

**INTERFAITH RELATIONS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF
IBADAN: HISTORY, DEVELOPMENTS AND
CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEXT
OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION**

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ABSTRACT

The scenario of contestable religious relations relating to religious supremacy and contestation for religious space evident in the larger Nigerian society has also found its way into the Nigerian University System (NUS). Scholars have engaged the subject matter of interfaith dialogue and relations within the context of the NUS as it relates to Ilorin Emirate, the University of Jos and some university campuses in Northern Nigeria. But adequate attention has not been paid to the connections between interfaith dialogue and students' contextual experiences at the University of Ibadan. Therefore, the study takes a cursory look at the historical developments and contemporary challenges associated with interfaith relations at the University of Ibadan to achieve national integration. The study combines descriptive phenomenology with key informant interviews and literature research methods to gather data from a sample questionnaire distributed to purposively select 219 University students of Ibadan through an online-mediated platform and from published works, respectively. And the data was descriptive and this was content analysed within the framework of the Social Identity Theory. Findings from the research revealed that interreligious conflict was very minimal, positive and cooperative interfaith relations exist, but the students had low awareness of the government's policy on interreligious dialogue. There was an acknowledged need for national integration among the students. Therefore, the management of the University of Ibadan is encouraged to infuse interfaith dialogue frameworks into its educational curricula such as the General Studies Programme and methodologies to facilitate dialogue and national integration.

Keywords: Interfaith dialogue, national integration, Nigerian University system, University of Ibadan

Word count: 245

Introduction

Religion, In the Nigerian context, religion is reversibly at the front burner of almost every national issue and any subject matter of interest to Nigerians. This is because religion is highly significant for the self-identification of most Nigerians. And both the Christian and Muslim communities are highly internally diverse when it comes to religiously-inclined issues. The scenario of contestable religious relations relating to religious supremacy and contestation for religious space evident in the larger Nigerian society has also found its way into the Nigerian University System (NUS) with gory tales of loss of lives and properties and the attendant concomitant factors such as discontinuance of academic programmes, disintegration, dispersion, destruction of facilities and academic instability as the totemic artefacts of this avoidable evil. Consequently, the students of the NUS, who are expected to propel national development, are been gradually drawn into the murky waters of religious bigotry with consequential dissonance in the ideals for national integration. And the University of Ibadan has become a case study of this unfortunate and avoidable phenomenon.

The University of Ibadan, the premier University in Nigeria, was founded in 1948 and was then known as the University College, Ibadan until 1962 when it gained autonomy and became a full-fledged Nigerian university and was renamed the University of Ibadan. The religious landscape of the University of Ibadan, Ibadan in Southwestern Nigeria is a microcosm of the entire Nigerian and by extension African religious setting

where religion permeates every aspect of its lives part - social, academic, political, education, business, social relations, ethics, economics and technology to mention but a few. It is this mentality that led to the provision of religious centres of worship such as Churches and Mosques.

Therefore, the study takes a cursory look at the historical developments and contemporary challenges associated with interfaith relations at the University of Ibadan to achieve national integration. The focus of this paper is on interfaith relations at the University of Ibadan, which is the interfaith relation that exists between the Muslim and Christian communities in the University. The followers of the African Traditional Religion (ATR) are often erased from the official view because they do not constitute a significant number, they are not in any reported clash with the other religious tradition, and they do not often display their membership of the ATR religious group. The focus of the paper is on interfaith or inter-religious relations and not interfaith dialogue. Interfaith dialogue and interfaith relations are polysemic terms, that is, they are different though related.¹ Interfaith dialogue has to do with sitting together to forge common grounds for religious harmony in the context of contestations while interfaith/inter-religious relations have to do with living together in the same space despite religious differences

Theoretical Framework

¹ Christopher E. Longhurst, "Interreligious Dialogue? Interfaith Relations? Or Perhaps Some Other Term?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 55, no. 1 (2020):117.

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The study adopts a descriptive phenomenology research design. The descriptive phenomenology research method is one of the phenomenological research methods which is widely used to explore and describe the lived experience of individuals. It seeks to understand a natural phenomenon through the emphasis on the meaning, views and experiences of participants.² It is used to describe how human beings experience a certain phenomenon. The researcher asks questions that attempt to set aside biases and preconceived assumptions about human experiences, feelings, and responses to a particular situation.

Descriptive phenomenology, born out of Edmund Husserlian's philosophy, peels off layers of relationships, thoughts, feelings, and behaviour to uncover an essential framework, which describes things as they are.³ It focuses on the correlation of the "what" (*noema* of experience) and the "how" it is experienced (*noesis*).⁴ This type of research prohibits the researcher from posting a static sense of objective reality for the researcher and the participants whose experiences are being studied. It allows the researcher to attend to the descriptions of the participants without forcing the meaning of the descriptive

² Z. Q. Al-Busaidi, "Qualitative Research and Its Uses in Health Care", *Sultan Qaboos University Medical Journal* 8, no. 1(2008), 11.

³ Katheryne Leigh-Osroosh, "The Phenomenological House: A Metaphoric Framework for Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Design and Analysis", *The Qualitative Report* 6, no. 6 (2021), 1817

⁴ M. Christensen, A. Welch, and J. Barr. "Husserlian Descriptive Phenomenology: A Review of Intentionality, Reduction and the Natural Attitude", *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice* 7, No. 8 (2017):114.

units into pre-defined categories. It is not interpretive.⁵ Even though, there may be both descriptive and interpretive moments in phenomenological research, yet, the principles of descriptive phenomenology inform the researcher to get a sense of the ways that the experiences given by the participants were lived.⁶ The descriptive phenomenology research applied in this study incorporates the use of in-depth interviews with key informants, the administration of a questionnaire, and the examination of written records as documented in historical materials.

Furthermore, the study used the Social Identity Theory (SIT) to interrogate the underlining assumptions and attitudes of the University of Ibadan students towards the variables of interfaith relations and dialogue. So, the complexity of religious identity as a social identity can result in varied attitudes of tolerance toward out-group members. Complex religious identities may pose challenges for group contact that aim to facilitate contact between distinctive group identities.

