

**CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND PEACE COEXISTENCE AS
CORRELATES OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION AMONG SECONDARY
SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ABIA STATE**

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated cultural understanding and peace coexistence as correlates of Social Studies Education among secondary school students in Abia State. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a correlational research design. The study population consisted of 6,180 junior secondary school students in Abia State who were enrolled in social studies classes, while the sample comprised 300 students selected using a multi-staged sampling method. Data for the study were collected using two researcher-developed instruments on a four-point Likert scale titled “Cultural Understanding and Peaceful Coexistence Questionnaire (CUPCQ)” and “Social Studies Education Questionnaire (SSEQ)”. The response options were structured as: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE). The instruments were subjected to face and content validity by three experts, two in Social Studies Education and one in Measurement and Evaluation from the Faculty of Education, Abia State University, Uturu; and subjected to reliability using 30 JSS II students from two public secondary schools outside the sampled schools, and returned reliability coefficients of 0.82 for the SSEQ and 0.85 for the CUPCQ. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to answer the research questions, while the t-test statistic associated with regression was employed to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance for acceptance or rejection. The study's findings revealed that cultural understanding has a positive relationship with Social Studies education to a high extent, while and peaceful coexistence has a positive relationship with students' Social Studies education to a low extent. The study concluded that Social Studies education plays a significant role in promoting cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence among secondary school students in Abia State, peaceful coexistence has a positive but weak relationship with Social Studies education. The study recommended among others that teachers should adopt interactive and culturally responsive teaching strategies, such as role-plays, group discussions, and cultural simulations, to actively engage students in exploring and appreciating cultural diversity.

KEYWORDS: Peaceful Coexistence, Cultural Understanding, Social Studies Education.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a nation characterised by wide cultural diversity, with over three hundred (300) ethnic groups and over 400 languages. While this diversity is a source of national heritage, it also poses significant challenges to fostering unity. Social Studies education is widely recognized as a critical vehicle for fostering cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence among learners, particularly in culturally diverse societies. Social Studies integrates concepts from history, civics, geography, and ethics to equip students with the knowledge, values, and skills necessary for active and responsible citizenship in multicultural settings. Through engagement with social issues, cultural narratives, and civic responsibilities, Social Studies promotes tolerance, respect for diversity, and the ability to navigate social differences constructively, contributing to harmonious social interactions among students (Folorunso & Adegboye, 2024; Adekunle, 2025).

In Nigeria, a society marked by ethnic, cultural, and religious plurality, the role of Social Studies in shaping attitudes toward diversity and peace cannot be overstated. By providing platforms for learners to explore cultural norms, social values, and intergroup relations, Social Studies education enhances awareness of others' traditions and perspectives, thereby laying the foundation for mutual respect and social cohesion (Adekunle, 2025). The subject also embeds peace-oriented content that encourages learners to develop conflict resolution skills and adopt non-violent approaches to disagreements. This attribute is indispensable in reducing tension and fostering peaceful coexistence in school environments and beyond (Omiyefa, 2024).

In contemporary educational discourse, integrating cultural understanding and peace education within the Social Studies curriculum is essential for nurturing students' social and emotional intelligence, thereby contributing to a stable and harmonious learning environment. According to Adekunle (2025), engaging students through collaborative and value-based Social Studies activities enhances their civic consciousness and commitment to peaceful interactions. Similarly, Omiyefa (2024) noted that experiential learning approaches, including role plays, simulations, and group discussions, foster empathy, cooperation, and intercultural awareness, which are critical for effective conflict management among students.

The 21st-century learner is exposed to increasingly complex social realities, including ethnic diversity, social media interactions, and competitive academic environments. As a result, classrooms must serve not only as centres for academic instruction but also as platforms for cultivating socio-emotional skills essential for cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence. Njoroge and Bennaars (2023) observe that education emphasizing peace and human rights equips students with attitudes and behaviors that prevent violence, encourage reconciliation, and support sustainable social cohesion. In this regard, Social Studies serves as a practical medium for nurturing conflict resolution and intercultural competence through participatory and problem-solving activities that reflect real-life social scenarios.

