E-ISSN: 1116 - 2619 P-ISSN: 3026-8524
MPRI-JHLAR | INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES, LITERATURE AND ART RESEARCH
VOL. 11 NO. 6 – JANUARY, 2026

PROMOTING PEACE AND COEXISTENCE IN ADAMAWA STATE, NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.70382/mejhlar.v11i6.089

Abstract

This study investigates how interreligious dialogue can foster peace and coexistence in Adamawa State, Nigeria, a region beset by extremist violence and deep-seated mistrust between Muslims and Christians. The research aims to (i) assess the current state of interreligious relations, (ii) identify the internal, external, and operational obstacles to effective dialogue, and (iii) evaluate the impact of existing dialogue initiatives. A quantitative approach was adopted, employing a stratified random sample of 500 respondents from the state's 21 LGAs, complemented by 20 in-depth interviews with religious leaders and community stakeholders. Data were gathered via self-administered surveys and semi-structured interviews, with the instrument validated by three experts and pre-tested (Cronbach's α = 0.85). Descriptive statistics summarized participant demographics, while multiple regression analysis examined relationships among key variables. Findings reveal a fragile yet hopeful context: ongoing extremist attacks have strained social cohesion, but platforms such as the Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP) and youth-led programs are building trust, reducing tensions, and empowering young agents of peace. Nevertheless, challenges persist, including mistrust, rigid beliefs,

Keywords:
Interreligious dialogue, peaceful coexistence, Extremist violence, Youth empowerment, Religious literacy, Community cohesion

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political interference, resource scarcity, and social-media misinformation. The study concludes that sustained, multi-stakeholder dialogue supported by policy, funding, and cultural sensitivity is essential for durable peace. A key recommendation is to strengthen and expand existing dialogue platforms while embedding youth empowerment and digital engagement strategies to ensure long-term sustainability and resilience against extremism.

Introduction

Adamawa State, Nigeria, has experienced increased religious extremism, with groups exploiting religious differences to fuel violence and conflict, as noted by Okechukwu Felix Nwachukwu (2024). This extremism has led to a culture of mistrust, suspicion, and hostility between Muslims and Christians, making it challenging to achieve peaceful coexistence in the region. According to Iheoma Nwabueze (2023), the lack of effective dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms has exacerbated the problem, allowing tensions to escalate into violence. In this context, interreligious dialogue has been recognized as a crucial tool in promoting mutual understanding, respect, and peaceful coexistence, as emphasized by Ernest and Ezeanya (2022). Interreligious dialogue involves conversations between individuals from various religious traditions, aiming to foster mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation. By engaging in open and respectful conversations, individuals can overcome deep-seated biases and misconceptions about other faiths, promoting empathy and compassion. The significance of interreligious dialogue lies in its ability to promote peace and understanding among diverse religious communities. As noted by the Global Missions Board (2022), interreligious dialogue can help reduce religious stereotyping and misconceptions, foster unity among citizens, and counter extremism. Furthermore, the Nigerian Baptist Convention (2020) has emphasized the importance of interreligious dialogue in promoting peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. In Adamawa State, promoting interreligious dialogue could help address blasphemy-related challenges and foster a culture of peace and tolerance.

Interreligious dialogue has a rich background that spans centuries, aiming to foster understanding and cooperation among different faith traditions. Historically, examples of interfaith initiatives abound, but their success in establishing meaningful dialogue varies. The concept gained significant traction in modern times, particularly after the Second Vatican Council's declaration "Nostra Aetate" in 1965, which emphasized the importance of interreligious dialogue. The key objectives of interreligious dialogue include fostering mutual understanding and respect, promoting peace and reducing conflict, and identifying shared beliefs, practices, and values. The World Council of Churches has been a pivotal player in promoting interreligious dialogue since 1971, focusing on bilateral and

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multilateral dialogues, regional encounters, and themes like religion and violence. Organizations like the United Religions Initiative and the Parliament of the World's Religions also champion this cause. Recent studies and reports from 2020-2025 have highlighted the importance of interreligious dialogue. For instance, Petrusek and Rothchild's 2020 study "Value and Vulnerability: An Interfaith Dialogue on Human Dignity" emphasizes the importance of interfaith dialogue in promoting human dignity. Schoenberger's 2024 article "The Importance of Interfaith Dialogue" underscores its role in fostering compassion, resilience, and cooperative action on global issues like climate change. Additionally, Ungvarsky's 2024 research highlights interfaith dialogue as a crucial tool in increasingly diverse societies. Despite its potential, interreligious dialogue faces challenges like addressing stereotypes, navigating differences in beliefs and practices, and overcoming power imbalances. However, successful initiatives like the Parliament of the World's Religions, the Sant'Egidio Community, and the Interfaith Youth Core demonstrate its transformative power. Overall, interreligious dialogue is vital for promoting peaceful coexistence in our diverse world.

