highlights the role of executive functioning and emotional regulation in shaping forgiveness tendencies. Prefrontal cortical regions involved in cognitive control, perspective-taking, and impulse regulation have been shown to support the inhibition of revenge-oriented responses, thereby facilitating forgiveness-oriented cognition and behaviour (Ricciardi et al., 2013). Conversely, maladaptive cognitive processes such as anger rumination, hostile attribution bias, and persistent negative affect significantly reduce the likelihood of forgiveness by reinforcing retaliatory tendencies and emotional reactivity (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). These findings position forgiveness as a psychologically effortful process influenced by cognitive capacity and emotional regulation mechanisms. From a theoretical perspective, forgiveness is conceptualised as a multidimensional psychological process involving cognitive, emotional, and motivational transformation. Enright and Fitzgibbons (2015) describe forgiveness as a conscious restructuring of negative perceptions about an offender, resulting in increased empathy and reduced resentment. Similarly, McCullough (2008) conceptualises forgiveness as a prosocial motivational shift characterised by a decrease in avoidance and revenge motivations and an increase in benevolent intentions toward the transgressor. Within this framework, the tendency to forgive is understood as an enduring disposition that influences how individuals interpret and respond to interpersonal offenses across different contexts. Within such post-conflict environments, forgiveness becomes not only an individual psychological process but also a socially embedded response influenced by cognitive appraisal of threat, group identity, and intergroup experiences. Empirical evidence from post-conflict settings suggests that sustained intergroup contact and structured dialogue are critical mechanisms for reducing prejudice and enhancing prosocial dispositions, including forgiveness. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), in their meta-analytic review, demonstrated that positive intergroup contact significantly reduces intergroup anxiety and increases empathy, both of which are key antecedents of forgiveness tendencies in divided societies. Educational status may also be relevant to the tendency to forgive because formal education provides opportunities for social learning, exposure to diverse perspectives, and development of interpersonal and problem-solving skills. However, educational attainment does not necessarily translate into a forgiving disposition, since forgiveness may also depend on personal experiences, emotional regulation, empathy, cultural context, and habitual responses to conflict. Including educational status in the present study therefore permits an empirical assessment of whether differences in formal educational attainment are associated with forgiveness among residents of Jos North. Conflict resolution styles further contribute to variations in the tendency to forgive by shaping how individuals respond behaviourally to interpersonal disagreement. Rahim (2002) identifies five styles: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. Integrating and compromising styles involve greater attention to problem solving and mutual outcomes, while obliging emphasises accommodation of the other party. Dominating reflects a stronger concern for one's own position, whereas avoiding involves withdrawal or limited engagement with the conflict. These differences are relevant to forgiveness because the way individuals manage disagreement can influence whether conflict is addressed constructively, prolonged, or met with retaliatory responses. Taken together, conflict resolution styles and educational status provide complementary perspectives for examining the tendency to forgive. Examining these factors

within the same study provides a basis for understanding forgiveness in a socially and culturally diverse setting such as Jos North. Against this backdrop, the present study examines conflict resolution styles and educational status as predictors of the tendency to forgive among residents of Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

i. Conflict resolution styles will significantly influence the tendency to forgive among residents of Jos North, Nigeria.

ii. Educational status will significantly effect the tendency to forgive among residents of Jos North, Nigeria.

Method

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey design. This design is appropriate because it allows the researcher to collect data from a diverse group of individuals at a single point in time, thereby providing a comprehensive snapshot of psychosocial constructs as they are expressed within the population.

Population

The study population comprised residents of Jos North across different ethnic, religious, gender, age, and educational categories. The population was taken as 643,200, representing the 2022 projected population of Jos North. The projection is reported by City Population from National Population Commission of Nigeria and National Bureau of Statistics population data. The 2006 census population of Jos North was 437,217, providing the underlying census base for the projection. The 643,200 figures was therefore used as the population basis for sampling and proportional allocation across the 14 wards.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size for this study is determined using the Krejcie and Morgan formula (1970). The formular has a confidence level of 95% and 5% margin error. Using proportionate sampling, this formula ensures that each ward contributes to the total sample in proportion to its share of the total population. For a population of 643,200, the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample-size table gives a minimum sample of approximately 384 respondents at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Because the study used a multistage community sampling approach, a design effect (DEFF) of 1.5 was applied, giving 576 respondents. Allowing approximately 10% for nonresponse or unusable questionnaires increased the target to approximately 640 respondents. Accordingly, 640 questionnaires were targeted for administration across the 14 wards.