Enhancing students' cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence through Social Studies instruction requires deliberate pedagogical strategies that emphasize peaceful dialogue, critical reflection, and collaboration between individuals. Kibiwott

and Njoroge (2024) demonstrate that simulation-based and interactive learning environments significantly improve students' interpersonal understanding and problem-solving abilities, which are foundational to peacebuilding. Additionally, Valverde-Berrocso, Acevedo-Borrega, and Cerezo-Pizarro (2022) aver that integrating civic responsibility with intercultural education enhances students' awareness of diversity and fosters positive social interactions. These highlight the relevance of Social Studies as a tool for social transformation and the promotion of peaceful coexistence in secondary schools.

Some studies have been conducted in this area, such as Makama Sani and Yahaya (2025), who investigated the role of Social Studies in fostering cultural tolerance and National Integration in Teacher Education Institutions. Findings reveal that while Social Studies promotes unity, inconsistencies in curriculum implementation and limited interactive teaching methods hinder its effectiveness. Cornelius-Ukpepi, Ndifon and Ibe (2019) investigated Socio-cultural diversity as a determinant of Social Studies students' academic performance in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. The results revealed that social and cultural diversity significantly influence students' Social Studies education and their academic performance in the Calabar Education Zone.

Omiyefa (2024) examined Teachers' perception of Social Studies as an instrument for promoting peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. Findings showed that Social Studies effectively fosters tolerance and civic attitudes necessary for social harmony among students, demonstrating its potential to promote peaceful coexistence in diverse student populations. Ogunmola and Amosun (2025) investigated students' attitudes to peace education concepts in Social Studies in junior secondary schools in Oyo West LGA, Oyo State. The study found high student awareness of peace concepts, which are closely linked to peaceful interactions, tolerance, and positive cross-cultural relationships.

Research indicates that Social Studies enables students to acquire attitudes of tolerance and appreciation for cultural diversity, which are central to building a culture of peace and reducing social tensions in heterogeneous communities (Folorunso & Adegboye, 2024; Omiyefa, 2024). In light of persistent ethnic and social conflicts within many regions of Nigeria, including Abia State, an investigation of the extent to which Social Studies education correlates with cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence among secondary school students is necessary. This study, therefore, examines the relationships between cultural understanding, peace coexistence and Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State.

Statement of the Problem

In contemporary multicultural societies, secondary schools are increasingly expected to serve as critical spaces for fostering cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence among young people. In Nigeria, and particularly in Abia State, schools bring together students from diverse ethnic, religious, and socio-cultural backgrounds. While this diversity has the potential to enrich learning experiences, it has also been associated with challenges such as intolerance, prejudice, bullying, intergroup conflicts, and occasional violence among students. These challenges threaten social harmony

within schools and undermine the broader goals of education in promoting national unity and sustainable peace.

Social Studies education is designed to address such societal challenges by equipping learners with the knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills necessary for understanding cultural diversity, respecting differences, and resolving conflicts peacefully. The curriculum emphasises civic responsibility, social interaction, tolerance, and democratic values, which are fundamental to cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence. Despite the inclusion of these objectives in the Social Studies curriculum, observable incidents of cultural misunderstanding, intolerance, and conflict among secondary school students in Abia State suggest that the desired outcomes of Social Studies education may not be fully realized in practice.

Empirical evidence on how Social Studies education relates to students' cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence remains limited, particularly at the secondary school level within the context of Abia State. Existing studies have largely examined Social Studies education in relation to civic competence, moral development, or general social behaviour, with fewer studies empirically establishing the extent to which cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence are associated with Social Studies learning outcomes. Moreover, there is insufficient localized research that simultaneously examines cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence as correlates of Social Studies education, thereby creating a knowledge gap relevant for curriculum implementation and educational planning.

This gap in empirical evidence poses a challenge for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers who require context-specific data to strengthen Social Studies instruction as a tool for promoting social harmony in schools. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence as correlates of Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. To what extent does cultural understanding relate to Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State?
2. To what extent does peaceful coexistence relate to Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State?

Hypotheses

H₁: There is no significant relationship between cultural understanding and Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State.

