



## **Chapter Eight - Religious Education and Peace Education in Northern Nigeria: A Synergistic Approach for Socio-Religious Harmony and National Security**

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# Chapter Eight

## Religious Education and Peace Education in Northern Nigeria: A Synergistic Approach for Socio-Religious Harmony and National Security

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### Abstract

This final *Chapter* provides an overview of the critical interplay between religious education and peace education in Northern Nigeria, a region marked by its diverse religious landscape and recurring interfaith conflicts. Al-amin argues that integrating peace education into religious curricula and community programs can play a pivotal role in mitigating religious-based conflicts in Northern Nigeria. He highlights the importance of inclusive, unbiased education that respects the plurality of beliefs and promotes peaceful coexistence. He discusses the challenges and opportunities in implementing such an approach, including the engagement of religious leaders, educational institutions, and civil society organisations.



## Introduction

Education plays an important role in the development of the nation in its ramifications. Education is the key sector upon which all nations of the world depend for their national security, development and prosperity. Since Nigeria is blessed with many religions and as a result the country has faced religious crises several times, religious education and peace education are key and viable tools in providing a synergistic approach for socio-religious harmony and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. Scholars have written much on the role and relationship between religious education and peace education. Consequently, almost all their findings indicate that religious education and peace education have a veritable role to play providing a synergistic approach for socio-religious harmony and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. The degree to which religious education and peace education improve socio-religious harmony and peaceful coexistence depends on their status and content.

Starting with the definition of education, there is no single universally accepted definition of the term 'education.' A great number of educationists have attempted to define education from different perspectives. Esaduwha, Ammantukur and Isyaku see education as any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, education is an integral part of any society, as it plays a vital role in shaping individuals and preparing them for their roles in society.<sup>2</sup> The Importance of Education to human beings cannot be over-emphasized. Education could be defined as a process, a product and a discipline.<sup>3</sup> As a process, education means a set of activities which entail handing down the ideals, values and norms of the society across generations. It involves the transmission of knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs. But according to Whitehead education does not end at the acquisition of knowledge. It transcends to the ability to apply the acquired knowledge. Moore opined that education may be thought of as a process involving activities like teaching, persuading, motivating, learning, and examining which go on generally in schools, colleges and religious places.<sup>4</sup> For this paper, education could be defined as a process of training and instruction designed to instil knowledge, skills, attitudes and values awakening the potentialities of all individuals, enabling them to develop to the fullest of their abilities and to contribute greatly to the development of their respective societies.

<sup>1</sup> Esaduwha, Ammantukur and Isyaku 2011 in Aigbe 2012, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Mohammed 2009, 71-2.

<sup>3</sup> Ukeje 1979 in Tijjani and Jiyah 2012, 25.

<sup>4</sup> Moore 1978 in Tijjani and Jiyah 2012, 25.



In fact, education is the most critical driving force in the growth of human civilization. Thus, the success of any nation and economy depends solely on the roles of critical skills, knowledge, intelligence and know-how of the population within the society, and the economy. The basic roles of the education sector therefore are to develop and supply the skilled manpower required for the revitalization and development of human and material resources within the economy. The development of human resources within every economy is significant for any meaningful change or development to take place. The human resource must be educated adequately, to adapt or adjust to new conditions and bring about positive changes in society. Education or knowledge and their practical applications are the major prerequisites for any sustainable development and economic empowerment. According to Faruk and Isa, No nation can aspire to achieve its full development potential unless all its citizens are full participants in its development process, which could be achieved through effective education. Based on this premise, qualitative education at all levels of Nigeria's educational system is an absolute prerequisite for the development and advancement of human and material resources in our society.

The main objective of education is to impart new knowledge to the changes that are almost ...as a product, education is measured by the qualities and traits displayed by the educated person. Here the educated person is traditionally conceived of as a knowledgeable, religious and cultured person. From the progressive viewpoint, the person has a well-developed personality and is self-realised.<sup>5</sup> As a discipline, education is defined in terms of the branches of organised knowledge to which people are exposed in colleges, institutes and worshipping places. The branches of organised knowledge in mosques, churches and society at large. But religious and peace education at all levels helps achieve peaceful coexistence in society. The major goal of religious education and peace education is to resist violence through the promotion of human freedom and dignity, respect for life and by introducing the learner to non-violent strategies, dialogue, mediation, and non-prejudice perception of others.<sup>6</sup>

This research finally underscores the significance of adopting a holistic approach that combines religious and peace education to address the intricate dynamics of religious diversity in Northern Nigeria. By promoting mutual respect, dialogue, and conflict resolution skills, this integrated approach holds the potential to contribute to

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<sup>5</sup> Moore 1978 in Tijjani and Jiyah 2012, 25.

