

Religious Intolerance and Educational System in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *The study examines the implications of religious intolerance on the Educational system in Nigeria. Nigeria experienced a lot of religious intolerance due to its diversity of ethnic groups and religions. Due to the narrow-mindedness, misunderstanding, extremism, and zeal of religious devotees, religion, intended to be a unifying element among many ethnic groups in Nigeria, has instead turned out to be one of the triggers destroying lives and property. Several persons have suffered bodily and psychological harm due to intolerance based on religious beliefs and practices, which has caused rifts between Nigerians of various religious backgrounds. Nigerian educational system is under threat from this turmoil. Problems of religious intolerance has hampered Nigeria's efforts to establish a standard educational system.*

KEYWORDS: religious; intolerance; education; christians; muslims; violence.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a multicultural nation with many different religions. But Nigeria deals with various social, political, and economic issues, including religious intolerance, election violence, insurgency, kidnapping, insecurity, corruption, and high unemployment. International and domestic politics are dominated by religion, which lacks a clear definition. African Traditional Religion, Islam, and Christianity are the three main religions practised in Nigeria. The final two religions are more common and are fundamental to their followers' way of life. Religious intolerance appears to have stoked the political climate and contributed significantly to numerous issues affecting various states in Nigeria. The influential individuals in Nigeria's public sphere have easy access to manipulate religious views. There is no doubt that religious intolerance has permeated Nigerian society's educational system and sociopolitical and economic spheres. Atoi and Yakubu (2022) emphasized that religious belief can, by its very nature, be easily conned by the major players in the Nigerian political realm; it is vital to note that the religious aspect of intolerance appears to have vapourised the system of governance and contributed a lot to the myriad issues afflicting the Nigerian state.

Given that its manifestation can be seen in almost every aspect of Nigeria's public life today, it has undoubtedly eaten deeply into the state's infrastructure. Religious intolerance is the tendency of many Muslims and Christians to think only about their beliefs and anything that seems to be in opposition to them. The issue of religious claims and the intolerance displayed by both Muslims

and Christians toward other faith and traditions in Nigeria have also affected Nigeria's Educational system.

According to Gofwen (2004), religious intolerance permeates all forms of human civilization. It is the leading cause of violent religion in all communities on the earth's surface and accompanying destructive tendencies. At this point, the issue of religious intolerance has persisted in dividing Nigerians into two main opposing factions that harbour animosity and violent impulses for one another. Nigeria's increased militant Muslim and Christian action is linked to religious intolerance. Numerous religious crises have resulted from this relationship, particularly in northern Nigeria. The traditional belief, which included a variety of ways to worship the Supreme Being, had been the religion of Nigerians before the arrival of Islam and Christianity. With the introduction of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria, violence and agitation ensued for supremacy.

Furthermore, bigotry based on religious affiliation has hurt several people physically and psychologically, legitimizing religious crises among Nigerians. According to Anthonia (2017), religious intolerance is the failure of a particular religion's adherent to respect, tolerate, and recognize the right of others to practice a faith other than their own. Such a believer, according to her, considers their religion to be the only divinely predetermined route to enlightenment and immortality in heaven. It is important to note that while enthusiasm for one's faith is admirable and expected, it becomes unsafe for the community's survival when it becomes unacceptable to other people's views. Consequently, this study examines the effects of religious Intolerance on Nigeria's educational system.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Religious Relativism Approach

The study is considered a good fit for the religious relativism methodology. The relativist school of thought on religion holds that all religions are equal and that there should be tolerance between different religious groups in a multireligious society. The argument emphasized that as all religions are proportionate to specific situations, no belief can assert superiority. The standards most religionists use to verify religious truth only apply to their worldviews and cultural heritage. According to Kirk (2004), there are no commonly accepted criteria for determining the integrity of religious beliefs. According to the relativist viewpoint, all religions either possess particular ideas that are acceptable and appropriate for certain persons or groups, or they may hold relative truths that are, therefore, equal to all religions. For instance, Islam may be suitable for Muslims, and Christianity may be correct for Christians, but there is no one supreme religion that is appropriate for everyone in the universe. Relativists contend that all religions are equal since they derive from the same deified being (God) (Atoi 2018). But Joseph Runzo is arguably relativism's most well-known supporter.

