Ethno-Religious Settlement Pattern, Teachers' Posting, Productivity and Junior Secondary School Students' Achievement in Social Studies in Plateau State, Nigeria

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Abstract
This study examined the relationship between ethno-religious settlement pattern and teachers' posting, teachers' productivity and junior secondary school students' achievement in Social Studies in the Northern Senatorial Zone of Plateau State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The population comprised the teachers and students of the 99 public junior secondary schools in the six local government areas of the zone, and purposive sampling was used to select 21 schools, 279 teachers and 701 students. Data were collected with the Teachers' Posting and Settlement Pattern Questionnaire (TPSPQ), the Students' Settlement Pattern Perception Questionnaire (SSPPQ) and the 30-item Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT), which was administered once. The instruments were given face and content validation by experts in Test and Measurement at the University of Jos, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .84 (TPSPQ), .81 (SSPPQ) and .79 (SSAT) showed that the questionnaires were highly consistent and the test acceptably so, since all exceeded the .70 benchmark and the instruments were therefore dependable for group-level comparison. Means and standard deviations answered five research questions, and four null hypotheses were tested at the .05 level with the independent samples t-test and Pearson product-moment correlation. Respondents largely agreed that religious considerations influence teachers' posting and the school's students attend, and this agreement was stronger in Christian-dominated than in Muslim-dominated zones. Teachers' posting was closely aligned with the religious character of school areas, and teachers reported that religious settlement pattern reduces their productivity, with greater polarisation going with lower productivity. Students' achievement in Social Studies was average, and male students achieved significantly higher than female students. It is recommended that the Plateau State Ministry of Education adopt a merit-based, religion-neutral posting policy, strengthen peacebuilding content in Social Studies, and support inter-community school exchanges and the safety of female teachers and learners.

Keywords: *ethno-religious settlement pattern, teachers' posting, teacher productivity, Social Studies achievement, junior secondary school, Plateau State*

1. Introduction

Plateau State has historically been home to many ethnic, religious and cultural groups living side by side. Jos, the state capital, earned the name "Tin City" during the colonial period, when tin mining attracted migrants from across Nigeria and beyond. Before the crises of 2001, people of different faiths and backgrounds are reported to have lived in mixed settlements, attended

the same schools and shared social and economic activities (Nnabuihe, 2016). The violence that broke out in September 2001 and recurred in later years is widely reported to have altered where people live in Jos and the wider Northern Senatorial Zone, as communities moved towards areas dominated by their own ethnic or religious group (Abdulyakeen, 2023; Mustapha & Christian, 2023; Olayinka, 2023). In this study, the term ethno-religious settlement pattern refers to this distribution of communities across residential areas according to ethnic and religious identity. The scale of the violence is captured in conflict event records. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project [ACLED] (2024) places Nigeria in the "extreme" category of its conflict index, with over 4,000 political violence events and 9,355 fatalities recorded between December 2023 and November 2024. Within Plateau State, the ACLED records for Jos North Local Government Area document 279 conflict events between this time frame. Schools are community institutions, and their students, teachers and surroundings are drawn from the neighbourhoods in which they are located. Changes in residential patterns may therefore be reflected in who attends a school, which teachers are posted to or willing to serve in it, and how well teaching and learning proceed. Social Studies is of particular interest because it is the junior secondary school subject charged with building citizenship, shared values and national unity. Eferebo (2022) argues that for Nigeria to achieve sustainable educational development and national unity, the civic purposes of education must be actively promoted even in the face of ethno-religious tension. Whether, and to what extent, settlement patterns in the Northern Senatorial Zone are connected with teachers' posting, teachers' productivity and students' achievement in Social Studies is the question this study sets out to examine. Existing studies have examined conflict and settlement dynamics (Nnabuihe, 2016), the polarisation of institutions (Abdulyakeen, 2023), residential patterns and the role of women in conflict resolution (Mustapha & Christian, 2023), and the effect of crisis on student and teacher populations in Jos schools (Jacob, 2015). Others have looked at university students of Social Studies (Olayinka, 2023), professional relationships among staff of higher and secondary institutions (Dayil, 2019) and community conditions affecting children's achievement (Rintep & Akoji, 2025). To the knowledge of the researchers, none of these studies brings teachers' posting, teachers' productivity and a measured test of Social Studies achievement together at the junior secondary school level in the zone. Because it cannot be known in advance what such evidence will show, an empirical study is needed before posting policy, school climate and learning outcomes can be addressed with confidence. This study was designed to supply that evidence without assuming its outcome, and its findings are interpreted only after the results are presented.

2. Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study was to examine ethno-religious settlement pattern in relation to teachers' posting, teachers' productivity and junior secondary school students' achievement in Social Studies in the Northern Senatorial Zone of Plateau State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

i. determine the attitude of respondents (teachers and students) towards ethno-religious considerations in teachers' posting in the Northern Senatorial Zone;
ii. ascertain the extent to which teachers' posting to junior secondary schools reflects religious settlement pattern in the zone;
iii. ascertain the extent to which teachers perceive religious settlement pattern as affecting their productivity;
iv. determine the level of junior secondary school students' achievement in Social Studies, measured on its own with the Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT); and
v. determine the difference in the Social Studies achievement of male and female junior secondary school students.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

i. What is the attitude of respondents towards ethno-religious considerations in teachers' posting in the Northern Senatorial Zone of Plateau State?

ii. To what extent does teachers' posting to junior secondary schools reflect religious settlement pattern in the Northern Senatorial Zone?

iii. To what extent do teachers perceive religious settlement pattern as affecting their productivity?

iv. What is the level of junior secondary school students' achievement in Social Studies in the Northern Senatorial Zone?

v. What is the difference in the mean Social Studies achievement scores of male and female junior secondary school students?

4. Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance:

i. H01: There is no significant difference in the mean attitude scores of students in Christian-dominated and Muslim-dominated school zones towards ethno-religious considerations in teachers' posting.

ii. H02: There is no significant difference in the mean posting alignment scores of teachers in Christian-dominated and Muslim-dominated local government areas.

iii. H03: There is no significant relationship between teachers' scores on religious settlement pattern and their productivity scores.

iv. H04: There is no significant difference in the mean Social Studies achievement scores of male and female junior secondary school students.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Ethno-Religious Conflict and Settlement Patterns in Nigeria

The literature on ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria repeatedly links violence to changes in where people live. Nnabuihe (2016), in a doctoral study of conflict and settlement dynamics in Plateau State from 1994 to 2012, traced how successive episodes of communal violence restructured residential geography along ethnic and religious fault lines. Abdulyakeen (2023) documents how the federal character principle and indigenous-settler politics generated the tensions that fuelled ethno-religious crises in Jos North, with ethnically and religiously segregated neighbourhoods emerging as a direct outcome. Mustapha and Christian (2023), examining the experience of Plateau and Bauchi States, identified religious intolerance as the main driver of the conflicts that influenced residential segregation. Their study also drew attention to the role of women in peacebuilding in mixed residential areas, which underscores the gendered dimension of both conflict and coexistence. Studies from other parts of northern and central Nigeria point in the same direction. Saleh, Bilyaminu, and Usman (2025), working in Yobe South, found that intergroup relations deteriorate markedly in communities experiencing sustained conflict, with adverse consequences for shared public institutions, schools included. Adamu, Abdulsalam, and Baba (2025), studying Kaduna metropolis, reported that historical conflicts, political interests and socio-economic pressures such as unemployment drive segregation and weaken inter-religious harmony. Okoli (2025) shows how communal conflict in central Nigeria, involving communities such as the Alago and the Eggon, fractures intergroup relations and produces patterns of separation similar to those described for Jos. Taken together, these studies suggest that settlement separation along ethnic and religious lines is a recurring feature of conflict-affected parts of the country rather than a peculiarity of one state.

Scholars also emphasise that separation is not inevitable and can be managed. Ottuh (2025) argues that the management of diversity is central to sustainable peace in Nigeria, because unmanaged ethno-religious difference tends to harden into suspicion and separation. Udoh (2025) likewise proposes practical strategies built on dialogue, inter-community engagement and policy reform for resolving ethno-religious conflicts and restoring the civic functions of public institutions. These contributions matter for education because schools are among the few public institutions in which children and adults from different groups can still meet in a structured way. Whether schools in the Northern Senatorial Zone perform that function depends in part on the settlement patterns that surround them.

The conflict event records for Jos North, summarised in Figure 1, give a sense of how persistent the violence has been. The records show peaks of activity around 2010 and 2011 and again in 2022 and 2024, with violence against civilians the most frequent event type, followed by riots and battles (ACLED, 2024). Such waves of violence are the kind of events that the qualitative literature associates with displacement and the re-patterning of settlements. The figure does not by itself show that settlements changed, but it does show the sustained insecurity within which residential and school decisions have been made. It therefore provides context for the present study without substituting for the data collected from teachers and students.

