

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Religious Education and Its Role in Building Peaceful and Inclusive Communities in Kaduna State

Esther Vinzai Umaru-Abdullahi, Bitrus Gani

Department of Christian Religious Studies, Kaduna State University, Kaduna, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of Religious Education (RE) in building peaceful and inclusive communities in Kaduna State, Nigeria, a region historically affected by interfaith tensions and recurring religious conflicts. The study pursued three objectives: to examine the current RE curricula and teaching methods used in selected schools; to evaluate the extent to which RE promotes interfaith understanding, reduces prejudice, and strengthens social cohesion; and to identify challenges and practical strategies for enhancing the peacebuilding potential of RE. Guided by the Contact Hypothesis and Critical Pedagogy frameworks, the research employed a mixed-methods case study design involving six schools selected from the three senatorial zones of Kaduna State. Data were collected through curriculum analysis, classroom observations, interviews, and focus group discussions involving teachers, students, parents, and community leaders. Findings revealed a significant gap between the peace-oriented ideals embedded in the national Religion and National Values curriculum and the predominantly doctrinal and teacher-centered approaches adopted in classrooms. While some instructional materials contained elements capable of fostering inclusion and mutual respect, others reinforced religious exclusivity and stereotypes. The study also found that schools implementing structured interfaith interactions recorded higher levels of trust, empathy, and positive attitudes among students toward peers from different religious backgrounds. Furthermore, inadequate teacher preparation, limited pedagogical resources, and weak stakeholder collaboration emerged as major barriers to effective peace-oriented RE. The study concludes that reforming Religious Education through inclusive curricula, participatory teaching approaches, and strengthened interfaith engagement is essential for promoting sustainable peace, social cohesion, and inclusive development in Kaduna State.

Keywords: peacebuilding; interfaith; dialogue; social cohesion; curriculum reform

1 Introduction

Kaduna State, a microcosm of Nigeria's rich religious diversity, has long grappled with the profound challenge of harmonizing the faiths of its Muslim and Christian communities. Situated at the heart of the nation's northern region, the state's history is marked by both vibrant interfaith collaboration and devastating periods of conflict, underscoring a pressing need for sustainable solutions (Umar, 2001). In this complex landscape, the institution of education emerges not merely as a source of academic instruction, but as a critical arena where the future of social cohesion will be decided. The current approach to Religious Education (RE), however, often remains a point of division rather than unity, typically siloing students into separate doctrinal studies without fostering a mutual understanding of the 'other' (Kukah, 1993). This entrenched model represents a missed opportunity of monumental proportions, allowing misconceptions to fester and ignoring the powerful role schools could play in shaping a more peaceful Kaduna. The legacy of colonial administration's indirect rule, which

empowered certain ethnic and religious hierarchies, laid a foundation for structural inequality that continues to influence socio-political relations (Ibrahim, 2000). This historical backdrop is the stage upon which modern religious education operates.

Over the decades, cycles of violence—particularly those of the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s—have left deep psychological scars and reinforced spatial as well as educational segregation. The city of Kaduna itself is informally divided into predominantly Muslim northern areas and predominantly Christian southern settlements (Adesoji, 2011). Children growing up in these homogeneous neighbourhoods often have limited opportunities for meaningful contact with peers from other religious backgrounds. When this residential separation is compounded by segregated religious instruction in schools, the result is a self-perpetuating cycle in which lack of contact breeds ignorance, ignorance breeds fear, and fear breeds hostility. Against this background, the question of how Religious Education is designed and delivered becomes central to any serious effort at building lasting peace and inclusive communities in the state.

2 Statement of the problem

Religious conflict continues to threaten peace, unity, and development in Kaduna State. A major cause of this challenge is the lack of mutual understanding and interfaith knowledge among people, especially young people (Danjuma, 2013). Rather than promoting tolerance and coexistence, the current Religious Education system often separates students by faith, limiting opportunities for them to learn about and appreciate other religions (Ojo, 2007). In addition, Religious Education is largely doctrinal and teacher-centered, emphasizing memorization over dialogue, critical thinking, and shared values (Durojaiye, 2016). As a result, many students gain knowledge of their own faith but little understanding of others, leaving them ill-equipped to build empathy, respect, and peaceful relationships (Eze, 2018). This study therefore addresses the need to reform Religious Education curriculum and teaching methods as a means of promoting interfaith understanding, reducing intolerance, and fostering lasting peace in Kaduna State.

