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Building an Inter-Religious Dialogue and Mediation: A Panacea for Peace, Integration and Sustainable Development in Adamawa and Borno States, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study focuses on building an inter-religious dialogue and mediation: a panacea for peace, integration and sustainable development in Adamawa and Borno states. In recent times, Nigeria especially in North East experienced high level of violence conflicts that includes: kidnapping, insurgency and terrorist attacks. Communities that were known with peaceful coexistence for long are ruined due to intolerance, disunity, widespread hatred, mistrust, ignorance, severe inequalities, deprivation, exploitation, poverty and oppression that destroy our communities. Despite government's efforts to address the problems through military kinetic methods, it has proven insufficient because the root of the issue lies in the human heart. The people need changed mind through sound religious teachings that is capable to assist the security men in doing their jobs and maintain peace and order. The choice of Adamawa and Borno for this study is due to the activities of Boko-Haram that created suspicion, mistrust and misunderstanding among the Christians and Muslims. The research used a sample size of 38 representatives comprising of students and lecturers drawn from the selected colleges of education in Adamawa and Borno states. The study adopted two research tools; questionnaire and interview for data collection. The result of this study shows the impact of building an interreligious dialogue and mediation on the future teachers of religions, who will develop common ground for tolerance, respect, unity, harmony and integration among Christians and Muslims at the grassroots level

Keywords: Building, Interreligious, Dialogue, Peace, Panacea, Integration, Development

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Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with almost equal number of the two world religions: Christianity and Islam which is peculiar in the world. Nigeria also is described as the most religious country in the world but one of the most religious intolerant as well (Musa 2020). Despite the government efforts on building peace through military might, the gap and trust among the Christians and Muslims are expanding every day. People use religion to divide communities for personal and political gain.

In recent times, Nigeria especially in North East experienced high level of violence conflicts that includes: kidnapping, insurgency and terrorist attacks. Communities that were known with peaceful coexistence for long are ruined due to hostility, intolerance, disunity, widespread of hatred, mistrust, stereotype, ignorance, severe inequalities, unemployment, deprivation, exploitation, poverty and oppression that eat our communities (Ossia, 2024). These combated problems call on the religious leaders, religious teachers and the government to look into the matter with urgency before escalation. Interfaith dialogue implies the coming together of people with different faith to a mutual understanding and respect (Olatunji, 2021).

According to Bolton (2018), if local faith communities and their leaders, including Muslims and Christians and other cultural groups engage in personal healing, rebuild internal group cohesion, and participate in intergroup dialogue, training and practical initiatives to meet shared needs, then overtime, mutual understanding, tolerance and trust will be enhanced because healing, reconciliation, joint decision making and action present opportunities for positive interactions that can breakdown stereotypes and hostility, contributing to peace and security”.

According to Bongotons in Mamza (2018), Religious educators play a crucial role in peace building by fostering understanding, empathy, and conflict resolution skills among students. They can equip students with knowledge of different religious beliefs and practices, promoting interfaith dialogue, mediation and cooperation, and addressing the root causes of conflict. By instilling values like compassion and forgiveness, they can shape the character of young people and inspire them to become peacemakers within their communities.

Religious dialogue and mediation are key strategy for peace building, as it fosters understanding, build trust and promotes cooperation between different religious groups. Building an inter religious dialogue involves engaging in conversations, sharing experiences, and working towards mutual understanding, ultimately aiming to transform conflict into collaboration.

Statement of the Problem

North East Nigeria is the most affected Geo political zones in Nigeria due to the activities of Boko Haram insurgency, especially Borno and Adamawa state. The activities of Boko-Haram created suspicion, mistrust and misunderstanding among the Christians and Muslims neighbors. Since the Boko-Haram use the name of Islam for its terrorist activities, Christians became skeptical about Islam who Preach peace. The gap between Christians and Muslims is also widening during political campaign. Politicians use religion to divide people for their selfish gain. Some of such politicians are conflict merchants and if dialogue is not strengthened, the fragile harmony will be disrupted. Some religious leaders and their followers intentionally and objectively resist dialogue engagement because of fear of compromising their faith or doctrinal rigidity, as a result of these, opportunities for dialogue and mediation for peaceful coexistence, healthy relationship, mutual understanding and collaborative social development between Christians and Muslims are destroyed. Inter-religious dialogue and mediation is capable of breaking such prejudice, skepticism, ignorance, hatred and preventing religious violence. Peaceful coexistence, unity and harmony between Christians and Muslims can only be attained through building an interreligious dialogue and mediation.