Social identity theory is a classic social psychological theory that attempts to explain intergroup conflict as a function of group-based self-definitions. Social identity theory explains that people derive esteem from a group that they positively identify with, therefore they favour it. They allocate more resources to the in-group to maximize the difference between

⁵ Amedeo Giorgi, *The Descriptive Phenomenological Method in Psychology* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2009), 127

⁶ Amedeo Giorgi, "Concerning Variations in the Application of the Phenomenological Method", *The Humanistic Psychologist* 34, No. 4 (2006): 307-308.

their in-groups and out-groups to achieve such identifications. This is a psychological basis for “ethnocentrism”, a common concept in intercultural communication. Ethnocentrism is a widely observed belief that ethnicity is superior to other ethnic groups.⁷ The social identity process in SIT argues that our knowledge of and emotional attachment to our p memberships is an important consideration for understanding the complexity of identity in intergroup relations.

Interreligious dialogue through social identity provides an avenue for a religious group to enrich itself and others via sharing of inter-religious understanding and learning as a means of promoting a pluralistic community that enables tolerance and respect for religious diversity. The main motive for its participation is the common good, which is intended for people to enjoy each other, regardless of secondary differences that tend to separate them, including religion. In the world today, anxieties and fears have engulfed the conscience of people and it becomes difficult for religious groups to come together for dialogue because everyone is afraid and suspecting his neighbour from another religious background. This is then situated within the context of interfaith dialogue and relations at the University of Ibadan.

Methodology

The research incorporates mixed methods of research (internet-mediated and offline research methods). The literature research method was used in reviewing published books, journal

⁷ Tumer et al., *Rediscovery the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987)

articles, magazines and newspapers about the subject matter. Also, key informant interview was applied to conduct oral interviews with purposively selected individuals who had useful information about the history of interfaith dialogue at the University of Ibadan. In addition, a digital ethnographic method⁸ using asynchronous structured online interviews conducted in non-real time was used to extract information from selected students of the University of Ibadan using a stratified random sampling method. The primary (online) data was collected through a survey using a web-based questionnaire. The research questions being asked through the survey questionnaire were specifically designed in tandem with the digital ethnographic method adopted. The questionnaires were created using Google Forms and sent to WhatsApp platforms comprising the University of Ibadan students to elicit information on variables related to interfaith relationships with 219 students being the respondents. Secondary data was collected through the document analysis technique. Data was descriptively and statistically analysed within the framework of the Social Identity theory.

Review of Relevant Literature on Interfaith Relations in the Nigerian University System

Interfaith or interreligious relations are necessary in any religiously pluralistic society. Interfaith relations are about

⁸ Digital ethnography is used to describe carrying out ethnographic research in an online space. It involves participants completing an online survey through their phones or other gadgets (Piia Varis, "Digital Ethnography", in *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Digital Communication*, ed. A. Georgakopoulou and T. Spilottv (London: Routledge, 2016), 55.

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people of different faiths or religious persuasion coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate despite their differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions at both the individual and institutional levels⁹. Each party remains true to its beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practice their faith freely.

The participants engaging in dialogue lay aside attempts to missionize, which is always accompanied by an attitude of exclusive superiority and can be equated with the spoken or unspoken belief that one's religion is the "true" way, or effectively the only way. Interfaith dialogue is distinct from syncretism or alternative religion, in that dialogue often involves promoting understanding between different religions or beliefs to increase acceptance of others, rather than to synthesize new beliefs.¹⁰

Much scholarly research has been done on the subject matter of interfaith relations and interfaith dialogue in the Nigerian context. But there is a dearth of research done on the subject matter of interfaith relations and interfaith dialogue within the context of the Nigerian University system (NUS), knowing fully well that the occurrence of inter-religious conflicts is largely premised on the absence of interfaith dialogue and positive interfaith relations. Ushe, using both secondary

⁹ "What is Inter-religious Dialogue?" *African Missionary* (2013), <https://sma.ie/chapter-1-what-is-interreligious-dialogue>.

¹⁰ L. Hoffman and M. Thelen, "Interfaith Dialogue", in *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, ed. D. Leeming (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2018): 2-3.

sources and observation methods, examined education as a catalyst for resolving conflicts and enhancing national security in Nigeria.¹¹

Akande looked at the concept of faith integration and the practice of inter-faith relations in some federal and state-owned tertiary institutions in the Ilorin Emirate of Kwara State using historical and descriptive methods. She found out that cases of religious crises in some institutions of higher learning have led to the killings of innocent students and lecturers; destruction of properties; disruption of families and academic calendars of these institutions; and harm to the national economy. But these are seldom heard of in the tertiary institutions in Ilorin Emirate.¹² She concluded that all stakeholders of the educational system must regularly brainstorm to discuss their areas of convergence or commonalities for holistic human development to sustain good inter-faith relations in institutional campuses.¹³

On their part, Ezeala and Olayinka examined the impact of the crisis on Library and Information Science undergraduate students in the University of Jos, Nigeria to determine the extent to which it affects students' socialization process using cross-sectional survey research design. They affirmed that

¹¹ Mike U. Ushe, "Religious Conflicts and Education in Nigeria: Implications for National Security", *Journal of Education and Practice* 6, no. 2 (2015):117-129.

¹² Lydia B. Akande "Inter-faith Relation in Nigeria Educational Institutions: A Case Study of Selected Tertiary Institutions in the Ilorin Emirate". *International Journal for Faith Integration* 1, no. 1 (2019): 44-50.

¹³ Akande, "Inter-faith Relation in Nigeria Educational Institutions", 51-52.

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religiously-inclined cross affects students' academic achievement and their socialization process. They recommend that tolerance should be encouraged, inter-faith competition should be established and religious institutions should promote interfaith relationships.¹⁴ And Mou and Mou looked at the attitudes towards religious tolerance on the University campuses in the Northern part of Nigeria to prevent the emergence of a religious war in Nigeria. They opined that the proper socialization process of children from the Nursery to the University years should be applied to encourage religious tolerance.¹⁵

More specifically, about interfaith relations at the University of Ibadan, Mala assessed Christian-Muslim relations from the perspective of students in the University of Ibadan in contemporary times and a cursory look into the relationships of Christian and Muslim students in the light of tensions generated by students activities both on a collective and personal note which almost made the university campus a theatre of religious violence and crises in 2010. He concluded that despite the tensions and seldom disagreements that occur, Christian and Muslim students co-exist peaceably and tolerate

¹⁴ Lily Ezeala, and Shittu L.Olayinka. "Impact of Ethno Religious Crisis on Library and Information Science Undergraduate Students of the University of Jos, Nigeria", *KIU Journal of Humanities* 4, no. 4 (2019): 105-112.