3 Theoretical framework

This study adopts the Contact Hypothesis, originally formulated by Gordon Allport (1954) in his seminal work *The Nature of Prejudice*. The theory posits that under appropriate conditions, interpersonal contact between members of different groups is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations. Allport argued that prejudice often stems from ignorance, fear, and lack of familiarity with the "other," and that direct, positive interaction between groups can challenge stereotypes, humanize outgroup members, and foster mutual understanding. Central to the hypothesis is the idea that contact alone is not sufficient; it must occur under specific conditions to be effective. Allport identified four optimal conditions: equal status between groups within the contact situation, shared goals that require cooperative effort, intergroup cooperation rather than competition, and institutional support from authorities and social norms. When these conditions are met, contact can lead to reduced prejudice, increased empathy, and more positive attitudes toward the outgroup.

Since Allport's original formulation, the Contact Hypothesis has been extensively tested and refined. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of over 500 studies and found that intergroup contact typically reduces prejudice, and that these effects generalize beyond the immediate contact situation to broader outgroup attitudes. They also identified key mediators through which contact

works, including increased knowledge about the outgroup, reduced anxiety during intergroup interactions, and enhanced empathy and perspective-taking. These findings have important implications for designing interfaith educational programs: effective programs should not only provide accurate information about other religions but also create safe, structured opportunities for students to interact, collaborate, and build emotional connections.

Applied to the context of Religious Education in Kaduna State, the Contact Hypothesis provides a compelling theoretical rationale for transforming RE from a segregated, doctrinally isolated subject into a dialogical, interfaith-engaging one. The current separation of Muslim and Christian students in parallel religious education systems means that many young people have little to no meaningful contact with peers from other faith traditions, perpetuating ignorance, mistrust, and prejudice. Empirical evidence from Nigerian interfaith initiatives, such as the work of the Interfaith Mediation Centre in Kaduna (Ashafa & Wuye, 2009) and recent studies on interfaith education (Babagario, 2019), supports this theoretical prediction.

4 Conceptual clarification

To ensure clarity and a common understanding of the concepts used in this study, the following terms are explained within the context of the research:

4.1 Religious education (RE)

Religious Education refers to the structured teaching and learning of religious beliefs, values, practices, and moral principles within formal educational institutions. In the context of this study, it encompasses educational approaches that promote understanding of one's own faith as well as respect for the beliefs and traditions of others.

4.2 Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding Peacebuilding is the process of fostering sustainable peace by addressing the underlying causes of conflict, promoting reconciliation, encouraging dialogue, and strengthening relationships among individuals and groups. It seeks to create conditions that support long-term harmony and peaceful coexistence.

4.3 Social cohesion

Social cohesion refers to the degree of unity, trust, cooperation, and shared belonging among members of a society. It reflects the ability of people from diverse backgrounds to live together peacefully while respecting their differences and pursuing common goals.

4.4 Interfaith dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is a constructive process of communication and engagement between individuals or groups from different religious traditions. It aims to promote mutual understanding, respect, cooperation, and the peaceful resolution of religious misunderstandings and tensions.

4.5 Contact Hypothesis

The Contact Hypothesis, developed by Allport (1954), proposes that meaningful interaction between members of different social, ethnic, or religious groups can reduce prejudice, challenge stereotypes, and improve relationships when conducted under appropriate conditions.

4.6 Inclusivity

Inclusivity Inclusivity refers to the intentional recognition, acceptance, and accommodation of diverse identities, beliefs, perspectives, and backgrounds. Within this study, it emphasizes creating educational environments where all students feel valued, respected, and able to participate regardless of their religious affiliation.

5 Significance of the study

This study holds significant theoretical, practical, and policy implications. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on the intersection of religious education and peacebuilding, particularly within the African context. By applying the Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954) to the specific socio-cultural context of Kaduna State, the study tested and refined existing theoretical frameworks.

Practically, the findings provide evidence-based insights for curriculum developers, teacher trainers, and school administrators seeking to enhance the peace building potential of Religious Education. The study's focus on both primary and secondary levels ensures that recommendations are relevant across different developmental stages of learners. From a policy perspective, the research offers concrete recommendations for the Kaduna State Ministry of Education and the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) regarding curriculum reform, teacher training, and the integration of interfaith dialogue into educational structures. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to the broader goal of sustainable peace and social cohesion in Kaduna State and beyond.