<sup>6</sup> Arweak et al 2005; see also Jackson and Fujiwara 2007.



lasting peace and social cohesion in a region marked by religious pluralism and historical tensions. In conclusion, the coexistence of religious education and peace education in Northern Nigeria is a critical imperative for fostering harmony and stability in the region. The rich religious diversity presents both opportunities and challenges, as it can either fuel interfaith tensions or serve as a foundation for mutual understanding. To ensure a peaceful coexistence, there is a need for comprehensive educational reforms that emphasise tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and conflict resolution skills. By integrating religious and peace education, Northern Nigeria can pave the way for a more peaceful and harmonious future, where individuals from different religious backgrounds can live together in respect and unity, ultimately contributing to the broader peace and development of the region.

## **Conceptual Clarification of Religious Education and Peace Education**

Religious education is secularly understood as the teaching of knowledge of a particular religion in general and its varied aspects, their beliefs, doctrines, rituals, custom rites, personal roles etc.<sup>7</sup> Garba further argues that the secular understanding of religious education is substantially different from that of society that adhere to religious law, wherein religious connotes the dominant academic study, and in the typical religious terms, teaches doctrine which defines social customs as ‘law’ and the violation thereof as ‘crimes’ or ‘misdemeanours’ requiring punishment.<sup>8</sup> It also refers to the teaching and learning of general information about God, the universe and mankind, the relationship that exists or should exist between them. In other words, religious education is a body of knowledge or the teaching of that knowledge about how man should relate with God, his creator, with nature i.e. the environment, and with his fellow man. Religion is the body of knowledge or the teaching of that body of knowledge, which will equip man with the skills and values necessary to relate positively with God, his creator, with the world around him and with his fellow man.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, religious education is not the type of so-called secular education that ensures ‘general religious literacy.’ It is a body of knowledge to be studied passionately to gain knowledge, skills, and values necessary to make man what his creator wants him to be. It is also concerned with the critical questions of our

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<sup>7</sup> Garba 2013, 22.

<sup>8</sup> Garba 2013, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Garba 2013, 22.



existence and relationship not just through information but also through seeking deeper understanding, which involves forms of living and practice. The role of religious education in improving peace is also visible in the statement of Olupona where he remarked that: “Unwise for anyone to ignore religious solutions to the world's problems because great issues continue to be settled consciously against the background of religious conviction.”<sup>10</sup>

In Islam, Islamic religious education could be defined as a guided process of acquiring balance and systematic knowledge (learning, training, and instruction), awakening and reforming human intellect to attain salvation in the hereafter, and excellence in the material world. From this definition, it could be deduced that the system is not only guided by divine laws but has struck a favourable balance between education for this world and education for the hereafter.

Peace education is a series of ‘teaching encounters’ that draw from peoples’ desire for peace, non-violent alternatives for managing conflict, and skills for critical analysis of structural arrangements that produce and legitimise injustice and inequality. Page sees peace education as

*Encouraging a commitment to peace as a settled disposition and enhancing the confidence of the individual as an individual agent of peace; as informing the students on the consequence of war and social injustice; as informing the student on the values of peaceful and just social structures and working to uphold or develop such social structures and working to the student to love the world and to imagine a peaceful future; and as caring for the student and encouraging the student to care for others.*<sup>11</sup>

Peace education simply means the body of that knowledge for acquiring the values, the knowledge and developing the attitudes, skills and behaviours to live in harmony with oneself and with others, and with the natural environment. Peace education empowers learners with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to end violence and injustice and promote a culture of peace. The objective of peace education is to encourage children and adults in the dynamics of conflict and promote skills of peace-making in our homes, schools, community, and

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<sup>10</sup> Olupona 1999 in Garba 2013, 25.