¹⁵ Dan Mou and Seseer P. Mou, "Religious Intolerance in Nigerian University Campuses". *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance* 8, no.4 (2017): 1-44.

one another and suggest possible recommendations to improve Christian-Muslim relationships.¹⁶

Despite the efforts of the above-mentioned scholars, there is still the need to probe into the state of interfaith relations at the University of Ibadan. Therefore, the study takes a cursory look at the historical developments and contemporary challenges associated with interfaith relations at the University of Ibadan to achieve national integration.

History of Interreligious Relations at the University of Ibadan (1962 – 2022)

Historically, the first sets of religious places of worship in the University of Ibadan were the *Chapel of the Resurrection* (for the Protestants) and *Our Lady Seat of Wisdom* (for the Roman Catholics). These were dedicated in 1954 and 1956 respectively. Later, a mosque of a small size was built in 1962 and later expanded to a bigger size and dedicated in 1985. This mosque is now known as the University of Ibadan Mosque. Since then, each of the religious centres has made some improvements by creating some allowances and facilities to meet the increasing spiritual and physical needs of their members.

As noted earlier, the predominant religions at the University of Ibadan are Christianity and Islam. The University of Ibadan,

¹⁶ Simon B. Mala, “Socio-religious Activities of Christian and Muslim Youth Organisations in Promoting Inter-religious Relations in Selected Universities in Kwara, Ogun and Oyo States.” A Thesis in the Department of Religious Studies, submitted to the Faculty of Arts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of PhD, 2015.

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being the first in Nigeria, has some unique features of interreligious relationships, which are both positive and negative in nature but much more positive and in infinitesimal cases of negativity. Historically, in the first instance, the University management was quick to remember the need to give land for the erection of the Mosque in 1962 which was a consequence of the increasing number of Muslims on the University campus. It must be noted that the Mosque did not start at the same time as the Chapel, not because of discrimination against Islam/Muslims, but because there were a few Muslims on the Campus at that ample time. Amplifying this fact, Banjo and Adesokan note that at the beginning, the Muslim population at the University College, Ibadan was, a small one, yet, the authorities of the college, and later the University, were even-handed enough to provide a place of worship for the Muslims, while the two Christian denominations – Protestants and Roman Catholics – were provided with their separate chapels.¹⁷

History has it that immediately after the University management realised that Muslims increased in number, it saw the need to make allowance for the building of the Mosque close to the Chapel with the Dr (later Professor) Sabiru Biobaku to oversee the assignment. The university management understands that the axis where the religious centres are located will constitute the religious hub of the

¹⁷ Ayo Banjo and Kayode Adesokan, “Chapel Cross versus Crescent Conflict: Its National Implications and Significance”, in *History of the Chapel of the Resurrection, University of Ibadan, Ibadan*, edited by Tekena N. Tamuno, (Ibadan: Stirling –Horden Publishing,), 311.

university. The granting of allowance for the construction of religious places of worship in the same axis was motivated among others by the desire of the University of Ibadan's management to provide religious freedom, and good neighbourliness on campus and also a way of keeping with the principle of zoning in the same area of the campus.¹⁸

Three historical events could be said to be the descriptive characteristics of the interfaith relations between Christians and Muslims at the University of Ibadan from the inception of the University's existence. This can also be considered the interactive colour of the relationship between Muslims and Christian students at the University of Ibadan in the present. Firstly, the dedication of the Chapel of Resurrection, to some extent, was a cross-cultural, inter-religious event because Dr (Later Professor) Sabiru O. Biobaku, a Muslim, who was the first indigenous University Registrar and later Vice Chancellor of the University of Lagos joined the University Management along with its Principal at the dedication of the Protestant and Roman Catholic Chapels during the formal ceremonies in 1954 and 1956 respectively. Biobaku was also part of the procession that started from the vestry into the church and thereafter like other principal officers took their places in the front pew of the north transept on November 17, 1954, the day the college celebrated her sixth anniversary of the cutting of the first sod

¹⁸ Banjo and Adesokan, "Chapel Cross versus Crescent Conflict", 311.

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by Mr Arthur Creech Jones who was the then Secretary of the state of the Colonies.¹⁹

Secondly, according to Professor Adetohun Ogunseye, one of the pioneer members of the Chapel of the Resurrection, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, many members of the Chapel donated their *widow's mite* to the Muslim community during the public fundraising for the building of the Mosque. She said they donated to the course of Islam to which their friends and colleagues in the same offices, departments and various workplaces on the campus belong. She further noted that at this time the religious identity of members of the University community was not an issue when it comes to interpersonal relationships among staff and students.²⁰

Thirdly, the Muslim community was given a financial grant by the University just like her counterpart, the Chapel of Resurrection and the Catholic Church to build the first small but unique mosque which was opened by the then Prime Minister, Sir Tafawa Balewa at his inauguration as Chancellor of the University in November 1963. The Mosque was in use from 1963 till 1979 when Muslims began building a bigger and more dignifying Mosque that opened in December 1985. The first Imām was one Alhaji Jimoh. Later, a disagreement

¹⁹ Tekena Tamuno, Tunde Yoloye and Kingta Princewill, "Overview: Eras of Dynamic Growth and Development", in *History of the Chapel of the Resurrection, University of Ibadan, Ibadan*, edited by Tekena N. Tamuno, (Ibadan: Stirling –Horden Publishing,), 17.