Adjust for nonresponse/unusable questionnaire, allowing for 10% nonresponse (refusals, absent, incomplete(s): The required sample for simple random sampling was 384. To account for the multistage sampling structure, a design effect of 1.5 was applied, producing a design-adjusted sample of 576. Allowing approximately 10% for nonresponse produced a final target of 640 respondents. Proportionate allocation was then used to distribute the target sample across the 14 wards according to their estimated shares of the 643,200 population. The final analysis was based on 615 properly completed and usable questionnaires. Where: n_h = sample size for each ward; N_h = population estimate for each ward; N = total population (643,200); and n = total target sample size (640).

Using proportionate sampling, this formula ensures that each ward contributes to the total sample in proportion to its share of the total population.

The study was designed around a multistage sampling framework to obtain broad geographical coverage of Jos North Local Government Area. The first stage involved the 14 council wards, with the target sample allocated proportionately according to the estimated population distribution used for the study. The second stage involved identifying residential localities or clusters within the wards. The third stage involved the selection of households and eligible adult respondents within the selected localities. Although multistage systematic sampling was the planned procedure, its implementation was affected by field conditions, including difficulties with street identification, the absence of standardized household numbering in some areas, accessibility constraints, community entry challenges, respondent movement, and security concerns. Consequently, the sampling procedure was adapted during fieldwork. Systematic selection was followed where a workable sampling frame and access permitted; where these conditions were not available, eligible and willing respondents were recruited conveniently within the selected wards and localities. The adaptation was made to maintain coverage across all 14 wards while allowing the field team to respond to the practical conditions encountered in the study area. Five trained research assistants supported data collection under the researcher's supervision. Only adults who had lived in Jos North for at least six months were eligible to participate, and one eligible adult respondent was recruited from a selected household or accessible residential location. Thus, the study should be described as a multistage sampling design with field-level adaptation to convenience sampling rather than as a purely probability-based multistage sample.

Instruments

The following instruments were used in the study;

Conflict Resolution Styles Scale

The conflict resolution styles inventory used in this study was based on Rahim's five-style framework: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. It consisted of 30 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The five styles represent different combinations of concern for self and concern for others (Rahim, 2002).

Heartland Forgiveness Scale Extended Version (HFS-E)

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale Extended Version (HFS-E) was used to assess dispositional tendency to forgive. The instrument is based on the Heartland Forgiveness Scale developed by Thompson et al. (2005), which conceptualises forgiveness as a general disposition involving responses to oneself, other people, and situations beyond personal control. For the present study, the extended version used a multidimensional format covering willingness to forgive, motivation to forgive, ability to forgive, and preference to forgive. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The initial version contained 25 items. Following pilot item analysis, two items (E2 and E6) were removed, leaving 23 items for the main study. Higher scores represented a stronger tendency to forgive.

Data Collection Procedure

The research procedure was conducted in three phases: pre-field preparation, field data collection, and post-field data processing. During the pre-field phase, the researcher obtained an

introductory letter from the Department of Psychology, Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi, and sought administrative permission from the Office of the Chairman of Jos North Local Government Area. Five research assistants were selected and trained on the study objectives, questionnaire administration, ethical procedures, informed consent, confidentiality, and culturally sensitive interactions with respondents. Field data collection covered the 14 council wards of Jos North Local Government Area. Although the study initially adopted a multistage systematic sampling technique, challenges relating to street identification, household numbering, accessibility, and community entry necessitated some adjustments. A total of 640 questionnaires were administered to eligible adult respondents, of which 615 were properly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 96.1%. Informed consent was obtained from participants, and alternative eligible households within the same localities were approached when selected households were inaccessible, respondents were unavailable, or participation was declined. After data collection, all returned questionnaires were checked for completeness, accuracy, and consistency. Questionnaires with substantial missing responses or inconsistencies were excluded, while valid responses were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Data cleaning was conducted to identify and correct errors, missing values, inconsistencies, unusual response patterns, and outliers. These procedures helped to ensure that the final dataset was accurate, reliable, and suitable for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 28. The dataset was first screened for accuracy, missing values, and outliers prior to analysis. The assumptions underlying parametric testing, including normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity, were assessed to confirm the suitability of the data for inferential statistics. Multicollinearity among predictor variables was examined using Pearson correlation coefficients among the independent variables. Inter-correlations below.90 indicated that there were no significant multicollinearity concerns among the predictor variables.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize participants' sociodemographic characteristics and study variables. Multiple regression analysis (standard/simultaneous entry method) was employed to test the hypotheses concerning the predictive influence of conflict resolution styles on tendency to forgive.

