

Inclusive and Pluralist Approaches As Correlates of Counselling Children Towards Religious Tolerance.

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Abstract

Issues of religious tolerance and intolerance continue to be current and controversial in contemporary debates around the world. This paper discusses the various approaches that may be adopted in counselling children towards religious tolerance, with particular attention on the inclusive and pluralist approaches. To be able to do this, relevant literatures were reviewed. Three research questions were developed for the study. A questionnaire titled Inclusive and Pluralist Approach to Religious Tolerance was used as an instrument to collect data for the study. The instrument had a reliability of 0.89. The data collected were analysed with linear and multiple regression to indicate the level of significance of the variables of the study at 0.05. The results of the study indicated that there is a significant correlation between child based counselling intervention strategy and religious tolerance of children. The conclusion therefore is that to foster and encourage religious tolerance, children should be prepared through counselling to deal with activities that may suggest or encourage religious intolerance.

Keywords: Counselling, intervention, inclusive, pluralist, children, religion, tolerance

1. Introduction

Despite the undeniable contributions of religion to human welfare, it is also true that it has been a divisive factor, especially when limits of disagreement amongst different religious group are not well managed. Whereas religious diversity can be a strength when people compare the relative values of their tenets and adjust accordingly, religious bigotry, which is a tendency to claim superiority of one's own faith and treating all others as worthy of condemnation, leads not only to suffering by many, it also results in a distortion of the basic truths and values of such religions. While the former creates an enabling environment for religious tolerance, the latter supports and encourages religious intolerance.

Religious intolerance is a tendency to claim that one's religion is superior to that of others, to the extent of condemning such religions. The tendency demonstrated here is subjective and hostile. The hostility that is expressed here is multi-dimensional in nature, ranging from physical attacks on people and structures to war of wits via the various mediums of mass communications. Religious intolerance has led and continues to lead to some of the most degrading violations of human rights around the globe.

Religious tolerance is a fair and objective attitude towards those whose opinions, practices, religion, etc., differ from one's own. This means having a fair and objective attitude towards others. Vanja (2003), says that religious tolerance means that we bear the religious truths of other religions that we do not necessarily accept, without strong opposition. Human society is not a uniform category. There are so many inevitable and unavoidable differences between people. The principle of tolerance therefore is not only an essential characteristics of any individual, but a necessary condition for living with other.

While it is true that religious tolerance/intolerance in the context in which it is being discussed is adult based, it may also be true that children who are offspring's of such adults can be adversely affected. That is why the *National Association of School Psychologists* (2001), in America, pointed out that children in particular may have difficulty channelling their feelings appropriately and can easily pick up negative or demeaning cues given by adults around them. In schools and other gatherings where children may have to interact, some children may be the targets of hostility and brutality either from their peers or significant others in matters relating to religious beliefs and practices. All of these go a long way in affecting the psychological development of such children and the consequent negative attitude of religious intolerance.

In a more recent approach to the study of religious intolerance, Ekanem and Ekefre (2013) states that education which was used in the earlier days as a means of attracting people to religious group has been turned around to be used as an instrument of formation and indoctrination in places of learning governed by some religious groups. From this point of view then, religious intolerance can be viewed as an outcome of how people are taught in school from their earliest days. The school environment therefore can be a breeding ground for traits of religious intolerance. The incidence of the clash between secondary school students from Muslim and Christian religious groups over the wearing of veil by the Muslims in school in Oyo State in 2003 buttresses the point made above.

They went on further to state that religious bigots from ancient times has legitimised religious violence under the cover of faith and holy war. It is against this backdrop that fundamentalist groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria and Talibans in the Middle East continue to unleash terror acts on their victims under the guise of religion. This has resulted in Nigeria in past decades destruction of lives and properties which is an outcome of religious intolerance.

This research work on the bases of the above problem situation wants to find out the extent to which the pluralist and inclusive approach to counselling for children will help to curb and maintain the many increasing incidences of religious intolerance in Nigeria.

2. 1 APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

Several approaches have been developed by psychologists and counsellors in the attempt to find ways to manage issues of religious tolerance or intolerance within the school system for children. Some of the approaches include the following.