5.2 Settlement Patterns and Educational Institutions

The relationship between ethno-religious residential segregation and schooling has been examined at several levels. Olayinka (2023), in a cross-sectional survey of Social Studies undergraduates at the University of Jos, found that ethno-religious crisis affected students' settlement patterns, restricted freedom of socialisation and adversely affected academic achievement. The study concluded that the redrawing of the residential map of Jos left student achievement vulnerable to conflict-driven residential restrictions. Jacob (2015), studying the pattern of student and teacher populations in 18 schools in Jos with stratified random sampling, found a significant difference between student populations before 2001 and from 2001 to 2014 when classified by religion. The movement of Christian teachers from mixed or Muslim-dominated areas to areas perceived as safe was reported to have harmed the quality of learning in the schools they left. Olayinka and Ridwan (2025) extend these findings by showing that conflict directly affects secondary school education in the Jos Jarawa community of Jos North. Evidence from other settings and from the history of Nigerian education adds to this picture. Milliken, Bates, and Smith (2020) show that in Northern Ireland, ethnic separation, exemptions from fair employment legislation and separate teacher training systems produce community-consistent teacher deployment, so that a considerable share of teachers has had no educational experience outside the community of origin. This comparison illustrates how divided societies can reproduce their divisions within the teaching workforce. Ezegwu and Okoye (2024), examining the takeover of mission schools by the Nigerian military government, demonstrate that political and religious bargaining over control of education increased access but reduced quality, with different consequences for different ethno-religious groups. Eferebo (2022) adds that ethno-religious conflicts stretch national unity to breaking point and argues for an approach to education that confronts ethno-religious difference directly in the interest of sustainable governance.

5.3 Teacher Posting, Productivity and Conflict

The effects of ethno-religious conflict on the professional lives of teachers in Plateau State are most fully documented by Dayil (2019), whose study of higher and secondary institutions in Jos found that conflict undermined codes of professional work relationships, subjected women teachers to religious and gendered scrutiny and led to widespread alienation. The study reported consequences for productivity and career progression, particularly for female teachers.

Abdulyakeen (2023) adds that conflict has polarised virtually all institutions in Jos along ethnic and religious lines, with civil servants facing intimidation and job insecurity linked to sharing or not sharing the religious or ethnic identity of their superiors. Jacob (2015) reports that after the 2001 crisis, teacher posting in the Northern Senatorial Zone moved towards a system in which Christian teachers are mainly deployed to Christian school zones and Muslim teachers to Muslim zones. Such deployment can limit teachers' professional growth and their interaction with students of other faiths, and Eferebo (2022) identifies it as particularly harmful to the Social Studies mandate of fostering unity in diversity. Community conditions also bear on how teachers work and how students learn. Rintep and Akoji (2025), studying children's educational achievement in Kabong, Plateau State, found that poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, noise pollution and a lack of positive role models in low-income settlements reduce concentration, attendance and motivation. These findings are a reminder that settlement pattern is one among several community factors that may shape school outcomes. They also suggest that posting is not only an administrative exercise but a process that can either bridge or reinforce social divisions. Studies that attend to posting, productivity and achievement together are therefore better placed to separate the contribution of each factor.

5.4 Gender, Conflict and Academic Achievement

Gender is an important consideration in any account of how ethno-religious conflict touches education. Dayil (2019) found that female teachers bear disproportionate professional costs from conflict-induced insecurity, including gendered scrutiny, alienation and career stagnation. Such vulnerability at the teacher level may have implications for female students, who may lack same-gender role models and mentors in schools serving religiously homogeneous communities. Mustapha and Christian (2023) acknowledge that gender is a strong factor in ethno-religious crisis, noting that females occupy particular roles in conflict dynamics even though men are usually at the forefront of violence. This does not shield female students or teachers from the educational disruptions that accompany settlement-based polarisation.

Adamu et al. (2025) similarly note a marked gender disparity in responses to settlement-related surveys in Kaduna, which they attribute to cultural and religious restrictions on women's participation in public discourse. Rintep and Akoji (2025) establish that family and community processes create different learning conditions for children, a finding that intersects with gender when conflict reshapes family and community life. Taken together, these studies suggest that male and female learners may not experience conflict-affected schooling in the same way. The present study therefore measures students' achievement in Social Studies on its own and then compares the mean achievement of male and female students.

6. Theoretical Framework

6.1 Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory, developed by Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000), holds that networks of relationships, norms of reciprocity and trust are resources that make collective action and learning possible. Coleman (1988) argued that social capital in families and communities supports the creation of human capital, including the educational attainment of children. Putnam (2000) distinguished bridging social capital, which links people across different social groups, from bonding social capital, which strengthens ties within a single group. Ethno-religious conflict and residential segregation can erode bridging capital across religious lines while reinforcing bonding capital within homogeneous enclaves. When schools mirror segregated neighbourhoods, they may stop functioning as places where bridging capital is formed, which weakens the civic purposes of Social Studies education (Eferebo, 2022).