Research Objectives

The general objective of the research is to explore cross cultural and religious dialogue and understanding, develop and improve the capacities of young teachers as mediators. The specific objectives are:

- i. To train the young teachers of the two religions to be committed in building peace at the grassroots level.
- ii. To identify actions that will address the recurring conflicts at early stage for mediation.
- iii. To find a common ground among Christians and Muslims from formulated Biblical and Qur'an teachings on Peace, morality and justice.

Literature Review

In this section, related literatures on religious intolerance, violence, and inter-religious dialogue will be reviewed.

Survey of the Dangers of Religious Intolerance and Violence in Nigeria.

The majority of the tensions and violence in Nigeria are associated with religious intolerance and hatred. Ossai (2024) observes that there is a big gap of suspicion and hatred between the Christians and Muslims especially on appointment in civil service, political positions and promotions. The divides are sharp between southern part of Nigeria and northern part. It is evident in some states in Nigeria where peace is fragile.

According to Little, David, Appleby, and Scott in Kanu (2017), Religious peace-building is a term used to describe the range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict, with the goal of building social relations and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence. Abdul and Modibbo (2020) also said that religious peace-building includes the beliefs, norms, and rituals that pertain to peace-building, as well as a range of actors for whom religion is a significant motivation for their peace-building.

Mamza (2018), traced the major crisis in Nigeria back to the time of military coups and countercoups that later led to civil war. The coups of January and July, 1966 was primarily driven by political and military discontent but it also had deep ethnic and religious undertones. It is unfortunate that the trends continue till date. In 1980s, Nigeria experienced the Maitatsine crises though not targeting particular religion but was religiously influenced. From 1987 of Kafanchan Religious crisis in Kaduna state, many states in northern Nigeria experienced great hit of violence, examples of such states are; Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi, Plateau, Benue, Adamawa, Borno, Yobe, Nasarawa and few in southern part of the country. Military force and tactics alone cannot solve such violence as Cardinal Onaiyekan (2019) states that “despite considerable efforts, the volume of insurgency and killing is still very high. Military intervention is only part of the solutions because more accusations are being recorded through the use of military force”. The lasting solution is dialogue, even though there have been series of dialogue between Christian and Muslim leaders; there is still an existing gap reaching grassroots which this research considers to cover through teachers to be in primary and secondary schools.

Despite the recognized potential of religious education to enhance conflict mediation skills, there exist a gap in its practical application at the grassroots level. Even though the Nigerian educational curriculum emphasizes principles of peace, reconciliation and dialogue, it seems very difficult and challenging to translate these ideals into effective conflict resolution strategies when confronted with real life religious disputes. Nurudeen (2019) assert that this challenge is exacerbated by lack of structured mediation training within the religious education framework, resulting in understanding theoretical concepts but struggle with practical implementation.

It is therefore timely and necessary to embark on grassroots campaign for dialogue and mediation and establishment of dialogue and mediation centers to equip the pupils with adequate skills for inter-religious dialogue and mediation.

Materials and Methods

This section explained the Research Design, Population, Sample and Sampling Technique, the Instrumentation, Reliability and Validity, Administration of Instrument and Methods of Data Analysis.

Research Design:

Research design is a procedure of solving a research problem. For this research, survey and experimental research designs will be adopted because survey is use for both large-scale and small-scale populations to sample opinions, beliefs, attitudes and experiences. While experimental design will be relevant in this research because of conflict Mediation Training and Practical Dialogue sessions for the respondents who will be ambassadors of peace in various schools and communities.

Population and Sampling Techniques

The targeted populations of the study are the students and lecturers of Christian and Islamic studies in Colleges of Education in Adamawa and Borno states. The population of students and lecturers in the selected Colleges of Education are too large, therefore 30 students and 8 lecturers from the selected colleges; FCE Yola and COE Waka-Biu was sampled to represent the general population using a random sampling technique as seen in Table 1.

Instrumentation:

The medium for data collection were structured questionnaire and interview.