²⁰ This information was a product of interview held with Professor Adetohun Ogunseye on Monday 27th March, 2023 at her residence in Bodija, Ibadan. She is 97 years old and was a pioneer member of the Chapel of the Resurrection, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

between the few Muslim students and members of the university staff over the selection of the Imām led to the establishment of the Muslim community and the appointment of the Chief Imām from the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies during the 1967/68 academic session²¹. Thus, from 1963 when the Mosque joined previous religious buildings – the two chapels earlier mentioned to 1985, there was a history of good rapport between the Christians and Muslim communities on the campus of the University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Two historical incidences seem to be a detour from the norm in the affirmed cooperative and positive interfaith relations at the University of Ibadan. One of these occurred in 1985. The year 1985 brought a strange development that nearly strained the amicable and mutual relationships between the Christian and Muslim communities at the University of Ibadan. The seed of the 1985 incident was sown during the occasion of the opening of the new Mosque on Saturday, 7th December 1985. According to historic records, the event was attended by many Muslim dignitaries the likes of Alhaji Arisekola Alao and Chief Moshood Abiola, who were frontline promoters of Islam in Nigeria at this period. On the occasion, the university was represented by the Pro-Chancellor, Prof T.Y. Yesufu, and the Vice Chancellor, Prof Ayo Banjo. It was said that during the ceremony, the two Muslim dignitaries in the course of

²¹ L. O. Abass “The Contributions of the University of Ibadan to Manpower Development in Arabic and Islamic Studies”, in *Fluorescence of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria*, edited by I. O. Zakariyau, (Ibadan: HEBN Publishers Plc, 2008), 19.

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speaking indicted the University of Ibadan for being biased against Islam and alleged that there was a subtle persecution of Muslim students in the university.

Worst still, they demanded the relocation of the Cross of the Chapel of the Resurrection on the excuse that it was too close to the Mosque and that Muslims usually see it during their prayers. Within a short period, the positional statements of these two Muslim leaders provoked the anger of the Muslim community and hence a lot of uprisings followed. It was so bad that the matter was externalized because the matter was reported at the Federal Ministry of Education. And, there were also press releases and counter-releases. Consequently, the University's internal mechanism was put in place to look into the matter with the setting of a committee of religious leaders which was led by Prof E.K. Adesogan representing, the Protestants; Professor J. Okogun, who represented the Roman Catholic community; and Professor M.O. Abdul who died shortly after the committee was inaugurated but was replaced by Dr D.S. Noibi who represented the Muslim community.

The committee met and was presided over by the then Vice-Chancellor, Prof Ayo Banjo. During the proceedings, many issues were raised by the Muslim community. Major among them were the allegations that Muslims were provoked by some Christians on the campus and the unfair use of the grassy areas which had originally been referred to as the Chapel ground. It was also said that Muslim members were being discriminated against in the halls of residence because their makeshift places of worship had been dismantled on the orders

of the University authorities. It is important to note the series of meetings that were held and carried out procedurally by the University's best tradition of discourse. From the meeting, some explanations and resolutions were made. For instance, it was made clear that the demolition of unauthorized places of worship on campus was not targeted against the Muslim community but it was done because they did not conform to the existing order prohibiting the erection of makeshifts for any purpose.

Contrary to a suggestion that a tall fence should be made to demarcate the church from the Mosque, it was reported that the Vice Chancellor along with the majority of members of the committee refused this request saying that he (the Vice Chancellor) personally did not want "to go down in the history of the University of Ibadan, as the Vice Chancellor who erected a wall of intolerance between the Christians and the Muslims".²² For him, it was either a dwarf wall or nothing.²³ In addition, the committee in conjunction with the then Commissioner of Police on 21 July 1986 unanimously advised against making press releases or granting interviews on the Cross issue. Consequently, a perforated wall was built in front of the Mosque so that Muslims would not be seen the Cross while praying. This was how peace returned to the University of Ibadan community.

In another vein, in respect of the aforementioned crisis, according to the incumbent and fifth substantive Chief Imām of

²² Ayo Banjo, *In the Saddle*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1997), 72.

²³ Banjo, *In the Saddle*, 72.

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the University of Ibadan, Professor M. O. Abdul Rahmon who was a staff of the University of Ibadan at the time of the 1985/1986 cross imbroglio, the hostility against the Muslim community in the years preceding the crisis was not noticed because the number of Muslim staff was negligible, especially the senior cadre. That was the reason the cross crisis was considered an affront since an insignificant number of Muslims dared to challenge the status quo²⁴.

The second significant occurrence that nearly marred the mutual interfaith relations in the University happened on Friday, 13 August 2010 when a 4400-level Christian student, who was also a student of the Faculty of Law, disguised in the university's central mosque and preached against Islam while the Muslim faithful were observing silent prayers. According to reports, the female student identified as Miss Seun Olubunmi Adegunsoye was said to have screamed during the *Jumat* service, saying, "Except you accept Christ in your life, you are not safe. All of you here, no matter the number of the congregation accept Jesus Christ. Allah is not God. Jesus is God"²⁵. The girl was subdued while the Chief Imam, Dr. Abdul-Rahaman Oloyede quickly sent for the Vice-Chancellor, who promptly joined the placating voices that calmed the frayed nerves. The errant student was, suspended and stealthily handed over to her parents by the university management. But some students under the umbrella association of the Muslim

²⁴ An interview held with Professor Abdul Rahmon Oloyede on 15 March, 2023

²⁵ Sunday Saanu, "Post-Mortem of UI's Averted Religious Riot", University of Ibadan Bulletin, <https://www.ui.edu.ng/religiousriot>

Students' Society of Nigeria (MMSN) protested. They locked all the gates, thereby paralyzing academic and social activities on campus for the better part of Monday, August 16. The then Vice-Chancellor, Professor Olufemi Bamiro worked with the Muslim leaders on campus, listened to their demands, and set strategies in action and calm gradually returned to the University.²⁶ And a situation that could potentially have resulted in a religious riot was wisely averted and nipped in the bud.

Apart from these major reported religious skirmishes and probably individualised ones that were not reported, both Christian and Muslim communities have worked together on many occasions to make the University a good one. For instance, the two major religions, apart from attending time-to-time meetings of the Centre for Social Orientation of the University of Ibadan played prominent roles through their teaching in their respective centres of worship about the evil of cultism. It will be recalled that the Chapel in conjunction with the University of Ibadan instituted and formulated an Anti-Cultism policy.