The phrase "heno fideism" (from the Greek heno, which means one, and the Latin fide, which means faith), which Runzo introduced, is a form of theological relativism in which the truth of a

religion is determined by the worldview of its adherents (Meister 2009). Accordingly, Atoi (2018) held that one's worldview affects how one perceives and comprehends the Ultimate Reality. According to Meiser (2009), the truth and authenticity of religion are determined by how well it fits into the worldview or cultural context it is a part of. A specific religious group's assertion of absolute truth at the expense of other religious organizations in a multifaith society is discouraged by the relativist philosophical approach to religion. As a result, relativists argue that tolerance should be the driving principle in a community with many religions.

Religious Intolerance in Nigeria

According to Omotayo (2017), religious intolerance is the act of emotional disagreement between two or more religious groups or entities. Provocative utterances, the defence of religion/self-interest, following in the footsteps of religious leaders, and the incorrect interpretation of biblical scriptures were among the reasons he named for religious conflict and terrorism in Nigeria. One of Nigeria's primary obstacles to academic freedom and education is still religious extremism. According to him, every religion has a method of turning impressionable children's minds into stone, impairing their ability to think critically and rationally. The unfortunate condition in Nigerian schools is as follows. According to Samuel and Ekeng's (2013) study, the north of Nigeria is where religious Intolerance in Nigeria is most pervasive. And this is the nation's region with the most significant illiteracy percentage. The north, which Muslims dominate, views everything through the prism of Islam. The north does not have a culture that is distinct from religion, according to Samuel and Ekeng (2013). The average Muslim in the north perceives everything through the lens of Islam. They, therefore, do not distinguish between politics, culture, and religion. It is challenging to separate the three due to the interaction between these crucial social components in the north.

Gellar (2007) notes that the movement toward adopting an extreme majority model imposing sharia law on all citizens has been a significant source of growing interreligious conflicts in the country. The number of fundamentalist sects among Muslims has also increased, and most of these Islamic sects are likewise intolerant of other Islamic organizations (Uzoma 2004). Discriminatory religious behaviour has a destructive impact on Nigerian society. The phenomena have hindered the nation's efforts to reform and develop for the better in several sectors, including security, education, social stability, socioeconomic prosperity, democratic transition, and national unity. No lack of proof shows that intolerance-related social unrest and insecurity have destroyed Nigeria's social fabric to the point where they have thwarted all efforts to improve the country's existence. A notable example is the Boko Haram riddle, perplexing Nigerian security services since it first entered the national conversation in 2009. According to Onuoha (2010), the Boko Haram organization wants to change the Nigerian state's political and theological landscape, mainly through implementing Sharia law, which is founded on practising Orthodox Islam. The sect has been particularly outspoken in its criticism of Nigerian society's secular structure and support for the complete application of sharia. It also harbours intense animosity toward secular government and educational institutions (Alkali et al., 2012).

Most religious fundamentalists and fanatics in Nigeria are intolerant, resulting in widespread cold-blooded terrorism and fierce ideological conflict, continuously threatening social stability and preventing most children and youths from attending school. Since societal volatility and turbulence have reached such hazardous proportions, there is no way to define the current state of events in Nigeria than to declare it the most chaotic moment in its history (Atoi 2013). Olupona (2014) opines that a significant challenge facing the Nigerian state is how the practice of religion in the country increasingly inhibits the democratic process and governance. According to him, the central issue today is how religious differences affect government and public life. The politics of representation, which used to be dominated by ethnic affiliation, is today dominated by religious identity. This situation influences public discourse concerning the survival of the country's democracy. Religious intolerance has dramatically shifted from the sacred assembly to the civil community, and this trend has persisted under several regimes. Religious extremists and militants who are out to destroy anything that belongs to anyone who rejects their religious beliefs have robbed several shops and devastated agricultural farmlands. Farmers and traders who mustered the bravery to work in the shops and fields were killed. An obvious example is the slaughter of around 43 farmers in Zabarmari, Borno state (BBC News, November 29, 2020).