One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine differences in tendency to forgive across educational status groups. Where significant differences were found, Tukey HSD post hoc tests were conducted. Homogeneity of variance was assessed using Levene's test prior to interpretation. All analyses were conducted at the 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 1:

This hypothesis stated that conflict resolution styles will significantly influence the tendency to forgive among residents of Jos North, Nigeria. This hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis, and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1:

Summary of multiple regression analysis showing the influence of conflict resolution styles on the tendency to forgive among residents of Jos North, Nigeria. Table 1: Summary of multiple regression analysis showing the influence of conflict resolution styles on the tendency to forgive among residents of Jos North, Nigeria. Table 1: Summary of multiple regression analysis

showing the influence of conflict resolution styles on the tendency to forgive among residents of Jos North, Nigeria.

DV	Predictor(s)	*β*	*t*	*p*	*R*	R^2	*F*	*df*	*p*
Willingness to Forgive	Constant				.588	.345	62.307	5, 591	<.001
	Integrating	.423	9.847	<.001					
	Obliging	.143	3.546	<.001					
	Dominating	.004	.109	>.05					
	Avoiding	-.054	-1.470	>.05					
	Compromising	.139	3.388	<.01					
Motivation to Forgive	Constant				.552	.305	51.986	5, 592	<.001
	Integrating	.432	9.670	<.001					
	Obliging	.107	2.594	<.05					
	Dominating	-.068	-1.760	>.05					
	Avoiding	.082	2.158	<.05					
	Compromising	.075	1.777	>.05					
Ability to Forgive	Constant				.428	.183	26.505	5, 592	<.001
	Integrating	.250	5.204	<.001					
	Obliging	.249	5.551	<.001					
	Dominating	-.083	-2.001	<.05					
	Avoiding	-.037	-.906	>.05					
	Compromising	.024	.519	>.05					
Preference to Forgive	Constant				.407	.166	23.503	5, 591	<.001
	Integrating	.238	4.907	<.001					
	Obliging	.132	2.895	<.01					
	Dominating	.015	.359	>.05					
	Avoiding	.001	.036	>.05					
	Compromising	.116	2.509	<.05					

As shown in Table 1, the five conflict resolution styles (integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising) jointly and significantly predicted all four dimensions of the tendency to forgive: willingness to forgive, $R = .588$, $R^2 = .345$, $F(5, 591) = 62.307$, $p < .001$; motivation to forgive, $R = .552$, $R^2 = .305$, $F(5, 592) = 51.986$, $p < .001$; ability to forgive, $R = .428$, $R^2 = .183$, $F(5, 592) = 26.505$, $p < .001$; and preference to forgive, $R = .407$, $R^2 = .166$, $F(5, 591) = 23.503$, $p < .001$. Conflict resolution styles jointly accounted for 34.5%, 30.5%, 18.3%, and 16.6% of the variance in willingness, motivation, ability, and preference to forgive, respectively. On the strength of this result, Hypothesis one, which stated that conflict resolution styles would significantly influence the tendency to forgive among residents of Jos North, Nigeria, was accepted. At the level of individual predictors, only integrating ($\beta = .423$, $t = 9.847$, $p < .001$), obliging ($\beta = .143$, $t = 3.546$, $p < .001$), and compromising styles ($\beta = .139$, $t = 3.388$, $p < .01$) significantly and independently predicted willingness to forgive; dominating ($\beta = .004$, $t = .109$, $p > .05$) and avoiding styles ($\beta = -.054$, $t = -1.470$, $p > .05$) did not. For motivation to forgive, only integrating ($\beta = .432$, $t = 9.670$, $p < .001$), obliging ($\beta = .107$, $t = 2.594$, $p < .05$), and