<sup>11</sup> Page 2008 in Garba 2013, 23.



the world. Peace educationists and advocates believe that peace education, within a framework of traditional values such as justice, honesty, and responsibility encourages the emotional, intellectual, ethical, and social growth of children. They also believe that conflict is a natural, unavoidable phenomenon that can be a constructive opportunity for positive change and empowerment. Peace educationists and advocates believe in teaching children the skills they need to find creative and constructive ways to settle conflicts before they escalate into violence.

The scope of peace education, according to Garba, human rights education, multicultural education, global citizenship education, conflict resolution education, and democracy education, variables provide different approaches to the field of peace education. Again, although peace education is highly contextual and, often tailored to specific settings or regions, the underlying goal is the same 'Peace is Peace', no matter the region or the time.

This analysis perfectly approximates the nature of traditional education in precolonial Nigeria; education was infused into the economy, religion, politics, and other cultural institutions of the period.

Peace education or education for peace is a broad interdisciplinary field, a values-related dimension of the curriculum and education of life rather than a 'discrete form of knowledge.' Education for peace has often been (continues to be) a priority of religious and spiritual bodies.<sup>12</sup> It is a positive step to find religious education, especially as it relates to issues such as peace and conflict in different contexts and at different levels. Jackson and Faajiwara had this to say on the relationship between peace education and religious education:

*As scholars of religion interested in the relationship between religious education and peace, we have a responsibility to make available and share the results of our specialised research on the different religions of the world so that a wide range of objective information can be drawn upon to encourage and strengthen active peace efforts in different societies and cultures.*<sup>13</sup>

Lihnemann remarks that:

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<sup>12</sup> Arweak et al 2005 cited in Garba 2013, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Jackson and Faajiwara 2007, 1-4.



*Religions for peace, through its peace education standing commission, has led the way towards developing a curriculum to promote tolerance among young people and adults. Using the spiritual and ethical teachings of students' faith traditions as a foundation, peace education helps students develop a new understanding and respect for people of other backgrounds.<sup>14</sup>*

The relationship between religious education and peace education is also demonstrated in the sacred scriptures of many revealed religions. These revealed religious scriptures narrated causes, causal agents, and reasons for battles, conflicts, violence and war in the historical world. They revealed that battles, conflicts, violence, and war are proposed, organised, planned, and originated from the human mind and carried out by them.<sup>15</sup> Thanks to these revealed religious scriptures they contained great teachings and lessons of how to prevent battles, conflicts, violence and war. They also emphasised the great need for peace and reconciliation and how to achieve them.<sup>16</sup>

The relationship between religious education and peace education can also be seen in the statement "Peace be with you" which is a very common greeting that originated from many religions and cultures such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

## **Religious and Peace Education can be a valuable tool for Socio-Religious Harmony in Nigeria in several ways:**

**Promoting Tolerance and Understanding:** Education about different religions and cultures can help foster tolerance and understanding among diverse communities in Nigeria. This can reduce inter-religious and inter-ethnic conflicts, which are often a source of insecurity. The Federal Ministry of Education in conjunction with the departments of religious studies, education resources centres and religious bodies such as Jama'atul Nasril Islam (JNI) and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) etc. should develop a curriculum for peace education which will be compulsory for all levels of education in Nigeria.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Lihnemann 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Garba 2013, 25.

<sup>16</sup> Garba 2013, 25.

<sup>17</sup> Garba 2013, 27.





**Conflict Resolution Skills:** Religious and Peace Education can teach conflict resolution skills, emphasising non-violent methods of resolving disputes. This can empower individuals and communities to address grievances peacefully. Government and religious leaders should enlighten Nigerians that Nigeria belongs to all Nigerians and not to some ethnic, sectional, religious, political groups or some few individuals. Nigerians should be enlightened to understand that it is undemocratic for a few individuals to dictate how a pluralistic nation like Nigeria should be governed. Governments at all levels, especially the federal government, should trace the root causes of the insecurity in Nigeria and address them properly. Problems such as unemployment and poverty need to be tackled seriously to transform Nigeria.<sup>18</sup>

**Promoting Social Cohesion:** By teaching values such as empathy, compassion, and cooperation, this type of education can promote social cohesion and unity within the nation, reducing the appeal of extremist ideologies.

**Countering Radicalization:** Religious and Peace Education can be a countermeasure against the radicalization of youth by extremist groups. It can provide critical thinking skills and alternative narratives to extremist ideologies.