6 Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods case study design to examine how religious education contributes to peaceful and inclusive communities in Kaduna State. The approach combined qualitative and quantitative methods to generate both contextual and comparative insights while enhancing the credibility of findings through triangulation. Data were collected from six purposively selected schools across Kaduna Central, Kaduna North, and Kaduna South Senatorial Zones, with each zone represented by one primary and one secondary school. The sample included public, private, faith-based, and government-owned institutions to capture diverse educational contexts. Data collection was conducted in three stages. First, we reviewed relevant Religious Education syllabi, textbooks, and instructional materials from NERDC, the State Ministry of Education, and selected schools using content analysis to identify peacebuilding themes, inclusive language, and representations of other religions. Second, researchers conducted classroom observations using a structured protocol to assess teaching approaches, classroom interactions, portrayals of religious diversity, and opportunities for dialogue and critical thinking. A minimum of four Religious Education lessons were observed in each school. Third, semi-structured interviews with teachers, parents, and community/religious leaders, alongside Focus Group Discussions with students, explored perceptions of Religious Education, peace-oriented teaching practices, challenges, and attitudes toward religious diversity and peaceful coexistence. Data analysis followed an iterative mixed-methods process. Quantitative data from observations and document reviews were analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations to identify patterns across school types and senatorial zones. Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs were transcribed and analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, combining predetermined and emerging codes. Integrating both data strands enabled a comprehensive understanding of how Religious Education content and teaching practices influence

students' attitudes toward peace and inclusion. Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from adult participants, while parental consent and student assent were secured for minors. All data were anonymized, securely stored, and reported using pseudonyms. Given the sensitivity of religious issues, researchers maintained cultural and religious sensitivity, and ethical approval was obtained from the Kaduna State University Research Ethics Committee before fieldwork commenced. Despite its strengths, the study has some limitations. The small sample of six schools limits the wider generalizability of findings, while reliance on self-reported responses may not fully reflect participants' actual behaviors. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the study captures perceptions at a single point in time and cannot assess long-term impacts. The sensitivity of religious topics may also have influenced some participants to provide socially desirable responses.

6.1 Scope and delimitation

The study was delimited to six schools across the three senatorial zones of Kaduna State: Kaduna Central, Kaduna North, and Kaduna South. Within each zone, one primary school and one secondary school were purposively selected. The research focused on the official Religious Studies or Religion and National Values syllabi, classroom teaching methods, and the perceptions of teachers, students, parents, and religious leaders. While the study acknowledges the influence of non-formal religious education (through media, sermons, and family teachings), its primary focus is on formal school-based Religious Education.

7 Historical context of religious diversity and conflict

The historical context of Kaduna State is essential for understanding the contemporary dynamics of religious education. Originally designated as the capital of the Northern Region, Kaduna has long been a melting pot of diverse ethnic and religious groups (Umar, 2001). However, this diversity has been a source of tension, with conflicts often framed along a Muslim-Hausa/Fulani versus Christian-Berom/Kataf dichotomy. The legacy of the colonial administration's indirect rule, which empowered certain ethnic and religious hierarchies, laid a foundation for structural inequality that continues to influence socio-political relations (Ibrahim, 2000). The colonial policy of indirect rule institutionalized differences between ethnic and religious groups by governing through traditional rulers who were granted authority over specific territories and populations. This system not only entrenched ethnic and religious identities as primary markers of political belonging but also created conditions in which competition for resources, political power, and social status became increasingly framed in religious terms. The post-independence era inherited these structural divisions, and subsequent political and economic developments often exacerbated rather than ameliorated them.

The physical and social architecture of Kaduna State often mirrors this educational separation. The city itself is informally divided into predominantly Muslim "core" northern areas and predominantly Christian southern settlements, a spatial segregation that followed the violent conflicts of the 1980s and 2000s (Adesoji, 2011). This geography means that for many children, their religious education is not only ideologically isolated but also physically situated within homogenous communities, further limiting opportunities for organic interfaith encounter and understanding. Children growing up in predominantly Muslim or predominantly Christian neighborhoods often have limited opportunities to interact with peers from other religious backgrounds in meaningful ways. This residential segregation reinforces the educational segregation that occurs in schools, creating a self-perpetuating cycle in which lack of contact breeds ignorance, ignorance breeds fear, and fear breeds hostility.

8 Traditional models of religious education

Formal religious education in Nigeria is primarily delivered through two parallel systems: the Islamiyya schools, which are predominantly Quranic, and the Sunday schools within Christian denominations (Kukah, 1993). These institutions have traditionally focused on faith formation and literacy within their own traditions, often with little to no interaction with the "other." This separation has created parallel socializations, where young citizens learn about their faith in isolation, potentially absorbing narratives that are silent on, or even hostile towards, other religious traditions. A significant body of literature critiques this isolationist model. Ojo (2007) argues that when religious education is solely inward-looking, it fails to equip students with the theological and social tools needed to navigate a religiously plural society. In the specific context of Kaduna, this isolation can reinforce stereotypes and prejudices from a young age. Children educated exclusively within their own religious enclaves may enter adulthood viewing members of the other faith not as fellow citizens but primarily as representatives of a competing, and potentially threatening, theological bloc (Danjuma, 2013). Furthermore, the content of some religious curricula has been identified as a potential source of conflict. Analyses of certain textbooks and teaching materials have revealed the presence of exclusivist theologies and polemical language that delegitimize other faiths (Ostien, 2009; Higazi, 2011).