Implications of Religious Intolerance on Educational System in Nigeria.

Religious intolerance has so much affected the educational system in Nigeria, especially in the Northern area. Western Education is considered as 'haram' by Boko haram. There are situations where Christian schools and other government schools were destroyed by Boko haram; children were abducted from their schools, and some were killed because of their religion. Due to the threatening actions of Boko Haram and other Islamic organizations opposed to Western Education, many children and youths find it challenging to attend school. This is made worse by the greed, corruption, and ill-equipped institutions of the ruling class to handle the variety of the nation. Lack of knowledge is to blame for these issues, especially in Nigeria's northern provinces. The colonial era is where the absence of education in Nigeria's north began. The few northern elites took advantage of the high rate of illiteracy in the region to oppress and impoverish the populace. The groups had nothing to keep their thoughts busy due to the absence of schooling in the north. The swarming masses' only remaining options are to turn to religion for purification.

All of these things combined point to religious intolerance and extremism. However, a lack of education that is based on a solid philosophical foundation feeds this triad. This claim is consistent with (Achunik, 2008), who argues that religious violence in Nigeria is caused by the low level of illiteracy among religious devotees. In Nigeria, the main cause of religious strife and violence is a lack of adequate education. This is because after having a decent education, religious adherents will have a better understanding of how religion functions. Religious followers of all dogmas that have a propensity to breed intolerance, fundamentalism, and extremism can be liberated from them via education.

Additionally, some unpleasant crises have been brought about by religious intolerance in many Nigerian schools. The confrontations between Muslim and Christian secondary school students in

Kwara state showed how religious intolerance harms Nigeria's educational system. Because Christian school administrators insisted that Muslim pupils not wear the hijab to school, the government forced the closure of Christian-owned secondary schools for several months. The occurrence in Kwara State discredits tolerance as the central value of religion and education. Another brutal clash broke out at Oyun Baptist High School (OBHS), Ijagbo, just when the nation had assumed the hijab crisis in Kwara schools was resolved. On Monday, January 17, 2022, the school allegedly turned back some female Muslim pupils because they refused to remove their hijabs. The action sparked a new feud between Muslim society and the Christian Association of Nigeria's Kwara State chapter (CAN) leadership. Dissatisfied with the events, some Muslim parents and their children went to Christian schools, creating a ridiculous scene in which one person was killed, and several others were injured (The Guardians 2022). It is disgraceful to have schoolchildren constantly engaged in such acts to close down schools.

Furthermore, the educational patterns in the south and north have differed. Christian missionaries freely established schools in the south but not in the north. As a result, there are educational disparities between the south and the north. This disparity has, in some ways, established marginalization in the country's national development. The pattern of education in the Southern and Northern part of Nigeria has always been different. The level of rational thinking and analytic skill of the human being can be increased through education, which has the potential to reduce the high incidence of religious-inspired violence drastically. The observation supports this claim that education develops human intelligence and gives people the curiosity to ask some fundamental questions. I'm confident most people can manage and regulate their inclination toward violence with teaching because of religion. For instance, the existence of God can only be questioned by those with an educated mind. To be capable of liberating ourselves from religious brainwashing, we need education as an accurate tool. We are not to accept all that religion proclaims or propagates.

CONCLUSION

The researchers looked at the effects of religious Intolerance on Nigeria's educational system based on the discussion that was just had. It was discovered that religious intolerance is terrible news for an excellent education. The study also demonstrated that religious intolerance happens when two or more religious groups have competing ideas, opinions, sentiments, and desires. Nigeria's educational system is impacted by the nation's deteriorating social and political stability. Experiences with religious Intolerance in Nigeria have demonstrated that power struggles, prejudice, and discrimination are some of the leading causes of the country's continued religious violence. If Nigeria wants to have proper education for all people without religious strife, the researchers suggested that religious believers from all backgrounds must show a sincere tolerance toward adherents of other religious traditions in the nation.

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