Apart from this, the mosque and the Chapel of the Resurrection have a history of helping the less privileged who asked for food and financial assistance from the Mosque or the Chapel of the Resurrection, respectively. The current Chief Imam of the University of Ibadan Mosque, Prof Abdul Rahman Oloyede reported an instance in which a Muslim student asked for urgent financial assistance that the Mosque could not provide

²⁶ Saanu, "Post-Mortem of UI's Averted Religious Riot".

immediately and therefore referred the case to the Chapel of Resurrection. It was confirmed by Venerable Dr Victor Oladele, the present Chaplain of the Chapel of the Resurrection that the financial need of the student in question was attended to immediately.²⁷ Furthermore, the leaders of Christian and Muslim communities at the University of Ibadan jointly attend programmes organised by the management of the University of Ibadan such as Matriculation, Services marking the beginning of the Calendar year, and Convocation ceremonies. Each of the leaders says prayers one after the other before and at the end of the events.

Background Information on the Respondents

The results show that 51.1% of the respondents were female students, while 48.9% were male (see Table 1). The age range of the respondents varies such that 50.2% of them had their ages ranging between 20 – 24 years. Also, 21.5% of them were between 25 – 29 years, while 13.7% of them were between 15 – 19 years of age. More of the respondents (53.0%) were Christians, 46.65% were Muslims, and only 0.5% practised African Traditional Religion.

Table 1: Background information

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	107	48.9

²⁷ The two religious leaders mentioned this story during their short remark at the Interfaith workshop held at the University of Ibadan early January, 2023

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Female	112	51.1
Religion		
Islam	102	46.6
Christianity	116	53.0
Traditional	1	0.5
Age		
15-19	30	13.7
20-24	110	50.2
25-29	47	21.5
30-34	13	5.9
35-39	8	3.7
40-44	11	5.0
Total	219	100.0

Significant Developments in the Interfaith Relations at the University of Ibadan

There are certain identifiable characteristics out of the state of interfaith relations at the University of Ibadan. One, most of the students were unaware of any form of inter-religious crisis at the University. When asked about cases of religious crisis in the University, the result in Fig 1 showed that 15.1% have experienced it, while 84.9% have not experienced it in the university community.

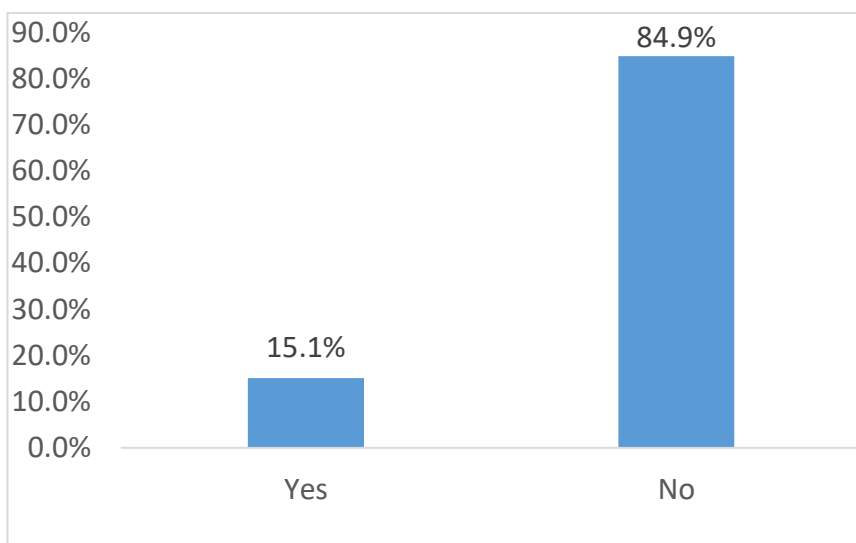


Fig 1: Distribution of respondents by their experiences of having witnessed religious crisis on campus

Those who claimed to have experienced religious crises on campus reported the crises about the location of the cross crisis of the 1990s, the case of the Christian girl that disrupted Jumat service, agitation for the use of hijab at the International School, Ibadan, which is the secondary school arm of the

university. Most of the issues that led to the arguments were resolved peacefully through the intervention of the school administration, religious leaders, and other interested stakeholders.

Another significant feature of interfaith relations at the University of Ibadan is that most students have friends or people of other religious faiths apart from theirs with whom they are in close contact with or the other. When asked if they have friends who are not of the same faith as the respondents, results in Fig 2 revealed that a larger percentage (95.0%) had such friends, while (5.0%) do not.

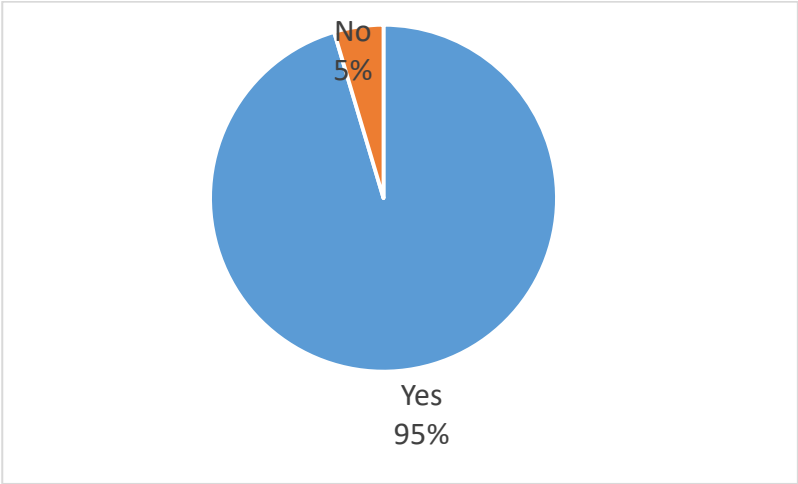


Fig 2: Distribution of respondents by whether they have friends from people of other faiths

Also, 53.4% of the students indicated that they relate peacefully with people of different religions to a great extent and 40.2% related to a very great extent as given in Fig 3

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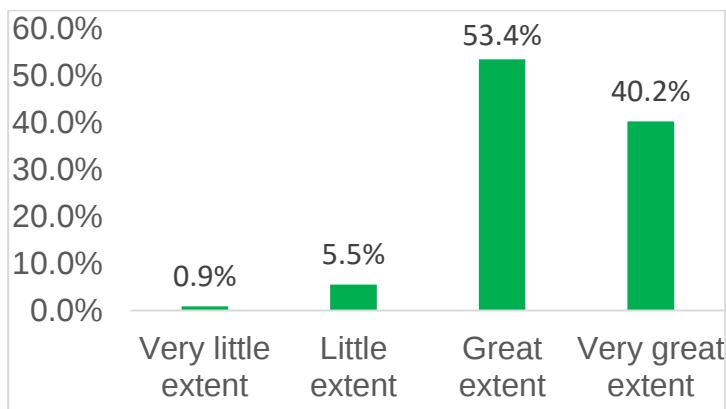


Figure 3: The extent to which respondents relate peacefully with students of other religions on campus

This is further corroborated by Fig 4. Respondents were further probed as per their interaction with people of other faiths. Responses, as given in Fig 4 revealed that 48.9% of the students reported that they make friends with people of other religion(s) to a very great extent, while 18.7% of them do that to a great extent.