9 The potential of dialogical religious education

A more nuanced strand of scholarship challenges the simplistic narrative that religious education is inherently divisive. These scholars contend that the problem lies not in religious education per se, but in its pedagogical approach and objectives. The work of Usman (2015) suggests that within both Islamic and Christian traditions are deep wells of resources—such as the concepts of justice ('adl), compassion (rahmah), and love for neighbor—that are foundational to peacebuilding. The failure, therefore, is in the underutilization of these peace-positive elements in standard curricula. In response to this failure, a growing movement advocates for a paradigm shift towards Interreligious Dialogue (IRD) and Interfaith Education. Proponents like Shann (2012) argue for the integration of dialogue into educational structures, moving beyond mere tolerance to active engagement. In this model, students are not only taught about their own faith in a self-critical manner but are also taught about the beliefs and practices of the religious "other" in a respectful and accurate way. The theoretical underpinnings of this approach are supported by the Contact Hypothesis, which posits that under appropriate conditions, interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between groups.

10 Empirical evidence from interfaith initiatives

Several local initiatives in Nigeria provide empirical evidence for this potential. The Interfaith Mediation Centre in Kaduna, for instance, has pioneered programs that bring together Muslim and Christian youth for dialogue and collaborative projects (Ashafa & Wuye, 2009). Their work demonstrates that when young people are given a safe space to share their fears, ask questions, and work towards common community goals, deeply held prejudices can be dismantled. This model exemplifies how RE can be transformed from a tool of separation into a platform for reconciliation. Similarly, the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), co-chaired by the Sultan of Sokoto and the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), provides a high-level model for collaboration. While not an educational institution per se, NIREC's very existence and its public pronouncements send a

powerful message that intra-faith leadership can model cooperation for their respective communities. Recent empirical studies have provided further evidence. Babagario (2019) examined an interfaith education pilot program in two parts of Kaduna City, one predominantly Christian and the other predominantly Muslim, and found that a majority of participants supported the IFE curriculum in schools and Community Peace Action Networks.

11 Government policies, curriculum frameworks, and the role of teachers

Government policies, particularly through the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), have attempted to introduce a more unified and nationalistic curriculum. The "Religion and National Values" curriculum, for example, is a compulsory subject that includes components of civic education and, in theory, teaches about different religions (NERDC, 2013). However, its implementation has been widely criticized. Critics point out that the curriculum is often taught in a perfunctory manner, and in many schools it is simply divided so that a Muslim teacher teaches the Islamic segment to Muslim students and a Christian teacher teaches the Christian segment to Christian students, thereby missing the core objective of integrated, dialogical learning (Durojaiye, 2016). The quality and orientation of teachers are paramount. A teacher who is themselves steeped in exclusivist theology is unlikely to effectively facilitate interfaith dialogue, regardless of the curriculum's intent. Consequently, scholars like Eze (2018) have called for specialized training programs for RE teachers in conflict-sensitive pedagogy. Recent research by Ozokoye and Farjani (2025) found that reflective-based seminars are effective in enhancing religious multicultural competence among future educators. Oluwatosin et al. (2025) similarly underscored the importance of comprehensive professional development programs that include cultural competence, inclusive pedagogical strategies, and opportunities for collaborative learning.

12 Challenges and summary of the literature

Despite the promising potential of dialogical RE, significant obstacles remain. Deep-seated mistrust between communities, fueled by a history of violent clashes, creates a social environment resistant to integration. Parents may fear that interfaith education will lead to the dilution of their children's faith or even conversion (Bala, 2014). Furthermore, the political economy of conflict in Kaduna State cannot be ignored. Many analysts argue that what appears as religious conflict is often a struggle over scarce resources, political power, and land, which is then framed in religious terms by elites to mobilize support (Mustapha, 2014). The rise of transnational extremist ideologies, such as those propagated by Boko Haram and ISWAP, presents another formidable challenge (Thurston, 2016).

The literature presents a dual narrative regarding religious education in Kaduna State. On one hand, it has been, and in many cases continues to be, a factor in sustaining the cycles of conflict by socializing youth into segregated identities and, at times, promoting exclusivist theologies. On the other hand, a reconceived model of religious education—one that is self-critical, dialogical, and intentionally peace-oriented—holds immense promise as a vehicle for reconciliation. The success of this transformative project hinges on several factors: the reform of curricula and teaching materials, the comprehensive training of teachers, the genuine commitment of religious and community leaders, and its integration with broader efforts to address the political and economic drivers of conflict.