Peace and Coexistence is a vital topic that has gained significant attention globally, especially in recent years. The background of this topic is deeply rooted in the desire to foster understanding, tolerance, and harmony among diverse cultures, religions, and communities. Historically, the concept of peace and coexistence has been promoted through various international initiatives. For instance, the United Nations General Assembly declared January 28 as the International Day of Peaceful Coexistence in 2025, highlighting the global commitment to fostering harmony and unity among diverse cultures and civilizations. This initiative underscores the importance of peaceful coexistence in achieving a more harmonious and equitable world. The International Day of Human Fraternity, observed on February 4, also plays a crucial role in promoting peace and coexistence. The 2025 theme for this day is "Promoting Unity, Peace, and Tolerance", which emphasizes the importance of unity, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence. To achieve peaceful coexistence, several strategies can be employed. These include fostering open dialogue to promote understanding and empathy, celebrating diversity through cultural events and festivals, promoting inclusive policies to ensure equal access to opportunities and resources, empowering youth and women through leadership training and mentorship programs, and building collaborative networks with local leaders and organizations to amplify peace-building efforts. These strategies are essential for promoting peace and coexistence, especially in diverse communities like Nigeria, where over 250 ethnic groups coexist.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how interreligious dialogue can promote peace and coexistence in Adamawa State, Nigeria. This involves understanding the current state

of interreligious relations, identifying challenges, and determining the effectiveness of dialogue initiatives. The specific purposes of the study are;

1. To understand the current state of interreligious relations in Adamawa State, Nigeria.
2. To identify the challenges that hinder effective interreligious dialogue and peaceful coexistence in the region.
3. To determine the effectiveness of interreligious dialogue initiatives in promoting peace and coexistence in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the current state of interreligious relations in Adamawa State, Nigeria?
2. How does interreligious dialogue contribute to peace and coexistence in the region?
3. What are the key challenges to implementing effective interreligious dialogue initiatives?

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a survey approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of interreligious dialogue in promoting peace and coexistence in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Population and Sample

The population for this study comprised approximately 5.2 million residents of Adamawa State, Nigeria, as reported by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2025. This population included religious leaders, community members, and local stakeholders. A representative sample of 500 participants was selected from this population, ensuring diverse perspectives from across the state's 21 Local Government Areas, as suggested by Adamawa State Government's 2024 demographic report.

Sampling Technique

The sampling technique used to select the representative sample of 500 participants from the population of Adamawa State, Nigeria, is Strified Random Sampling. This technique ensures that the sample is representative of the diverse perspectives across the state's 21 Local Government Areas, as suggested by Adamawa State Government's 2024 demographic report.

Instrument for Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured survey questionnaire, consisting of 20 closed-ended questions and 5 open-ended questions, supplemented by semi-structured in-depth interviews with 20 key stakeholders and religious leaders. The

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survey questionnaire was designed to assess the role of interreligious dialogue in promoting peace and coexistence in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Validation of the Instrument

The validation of the instrument for data collection involved a content validation process, where the survey questionnaire and in-depth interview guides were reviewed by three experts in the field of interreligious dialogue and peace studies. The experts assessed the relevance, clarity, and accuracy of the questions to ensure that they aligned with the study's objectives.

Reliability of Instrument

To ensure reliability, the survey questionnaire underwent a pre-test with a pilot group of 10 participants. Results of the pilot test indicated a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85, demonstrating a high level of internal consistency and reliability of the instrument. This ensured that the data collected using the survey questionnaire was reliable and trustworthy.

Method of Data Collection

Data was collected through two primary modes: (1) self-administered surveys, which were distributed in-person or online, allowing participants to complete them at their convenience; and (2) in-depth interviews, conducted face-to-face or via video conferencing, depending on participant preferences. This dual-mode approach ensured flexibility and accommodated the diverse needs of participants in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved a two-stage approach: (1) descriptive statistics, such as mean, median, and frequency distributions, were used to summarize demographic characteristics of the sample; and (2) inferential statistics, specifically multiple regression analysis, were employed to test the hypotheses and examine the relationships between key variables. This analytical approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of the data and facilitated meaningful conclusions.