The theory is relevant to the study because it explains how settlement pattern can shape the relational resources available to teachers and students. Teachers posted to schools within their

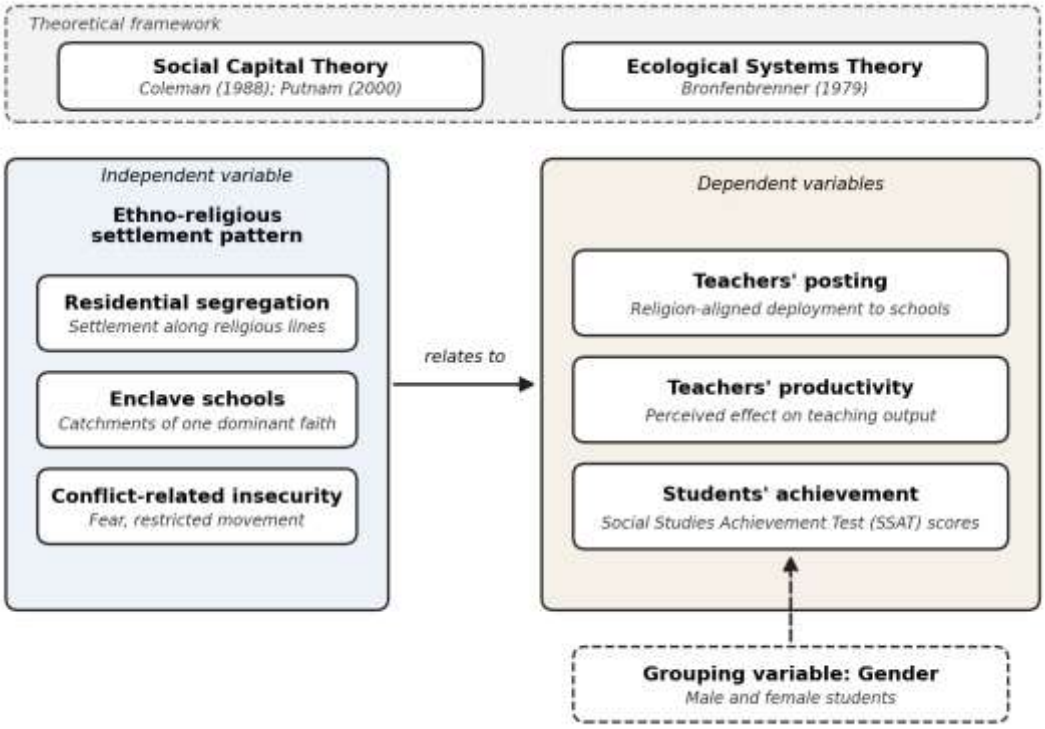
own religious community may enjoy trust and support, yet they may have fewer opportunities to work with and teach people of other faiths. Students in homogeneous schools may likewise gain strong in-group bonds while meeting few peers or teachers from other groups. A limitation of the theory is that bonding capital is not harmful in itself and can protect members of a community in times of insecurity. The theory is therefore used to frame what is gained and lost when posting and schooling follow settlement lines, rather than to assume that segregation has only negative consequences.

6.2 Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory, articulated by Bronfenbrenner (1979), holds that human development occurs through interaction between the individual and several nested environmental systems. The microsystem includes the school and classroom, the mesosystem the links between school and community, the exosystem institutions such as local government and education authorities, and the macrosystem the wider cultural and religious values of society. Ethno-religious settlement pattern operates across these levels, because it shapes the community in which a school is located, informs the posting decisions of education authorities and affects the safety and socialisation experiences of teachers and students. The theory is appropriate because it avoids reducing educational outcomes to individual factors and instead places posting, productivity and achievement within their social and institutional surroundings. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is used only as a supporting perspective. Its relevant insight is that when safety needs are threatened by fear and restricted movement, the capacity for work and learning may be constrained. The two frameworks above are preferred as the main explanation because they address relational and environmental processes directly, whereas Maslow's account is largely individual. A shared limitation of all three perspectives is that they offer expectations rather than proof, so the present study tests these expectations with data instead of assuming them.

6.3 Conceptual Framework

Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework of the study. The independent variable is ethno-religious settlement pattern, which comprises residential segregation, enclave schools and conflict-related insecurity. The dependent variables are teachers' posting, teachers' productivity and students' achievement in Social Studies, each of which is measured in its own right before it is related to settlement pattern. Gender is treated as a grouping variable in the analysis of achievement. The theories lead one to expect an association between settlement pattern and these outcomes, but the direction and strength of that association are matters for the data to show.



Conceptual framework of the study. Based on Social Capital Theory (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000) and Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

7. Methodology

7.1 Research Design

A descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. Descriptive survey research is suitable for investigating the attitudes, perceptions and characteristics of a defined population at a given point in time, and it has been used in comparable studies of ethno-religious conflict and education in Nigeria (Jacob, 2015; Mustapha & Christian, 2023). The design allowed the phenomena under study to be described quantitatively and the hypotheses to be tested with inferential statistics. It was not an experimental study, so no variable was manipulated and no pre-test or post-test was used. Students' achievement was therefore measured once, with a single administration of the achievement test.