Questionnaire:

The questionnaire was designed in two sections. Section A consists items on the respondents' demographic information such as College, gender, level and status of the respondents. Section comprises the main question to be answered from the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was structured using a four-point Likert scale: SA (strongly agree 4), A (agree 3), SD (strongly disagree 2), D (disagree 1)

Interview

Interview was used as a supplementary data to get first-hand information concerning the student's experiences on intolerance, violence, hatred and how they can reverse such extremism.

Validity of Instrument

After the development of instruments, a pilot study was carried out to test the authenticity of the instruments and do adjustments. This was possible through the help of statisticians to determine the reliability of the instruments before going to the field.

Administration of Research Instrument

The researchers will seek the permission of the sampled institutions through the Head of Departments of Islamic and Christian Religious Studies in each institution selected to mobilize their students who will be issued with questionnaire. The research assistants will help the participants explain where they did not understand.

Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). T-test and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to determine significant differences and relationships among variables.

Expected Results

The result is expected to show the impact of building an interreligious dialogue and mediation on the future teachers of religions, who will develop common ground for tolerance, respect, unity, harmony and integration, ambassadors of peace through mediation in conflict and violence situations to possibly start a dialogue and mediation centers in their colleges. This research will also provide a practical training to curtail hate speech, suspiciousness and violence, rather than depending only on military tactics that has short time results on peace.

Results

Research question one

To what extent does training of young teachers of Islam and Christianity helps them to be committed in building peace at the grass root?

The results of the analysis from Table 2 revealed that items 1, 3, 4 and 5 were accepted because the items had mean above the criteria mean of 2.50. This implies that most students that read religious education do not actually applied for the course, lack of schooling together is one of the reasons that promote hatred, indoctrination of children is one of the reasons for conflicts, and Christians and Muslim need have peace club. While item 2 was rejected because the mean had mean below the criteria mean of 2.50. This implies that lectures really understand the skills of building peace. The grand mean of 2.89 is higher than the criteria mean of 2-50. This implies that most of the respondent agree that training of young teachers will of Islam and Christians will help them to be committed in building peace at the grass root

Research question two

What are the identified actions that will address the recurring conflicts at the early stage of mediation?

The result of the analysis from Table 3 reveal the all the items were accepted because the items had mean above the criteria mean of 2.50. This implies that hate speech, rumour on social media, injustice, stereotype and prejudice and argument about religious matters, prophets and holy books are the causes of religious conflict in Nigeria. The grand mean of 3.37 shows that respondent agree that all the identified factors are the reason for recurring conflict in Nigeria

Research question three

What are the identified actions that will address the recurring conflict at the early stage of mediation?

The results of the analysis from Table 4 showed that all the items were accepted because the items had mean above the criteria mean of 2.50. this implies that believing in prophet and their message of peace will help in tackling religious conflict, both Islam and Christianity teach stewardship, there is teaching against killing of innocent person, bible and Qur'an preaches against false witness and drugs and alcoholism. The grand mean of 3.34 indicates that respondent agree that the identified could address recurring conflict at the early stage

Discussion of Results

The purpose of this study was to build an inter-religious dialogue and mediation: A panacea for peace, integration and sustainable development in Adamawa and Borno State. Findings from research questions one revealed that training of young teacher of Islam and Christians will help them to be committed in building peace at the grass root. This is in accordance with the findings by Bongotons in Mamza (2018) who reported that religious education plays a critical role in peace building by fostering understanding, empathy and conflict resolution skills among students. The implication of these findings is that young people need to be trained on peace building so as to results most of the conflicts that are reported in the society.