The Exclusionist Approach: According to Khalid (2003), the most commonly known approach to religious diversity is the one adopted by Religious Exclusionist who feel that they are the main custodians of religious truths to the complete exclusion of all others. The obvious implication of this approach is intolerance for those who do not share the faith of members of such groups. Such exclusionist groups are to be found in the major religions of the world today.

The Inclusive Approach: Here the right of other faiths to thrive side by side with the faith of the Inclusionist is tolerated though not accepting their validity. The Vatican for instance adopted the policy of Religious Inclusionism in various declarations on the freedom of the individual in religious matters and also on how the Catholic Church should treat members of other religious groups. (Vatican II, 1967, & 1965). These expressed sentiments of cordiality for other important world religions.

The Pluralist Approach: According to this approach, all important religions are genuine human responses to the same Transcendental Reality even though influenced by different cultural environments of the religious leaders. (Khalid, 2003) All religions therefore are simultaneously correct. This is a form of open-ended search for the truth. Both faith and non-faith responses may be equally valid.

So many reasons can be adduced to be responsible for religious intolerance in Nigeria. Some these reasons include socio-economic factors, political, governance, oppression, exploitation, victimisation, discrimination, marginalisation, bigotry, etc. (Samson 2012, Salawu 2010, Sanusi 2009, Iwara 2006) Other factors include inequality, poverty, violation of human rights and provoking publications by religious bodies. These trigger off or religious violence and fundamentalism in the country from time to time. (Ekanem and Ekefre 2013)

A major challenge to the efforts that have been made severally to achieve religious tolerance is the close ties between ethnicity and religion. Most popular religious groups in Nigeria are tied to some ethnic groups in the country. This however does not undermine the small presence of memberships that may cut across all ethnic groups. More specifically, the Northern part of the country is dominated by Muslims; the West is dominated by protestant Christians while the East is dominated by Catholic Christians. In the South, West, and Eastern part of the country, the Christian religion is dominant, though with traces of African Traditional Religion. Since ethnicity expresses a people's identity and cultural-religious values, any form of opposition or criticism is seen as apposing the very being of such a people. This approach makes it difficult for people to be very objective in the expression of their religious beliefs and response to issues that affect their faith.

A statistical presentation by Ekanem and Ekarafe (2013) reveals that the Hausas' in the North is 95% Muslim and 5% Christianity, the Yoruba tribe in the west have 60% Christians, 30% Muslims and 10% belonging to other African religions. The Igbos in the East and the Ijaw in the south are 98% Christians (Catholics), while 2% practice other African religions. The middle belt of Nigeria is the largest minority group and they are Christians mostly with traditional religions and very few Muslim converts. The question and the challenge is how do we manage these religious differences that cuts across ethnicities?

The above problem situation has the capacity to obstruct and possibly destroy the young evolving democratic system of governance that we are developing in Nigeria. The solution which was proposed by Ekanem and Ekarafe is to go back to education and develop a philosophy of education that will help those who champion religious intolerance to rediscover new and better ways of handling issues of religious tolerance. The assumption of this paper is that if children are well taught the right ways to respond to issues of religious tolerance and incidences of intolerance, the increasing cases of terrorism under the banner of religious intolerance will be reduced. The proposal therefore is adopt the pluralist and inclusive approach to the education of children in secondary schools in matters of religious tolerance.

2.2 FORMS OF CHILD-BASED COUNSELLING INTERVENTIONS

It has been established that children need to be guided in their formative stages so that they will be equipped with the necessary skills for religious tolerance. The following counseling intervention strategies have been presented as tips for counselors, school teachers and parents in preparing children for the challenges of religious tolerance in the future.