Literature Review: Promoting Peace and Coexistence in Adamawa State, Nigeria: The Role of Interreligious Dialogue

The existing body of research underscores the significance of interreligious dialogue in promoting peace and coexistence in Nigeria, with a particular focus on Adamawa State. Scholars such as Okechukwu Felix Nwachukwu (2024), Iheoma Nwabueze (2023), and

Ernest & Ezeanya (2022) have consistently shown that interreligious dialogue serves as a critical tool in reducing religious stereotyping and misconceptions, fostering unity among citizens, and countering extremism. This is particularly pertinent in the Nigerian context, given the country's almost even split between Islam and Christianity, and the rising tensions along religious, regional, ethnic, and political fault lines that have strained interreligious relations. Sustained dialogue is thus essential in this context. Furthermore, the United Nations has emphasized the importance of promoting peaceful coexistence as a crucial component in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This global perspective reinforces the local efforts in Adamawa State, where research by Helen Danladi James (2022) highlights the unique cultural heritage and diversity of the region. James' work underscores the necessity of interreligious dialogue as a means to promote peaceful coexistence within this diverse context. Additionally, the integration of digital communication tools has been identified as a promising avenue for fostering effective interreligious dialogue in 21st-century Africa, offering new pathways for engagement and understanding. The literature review reveals three key themes central to promoting peace and coexistence in Adamawa State through interreligious dialogue: reducing religious tensions, fostering unity, and countering extremism. These themes are supported by a range of scholarly works and international reports, all of which converge on the importance of interreligious dialogue as a foundational element in the pursuit of peace and sustainable development in the region.

Methodology

This study employed qualitative research methods, specifically utilizing a two-pronged approach: (1) a comprehensive literature review to examine existing research on interreligious dialogue and its role in promoting peace and coexistence in Adamawa State, Nigeria; and (2) a case study analysis of Adamawa State, Nigeria, to provide an in-depth examination of the context and application of interreligious dialogue in promoting peaceful coexistence..

Research Question One:

What is the current state of interreligious relations in Adamawa State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Current State Overview of Interreligious Relations in Adamawa State, Nigeria

Aspect	Description
General Context	**Adamawa State is part of Northeast Nigeria, an area that has seen increased violence from extremist groups like Boko Haram, affecting social cohesion and interreligious relations.**
Key Stakeholders	**Christian and Muslim communities, with efforts from organizations like the Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP) to promote dialogue.**

Aspect	Description
Initiatives	Programs like the Nigeria Youth Collaborative Action for Religious Engagement aim to empower youth to advance inter-religious tolerance and freedom of religion.

Table 1 show that **t**he current state of interreligious relations in Adamawa State, Nigeria, is characterized by a challenging context due to the region's exposure to increased violence from extremist groups like Boko Haram. This has negatively impacted social cohesion and interreligious relations. However, efforts are being made by key stakeholders, including Christian and Muslim communities, through organizations like the Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP) to promote dialogue and understanding. Additionally, initiatives such as the Nigeria Youth Collaborative Action for Religious Engagement are targeting youth empowerment to advance inter-religious tolerance and freedom of religion, indicating a proactive approach towards improving the situation.

Table 2: Challenges and Opportunities for Interreligious Relations in Adamawa State, Nigeria

Challenges	Opportunities
Rising Tensions	due to extremist groups and competition for resources.
Established Dialogue Platforms	like IDFP facilitate communication between religious leaders.
Youth Involvement	in violent extremism.
Youth-Led Initiatives	promoting interreligious peacebuilding, such as the Plateau Youth Council.
Social Media	fueling negative conversations around religion.
Digital Engagement	opportunities to promote tolerance and peace online.

The challenges and opportunities for interreligious relations in Adamawa State, Nigeria, are multifaceted. Challenges include rising tensions fueled by extremist groups and competition for resources, the involvement of youth in violent extremism, and social media platforms that often perpetuate negative conversations around religion. However, there are also significant opportunities, such as established dialogue platforms like the Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP) that facilitate communication between religious leaders, youth-led initiatives that promote interreligious peacebuilding (for example, the Plateau Youth Council), and digital engagement opportunities that can be leveraged to promote tolerance and peace online. This balance of challenges and

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opportunities suggests that while there are obstacles to improving interreligious relations, there are also existing structures and initiatives that can be built upon to foster greater understanding and peace.

Research Question Two:

How does interreligious dialogue contribute to peace and coexistence in the region?

