

## Integrating Islamic Education into Conflict Management: Strategies for Sustainable Peace in Northern Nigeria.

**Masud Jibril Sahban**

Arabic Medium Department, School of Languages  
Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin  
Email: mashban2004@gmail.com  
Phone number: 08056668219

&

**Yusuf, Mashood Dagbo**

Islamic Studies Department,  
Muhyideen College of Education, Ilorin  
[dagbomashood@gmail.com](mailto:dagbomashood@gmail.com)  
08035215264

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### Abstract

*Northern Nigeria has been plagued by ongoing and complex conflicts, ranging from terrorism and ethno-religious violence to communal conflicts and political instability. These conflicts have impeded development, threatened national unity, and undermined peaceful coexistence. Western peace building models have been implemented with limited success. To this fact, this paper torchlight into the conflicts in Northern Nigeria by employing analytic method of contents with textual studies through which suitability of peace and conflict management is carefully looked into. The paper also juxtaposes Islamic education and peacebuilding, explores the causes of conflict in Northern Nigeria, identifies conflict dynamics and integrative approach to conflict management and assesses the roles of stakeholders both resources and humans in fostering tolerance and reconciliation. The paper comes to the conclusion that a locally based inclusive, and religiously sensitive approach to conflict resolution is necessary for a lasting peace in Northern Nigeria, while it recommends steps in bringing the approach into success, such as; scholars' engagement, youths' empowerment, parental control, value awareness, among others.*

**Keywords:** Islam, Education, Conflict, Management, Approach, Peace, Northern Nigeria

### Introduction

Over the last 20 years, there has been ongoing war in northern Nigeria, ranging from political upheaval and ethno-religious bloodshed to the emergence of bandit militias and insurgent organizations like Boko Haram. Millions have been displaced, socioeconomic progress has been hampered, and community trust has been damaged by these wars. Traditional responses, including military interventions and political negotiations, have yielded limited success. On the other hand, a viable route to long-term peace is provided by the fusion of culturally appropriate and religiously based strategies, especially those originating from Islamic education. So, Northern Nigerian culture and spirituality are strongly rooted in Islamic education, which is generally understood to be the dissemination of information founded on the Qur'an, Hadith, and traditional legal principles. It affects not just moral conduct but also interpersonal relationships, community leadership, and societal standards. Fundamental to preventing and resolving conflicts, Islamic education

may impart ideals like justice, compassion, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence when it is properly organized (Abubakar & Haruna, 2021).

Indeed, sustainability of peace is a necessity in all regions, but particular in Northern Nigeria with recent conflict escalation. It refers to a long-term stability and harmony that develops from determining conflicts and addressing their root causes to allowing the societies to heal, rebuild, and thrive from disunity, discord and disharmony (Sharifi & Simangan, 2022). According to the United Nations, sustainable peace is closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16, which focuses on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG Goal 16, 2021). Meanwhile, the concept of sustainable peace encompasses several key elements to include:

1. Addressing root causes of conflict: This includes addressing issues such as poverty, inequality, and social injustice, which can contribute to conflict and instability.
2. Promoting social cohesion: Building trust and understanding between different groups and communities is essential for sustainable peace.
3. Fostering inclusive governance: Ensuring that all stakeholders have a voice and are represented in decision-making processes can help to build trust and promote stability.
4. Encouraging economic development: Economic growth and development can help to reduce poverty and inequality, which can contribute to sustainable peace <sup>2</sup>.

It is further established that integrating environmental sustainability into positive peace can help to achieve sustainable development and reduce the risk of conflict (Krampe, Hegazi & Van Deveer, 2021). Thus, sustainability of peace should be considered a key pillar of positive peace, alongside other dimensions such as economic, social, and institutional sustainability.

While, conflict management is also a call when a peace is broken. It is often meant the same in meaning with substantiality of peace. That means, when conflict is managed, the peace is sustained. However, it is the process of identifying, addressing, and resolving conflicts in a constructive and sustainable manner. It includes understanding the root causes of conflict, managing emotions, and finding mutually beneficial solutions. Accordingly, to Thomas (1992), conflict management involves "the process of managing a dispute or disagreement in order to minimize the negative consequences and maximize the positive outcomes. He further asserted that effective conflict management helps in improving relationship, enhancing communication and increasing productivity, among many. More importantly, there are strategies employed to bring about conflict management, such as; negotiation, mediation, arbitration, accommodation, avoidance, compromise and others (Deutsch, 2000).