1. **Talk to children about discrimination:** Children may be exposed to religious intolerance at some point in their lives. They may hear discriminatory remarks on the playground, see examples of prejudice in the news, movies, or pick up intolerance in the behaviour of adults that they know. If counsellors do not address issues of prejudice and discrimination, children may grow up believing that religious discrimination in the form of religious intolerance is normal and that victims of religious intolerance deserve whatever treatment they receive. Such discussions will extol the values of tolerance.
2. **Explore children's fears:** Most children may not be able to express their fears, question or seek clarification about conclusions that they may have made. Counsellors then can use activities, role-playing, and discussions to explore their fears and feelings about instances of religious intolerance that they may have heard of or experienced. This will enable children deal with such fears and adjust in readiness to deal positively with religious differences.
3. **Model religious tolerance and compassion:** Children take their emotional cues from significant others in their lives. Parents therefore should be advised to avoid making negative statements about other religions during the formative years of children. Such negative remarks affect the way children may react to person who may not be of the same faith with them. In modelling religious tolerance, children should be presented with the values of religious tolerance.
4. **Fight discrimination with knowledge:** When issues of discrimination are discussed with children, it is important that issues of blame should be carefully considered. For example, the child can be told that it is wrong to blame an entire tribe or people, but that some individuals in the group may be bad while others may be good. The child may be told to recall any instance when he or she may have felt blamed wrongly and how he or she felt at that time. This will help the child to realize that it may be wrong to discriminate against an entire people.
5. **Help the children explore the things that they may have in common with others:** Children may be surprised to know that the Muslim boy in his class for example likes playing football as much as he does, or may like watching movies too as much as he does. This will enable the child to know that human beings have many things in common that goes beyond different religious affiliations. This will enable the child to accept everyone despite differences in religion.
6. **Discuss historical incidents of discrimination:** The child will learn much from events of religious intolerance that may have occurred in the past. For instance a counselor, teacher, and parent in Nigeria may discuss some major riots because of religious intolerance that may have taken place in the past. Such historical exposition will help the child to see the evils of religious intolerance.
7. **Some key messages that children must keep in mind as they grow up:** They include:
 - Violence and hate are never solutions to anger.
 - Groups of people should never be judged by the actions of a few.
 - All people deserve to be treated with fairness, respect and dignity.
 - Vengeance and justice are not necessarily the same.
 - History shows us that intolerance only causes harm.
 - We need to work for peace in our communities and around the world.
 - Religious tolerance is a life long endeavour.

2.3 THE PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

As identified earlier, religious intolerance is a social, political and religious problem that is growing at a geometric rate around the world. This is evidenced by the increasing cases of religious violence which leads to destructions of lives and properties. More worrisome is the presence of many young children who constitute the fighting force in those places. The educational process of children is therefore challenged in a very serious way. This paper is therefore an attempt to find out the extent to which the inclusive and pluralist approach will help in training young children towards religious tolerance.

2.4 HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant relationship between child based counselling intervention of children and their

attitude towards religious tolerance.

2. There is no significant relationship between inclusive approach of counselling children towards religious tolerance and their attitude towards religious tolerance
3. There is no significant relationship between pluralist approach of counselling children towards religious tolerance and their attitude towards religious tolerance

3.METHOD OF STUDY

The study adopted a survey research approach whereby responses were sought from the population for the study through the use of questionnaire measuring the variables of the study. The population of the study consist of all students in the department of guidance and counselling, Delta State University Abraka. The simple random random sampling technique was used to select a sample 100 students for the study. The method of data collection was a questionnaire titled INCLUSIVE AND PLURALIST APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE. The instrument is made up of 30 items measuring the main variables of the study. It had a reliability of 0.89, which indicated that the instrument was appropriate for the study. The method of data analysis was linear and multiple regression.

4.PRESENTATION OF DATA AND DISCUSSION

4. **1a RESEARCH QUESTION ONE:** Is there any significant relationship between child-based counselling intervention for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious tolerance?

4. **1b RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS ONE:** There is no significant relationship between child-based counseling intervention for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious tolerance.

Table 1a: Linear Correlation for Relationship between child-based counseling intervention for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious.