H₂: There is no significant relationship between peaceful coexistence and Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design. A correlational design is appropriate for this study because it seeks to determine the nature and strength of the relationship between students' cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence and Social Studies education without manipulating any of the variables. The study was conducted in Abia State, one of the five states in the Southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Abia State has a mix of urban and rural communities and a diverse population that reflects different cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. The state is organized into three education zones: Aba, Umuahia, and Ohafia. Secondary schools in these zones offer Social Studies as a core subject at the junior secondary level. The choice of Abia State was informed by the increasing concern over issues of cultural intolerance, student conflicts, and the need to strengthen peaceful coexistence among learners through school-based interventions such as Social Studies education. The population of the study comprised 6,180 Junior Secondary School II (JSS II) students in public secondary schools in Abia State who were offering Social Studies during the 2024/2025 academic session. JSS II students were considered appropriate for the study because they are sufficiently mature and have been adequately exposed to Social Studies concepts relating to culture, citizenship, social interaction, and peaceful living. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select the sample for the study. In the first stage, two education zones were randomly selected from the three zones in the state. In the second stage, five public secondary schools were randomly selected from each of the chosen zones, giving a total of ten schools. In the third stage, thirty (30) JSS II students were selected from each school using simple random sampling. This procedure resulted in a total sample size of 300 students, which was considered adequate for the study. Data for the study were collected using two researcher-developed instruments on a four-point Likert scale titled "Cultural Understanding and Peaceful Coexistence Questionnaire (CUPCQ)" and "Social Studies Education Questionnaire (SSEQ)". The response options were structured as: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE). The CUPCQ measured students' levels of cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence, while SSEQ measured students' exposure to and experiences in Social Studies education. The instruments were subjected to face and content validity by three experts, two in Social Studies Education and one in Measurement and Evaluation from the Faculty of Education, Abia State University, Uturu. Their inputs ensured that the items were clear, relevant, and adequately covered the variables under investigation. To establish the reliability of the instruments, a trial test was conducted on 30 JSS II students from two public secondary schools outside the sampled schools. The internal consistency of the instruments was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding reliability coefficients of 0.82 for the SSEQ and 0.85 for the CUPCQ, which were considered acceptable for the study. The validated instruments were administered by researcher with the assistance of three trained research assistants. The research assistants were briefed on the objectives of the study and the procedures for administering the questionnaires to ensure uniformity. A total of 300 copies of the questionnaires were distributed, out of which 292 copies were correctly completed and returned, representing a 97.3% return rate. Data collected were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to answer the research

questions, while the t-test statistic associated with regression was employed to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance for acceptance or rejection.

Results

The result from study indicated the following;

Research Question One

To what extent does cultural understanding relate to Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State?

Table 1: Simple Linear Regression Analysis Between cultural understanding and Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State

Model	r	r Square	r square x 100	Adjusted r Square	Remarks
1	.757 ^a	.573	57.3	.573	High Extent

a. Predictors: (Constant), Cultural Understanding

Table 1 presents the results of a simple linear regression analysis showing the extent to which cultural understanding relates to Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State. The correlation coefficient (r) of 0.757 indicates a strong positive relationship between cultural understanding and Social Studies education. This implies that as students' level of cultural understanding increases, their engagement and outcomes in Social Studies education also tend to increase correspondingly. The coefficient of determination (r²) is 0.573, which indicates that approximately 57.3% of the variance in Social Studies education among the students is explained by cultural understanding. This suggests that cultural understanding makes a substantial contribution to students' Social Studies education.

Research Question Two

To what extent does peaceful coexistence relate to Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State?

Table 2: Simple Linear Regression Analysis Between peaceful coexistence and Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State

Model	R	r Square	r square x 100	Adjusted r Square	Remarks
1	.469 _a	.220	22.0	.219	Low Extent

a. Predictors: (Constant), Peaceful Coexistence

Table 2 presents the results of a simple linear regression analysis showing the extent to which peaceful coexistence relates to Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State. The correlation coefficient (r) of 0.469 indicates a weak positive relationship between peaceful coexistence and Social Studies education. This implies that as students' level of peaceful coexistence increases, their engagement and outcomes in Social Studies education also tend to increase, though to a limited extent. The coefficient of determination (r²) is 0.220, which indicates that approximately 22.0% of the variance in Social Studies education among the students is explained by peaceful coexistence. This suggests that peaceful coexistence contributes to students' Social Studies education to a low extent.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between cultural understanding and Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State.

Table 3: Summary of t-test Statistic Associated with Regression Analysis of Significant Relationship Between cultural understanding and Social Studies education

Model	No	df	β	t	t-crit	Sig	Decision
Cultural understanding	292		.757	28.294	1.96	0.00	Reject Ho
Social Studies Education		291					

Table 3 presents the t-test result associated with the regression analysis conducted to determine whether a significant relationship exists between cultural understanding and Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State. The result shows a standardised regression coefficient (β) of 0.757, indicating a strong positive contribution of cultural understanding to Social Studies education. The calculated t-value of 28.294 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance. In addition, the significance value ($p = 0.00$) is less than 0.05. Based on these results, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between cultural understanding and Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State, is rejected. This implies that a statistically significant relationship exists between cultural understanding and Social Studies education.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between peaceful coexistence and Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State.