avoiding styles (β =.082, t = 2.158, p <.05) were significant independent predictors; dominating (β = -.068, t = -1.760, p >.05) and compromising styles (β =.075, t = 1.777, p >.05) were not. For ability to forgive, integrating (β =.250, t = 5.204, p <.001), obliging (β =.249, t = 5.551, p <.001), and dominating styles (β = -.083, t = -2.001, p <.05) significantly and independently predicted the outcome, whereas avoiding (β = -.037, t = -.906, p >.05) and compromising styles (β =.024, t =.519, p >.05) did not. Finally, for preference to forgive, integrating (β =.238, t = 4.907, p <.001), obliging (β =.132, t = 2.895, p <.01), and compromising styles (β =.116, t = 2.509, p <.05) significantly and independently predicted the outcome, while dominating (β =.015, t =.359, p >.05) and avoiding styles (β =.001, t =.036, p >.05) did not. Across all four outcomes, the integrating style was consistently the strongest positive predictor, while the dominating and avoiding styles were the most consistently nonsignificant, underscoring the centrality of collaborative, high-concern-for-others conflict management to forgiveness in this sample.

Hypothesis 2:
This hypothesis stated that educational status will significantly influence the tendency to forgive among residents of Jos North, Nigeria. This hypothesis was tested using a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2:
Summary of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showing the influence of educational status on tendency to forgive among residents in Jos North, Nigeria. Table 2: Summary of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showing the influence of educational status on tendency to forgive among residents in Jos North, Nigeria. Table 2: Summary of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showing the influence of educational status on tendency to forgive among residents in Jos North, Nigeria.

Sources of Variation	**Sum of Squares**	***df***	**Mean Square**	***F***	***p***
Between Groups	227.410	2	113.705	.720	>.05
Within Groups	96209.897	609	157.980		
Total	96437.307	611			

As shown in Table 2, there was no statistically significant influence of educational status on the tendency to forgive among residents of Jos North, Nigeria, F(2, 609) =.720, p >.05. On the strength of this result, Hypothesis two, which stated that educational status would significantly influence the tendency to forgive among residents of Jos North, Nigeria, was rejected. The result suggests that, unlike the attitudinal and behavioural variables examined in this study, differences in formal educational status did not meaningfully distinguish residents in their disposition to forgive, a pattern broadly consistent with prior evidence that educational status is a comparatively weak and inconsistent correlate of forgiveness relative to psychological and behavioural factors (Mullet et al., 2005).

Discussion of Findings
The first hypothesis examined whether conflict resolution styles significantly predict the tendency to forgive among respondents. The findings revealed that conflict resolution style is the strongest and most robust correlate of forgiveness among all variables considered in the study, accounting for approximately 16.6%–34.5% of the variance in forgiveness tendencies. The effect size was also substantial (f^2 = 0.459), indicating a strong practical and statistical relationship between how individuals manage interpersonal conflict and their willingness to forgive. This