The objective of this paper is to make Islamic education an instrument offering a comprehensive framework for managing conflicts in Northern Nigeria when combined with contemporary conceptions of peace education. It also looks at how community-based Islamic organizations, religious experts, and Islamic schools (madrasas and tsangaya) may be used to foster social cohesion and reconciliation. By doing this, the research suggests an integrated paradigm that harmonizes religious principles with civic education and human rights norms, drawing on both Islamic and Western peacebuilding frameworks.

## **Islamic Education and Peacebuilding**

Islamic education is described as an act of impacting Islamic values into the learners as contained in the Holy Qur'an to guide the moral conduct and spiritual wellbeing of the people to bring about peaceful co-existence (Dagbo, 2025). While, peacebuilding is an ability of a nation to bring about valuable and positive changes that improves the living standard and harmonious relationship among the citizens through creation of employment opportunity, reduction of poverty, accessibility of free railway, supply of good drinkable water and quality health care delivery, enabling environment free from fear, conflict and tension, among others (Dagbo, 2020).

Thus, the potential of Islamic education to solve violent conflict, especially in cultures with a majority of Muslims, has been emphasized more and more in recent studies. Islamic education in Nigeria has always had a dual purpose, encouraging moral growth while occasionally being influenced by extreme views. It was agreed in order to reverse this tendency that curricular content needs to be changed to incorporate civic engagement, tolerance, and interfaith discussion (Adebayo and Yusuf, 2022).

According to Bello and Nasir (2023), tsangaya schools, which are common in Northern Nigeria were identified to be vulnerable to ideological abuse since they frequently lack regulated curricula. But when backed by teacher preparation programs and legislative changes, they also have strong community trust, which makes them appropriate venues for peace education. Their research highlighted the necessity of incorporating ethical education and conflict resolution techniques within the current Islamic educational frameworks.

## **Conflict and its Causes in Northern Nigeria**

Conflict is a multi-layered phenomenon that arises from differences in interests, values, beliefs, or goals between individuals, groups, or organizations. It can manifest in various forms, such as; interpersonal, intrapersonal, intergroup, or international conflicts (Deutsch, 1973). Meanwhile, its devastating consequences resulted into emotional distress, like; anxiety, or depression; damaged relationship leading to social isolation; reduced productivity in workplaces, violence and aggression, killing, among others (Bush & Folger, 2005).

Specifically, conflicts in northern Nigeria are caused by a number of interconnected and deeply ingrained factors. The causes include the following as identified by Ibrahim and Mohammed (2023) below:

- a. Ethno-religious intolerance and divisions: Because of political manipulation, historical grudges, and rivalry for resources, long-standing conflicts between ethnic and religious groups can turn violent.
- b. Youth unemployment and economic inequality: High rates of youth unemployment and poverty fuel social instability and leave young people open to recruitment by extremist organizations.
- c. Political marginalization and corruption: Resentment and mistrust of governmental institutions have been cultivated by the disenfranchisement of some populations and widespread corruption.
- d. Misunderstandings of religious doctrines: Extremist organizations frequently use religious narratives to defend violence because they lack a sufficient understanding of Islam and the ability to critically analyze religious texts.
- e. Poor access to social services and high-quality education: Many communities are marginalized as a result of having little access to infrastructure, healthcare, and secular and religious education.
- f. Lack of inclusive development: the lack of inclusive development strategies and bad governance make conflict worse. The call therefore, was necessary for integrated, comprehensive strategies that go beyond military operations and incorporate social, educational, economic, and regulatory changes in order to address the complex drivers of conflict.

## **Conflict Dynamics in Northern Nigeria**

Conflict dynamics refers to the complex and evolving interactions between parties in a conflict, influenced by various factors such as power disparities, social structures, economics conditions and cultural differences (Walther, Radil, Russell & Trémolières, 2023). So, understanding conflict dynamics is crucial for effective management of conflict, particularly as the case of Northern Nigeria's conflicts are complex due to the fact some underlying factors intertwine with socioeconomic inequality, young radicalization, and conflicts between different ethnic and religious groups, among many (Okonkwo & Ibrahim, 2020). While, according to Musa and Yahaya (2021), he opined that a misreading of Islamic teachings has been a major factor in the emergency of conflict, especially that of Boko Haram. They advocated for a counter-narrative strategy that uses both official and informal educational venues to spread genuine Islamic teachings on social justice and peace.