13 Limitations of the study

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the focus on six schools, while providing depth, limits the generalizability of findings to the entire state. Second, the study relies on self-reported attitudes in interviews and FGDs, which may not fully reflect actual behaviors. Third, the cross-sectional design captures attitudes at a single point in time and cannot measure long-term impact. Finally, the sensitive nature of religious topics may lead some participants to provide socially desirable responses rather than their true views.

14 Findings

14.1 Current RE syllabi and teaching methods

The documentary analysis revealed that the official "Religion and National Values" curriculum, developed by NERDC (2013), contains explicit provisions for promoting interfaith understanding and peaceful coexistence. The curriculum document includes themes such as "Living in Unity and Harmony," "Respect for Other Religions," and "Peace and Conflict Resolution." However, the analysis of actual classroom practice revealed a significant disconnect between these official prescriptions and what occurs in the classroom.

Across the six schools, classroom observations (24 sessions in total) revealed that teaching methods were predominantly dogmatic and teacher-centered. In 18 of the 24 observed sessions (75%), the teacher relied primarily on lecture and rote memorization. Only 6 sessions (25%) demonstrated elements of dialogical or participatory pedagogy. In all schools, the RE curriculum was effectively divided so that Muslim students learned Islamic Studies while Christian students learned Christian Religious Studies, with minimal opportunity for cross-religious interaction or comparative study.

"We teach our students according to their faith. The Muslim students go with the Islamic Studies teacher, and the Christian students stay with me for CRS. That is how it has always been done."

This finding confirms Durojaiye's (2016) observation that the integrated intent of the "Religion and National Values" curriculum is often undermined in practice by the separation of religious instruction along faith lines.

14.2 Impact on stereotypes, prejudice, and social cohesion

The analysis of classroom discourse and student responses in FGDs revealed that the current approach to RE does little to challenge stereotypes or reduce prejudice. In schools where RE was taught in isolation, students demonstrated limited knowledge of other religions and, in some cases, expressed negative stereotypes about followers of other faiths.

"I don't know what Muslims believe, but I know they are different from us. We don't play with them."

In contrast, the two schools that had participated in structured interfaith activities (organized by the Interfaith Mediation Centre) demonstrated significantly different outcomes. In these schools, students who had engaged in joint activities with peers from other religious backgrounds expressed higher levels of empathy, trust, and willingness to collaborate. This finding provides empirical support for the Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954) and aligns with the work of Babagario (2019),

who found that interfaith education pilot programs in Kaduna City were supported by a majority of participants and helped to reduce tensions.

14.3 Challenges hindering peace-oriented RE

The study identified several key challenges hindering effective, peace-oriented RE in Kaduna State:

- **Inadequate Teacher Training:** The vast majority of RE teachers interviewed (10 of 12) reported that their pre-service training did not include any modules on interfaith education, conflict-sensitive pedagogy, or teaching in religiously diverse classrooms.

"I was trained to teach Christian Religious Studies, not to teach about Islam or to handle Muslim students in my class. I don't have the skills for that."

- **Parental and Community Resistance:** Several teachers and school administrators reported that some parents were resistant to the idea of interfaith education, fearing that it would lead to the dilution of their children's faith or even conversion (supporting Bala, 2014).

"I want my child to learn our religion, not to be confused by learning about other religions. That is the work of the mosque, not the school."

- **Curriculum Implementation Gaps:** While the official curriculum contains peace-oriented content, its implementation is inconsistent. Teachers reported that the "Religion and National Values" curriculum is often treated as a low-priority subject, with limited time allocated and few resources provided.
- **Security Concerns:** In some areas, security concerns limited the ability of schools to organize interfaith activities. Teachers and administrators expressed reluctance to bring students from different religious backgrounds together due to fears of potential conflict or reprisals.

14.4 Stakeholder views on RE for peacebuilding

The interviews and FGDs revealed a complex picture of stakeholder views on the role of RE in peacebuilding. Most teachers (9 of 12) expressed support for the idea that RE should contribute to peacebuilding, but many felt ill-equipped to implement this vision. Several teachers called for specialized training in interfaith education and conflict-sensitive pedagogy.

"I believe religious education can help bring peace, but we need training. We need to learn how to teach about other religions without making students feel that their own faith is being attacked."

Parental views were more divided. While some parents saw value in interfaith education, others expressed concerns about religious dilution and conversion. Among the 20 parents interviewed, 12 expressed support for interfaith education, 5 were neutral, and 3 were opposed. The parents who supported interfaith education often cited the desire for their children to grow up in a peaceful society.

The religious leaders interviewed (both Muslim and Christian) generally expressed support for peace-oriented religious education, though some emphasized the importance of maintaining doctrinal integrity.

"Islam teaches peace and respect for others. But we must be careful not to compromise our beliefs. Teaching about other religions is good, but it must be done in a way that does not confuse our children."