**Civic Responsibility:** Education can instil a sense of civic responsibility, encouraging citizens to engage in the democratic process and work together to address security challenges.

**Awareness of Religious Manipulation:** It can educate people about how religion can be manipulated for political or extremist purposes, making them more resistant to such manipulation. It is stated that the reasons for the violence are rooted in politics rather than religion.

**Dialogue and Reconciliation:** It can promote interreligious and inter-ethnic dialogue, facilitating reconciliation, and peace-building efforts in areas affected by violence. Governments at all levels should always listen to the agitations of groups and communities and dialogue with them as this is the best way of minimising violence and tension. Rather than suppress the demands of and agitations of aggrieved citizens or groups by force, the government should always engage in dialogue with them for the sake of peace, unity and national transformation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Garba 2013, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Garba 2013, 27.



**Law Enforcement Training:** Religious and Peace Education can also benefit law enforcement agencies by providing them with cultural and religious sensitivity training, improving their ability to handle sensitive situations without exacerbating tensions.

However, it's important to note that the effectiveness of religious and peace education depends on its implementation, curriculum design, and the commitment of the government and civil society to prioritise such education as a means of improving national security. It should also be part of a broader strategy that includes economic development, governance reform, and conflict prevention efforts.

The importance of education as a burning national security issue cannot be overemphasised. The overall philosophy of Nigeria is to

- (a) Live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble democratic, and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice;
- (b) Promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding.<sup>20</sup>

Based on that the National Policy on Education contends that education in Nigeria is expected to play a vital role in the building of: "... a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a great and dynamic economy; a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens."<sup>21</sup>

Education is the main weapon to fight the decay, whether in food security, power delivery, building and managing infrastructure, our tragic health delivery, it is education, education and education. Education is a weapon.

Onifade and Ogunlade: Albert and Olarinde describe education:

*...as a dynamic instrument of social change that can bring about rapid development of a nation's total resources, hence the need for constant evaluation of the educational system to ensure its adequacy and continued relevance to national needs and objectives.*<sup>22</sup>

Such an ideal society would be a close approximation to a society, a Nigerian society with minimal national security issues and challenges and no need for a transformation agenda. Unfortunately, the hue and cry and lofty government policy

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<sup>20</sup> NPE 2014, 4.

<sup>21</sup> NPE 2014, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Albert and Olarinde in Osakwe 2013, 4.



stamen have not translated into any meaningful education project in Nigeria. For instance, about one hundred and eighty cult groups exist in our universities which are just a little over one hundred.<sup>23</sup>

Education is universally regarded and accepted as a main tool for development and social mobility for both the society and individual. It is on this note that it has become necessary for every nation to put its resources and machinery in proper perspective to ensure an effective and efficient system of education.

## Conclusion

This research underscores the significance of adopting a holistic approach that combines religious and peace education to address the intricate dynamics of religious diversity in Northern Nigeria. By promoting mutual respect, dialogue, and conflict resolution skills, this integrated approach holds the potential to contribute to lasting peace and social cohesion in a region marked by religious pluralism and historical tensions.

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<sup>23</sup> Osakwe 2013, 4.



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## About the Author



Usman Al-amin, PhD, is a lecturer in the Department of History, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria. He received his B.A. and M.A. in social and intellectual history from the University of Maiduguri. Dr. Al-amin bagged his Ph.D. from the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, University of Hamburg. A specialist in the documentation and history of Arabic Literature, Sufi traditions, and Islamic manuscript cultures, his main fields of research include Islamic

history, Sufism, and book history of Islamic manuscript cultures dealing with content, thematic, codicological, and paleographical analysis in the context of Nigerian social and intellectual history, in particular, the formative period up to the 20th century, and the historiography of Islamic sects in modern and contemporary Nigeria. He has collaborated on several international projects about Islamic manuscripts and recently carried out a research project on one of the Tarjamo Kanembu Qur'anic manuscripts attributed to the seventeenth-century Bornoan scholar Goni Musa. Dr. Al-amin's current research project focuses on the digitization of Islamic manuscripts and books across the Yobe/Borno axis in Nigeria. He has published extensively in journals and presented so many academic papers at local and international conferences. In addition, he has been invited to research, write papers, and make presentations for several government functions and civil society fora.