Table 4: Summary of t-test Statistic Associated with Regression Analysis of Significant Relationship Between cultural understanding and Social Studies education

Model	No	df	β	t	t-crit	Sig	Decision
Peaceful Coexistence	292		.469	12.961	1.96	0.00	Reject Ho
Social Studies Education		291					

Table 4 presents the t-test result associated with the regression analysis conducted to determine whether a significant relationship exists between peaceful coexistence and Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State. The standardised regression coefficient (β) of 0.469 indicates a positive contribution of peaceful coexistence to Social Studies education. The calculated t-value of 12.961 exceeds the critical t-value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance. Furthermore, the significance value ($p = 0.00$) is less than the 0.05 threshold. In view of these results, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between peaceful coexistence and Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State is rejected. This finding implies that a statistically significant relationship exists between peaceful coexistence and Social Studies education.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from research question one revealed that cultural understanding relates positively to a high extent with Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State. The test of the hypothesis was rejected, indicating that cultural understanding significantly relates to Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State. This suggests that Social Studies education plays a critical role in shaping students' awareness, appreciation, and understanding of cultural differences, which in turn enhances their learning experiences in the subject. This finding is consistent with the study of Makama Sani and Yahaya (2025), who investigated the role of Social Studies in fostering cultural tolerance and national integration in teacher education institutions. Their findings revealed that Social Studies promotes unity and cultural tolerance among learners. However, they noted that inconsistencies in curriculum implementation and limited use of interactive teaching methods constrained its full potential. Also, the finding aligns with Cornelius-Ukpepi, Ndifon, and Ibe (2019), who examined socio-cultural diversity as a determinant of Social Studies students' academic performance in Calabar Education Zone, Cross River State. Their study revealed that social and cultural diversity significantly influence students' Social Studies education and academic performance. This corroborates the present study's result, as it demonstrates that exposure to diverse cultural contexts through Social Studies enhances students' understanding and academic engagement in the subject.

The finding from the second research question, which investigated the extent to which peaceful coexistence relates to Social Studies education among secondary school students in Abia State, revealed that peaceful coexistence relates positively to Social Studies education to a low extent. The test of hypothesis two further showed that peaceful coexistence significantly relates to Social Studies education. This result suggests that Social Studies education plays a meaningful role in fostering attitudes, values, and behaviours that support peaceful living among students, even though its impact may be moderated by other contextual factors. The finding from this study is consistent with that of Omiyefa (2024), who examined teachers' perceptions of Social Studies as an instrument for promoting peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. The study revealed that Social Studies effectively fosters tolerance, civic attitudes, and social harmony among students, demonstrating its capacity to promote peaceful coexistence in diverse learning environments. In the same vein, the finding agrees with that of Ogunmola and Amosun (2025), who investigated students' attitudes toward peace education concepts in Social Studies in junior secondary schools in Oyo West Local Government Area of Oyo State. Their study found a high level of students' awareness of peace-related concepts, which were closely linked to peaceful interactions, tolerance, and positive cross-cultural relationships among learners.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that Social Studies education plays a significant role in promoting cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence among secondary school students in Abia State. The study established that cultural understanding has a strong and positive relationship with Social Studies education, indicating that the subject effectively enhances students' awareness,

appreciation, and acceptance of diverse cultural values, beliefs, and practices. This demonstrates that Social Studies serves as a vital medium for nurturing tolerance, mutual respect, and inclusiveness among learners in a multicultural society. The findings further revealed that peaceful coexistence has a positive but weak relationship with Social Studies education, although the relationship was statistically significant. This suggests that while Social Studies contributes meaningfully to fostering peaceful interactions, cooperation, and harmony among students, its influence on peaceful coexistence may be moderated by other social and environmental factors beyond classroom instruction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Teachers should adopt interactive and culturally responsive teaching strategies, such as role-plays, group discussions, and cultural simulations to actively engage students in exploring and appreciating cultural diversity.
2. Schools should integrate practical peace education activities within Social Studies lessons, including collaborative problem-solving and conflict resolution exercises, to strengthen students' ability to coexist harmoniously and apply peace-oriented values in their daily interactions.

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