This view aligns with the perspective of Al-Miskin (2010), who argued that emphasizing historical precedents of coexistence within Islamic tradition can provide a powerful counter-narrative to exclusivist interpretations.

14.5 Inflammatory and peace-promoting content

The analysis of textbooks and teaching materials revealed both problematic and promising content. In several textbooks used in the selected schools, the study identified language that could be considered polemical or disparaging toward other religions. For example, some Christian Religious Studies textbooks referred to Islam as a "false religion," while some Islamic Studies materials described Christianity as having "corrupted" the original message of Jesus. While these examples were not pervasive, their presence points to a need for careful review and revision of teaching materials.

The analysis also identified underutilized resources within both Islamic and Christian traditions that emphasize universal values like justice, compassion, and neighborly love. For example, Islamic textbooks included teachings on the importance of justice ('adl) and compassion (rahmah), while Christian textbooks emphasized the love of neighbor and the Beatitudes. These resources provide a foundation for interfaith cohesion but are often not explicitly connected to peacebuilding themes.

14.6 Teacher training and inclusive outcomes

The study found a clear correlation between teacher training and inclusive outcomes. Teachers who had received training in conflict-sensitive pedagogy and interfaith dialogue (3 of 12) were significantly more likely to create inclusive classroom environments and facilitate constructive discussions about religious diversity. In schools where teachers had received such training, students demonstrated higher levels of interfaith knowledge and more positive attitudes toward other religions. This finding supports the work of Eze (2018), who called for specialized training programs for RE teachers in conflict-sensitive pedagogy, and Ozokoye and Farjani (2025), who found that reflective-based seminars are effective in enhancing religious multicultural competence among future educators.

14.7 Evidence supporting the Contact Hypothesis

The study provided strong evidence supporting the Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954). Students in schools that hosted joint interfaith activities, or where the RE curriculum deliberately created space for dialogue, expressed significantly higher levels of empathy, trust, and willingness to collaborate with peers from the other religious community compared to those in fully segregated environments. In the two schools that had participated in structured interfaith activities, students demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of other religions and were more likely to reject stereotypes.

"Before, I thought all Muslims were violent. But when we did the peace club together, I met Muslim students who were just like me. They want peace too. We are not so different."

This finding provides empirical support for the Contact Hypothesis in the specific context of Kaduna State and aligns with the work of Pam (2011), who argued that structured interfaith educational programs can create the optimal conditions for reducing prejudice.

15 Discussion

The findings of this study paint a complex picture of the current state of Religious Education in Kaduna State. On one hand, the official curriculum contains peace-oriented content, and there are promising examples of interfaith initiatives that are making a positive difference. On the other hand, the predominant approach to RE in most schools remains dogmatic, exclusivist, and disconnected from the realities of a religiously plural society.

The disconnect between official policy and classroom practice is a critical finding. It suggests that simply revising curricula is insufficient; what is needed is a comprehensive approach that addresses teacher training, resource development, and institutional support. As Oluwatosin et al. (2025) argued, curriculum reform alone is insufficient without corresponding pedagogical change and comprehensive teacher development.

The study's finding on the importance of teacher training is particularly significant. Teachers who had received training in interfaith education and conflict-sensitive pedagogy were able to create more inclusive classroom environments, even within the constraints of the existing curriculum. This suggests that investing in teacher professional development is a high-leverage strategy for improving the peacebuilding potential of RE.

The evidence supporting the Contact Hypothesis is also encouraging. It suggests that when Muslim and Christian students are given opportunities to interact in structured, cooperative settings, stereotypes and prejudices can be reduced. This finding has important implications for school policies and practices, suggesting that schools should actively create opportunities for interfaith contact and collaboration.

However, the study also identified significant challenges. Parental resistance, security concerns, and the influence of non-formal religious education (through media, sermons, and family teachings) are all obstacles that must be addressed. As Mustapha (2014) argued, religious education alone cannot resolve conflicts whose roots are structural and economic. It must be part of a broader, multi-sectoral approach that addresses governance, economic inequality, and justice.

16 Conclusion

This study addresses a critical gap in understanding the role of Religious Education in building peaceful and inclusive communities in Kaduna State. By examining the current state of RE syllabi and pedagogy, evaluating their impact on stereotypes and social cohesion, and exploring stakeholder perspectives, the research provides evidence-based recommendations for reform.

The literature review demonstrated that religious education in Kaduna State has been both a source of division and a potential resource for peacebuilding. Traditional, exclusivist models of RE have reinforced divisive identities and perpetuated mutual ignorance, while emerging dialogical approaches offer a path towards mutual understanding and respect. The Contact Hypothesis provides a foundation for understanding how RE can be transformed to fulfill its peacebuilding potential.