Findings from research questions two revealed that hate speech, rumour on social media, injustice, stereotype and prejudice and argument about religious matters, prophets and holy books are the causes of religious conflict in Nigeria. This is in agreement with the findings by Mamza (2018) who traced major causes of conflict to include hate speech, injustice and other factors. The implication is that religious leaders need to caution their followers on the need for peaceful coexistence in the society. Findings from research question three shows that believing in prophet and their message of peace will help in tackling religious conflict. These findings is in accordance with studies by Ossai (2014) who reported that adherence to religious teaching will help in building peace among Christians and Muslims in the country. The implication of this finding is that more need to be done by religious teachers in the area of peace building for the purpose of peaceful coexistence.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Interreligious dialogue and mediation present a practical pathway toward peace building, social cohesion, and sustainable development in diverse societies. When religious communities cultivate mutual respect, shared understanding, and collaborative problem solving, the roots of conflict become weaker and opportunities for collective progress grow stronger. Dialogue invites individuals and groups to move beyond prejudice, while mediation promotes constructive engagement that transforms tensions into cooperation. Sustainable development cannot thrive in environments marked by mistrust and hostility. Religious leaders and institutions hold influence that can be directed toward fostering integration, protecting human dignity, and supporting national development priorities. Policies that encourage interfaith engagement, education that nurtures tolerance, and platforms that enable peaceful negotiations are essential components of a stable and prosperous society. The commitment of all stakeholders to genuine dialogue remains vital. Through continuous interaction and partnership, interreligious mediation will continue to serve as a reliable instrument for resolving disputes and building a future where peace and development are shared achievements.

The paper made the following recommendations for effective interreligious dialogue that can lead to peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society;

- i. Government should develop and enforce policies that promote regular and inclusive interreligious dialogue forums.
- ii. Religious leaders should model tolerance and educate their followers on peaceful coexistence for sustainable development in the society.
- iii. Civil society organizations should organize community-based interfaith activities that encourage collaboration and trust building.
- iv. Educational institutions should include peace education and religious tolerance in their curricula. This is to ensure an unbiased teaching about religious tolerance at the grass root level.
- v. There should be a Provision for continuous training in mediation and conflict resolution for religious actors and community leaders.
- vi. There should be establish interfaith committees at local and national levels to facilitate cooperation on development and peace initiatives.
- vii. The Government should encourage joint social and humanitarian projects among different religious groups to strengthen unity.

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Tables**Table 1:** Selected Colleges of Education and sampled respondents.

S/N	Selected Colleges	Sampled Respondents		TOTAL	
1.	FCE Yola	Lecturers:	CRS	ISS	
			2	2	4
		Students:	Male	Female	
		NCEI	3	2	5
		NCEII	3	2	5
		NCEIII	3	2	5
2.	COE Waka-Biu	Lecturers:	CRS	ISS	
			2	2	4
		Students:	Male	Female	
		NCEI	3	2	5
		NCEII	3	2	5
		NCEIII	3	2	5
Sum total of respondents					38

Table 2: Results of the analysis on extent to which training of young teachers helps in building peace in the grass root

S/N	STATEMENT	N	X	SD	DEC
1	I found myself I religion education by accident, not what I wanted to	38	2.67	.89	agree
2	Some of my lecturers did no really understand the skills of building peace	38	2.12	.76	agree
3	Lack of schooling together at the primary school aided hatred among Christians and Muslims	38	2.68	.88	agree
4	Most students are indoctrinated at lower level of their education	38	3.43	.83	agree
5	Christians and Muslims students need to have peace clubs in schools	38	3.56	.79	agree
	Total	38	2.89	.83	Agree

Table 3: Results of the analysis on identified actions that could address recurring conflicts at the early stages for mediation

S/N	STATEMENT	N	X	SD	DECISION
1	Hate speech from one group to another is one of the factor that generate conflict in Nigeria	38	3.31	.83	Agree
2	Rumours on social media causes religion crisis in Nigeria	38	2.90	.75	Agree
3	Injustice of every kind causes religion crises in Nigeria	38	3.43	.77	Agree
4	Stereotype and prejudice cause hatred among Christians and Muslims	38	3.56	.89	Agree
5	Arguments about religious matters, prophets and holy books causes conflicts in Nigeria	38	3.64	.83	Agree
		38	3.37	.81	Agree

Table 4: Results of the analysis on identified actions that could address recurring conflicts at the early stage for mediation

S/N	STATEMENT	N	X	SD	DEC
1	Believing in prophets and their message of peace will help in tackling religious conflicts in Nigeria	38	3.18	.89	Agree
2	Both Islam and Christianity teach stewardship to neighbors regardless of their faith	38	3.47	.76	Agree
3	Bible and Qur'an teaches against killing of innocent person	38	3.33	.88	Agree
4	Bible and Qur'an preaches against false witness rumour and hate speech	38	3.26	.83	Agree
5	Bible and Qur'an teaches against drugs, alcoholism that instigate inhumanity and killings	38	3.44	.79	Agree
	Grand total	38	3.34	.83	Agree