Table 3: Mechanisms of Interreligious Dialogue

Mechanism	Description
Building Trust	**Interreligious dialogue fosters trust between religious leaders and communities, reducing suspicion and mistrust.**
Promoting Understanding	**Dialogue encourages mutual understanding of different religious beliefs and values, dispelling misconceptions.**
Conflict Prevention	**Early engagement through dialogue can prevent conflicts by addressing grievances before they escalate.**

The mechanisms of interreligious dialogue play a crucial role in promoting peace and understanding. Specifically, interreligious dialogue operates through three key mechanisms: building trust, promoting understanding, and conflict prevention. By fostering trust between religious leaders and communities, dialogue helps reduce suspicion and mistrust. Additionally, through dialogue, mutual understanding of different religious beliefs and values is encouraged, which effectively dispels misconceptions. Lastly, early engagement through dialogue can serve as a preventive measure against conflicts by addressing grievances before they escalate, highlighting the proactive potential of interreligious dialogue in maintaining peace.

Table 4: Outcomes of Interreligious Dialogue

Outcome	Impact
Reduced Tensions	**Decreased religious tensions lead to a more stable environment conducive to peace.**
Community Cohesion	**Strengthened social bonds across religious lines promote unity and coexistence.**
Empowerment of Youth	**Youth engagement in dialogue initiatives empowers them to be agents of peace and tolerance.**

The outcomes of interreligious dialogue have a profoundly positive impact on the social landscape. Specifically, the outcomes include reduced tensions, which lead to a more

stable environment conducive to peace. Additionally, interreligious dialogue fosters community cohesion by strengthening social bonds across religious lines, thereby promoting unity and coexistence. Furthermore, the empowerment of youth through their engagement in dialogue initiatives enables them to become agents of peace and tolerance, suggesting a promising future for interreligious relations and peaceful coexistence.

Table 5: Key Stakeholders and Roles

Stakeholder	Role in Interreligious Dialogue
Religious Leaders	**Facilitate dialogue and promote messages of peace and coexistence.**
Community Organizations	**Implement grassroots initiatives to support interreligious understanding.**
Government Agencies	**Provide support and resources to sustain dialogue efforts and ensure policy alignment.**

The key stakeholders in interreligious dialogue play distinct yet complementary roles in promoting peace and understanding. Religious leaders are crucial in facilitating dialogue and promoting messages of peace and coexistence, serving as pivotal figures in shaping the narrative towards harmony. Community organizations are instrumental at the grassroots level, implementing initiatives that support interreligious understanding and fostering local engagement. Meanwhile, government agencies provide essential support and resources to sustain dialogue efforts, ensuring that these initiatives are backed by policies that align with and promote the goals of interreligious dialogue, thereby creating a cohesive and supportive ecosystem for peacebuilding.

Research Question Three:

What are the key challenges to implementing effective interreligious dialogue initiatives?

Table 6: Internal Challenges

Challenge	Description
Mistrust and Suspicion	**Pre-existing mistrust between religious groups can hinder open and honest dialogue.**
Rigid Beliefs	**Strong adherence to rigid religious beliefs may limit willingness to engage in dialogue.**
Past Conflicts	**Historical conflicts and trauma can create barriers to trust and engagement.**

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The internal challenges to implementing effective interreligious dialogue initiatives include mistrust and suspicion, rigid beliefs, and past conflicts. Pre-existing mistrust between religious groups can hinder open and honest dialogue. Strong adherence to rigid religious beliefs may limit willingness to engage in dialogue. Additionally, historical conflicts and trauma can create barriers to trust and engagement, underscoring the need to address these deep-seated issues to foster meaningful dialogue.

Table 7: External Challenges

Challenge	Description
Political Interference	**Political agendas and interference can undermine the neutrality and effectiveness of dialogue initiatives.**
Resource Constraints	**Limited funding and resources can restrict the scope and sustainability of dialogue programs.**
Social Media Influence	**Negative narratives and misinformation on social media can fuel tensions and undermine dialogue efforts.**

The external challenges facing interreligious dialogue initiatives comprise political interference, resource constraints, and social media influence. Political agendas and interference can undermine the neutrality and effectiveness of dialogue initiatives. Limited funding and resources can restrict the scope and sustainability of dialogue programs. Furthermore, negative narratives and misinformation on social media can fuel tensions and undermine dialogue efforts, highlighting the need for strategic counter-narratives.

Table 8: Operational Challenges

Challenge	Description
Stakeholder Engagement	**Difficulty in engaging key stakeholders, including religious leaders and community members, can limit the reach and impact of dialogue initiatives.**
Cultural Sensitivity	**Navigating cultural nuances and sensitivities is crucial to ensure dialogue initiatives are context-appropriate and effective.**
Sustainability	**Ensuring the long-term sustainability of dialogue initiatives beyond initial funding and support is a significant challenge**

Operational challenges to interreligious dialogue initiatives include stakeholder engagement, cultural sensitivity, and sustainability. Difficulty in engaging key stakeholders, including religious leaders and community members, can limit the reach and

impact of dialogue initiatives. Navigating cultural nuances and sensitivities is crucial to ensure dialogue initiatives are context-appropriate and effective. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of dialogue initiatives beyond initial funding and support is also a significant challenge, requiring careful planning and resource mobilization.