The study's key findings—a documented disconnect between syllabi and practice, the identification of inflammatory and peace-promoting content, the correlation between teacher training and outcomes, and evidence supporting structured interfaith contact—provide a comprehensive picture of the current state of RE and a roadmap for reform. Ultimately, this research is motivated by the conviction that education, and Religious Education in particular, can and must play a central role in

building a peaceful and inclusive Kaduna State. The transformation of RE from a potential source of division into a cornerstone of inclusion is not merely an educational preference; it is an urgent imperative for the state's future. As Kaduna continues to navigate the challenges of religious diversity, the findings and recommendations of this study will contribute to the collective effort to secure lasting peace and social cohesion.

17 Recommendations

1. **Curriculum Reform:** Revise the RE curriculum to include comparative religious literacy, shared ethical values, and practical conflict-resolution skills. Ensure that textbooks and teaching materials accurately and respectfully represent all religious traditions, avoiding polemical language and stereotypes. Integrate local case studies of peaceful coexistence and interfaith collaboration, and develop supplementary resources that highlight the peace-positive elements within both Islamic and Christian traditions.
2. **Teacher Training and Development:** Include modules on interfaith education, conflict-sensitive pedagogy, and classroom management in diverse settings in pre-service teacher education programs. Provide ongoing in-service training for RE teachers on facilitating interfaith dialogue and addressing sensitive topics. Consider commitment to interfaith understanding and respect for religious diversity in teacher recruitment and promotion decisions.
3. **Structured Interfaith Contact:** Create structured opportunities for interfaith contact and collaboration in schools, ensuring that these meet the optimal conditions of equal status, common goals, cooperation, and institutional support. Establish peer mediation and conflict resolution programs that draw on religious values and principles, and encourage joint community service projects that bring together students from different religious backgrounds.
4. **Community and Parental Engagement:** Engage parents and community leaders in dialogue about the goals and benefits of peace-oriented RE, addressing concerns about religious dilution or conversion. Partner with religious institutions and interfaith organizations to support and supplement school-based RE programs. Promote responsible religious communication in media and public discourse, countering extremist narratives and promoting messages of tolerance and coexistence.
5. **Resources, Monitoring, and Research:** Allocate adequate resources for curriculum development, teacher training, and the production of quality teaching materials. Establish mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of RE's peacebuilding impact, and integrate RE reform with broader peacebuilding and social cohesion initiatives at the state level. Support the establishment of pilot Centers of Excellence for Peace Education as models for other schools and regions. Conduct longitudinal and comparative studies to measure the long-term impact of peace-oriented RE and explore the potential of digital technologies for enhancing interfaith education and dialogue.

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Appendix A. Classroom observation checklist

Table A1. Classroom observation checklist (rating scale 0-4).

Indicator	Not Observed (0)	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Always (4)
Teacher uses dialogical methods					
Students encouraged to ask questions					
References to other religions are respectful					
Opportunities for critical thinking provided					
Peace-related themes discussed					
Inclusive language used					
Students from different faiths interact					
Teacher avoids stereotyping					

The observation protocol was applied across all six schools (two per senatorial zone). Below are three representative completed checklists — one from each of Kaduna Central, Kaduna North, and Kaduna South — followed by an aggregated summary of the full 24 sessions.

Kaduna Central Senatorial Zone

School: Government Secondary School, Kawo; Class Level: JSS 2

Subject: Christian Religious Studies; Topic: Love of Neighbor / Peaceful Coexistence

Date of observation: 8th June 2026; Observer: Research Team

Table A2. Completed observation checklist, Kaduna Central Senatorial Zone.

Indicator	Rating	Brief comment
Teacher uses dialogical methods	1 (Rarely)	Mostly lecture; one short Q&A segment
Students encouraged to ask questions	1 (Rarely)	Students largely passive
References to other religions respectful	2 (Sometimes)	Other faith mentioned once, neutrally
Opportunities for critical thinking	0 (Not Observed)	No analysis or comparison tasks
Peace-related themes discussed	2 (Sometimes)	Love of neighbor touched on, not interfaith
Inclusive language used	1 (Rarely)	Language remained confessional
Students from different faiths interact	0 (Not Observed)	Class was Christian students only
Teacher avoids stereotyping	3 (Often)	No negative stereotypes expressed

Notes: Teaching was teacher-centred and confessional. The peace potential of the topic was not extended to interfaith relations. Pattern typical of the majority of observed sessions.

Kaduna North Senatorial Zone

School: Local Government Education Authority Primary School, Zaria; Class Level: Primary 5

Subject: Islamic Studies; Topic: Justice (Adl) and Good Neighbourliness

Date of observation: 18 March 2025; Observer: Research Team

Table A3. Completed observation checklist, Kaduna North Senatorial Zone.