7.2 Population and Sample

The population comprised all junior secondary school students and teachers in the 99 public junior secondary schools of the six local government areas of the Northern Senatorial Zone of Plateau State, namely Jos North, Jos South, Jos East, Bassa, Riyom and Barkin-Ladi. The total student population was 29,201 and the teacher population was 1,413. Purposive sampling was used to select 21 schools, representing about 21% of the schools in the zone. The sample comprised 701 students, about 2.4% of the student population, and 279 teachers, about 20% of the teacher population. Because the schools were purposively selected and the student sample is a small fraction of the population, the findings are best generalised to the wider zone with caution. Research assistants, one for each local government area, were trained and deployed to administer the instruments.

7.3 Instruments

Three instruments were used for data collection. The Teachers' Posting and Settlement Pattern Questionnaire (TPSPQ) measured teachers' perceptions of posting and of settlement pattern. The Students' Settlement Pattern Perception Questionnaire (SSPPQ) measured students' perceptions of ethno-religious settlement pattern in their school environments. The Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT) was a 30-item test developed to measure students' achievement in Social Studies. The items of the TPSPQ and SSPPQ were set on a five-point scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), and the SSAT was administered once to the student respondents. The instruments were given face and content validation by experts in Test and Measurement at the University of Jos, who checked that the items were clear, relevant to the variables and adequate in coverage. Reliability was established with Cronbach's alpha, which gave coefficients of .84 for the TPSPQ, .81 for the SSPPQ and .79 for the SSAT. All three exceeded the .70 benchmark recommended for research instruments. The coefficients for the two questionnaires indicate high internal consistency, meaning that their items measured the same underlying construct in a stable way. The coefficient for the achievement test indicates acceptable consistency, which makes the test dependable for comparing the scores of groups, although it would call for more caution if used to make decisions about individual students.

7.4 Data Analysis

Means and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions, with a decision point of 3.00, the mid-point of the five-point scale: a mean of 3.00 or above indicated agreement and a mean below 3.00 indicated disagreement. The independent samples t-test was used to test H01, H02 and H04, and Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test H03, all at the .05 level of significance with SPSS Version 26. For H01 and H02, respondents were grouped by the settlement zone of their school, classified as Christian-dominated or Muslim-dominated from the predominant religious affiliation of the school catchment area and checked against school enrolment records and community religious composition data. For H03, each teacher's religious settlement pattern score was the mean of that teacher's responses to the settlement pattern items of the TPSPQ, and the productivity score was the mean of the productivity items, so that the two scores could be correlated across the 279 teachers. Students' achievement was first described on its own with the SSAT scores before male and female students were compared.

8. Results

Research Question 1: Attitude of Respondents Towards Ethno-Religious Considerations in Teachers' Posting

Table 1

Attitude of Respondents Towards Ethno-Religious Considerations in Teachers' Posting

S/N	Item	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
1	Teachers prefer posting to schools in their religious enclaves	3.82	0.91	1	5
2	Students attend schools closer to their religious settlements	3.74	0.89	1	5
3	Ethno-religious divisions influence posting decisions by authorities	3.91	0.85	1	5
4	School authorities accommodate ethno-religious preferences in postings	3.56	0.97	1	5
5	Students feel safer learning in religiously homogeneous schools	3.78	0.93	1	5
Composite		**3.76**	**0.91**	—	—

Note. Decision point = 3.00. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

Table 1 shows that all five items had means above the decision point of 3.00, and the composite mean was 3.76 (*SD* = 0.91). The highest-rated item was "Ethno-religious divisions influence posting decisions by authorities" (*M* = 3.91, *SD* = 0.85). The lowest-rated item, "School authorities accommodate ethno-religious preferences in postings" (*M* = 3.56, *SD* = 0.97), was still well within the range of agreement. Respondents therefore agreed on every item, which means that teachers and students in the zone generally acknowledged that religious considerations are part of how teachers are posted and where students feel safe to learn. The relatively small standard deviations show that this agreement was fairly widespread rather than driven by a few strong views.

Hypothesis 1: Students' Attitude by School Zone

Table 2

Independent Samples t-Test of Students' Attitude Towards Ethno-Religious Considerations in Teachers' Posting by School Zone (H01)

School zone	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Christian-dominated	354	3.89	0.88	699	4.09	< .001
Muslim-dominated	347	3.61	0.94			

Note. Two-tailed test at the .05 level of significance. H01 was rejected.

Table 2 shows that students in Christian-dominated school zones had a higher mean attitude score (*M* = 3.89, *SD* = 0.88) than students in Muslim-dominated zones (*M* = 3.61, *SD* = 0.94). The difference was statistically significant, $t(699) = 4.09$, $p < .001$, so the null hypothesis H01 was rejected. Students in both kinds of zone were in the range of agreement, since both means exceed 3.00. The significant result means that the strength of agreement differed by zone, with students in Christian-dominated zones agreeing more strongly that religious considerations enter into teachers' posting. The data do not by themselves explain why this difference exists, and the possible reasons are taken up in the discussion.