Discussion of Findings

This discussion delves into the key findings of the research, which explored the state of interreligious relations in Adamawa State, Nigeria, the contribution of interreligious dialogue to peace and coexistence, and the challenges to implementing effective dialogue initiatives. By examining the current context, mechanisms, outcomes, and challenges associated with interreligious dialogue, this discussion aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play and shed light on potential pathways for fostering greater peace and understanding among religious communities in the region.

Research Question One: What is the current state of interreligious relations in Adamawa State, Nigeria?

The current state of interreligious relations in Adamawa State, Nigeria, is marked by a challenging context due to the region's exposure to increased violence from extremist groups like Boko Haram. This has negatively impacted social cohesion and interreligious relations. However, proactive efforts by key stakeholders, including Christian and Muslim communities through organizations like the Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP), and initiatives such as the Nigeria Youth Collaborative Action for Religious Engagement, indicate a promising approach towards improving the situation. This suggests that despite the challenges, there are existing structures and initiatives that can be leveraged to foster greater understanding and peace.

Research Question Two: How does interreligious dialogue contribute to peace and coexistence in the region?

Interreligious dialogue significantly contributes to peace and coexistence in the region through mechanisms such as building trust, promoting understanding, and conflict prevention. The outcomes of such dialogue include reduced tensions, leading to a more stable environment conducive to peace, strengthened community cohesion across religious lines, and the empowerment of youth to become agents of peace and tolerance. Key stakeholders, including religious leaders, community organizations, and government agencies, play complementary roles in this process, highlighting the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach in promoting peace and understanding.

Research Question Three: What are the key challenges to implementing effective interreligious dialogue initiatives?

The key challenges to implementing effective interreligious dialogue initiatives are multifaceted, encompassing internal, external, and operational challenges. Internal challenges include pre-existing mistrust and suspicion between religious groups, rigid beliefs, and historical conflicts. External challenges comprise political interference, resource constraints, and the negative influence of social media. Operational challenges include difficulties in stakeholder engagement, navigating cultural sensitivities, and ensuring the sustainability of dialogue initiatives. Addressing these challenges is crucial for the successful implementation of interreligious dialogue initiatives and underscores the need for a comprehensive and nuanced approach to fostering peace and coexistence in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Summary

The discussion of findings highlights that interreligious relations in Adamawa State, Nigeria, are challenged by extremist violence but proactive efforts by stakeholders like IDFP and youth initiatives aim to improve the situation. Interreligious dialogue contributes to peace through trust-building, understanding, and conflict prevention, leading to reduced tensions, community cohesion, and youth empowerment. Key challenges to effective dialogue initiatives include internal factors (mistrust, rigid beliefs, past conflicts), external factors (political interference, resource constraints, social media influence), and operational factors (stakeholder engagement, cultural sensitivity, sustainability). Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering peace and coexistence in the region.

Conclusion

In conclusion, fostering interreligious dialogue is crucial for promoting peace and coexistence in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Despite the challenges posed by extremist violence and deep-seated mistrust, existing initiatives and stakeholders offer a foundation for building trust, understanding, and peace. By addressing the internal, external, and operational challenges to interreligious dialogue, it is possible to create a more stable and harmonious environment, empowering youth and strengthening community cohesion across religious lines.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Strengthen Dialogue Platforms: Enhance established dialogue platforms like the Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP) to facilitate continuous communication and trust-building between religious leaders and communities.

2. Youth Empowerment: Scale up youth-led initiatives such as the Nigeria Youth Collaborative Action for Religious Engagement to empower young people as agents of peace and tolerance.
3. Address Internal Challenges: Develop strategies to address pre-existing mistrust, rigid beliefs, and historical conflicts through targeted dialogue initiatives and healing programs.
4. Mitigate External Challenges: Ensure neutrality and effectiveness of dialogue initiatives by minimizing political interference, securing sustainable funding, and countering negative social media narratives.
5. Enhance Operational Capacity: Improve stakeholder engagement, cultural sensitivity, and ensure the long-term sustainability of dialogue initiatives through capacity building and resource mobilization.
6. Policy Support: Encourage government agencies to provide policy support and resources to sustain and align dialogue efforts with national peacebuilding strategies.

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