	Children's Attitude	Child-based Counseling Intervention	Sig. (1- tailed)
Children's Attitude	1		0.00
Child-based Counseling Intervention	0.30	1	0.00
Mean	15.03	15.21	
Standard Deviation	3.51	3.34	

*Significant (P< 0.05)

Table 1b: Linear Regression of child-based counseling intervention for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious tolerance

Model	R	R Squared	Adjusted R Squared	Std Error of the Estimate	Significance	Remark
1	0.30a	0.09	0.08	3.36		
ANOVA ON MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS						
Model 1	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	Significance	Remark
Regression	95.73	1	95.73	8.48	0.01a	Significant
Residual	937.17	83	11.29			
Total	1032.89	84				
Significance of regression weights of Variables in the Equation 2						
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-Ratio	Significance	Remark
Child-based counseling intervention	0.32	0.11	0.30	2.91	0.01	Significant

- a. Predictor (constant): child-based counseling intervention
 - b. Dependent Variable: Children's attitude towards religious tolerance.
- *Significant, ($p < 0.05$).

To test this Research Question and Hypothesis, a linear correlation and Regression analysis was performed with child-based counseling intervention for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious tolerance. The results are presented in Table 1a and 1b below.

The data in Table 1a showed that there was a significant correlation/relationship between child-based counseling intervention for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious tolerance ($r = 0.30, p < 0.05$).

The data in Table 1b shows that $F(1, 83) = 8.48, p = 0.01$. This indicated that statistically there is a significant relationship between child-based counseling intervention for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious tolerance. Hypothesis one is therefore rejected, and alternative hypothesis holds true. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.30 showed that 30% of children's attitude towards religious tolerance is due to child-based counseling intervention.

4. **2a RESEARCH QUESTION TWO:** Is there any significant relationship between inclusive approach towards counselling children for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious tolerance.
4. **2b RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS TWO:** There is no significant relationship between inclusive approach towards counseling children for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious tolerance.

Table 2a: Linear Correlation for Relationship between inclusive approach towards counseling children for religious tolerance and children’s attitude towards religious

*Significant (P< 0.05)

Table 2b: Linear Regression of Inclusive Approach for religious tolerance and children’s attitude towards

	Children’s Attitude	Inclusive Approach	Sig. (1- tailed)
Children’s Attitude	1		0.01
Inclusive Approach	0.27	1	0.01
Mean	15.03	10.21	
Standard Deviation	3.51	4.19	

religious tolerance

Model	R	R Squared	Adjusted R Squared	Std Error of the Estimate	Significance	Remark
1	0.27a	0.07	0.06	3.40		

ANOVA ON MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Model 1	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	Significance	Remark
Regression	75.18	1	75.18	6.52	0.01a	Significant
Residual	957.71	83	11.54			
Total	1032.89	84				

Significance of regression weights of Variables in the Equation 2

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-Ratio	Significance	Remark
Inclusive Approach	0.23	0.09	0.27	2.55	0.01	Significant

- a. Predictor (constant): inclusive approach
 - b. Dependent Variable: Children’s attitude towards religious tolerance.
- *Significant, (p< 0.05).

To test this Research Question and Hypothesis, a linear correlation and Regression analysis was performed with inclusive approach towards counseling children for religious tolerance and children’s attitude towards religious tolerance. The results are presented in Table 2a and 2b below.

The data in Table 2a showed that there was a significant correlation/relationship between inclusive approach for religious tolerance and children’s attitude towards religious tolerance ($r = 0.27, p < 0.05$).

The data in Table 2b shows that $F(1, 83) = 6.52, p = 0.01$. This indicated no statistically significant child-based counseling intervention for religious tolerance and children’s attitude towards religious tolerance.

Hypothesis one is therefore rejected, and alternative hypothesis holds true. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.07 showed that 7.0% of children's attitude towards religious tolerance is due to inclusive approach.

4. **3a RESEARCH QUESTION THREE:** Is there any relationship between Pluralist approach towards counseling children for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious tolerance.

4. **3b RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS THREE:** There is no significant relationship between pluralist approach towards counseling children for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious tolerance.