Research Question 2: Extent to Which Teachers' Posting Reflects Religious Settlement Pattern

Table 3

Extent to Which Teachers' Posting Reflects Religious Settlement Pattern

S/N	Item	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
1	Teachers are posted mainly to schools within their religious community areas	3.94	0.86	1	5
2	Religious settlement pattern dictates where Social Studies teachers serve	3.79	0.91	1	5
3	Cross-religious postings are rare in the Northern Senatorial Zone	3.88	0.87	1	5
4	Official posting policy is influenced by teachers' ethno-religious affiliations	3.65	0.95	1	5
5	Teachers request transfers to schools aligned with their religious communities	3.71	0.92	1	5
Composite		**3.79**	**0.90**	—	—

Note. Decision point = 3.00.

Table 3 shows that every item on the extent to which posting reflects religious settlement pattern was above the decision point of 3.00, with a composite mean of 3.79 (*SD* = 0.90). The item with the highest mean was "Teachers are posted mainly to schools within their religious community areas" (*M* = 3.94, *SD* = 0.86). The lowest mean was for "Official posting policy is influenced by teachers' ethno-religious affiliations" (*M* = 3.65, *SD* = 0.95), which suggests that respondents see posting practice as following religious lines somewhat more than they see official policy as doing so. Overall, the results indicate that teachers' posting to junior secondary schools in the zone is, to a high extent, aligned with the religious character of the surrounding settlement. The result describes the pattern of posting and does not by itself identify who or what produces it.

Hypothesis 2: Teachers' Posting Alignment by Local Government Area

Table 4

Independent Samples t-Test of Teachers' Posting Alignment by Type of Local Government Area (H02)

Local government area	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Christian-dominated	142	3.96	0.84	277	3.26	.001
Muslim-dominated	137	3.61	0.95			

Note. Two-tailed test at the .05 level of significance. H02 was rejected.

Table 4 shows that teachers in Christian-dominated local government areas had a higher mean posting alignment score (*M* = 3.96, *SD* = 0.84) than teachers in Muslim-dominated areas (*M* = 3.61, *SD* = 0.95). The difference was statistically significant, $t(277) = 3.26$, $p = .001$, and the null hypothesis H02 was therefore rejected. Both groups' means lie in the range of agreement, so religion-aligned posting was reported in both kinds of area. The significant result means, however, that the degree of alignment was greater in Christian-dominated areas than in Muslim-dominated ones. This is a difference in degree between two groups on one measure, and it does not show that posting is free of religious alignment in either group of areas.

Research Question 3: Extent to Which Teachers Perceive Religious Settlement Pattern as Affecting Their Productivity

Table 5

Teachers' Perception of the Effect of Religious Settlement Pattern on Their Productivity

S/N	Item	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
1	Ethno-religious tensions in school environments reduce my teaching effectiveness	3.88	0.84	1	5
2	Fear of violence in mixed-zone schools discourages full professional engagement	3.81	0.91	1	5
3	Teacher productivity is lower in religiously polarised school environments	3.76	0.93	1	5
4	Settlement-based posting limits professional development opportunities	3.69	0.96	1	5
5	Gendered insecurity from conflicts adversely affects women teachers' output	3.74	0.91	1	5
Composite		**3.78**	**0.91**	—	—

Note. Decision point = 3.00.

Table 5 shows a composite mean of 3.78 (*SD* = 0.91), with all five items above the decision point of 3.00. The highest-scoring item was "Ethno-religious tensions in school environments reduce my teaching effectiveness" (*M* = 3.88, *SD* = 0.84). The lowest-scoring item, "Settlement-based posting limits professional development opportunities" (*M* = 3.69, *SD* = 0.96), still showed agreement. Teachers therefore reported, to a high extent, that religious settlement pattern affects how productively they are able to work. Because these are self-reports, they reflect what teachers perceive rather than an independent measure of their output.

Hypothesis 3: Religious Settlement Pattern and Teachers' Productivity

Table 6

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Between Teachers' Religious Settlement Pattern Scores and Productivity Scores (H03)

Variables	*N*	*r*	*p*	r^2
Religious settlement pattern and teachers' productivity	279	-.612	< .001	.37

Note. Two-tailed test at the .05 level of significance. H03 was rejected.

Table 6 shows a correlation of *r* = -.612 (*N* = 279, *p* < .001) between teachers' religious settlement pattern scores and their productivity scores. The relationship is statistically significant and negative, so the null hypothesis H03 was rejected. A negative coefficient means that teachers who reported greater settlement polarisation tended to report lower productivity. The coefficient is of moderate to strong size and indicates that about 37% of the variation in one score is shared with the other. Because the design was correlational, the result shows that the two go together and does not by itself prove that settlement pattern causes the change in productivity.