aligns with Jain and Arya's (2024) finding that forgiveness and conflict resolution jointly predicted marital satisfaction, with conflict resolution partially mediating the link. This suggests a mutually reinforcing relationship: just as forgiveness enhances relational outcomes through improved conflict resolution, how residents habitually approach conflict substantially shapes their disposition to forgive, particularly for willingness (34.5%) and motivation (30.5%), the most volitional dimensions of forgiveness. The strong, consistent positive contribution of integrating styles across all four outcomes is supported by Alimba and Abu's (2018) finding that the collaborating style was both the most frequently used and most strongly correlated with productivity (r =.32) among Nigerian teachers, compared to weaker relationships for competing and avoiding styles. Integrating approaches involve mutual problem-solving and genuine engagement with the other party's concerns, plausibly cultivating the empathy and perspective-taking that Exline et al. (2018) identified as central to forgiveness. This explains why integrating styles emerged as the single most powerful predictor: the style itself embeds the same relational orientation underlying forgiving behaviour. The recurring significance of obliging and compromising styles resonates with Adebisi et al.'s (2024) findings that conciliatory gestures including apology, negotiation, and compromise significantly predicted employee commitment and performance outcomes. These styles function as behavioural analogues of conciliation, suggesting residents who habitually accommodate others in conflict are similarly predisposed to relinquish resentment. This is corroborated by Umar et al. (2022) and Apeh and Mbaegbu (2020), who demonstrated that negotiation and conflict-resolution training improve conflict handling styles, affirming that accommodating approaches to conflict translate into more constructive relational outcomes, including forgiveness. By contrast, the general non-significance of dominating and avoiding styles with dominating styles even negatively influencing ability to forgive is consistent with Alimba and Abu's (2018) finding that competing and avoiding styles bore no meaningful relationship to productivity. These approaches do not provide the relational or cognitive engagement necessary to process and release a transgression, explaining their lack of association with forgiveness. This reinforces Karremans and Aarts (2016) and Wenzel and Okimoto's (2022) position that forgiveness is sustained through shared values and cooperative engagement, whereas status and power concerns foregrounded by dominating styles undermine forgiveness, particularly where power asymmetries are salient, as in Jos North's historically contested intercommunal relations. The second hypothesis examined whether educational status was significantly associated with forgiveness. The results showed that educational status was not a significant correlate of forgiveness, explaining only 3.2% of the variance, thereby indicating a negligible and nonsignificant contribution to the prediction of forgiveness tendencies. This suggests that formal education alone does not appear to be substantially associated with forgiveness tendencies. The finding is compatible with Enright's Process Model and Worthington's REACH Model because both emphasize psychological processes involved in forgiveness rather than educational attainment as the direct mechanism. In particular, empathy, perspective-taking, emotional processing, and a deliberate movement away from resentment are central to these models. Formal education may provide opportunities for cognitive development, but educational status by itself does not necessarily produce these forgiveness-related processes. The finding that educational status was not significantly associated with the tendency to forgive among residents of Jos North, Nigeria leads to the rejection of hypothesis five, and this null result is worth situating carefully against the broader literature rather than dismissed outright, since some studies have found education to be a relevant factor in related constructs while others have not. Okedo-Alex et al. (2021), for instance, found

that secondary education was a significant predictor of attitudes toward violence against women among adults in a rural Nigerian community, suggesting that in some contexts, formal education can shape normative beliefs about acceptable conduct within relationships. However, the present finding suggests that whatever association education may have with attitudes toward violence does not necessarily extend to the more specific and psychologically distinct construct of forgiveness, indicating that these two variables, though related, may be governed by different underlying mechanisms. This finding can also be considered in light of Thompson et al.'s (2005) conceptualisation of forgiveness as a dispositional orientation rather than simply an outcome of formal knowledge. The HFS framework focuses on relatively general patterns in how individuals respond to themselves, other people, and difficult situations. Accordingly, formal educational attainment may provide cognitive and informational resources without necessarily producing the emotional, motivational, and interpersonal dispositions required for forgiving responses. This interpretation is consistent with the present finding that educational status did not significantly differentiate tendency to forgive. It also fits the broader pattern of the study, in which the psychological and behavioural variables showed stronger relationships with forgiveness than the demographic variable. Thus, interventions in Jos North may be more productively directed toward intercultural competence, non-violent orientations, and constructive conflict management than toward educational status itself.

Conclusion

Conflict resolution style emerged as the strongest correlate of forgiveness, underscoring the importance of constructive engagement, emotional regulation, and cooperative problem-solving in promoting relational repair. By actively facilitating empathy, mutual problem-solving, and perspective-taking, these constructive styles provide the necessary psychological pathways through which interpersonal transgressions can be processed and released.

In contrast to the significant influence of behavioral conflict styles, formal educational status demonstrated no statistically significant effect on the tendency to forgive among residents. This null result aligns with established theoretical frameworks emphasizing that dispositional forgiveness is governed primarily by affective, cognitive, and relational mechanisms—such as emotional regulation and empathy rather than by cognitive literacy or academic achievement alone. While formal education may expand cognitive awareness and exposure to diverse perspectives, it does not inherently translate into the socio-emotional competencies required for interpersonal reconciliation. Consequently, demographic indicators like educational attainment offer limited explanatory power when evaluating an individual's readiness to forgive in complex social environments.

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