Indicator	Rating	Brief comment
Teacher uses dialogical methods	1 (Rarely)	Predominantly rote recitation and explanation
Students encouraged to ask questions	1 (Rarely)	Limited to clarification of memorized points
References to other religions respectful	1 (Rarely)	Other faiths not mentioned in the lesson
Opportunities for critical thinking	0 (Not Observed)	Focus remained on doctrinal content
Peace-related themes discussed	2 (Sometimes)	Justice and neighborliness taught within Islamic frame
Inclusive language used	1 (Rarely)	Language was faith-specific
Students from different faiths interact	0 (Not Observed)	Class was Muslim students only
Teacher avoids stereotyping	3 (Often)	No negative remarks about other faiths

Notes: Content had clear peace-relevant values (justice, neighborliness) but remained confined to the Islamic tradition. No comparative or interfaith dimension was introduced. Segregated delivery mirrored the pattern in other zones.

Kaduna South Senatorial Zone

School: Community Secondary School, Kafanchan; Class Level: SS 1

Subject: Christian Religious Studies; Topic: The Beatitudes and Peacemaking

Date of observation: 8th June 2026; Observer: Research Team

Table A4. Completed observation checklist, Kaduna South Senatorial Zone.

Indicator	Rating	Brief comment
Teacher uses dialogical methods	2 (Sometimes)	Some group discussion; still largely teacher-led
Students encouraged to ask questions	2 (Sometimes)	A few student contributions were invited
References to other religions respectful	2 (Sometimes)	Brief neutral reference to living with others
Opportunities for critical thinking	1 (Rarely)	Limited application to real-life conflict
Peace-related themes discussed	3 (Often)	Peacemaking was the central theme of the lesson
Inclusive language used	2 (Sometimes)	Some inclusive phrasing used
Students from different faiths interact	0 (Not Observed)	Class was Christian students only
Teacher avoids stereotyping	3 (Often)	No stereotyping observed

Notes: This session showed relatively more participatory elements than the majority of observations (one of the 6 sessions rated as having dialogical features). However, the class remained mono-religious and no structured interfaith contact occurred.

Aggregated summary across all 24 observed sessions (three zones)

The three sample checklists above illustrate the dominant pattern observed throughout the study. Key aggregated results from the full set of 24 classroom observations are as follows:

- Dialogical / participatory methods: Observed in only 6 of 24 sessions (25%). The remaining 18 sessions (75%) were predominantly lecture- and rote-based.
- Cross-faith student interaction within RE classes: Not observed in any of the 24 sessions. In every school, Muslim students were taught Islamic Studies and Christian students were taught CRS separately.
- Peace-related themes: Present in the official curriculum and occasionally touched upon in lessons, but rarely linked explicitly to interfaith understanding or conflict resolution skills.
- Stereotyping in classroom talk: Overt negative stereotyping of other religions was uncommon in the observed lessons. Problematic language appeared more frequently in some textbooks and teaching materials than in live teacher discourse.
- Consistency across zones: The same overall pattern (dogmatic delivery + faith segregation) was found in Kaduna Central, Kaduna North, and Kaduna South. Minor variation existed in the degree of student participation, but no zone showed regular interfaith classroom contact.

These observational data underpin the central finding reported in the main text: a significant disconnect exists between the peace-oriented content of the official curriculum and the predominantly segregated, non-dialogical pedagogical practices in classrooms across the three senatorial zones of Kaduna State.

Appendix B. Interview guide for teachers

The following guide was used for semi-structured interviews with Religious Education teachers:

1. How long have you been teaching Religious Education?
2. What training have you received for teaching RE?
3. How would you describe your approach to teaching RE?
4. How do you handle discussions about other religions in your classroom?
5. What challenges do you face in teaching RE in a religiously diverse context?
6. In your view, what is the role of RE in promoting peace and understanding?
7. Have you participated in any interfaith activities or training?
8. What resources would help you teach RE more effectively for peacebuilding?
9. How do parents and community members respond to RE teaching?
10. What changes would you recommend to the RE curriculum?

Appendix C. Focus group discussion guide for students

The following guide was used for Focus Group Discussions with students:

1. What do you learn in your Religious Education classes?
2. How does your RE class talk about other religions?
3. Have you ever interacted with students from other religious backgrounds?
4. What do you think about people of other faiths?

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5. How can RE help bring people of different religions together?
 6. What would you like to learn more about in RE?
 7. Do you think RE helps you understand people different from you?
 8. What activities would help students from different religions become friends?

Note: Interviews and FGDs were conducted in English or the local language as preferred by participants. All sessions were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed, and anonymized. Pseudonyms are used in the reporting of findings.