Table 3a: Linear Correlation for Relationship between pluralist approach towards counseling children for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious

	Children's Attitude	pluralist Approach	Sig. (1- tailed)
Children's Attitude	1		0.00
pluralist Approach	0.36	1	0.00
Mean	15.03	14.45	
Standard Deviation	3.51	3.53	

*Significant ($P < 0.05$)

Table 3b: Linear Regression of Inclusive Approach for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious tolerance

Model	R	R Squared	Adjusted R Squared	Std Error of the Estimate	Significance	Remark
1	0.36a	0.13	0.12	3.29		
ANOVA ON MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS						
Model 1	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	Significance	Remark
Regression	135.46	1	135.46	12.53	0.00a	Significant
Residual	897.43	83	10.81			
Total	1032.89	84				
Significance of regression weights of Variables in the Equation 2						
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-Ratio	Significance	Remark
Pluralist Approach	0.36	0.0	0.36	3.54	0.00	Significant

a. Predictor (constant): pluralist approach

- b. Dependent Variable: Children's attitude towards religious tolerance.
*Significant, ($p < 0.05$).

To test this Research Question and Hypothesis, a linear correlation and Regression analysis was performed with pluralist approach towards counseling children for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious tolerance. The results are presented in Table 2a and 2b below.

The data in Table 3a showed that there was a significant correlation/relationship between inclusive approach for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious tolerance ($r = 0.36, p < 0.05$).

significant child-based counseling intervention for religious tolerance and children's attitude towards religious tolerance. Hypothesis one is therefore rejected, and alternative hypothesis holds true. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.12 showed that 12% of children's attitude towards religious tolerance is due to pluralist approach.

4. 4 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The result of data analysis for research question and hypothesis one indicated there was a significant relationship between child based counseling intervention for religious tolerance and attitude of children towards religious tolerance. This is because the developmental process of children, predisposes them to be open to any learning situation. Just as they can learn negative traits of religious intolerance, so also they can unlearn such traits to cope with religious differences through the child based counseling approach. The findings of this study is consistent with the study of Ekanem and Ekrefe (2013) who stated that the school is a place where children can be taught the values of religious tolerance. If the learning process for children are well utilized, the school system through counseling interventions will help raise young people who will be open to religious dialogue and religious differences.

The findings of research question and hypothesis two indicated that there was a significant relationship between the inclusive approach to counseling children towards religious tolerance and their attitude towards religious tolerance. The inclusive approach as indicated earlier tolerates the religious views of others without necessarily accepting them. The inclusivist can live side by side with people of other religions. The findings of this study is therefore consistent with the proponents of the inclusive approach who expect that when people are taught and encouraged to tolerate and respect the religious views of others, it will help to resolve issues of religious intolerance.

Finally, the findings research question and hypothesis three indicated that there is a significant relationship between the pluralist approach to counseling children for religious tolerance and their attitude towards religious tolerance. The pluralist approach states that all religions are genuine and correct. The base for this understanding is that all religions are directed towards the same transcendent Being. It is just a matter of culture and different approach that makes the difference. This position will help people also to tolerate the religious of other people with the understanding that no religion is more important than the other. If children are therefore brought up in this way, it will help to prevent the increasing incidences of religious intolerance.

5. 1 CONCLUSION

It has become obvious at this point that religious intolerance is a religious and social evil that can be addressed through the process of education and counseling. The point is that it is possible to live with people who share different religious beliefs with confrontation or quarrelling. In resolving and attempting to find solution to the on going incidences of religious intolerance in Nigeria, it has been found out in this study that educating children properly through child based counseling interventions and teaching religious perspectives that tolerate and accept other religious views, will go a long way to resolve issues of religious intolerance. The educational system should be redesigned in such a way that parts of the philosophy of education in the National Policy on Education should be highlighted and made more practical in the education of children. In this way, our educational process will become more effective useful in solving problems that are facing the nation.

5. 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made.

1. Counselling as an educational and formative process should given more prominence in the education process in schools and especially of young children. The aim is to prepare them with skills that will help them to handle issues in the society like those of religious intolerance and violence.
2. As a response to issues of religious tolerance, the curriculum of schools should be updated to reflect directly an educational process that will provide for religious tolerance just like the study of Nigerian languages are in the school curriculums.

3. There should be greater emphasis on counseling at the primary and secondary levels. The reason is that this is the point of actual formation. Once young people leave the secondary school to the tertiary institutions, their values and behavior patterns would have been formed.

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