Research Question 4: Level of Students' Achievement in Social Studies

Table 7
Students' Achievement in Social Studies on the Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT)

Variable	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Social Studies achievement score	701	54.6	8.80

Note. Scores are expressed out of 100.

Table 7 presents the achievement of the 701 students on the SSAT, which was measured on its own before any comparison was made. The mean score was 54.6 (*SD* = 8.80), which is a little above the mid-point of 50. This indicates an average level of achievement in Social Studies among the students sampled. The standard deviation shows that scores were spread moderately around the mean, so that some students performed well above and others well below it. Achievement is reported here as a separate outcome, and its comparison by gender follows.

Research Question 5 and Hypothesis 4: Difference in Achievement Between Male and Female Students

Table 8
Independent Samples t-Test of Male and Female Students' Achievement in Social Studies (H04)

Gender	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Male	362	56.8	8.43	699	6.77	< .001
Female	339	52.3	9.17			

Note. Two-tailed test at the .05 level of significance. H04 was rejected.

Table 8 shows that male students (*M* = 56.8, *SD* = 8.43) scored higher than female students (*M* = 52.3, *SD* = 9.17), a difference of 4.5 points in favour of males. The difference was statistically significant, $t(699) = 6.77$, $p < .001$, and the null hypothesis H04 was rejected. Male students therefore achieved significantly higher than female students on the SSAT. The study used a cross-sectional survey without a comparison group outside segregated settings, so the result is an observed difference between male and female students and not evidence of what produced it. Other explanations for the gap cannot be ruled out.

9. Discussion of Findings

Respondents largely agreed that religious considerations enter into where teachers are posted and where students feel safe to learn, and they agreed more strongly in Christian-dominated than in Muslim-dominated zones. This is in keeping with studies across Nigeria that describe how conflict reorganises everyday life around group identity, including the choice of schools and the movement of teachers to areas seen as safe (Jacob, 2015; Olayinka, 2023; Saleh et al., 2025). It also supports Abdulyakeen's (2023) argument that conflict has polarised institutions along ethnic and religious lines, since schools appear to be no exception. The difference between zones suggests that the experience of separation is not the same everywhere, which is consistent with the view of Adamu et al. (2025) that local histories of conflict and political interests shape segregation. A possible explanation is that communities that feel more exposed to insecurity are more alert to how institutional decisions follow religious lines, although this interpretation needs further study. In view of Mustapha and Christian's (2023) finding that religious intolerance drives residential segregation, the result also indicates that attitudes towards posting cannot be separated from wider relations between religious communities.

The finding that teachers' posting is closely aligned with the religious character of the surrounding settlement is consistent with Jacob's (2015) report of religion-aligned deployment

as a lasting feature of the zone after the crisis. It also parallels the experience of Northern Ireland, where Milliken et al. (2020) found that division in society produces community-consistent teacher deployment. In Nigeria the practice appears to be informal rather than written into policy, and respondents rated official policy as somewhat less responsible than everyday practice. This resembles the observation of Abdulyakeen (2023) that identity shapes treatment within public institutions even where no formal rule requires it. The finding that alignment was stronger in some areas than in others may reflect how firmly settlement separation has become established in each, as the work of Okoli (2025) on central Nigeria and of Saleh et al. (2025) on Yobe South suggests for other conflict-affected places. At the same time, Ezegwu and Okoye (2024) remind us that the religious character of schools in Nigeria has deeper historical roots, so that posting practices may be reinforcing arrangements that predate the recent crises. Teachers reported that religious settlement pattern reduces their productivity, and greater polarisation went with lower productivity. This gives measurable form to the accounts in Dayil (2019) of alienation, strained professional relationships and constrained career progression among teachers in conflict-affected institutions. In terms of Ecological Systems Theory, a school whose links with its surrounding community are marked by distrust is likely to offer a less supportive environment for teachers' work. Social Capital Theory points the same way, since fewer ties across religious groups mean fewer relational resources for collaboration and professional growth. The result does not, however, establish that settlement pattern is the only or main cause. Rintep and Akoji (2025) show that infrastructure, overcrowding and community conditions also affect school functioning in Plateau State, so teachers' perceptions probably reflect several pressures at once. Because productivity was self-reported, the finding is best read as an indication of how teachers experience their working conditions. Students' achievement in Social Studies was average, which suggests there is room for improvement in a subject meant to prepare young people for citizenship and living together. Since achievement was measured on its own, this result cannot be attributed to settlement pattern, and it is more cautious to say that it is consistent with studies that describe achievement as vulnerable in conflict-affected settings (Olayinka, 2023; Olayinka & Ridwan, 2025). It is equally consistent with the point made by Rintep and Akoji (2025) that family and community conditions influence how children perform. Eferebo (2022) argues that Social Studies has a special role in building unity in diversity, and an average level of achievement indicates that this role is not yet being fully realised. The result therefore calls for attention to the conditions under which Social Studies is taught, in addition to its content.