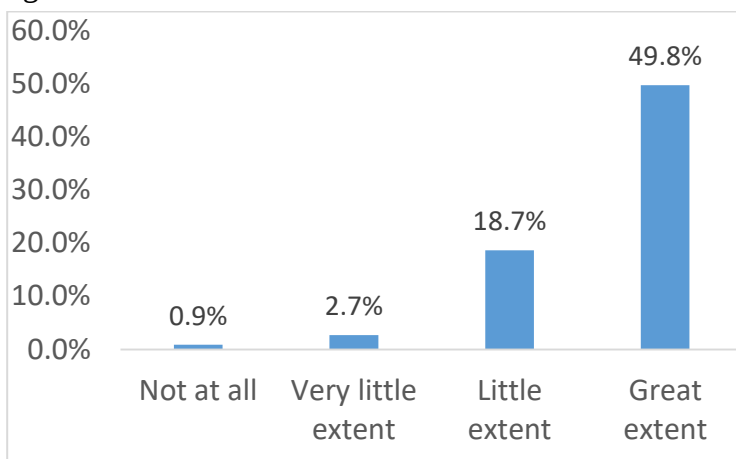


Fig 4: Distribution of respondents by the extent of making friends with people of other faiths

Furthermore, students of the University of Ibadan do not consider people of other religions as a threat to the practice of their chosen religion. Respondents were asked about their perception of students from other religions and whether the latter constitutes a threat to their security or not. Results in Fig 5 revealed that 98.6% of the respondents do not see religious others as a threat to their security, while 1.4% of them do. Hence, there is religious tolerance among the students of the University of Ibadan.

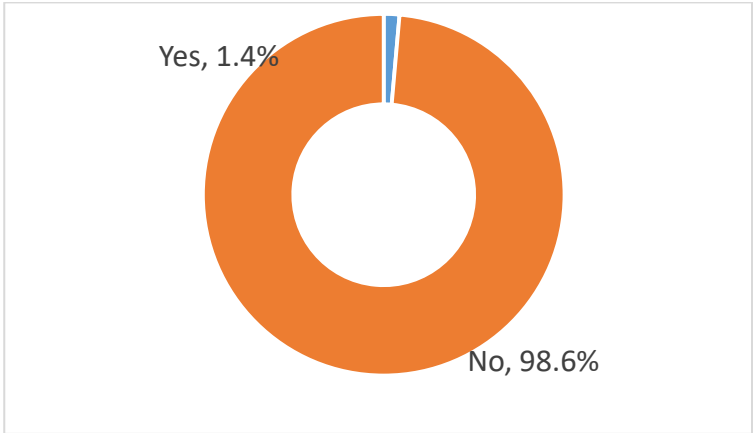


Fig 5: Distribution of respondents by their perception of people of other religion(s) as a threat

Some of the reasons alluded to for this cordial interfaith relation among the University of Ibadan students' community include the necessity of obeying God's command to love our fellow neighbours; the need for mutual respect and mutually beneficial relationships; the desire to uphold the principle of the dignity of life; and the need to be human and humane in

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interpersonal relationships. Mala (2015) corroborates this interfaith cordiality as he investigated four identified areas of Christian-Muslim relations among students of the University and found their mutually friendly interactions quite overwhelming, impressive and worthwhile, culminating in some cases of a lifetime friendship, interreligious adaptation and marital union. These relationships have been characterised by the exchange of visits, gifts and expressions of greetings, and good wishes during religious festivals such as Easter, and Christmas. Id-Il-Fitr and Ed-Il-Kabir.²⁸

It was discovered that there were certain identifiable behavioural characteristics among the students of the University about religious differences. Results in Table 2 show how the religious differences of the students influence their behavioural interaction with their mates. Of the 219 respondents, 81.7% strongly agreed that they live peacefully with their fellow students regardless of religious differences, 16.0% agreed to the statement, just 1.4% of the students were undecided, while 0.9% strongly disagreed. When asked if there is unity among their colleagues whose religions are different, 75.3% strongly agreed to the assertion, 19.2% agreed, 1.8% were undecided, 1.8% disagreed, and 1.8% strongly disagreed.

²⁸ Simon Mala, "Socio-religious Activities of Christian and Muslim Youth Organisations in Promoting Inter-religious Relations in Selected Universities in Kwara, Ogun and Oyo States." A Thesis in the Department of Religious Studies, submitted to the Faculty of Arts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of PhD, 2015.

Table 2: Religious Differences and Students’ Behaviours

Opinion statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Regardless of religious differences, I live peacefully with my fellow students	81.7%	16.0%	1.4%	0.0%	0.9%
I unite with my colleague whose religion is different from mine because my religion teaches me so	75.3%	19.2%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%
Because of my religious teaching to always obey leaders regardless of religious affiliation, I obey my students’ leaders	65.8%	31.1%	0.5%	0.9%	1.8%
I am always careful of utterances that may breed religious violence and intolerance because of my religious understanding	74.9%	21.5%	0.9%	0.9%	1.8%

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Opinion statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The more I read my scripture(s), the better I learn to live in peace, unity and harmony with adherents of other religions	78.1%	19.2%	0.5%	0.5%	1.8%

Also, 65.8% of the students strongly agreed that they obeyed their students' leaders regardless of their religious affiliation, 31.1% agreed, 0.9% disagreed and 1.8% strongly disagreed. Concerning the students' religious understanding, 74.9% of them strongly agreed that they were being careful of utterances that may breed religious violence and intolerance, 21.5% agreed, 0.9% disagreed, and 1.8% strongly disagreed. Moreover, 78.1% of the students strongly agreed that reading their religious scripture(s) helps them to live better in peace, unity and harmony with adherents of other religions, 19.2% agreed with the statement, while 0.5% disagreed and 1.8% strongly disagreed. This means that the students generally have a tolerant disposition despite their religious affiliations or differences.