Male students achieved significantly higher than female students, which is in line with research that points to gendered disadvantage in conflict-affected communities. Dayil (2019) found that female teachers in Jos face religious and gendered scrutiny that limits their productivity, and a similar dynamic may restrict the confidence and participation of female students. Adamu et al. (2025) show that cultural and religious restrictions limit women's participation in public life in northern Nigeria, and Rintep and Akoji (2025) show that family and community processes create different learning conditions for children. In partial contrast, Mustapha and Christian (2023) stress that women play active roles in peacebuilding, which cautions against treating female learners only as people who are disadvantaged. Because the study had no comparison group outside segregated settings, the gap may arise from wider social expectations about girls' schooling and not from settlement pattern alone. The finding therefore signals a need for attention to female learners, but the explanation for it requires further investigation.

Taken together, the findings suggest that settlement pattern, posting, productivity and achievement are connected in ways that deserve policy attention, while the design of the study limits what can be said about cause. The sample was purposive and drawn from one zone, the main variables were measured through self-report, and the survey was cross-sectional. These limitations suggest that the findings should be generalised cautiously and that later studies

could use wider samples, school records on posting and, where possible, designs that follow teachers and students over time. The literature from other parts of Nigeria nonetheless shows that similar processes of separation are present elsewhere, and this lends weight to the relevance of the findings beyond the zone studied (Adamu et al., 2025; Okoli, 2025; Ottuh, 2025).

10. Conclusion

This study found that, in the Northern Senatorial Zone of Plateau State, respondents widely acknowledge that religious considerations shape teachers' posting, and that posting is closely aligned with the religious character of school areas. Teachers reported that religious settlement pattern reduces their productivity, and those who reported greater polarisation tended to report lower productivity. Students' achievement in Social Studies was average, and male students achieved significantly higher than female students. All four null hypotheses were rejected. Because the study was a cross-sectional survey, these results describe associations and differences and do not prove that settlement pattern causes them.

The Social Studies classroom is meant to be a place where civic values and intercultural understanding are formed, yet the evidence suggests that it operates within settlement and posting arrangements that follow religious lines. The findings point to the need for posting practices that do not depend on the religious character of an area, for stronger attention to peacebuilding and citizenship in the Social Studies curriculum, and for support that addresses the circumstances of female teachers and learners. Further research with wider samples and designs that can examine change over time would strengthen the evidence on which such measures are based. Nigeria's aspiration to unity in diversity depends in part on whether its schools can serve learners and teachers of all backgrounds, and this study suggests that this aim needs deliberate attention in conflict-affected areas.

11. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

i. The Plateau State Ministry of Education should develop and enforce a merit-based, religion-neutral posting policy that distributes qualified Social Studies teachers equitably across the Northern Senatorial Zone, irrespective of the religious composition of the receiving community. The policy should be published and monitored so that postings can be explained on grounds of qualification and need.

ii. Peacebuilding and social cohesion should be included as compulsory themes in the junior secondary Social Studies curriculum in conflict-affected zones, with modules on inter-religious dialogue, shared history and citizenship. Teachers should be trained to handle these themes in classrooms of mixed or single religious composition.

iii. Government and development partners should establish inter-community school exchange programmes that allow students and teachers from different religious enclaves to share learning spaces. Such programmes can help to rebuild the bridging social capital weakened by conflict.

iv. Support such as safe transport, security assurances and professional development should be provided for female teachers posted to mixed or previously conflict-affected areas. This would address the gendered productivity concerns that teachers reported.

v. Schools should provide mentoring, academic support and safe learning conditions for female students, and school counselling and psychosocial services should be strengthened for all learners affected by conflict.

vi. The Federal Government, through TETFund and similar bodies, should fund research on conflict and education in the Middle Belt, including studies with wider samples and designs that follow teachers and students over time.

vii. Government at all levels should apply the constitutional provisions on citizenship rights

and the federal character principle in ways that promote genuine integration and do not institutionalise religious or ethnic separation in public service appointments, including teacher postings. Udoh (2025) proposes practical strategies built on dialogue, inter-community engagement and policy reform for sustaining inter-religious harmony, and these could guide such efforts.

Declarations

This study received approval from the Head of the Department of Social Science Education at the University of Jos, in line with institutional research standards. Informed consent was obtained from parents or guardians of minor junior secondary school students and from participating teachers, with assurances of confidentiality and the right to withdraw. The ACLED dataset used for the conflict trend analysis is publicly accessible, while the research instruments can be requested from the corresponding author. Individual questionnaire responses remain confidential. AI tools assisted in data processing, and the results were independently verified to ensure accuracy and originality, which was confirmed through a plagiarism check.

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