Significantly, foreign religious ideologies do not negatively impact the relationships or interactions among students of different religious affiliations. In the bid to know the effects of participants' exposure to foreign religious opinions on their

belief system, the study probed this matter via some statements, and the results were presented in Table 3. When asked about whether exposure to foreign religious thoughts and conflicts influences the hatred for adherents of other religions, the majority (68.9%) of the students strongly disagreed with the statement followed by 18.3% who disagreed with the statement, while 4.6% agreed and 5.9% strongly agreed with the statement. Also, when asked if exposure to foreign religious conflicts influences violent behaviour against adherents of other religions, 74.0% of the students strongly disagreed, followed by 17.8% who disagreed with the statement, while 5.0% agreed and 2.7% strongly agreed with the statement. Moreover, 73.1% strongly disagreed and 19.6% disagreed that exposure to foreign religious conflicts influences bad utterances against adherents of other religions, while the rest 4.1% agreed and 2.3% strongly agreed with the statement. On a similar note, 73.1% strongly disagreed with the statement that exposure to foreign religious conflicts serves as a motivation to fight adherents of other religions followed by 19.2%, who disagreed, and then 4.6% who agreed and 2.3% strongly agreed with the statements.

Table 3: Influence of Foreign Ideologies on the Students' belief system

Opinion statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My exposure to foreign religious thoughts influences my hatred for adherents of other religions in my university	5.9%	4.6%	2.3%	18.3%	68.9%
My exposure to foreign religious conflicts influences my violent behaviour against adherents of other religions in my university	2.7%	5.0%	0.5%	17.8%	74.0%
My exposure to foreign religious conflicts influences my bad utterances against adherents of other religions in my university	2.3%	4.1%	0.9%	19.6%	73.1%

Opinion statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My exposure to foreign religious conflicts motivates me to fight adherents of other religions in my university	2.3%	4.6%	0.9%	19.2%	73.1%

Contemporary Challenges to Interfaith Relations at the University of Ibadan

One significant challenge in interfaith relations at tat University of Ibadan (UI) is the proliferation of worship centres. The increase in the number of students admitted into the university, and consequently the upsurge in the number of student religious personas has led to the insufficiency in religious spaces that can contain large numbers of worshippers at one worship or prayer service. There has been a geometric rise in the number of Christian fellowships/associations and Muslim groups. In addition to the aforementioned scenario, there is the issue of the long distance of the students’ hostels to the major places of worship for both Muslims and Christians, which are the UI Mosque and the Chapel of Resurrection, respectively.

These above-mentioned factors combined have led to the presence and multiplicity of religious meetings and the conduct

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of mass religious programmes in the halls of residences and their adjoining spaces. This is a dangerous development for interreligious relations because some of the religious practitioners have been accused of causing noise pollution and consciously or unconsciously violating the religious freedom of other residents in the residential halls and hostels.

Another notable challenge is that the authorities of the University did not make any visible and accessible provisions for students of other religious faiths such as Traditional religious practitioners, members of Eckankar, Krishna, Grail Message and Jehovah's Witnesses on the University campus. This development can be referred to as a form of social exclusion. Ayantayo describes social exclusion as a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society is one of the consequences of insider and outsider phenomena.²⁹ In Munck's words, "social exclusion is all how people are excluded from the necessities in life."³⁰

The number of fellowships of both faiths in the halls of residence of the University of Ibadan is increasing. They need to be controlled because they create noise pollution and in a way, some of their activities like open crusades and night vigils have the tendency to violate the religious freedoms of others. The development has eroded the vision of having religious centres in the specific axis of the University.

²⁹ Jacob Kehinde Ayantayo, *Sociology of Religion in the African Context: A Pragmatic Approach*, (Ibadan: Hope Publication, 2023) 445

³⁰ R. Munck, *Globalization and Social Exclusion: A Transformationalist Perspective* (London: Kumarian Press, 2005), 1.

Also, the populations of students of both the Christian and Islamic faith are increasing in number with no commensurate education and sensitisation about interrelations and interfaith dialogue. This ignorance has the potential to strain state interfaith relations. There is a need to have a forum for interreligious relations. So, we do not need to wait for a time of trouble.

One other challenge of the inter-religious relations in the University of Ibadan is that of the non-existent of a government or university policy that promotes inter-religious peaceful coexistence among Muslim and Christian students in Nigeria and invariably not domiciled in the University of Ibadan. This challenge becomes clear from the response of the research respondents. When asked if there is a government or university policy that promotes inter-religious peaceful coexistence among Muslim and Christian students in Nigeria, the result in Fig 6 revealed that only 22.8% were aware of such policies, while the majority (77.2%) were not aware of the existence of such a policy.

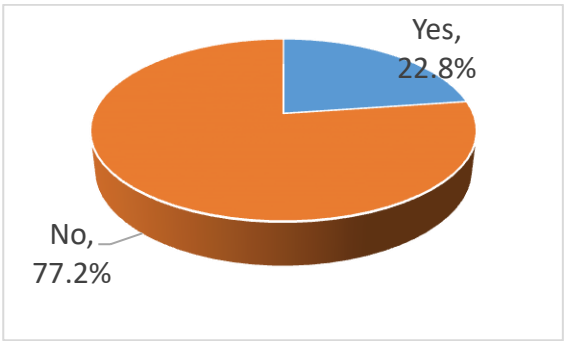


Fig 6: Distribution of respondents by their awareness of enabling policy for religious harmony

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There are severe consequences for not allowing interfaith relations to be positive in the University. When asked about their thoughts on what will happen if Christian and Muslim students live without love, peace and harmonious relationship on campus, results, as given in Fig 7, showed that 73.1% of them posited that extremism would grow, 61.2% can lead to low academic performance, and 47.0% suspicion and distrust will increase.

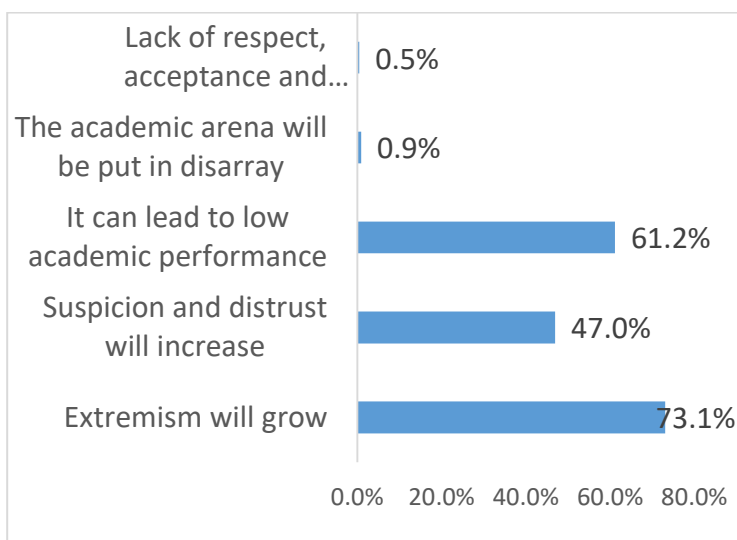


Fig 7: Distribution of respondents by their perception of the consequence of living without peace among people of different faiths

Also, there is a need to teach or put structures in place that can aid students to imbibe interfaith dialogue skills. This structure is presently non-existent at the University of Ibadan. As such, when the students were probed, in their opinion, they feel that interfaith dialogue and national integration should be taught as a general studies course in Nigerian universities. The result, as

revealed in Fig 8, showed that 90.0% were in agreement, while 10.0% of them disagreed. The respondents opined that teaching the course will foster unity among future leaders, which will allow love, peace, harmony, and cordial relationship to exist among the present and future generations in this country.

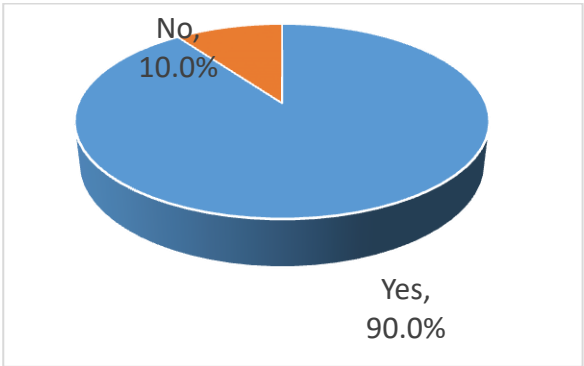


Fig 8: Distribution of respondents by their opinions on the desirability of interfaith dialogue in educational institutions

This is because the majority of the students of the University of Ibadan believe that interfaith relations and dialogue will lead to national integration. When asked if the interfaith dialogue in the Nigerian University System can foster national integration and development, the result, as revealed in Figure 9, shows that 85.8% affirmed it, while 14.2% answered in the negative.

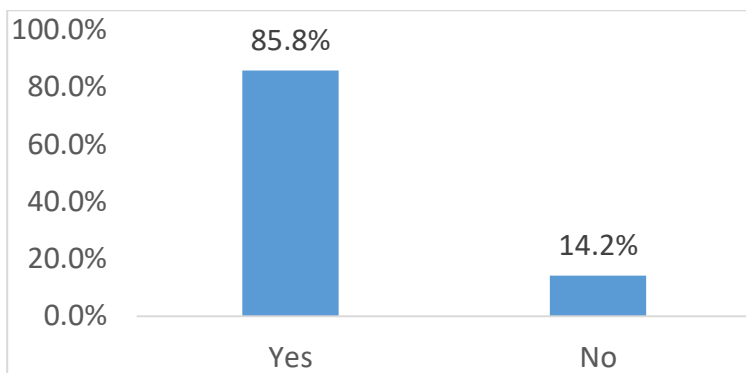


Fig 9: Distribution of respondents' opinions on whether interfaith dialogue can foster national integration

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the research findings through the use of the descriptive phenomenological research method and within the framework of the social identity theory about interfaith relations and dialogue at the University of Ibadan.

1. The University of Ibadan must continue the framework of interfaith relations that recognises the reality of religious pluralism and multiculturalism of both the domestic and global environments as well as the risk of conflicts emanating from it.
2. The management of the University of Ibadan should endeavour to ensure the introduction of a course on interfaith dialogue and national integration under the General Students Programme of the University which all students must take and pass as a compulsory course. Such a course would incentivize peaceful co-existence among

students on campus and ultimately impact the larger Nigerian society. It is also evident from the survey that the religious crises that Nigeria, has experienced in parts of the country were partly caused by a lack of adequate knowledge and understanding of the worldviews of adherents of other faiths.

3. The University of Ibadan should evolve a kind of religious education curriculum which will not limit student exposure to their religious traditions alone. Similarly, the University can develop to a course on interreligious dialogue for the proper training of would-be Imams, pastors, priests and other Church ministers and students.
4. The study, therefore, recommends that relevant government agencies like the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should as a matter of urgency put in place machinery to create more awareness about various government policies and efforts relating to interfaith harmony and cooperation.

Conclusion

In Nigerian, religion has been labelled as the reason for the perpetration of violence and for indulgence in acts that run contrary to the tenets of both Christianity and Islam. Religion has been indicted in many conflicts that have led to the loss of lives and properties in Nigeria. Hence, interfaith dialogues have been proposed to tackle the identified challenges. This study focused on the history, significant characteristics, and contemporary challenges of interfaith relations in the University of Ibadan Also, it further attempted at feeling of

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students of the University on the viability of these dialogues in fostering national integration.

The experiences shared by the respondents about interfaith relations at the University of Ibadan provided insights into how leadership could function to mitigate interfaith conflicts, and more importantly, in preventing their occurrence. The University of Ibadan Muslim and Christian communities have experienced more prolonged peaceful and positive interfaith relations but with very minimal occurrences of deviations from this norm, unlike the experience of many University campuses in Nigeria. This ambivalent religious atmosphere might be because higher institutions of learning campuses in the country are generally yet to put in place such institutional and administrative measures that would have a bearing on how their campuses can be friendly to all religions and bring about mutual understanding among students and workers of different faiths like that of the University of Ibadan.

- * This paper resulted from a research project titled: “Using Interfaith Dialogue as a Tool for National Integration”, which was supported by TETFUND/NRF 2020 Grant Cycle.

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