Additionally, Olayiwola (2024) identified Islamic education as a tool to manage conflicts in our society by equipping children with critical thinking abilities and inculcating in them moral values capable of lessening the religious extremism. He further ascertained that curriculum reform is a step towards managing the conflict through the contents including pluralism, peace, and the moral precepts of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) are taught and tailored towards developing tolerance and understanding cultural differences among the citizens.

## **Integrative Approaches to Conflict Management**

An integrative approach combines different methods, techniques or therapies to create a personalized and holistic treatment plan that acknowledges that each individual is unique, with their own set of needs, goals and preferences (Zhang & Liu, 2020). Applying integrative approach to conflict management, a sort of framework that is both culturally

aware and successful is provided by combining Islamic principles with Western dispute resolution techniques. It is noted by Usman and Danjuma (2022) that Islamic concepts of sulh (reconciliation) and adl (justice) are in harmony with Lederach's conflict transformation theory as integrative approach to control the conflict.

In fact, Islamic concept of sulh (reconciliation) refers to the process of reconciling quarrels and conflicts. It is a procedure used to settle marital conflicts, disputes between individuals, or even wars between groups as evidenced in al-Qur'an 4: 128 thus: "If a wife fears cruelty or desertion on her husband's part, there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves". It involves mediation, arbitration, forgiveness and negotiation to resolve conflicts peacefully. While 'Adl (justice) is an essential concept in Islam that refers to fairness, impartiality and equity. It is an all-embracing conflict tool that incorporates steadiness, evenness, and righteousness in all features of life as Allah says in al-Qur'an 5: 8: "O you who believe! Be persistently just, a witness for Allah, and let not the hatred of a people prevent you from being just". The verses ensures that conflicts are resolved equitably, prevents injustice and contribute to lasting peace. Islam by these principles, fosters a culture of peace, justice, and reconciliation (Khakimov, 2020).

On the other hands, John Paul Lederach's conflict transformation theory explains that it is a holistic approach to managing conflicts that focuses on sustaining peace and promoting social justice. This theory stresses understanding the complexities of conflicts, addressing their root causes, and fostering long-term change in relationships, structures, and attitudes. The theory is principled on resolving conflict with relational aspect that often rooted in damaged or broken relationships. It also based on local Capacity to empower local communities and recognizing their knowledge, skills, and relationships is crucial for sustainable peace as well as understanding the perspectives of all parties and imagining a future where justice and reconciliation are possible based on moral conduct (Lederach, 2003).

In order to resolve local disputes as in the case of conflict in Norther Nigeria, it was asserted that an integrative approach where Islamic principles of sulh and adl, and transformation theory is appropriate as a paradigm in which civil society groups collaborate with neighborhood Imams, educators, and traditional leaders. This opinion is supported by recent research from the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR, 2025), which pointed out that peacebuilding initiatives are more effective when they are based on both democratic principles and religious credibility.

Furthermore, Usman and Bello (2022) further ascertained some elements for the success of integrative approach to conflict management, such elements are as follows

- i. Education reform: Using both secular and Islamic curriculum, encourage civic engagement, tolerance, and critical thinking.
- ii. Community dialogue: To resolve conflicts and promote understanding, a mix of religious academics, traditional leaders, and civil society participants facilitates community discourse.
- iii. Inter-faith and intra-faith cooperation: Promoting communication and joint projects among various religious and sectarian communities in order to foster trust and lessen mistrust.

- iv. Youth empowerment: To lessen vulnerability to radicalization and violence, funds should be allocated for leadership development, peace education, and vocational training.

Therefore, conflict management initiatives need to be grounded in culturally acceptable methods and tailored to the particular setting. While addressing the structural roots of conflict, this integrative strategy provides a comprehensive, community-centered response that honors local values.

## Contributions of Stakeholders to Conflict Resolution in Northern Nigeria

Some notable contributions from both resources and human stakeholders are identified to work hand in hand with integrative approach in order to be an inclusive effort to conflict management in Northern Nigeria. The stakeholders are given as follows:

- a. **The Role of Islamic Education in Kano State:** A 2021 initiative in Kano State brought peace education into Islamic schools. It featured modules on civic duty, gender equity, and conflict resolution and was sponsored by NGOs and local academics. Students' views toward various religions and ethnic groups have improved, according to an assessment by Yusuf et al. (2024). Additionally, 500 teachers received peace pedagogy training from the program, which had an impact on community relations.
- b. **Islamic principle as a Stratagem for Conflict Management:** When properly organized, Islamic education encourages moral conduct, fairness, and harmonious cohabitation. The sanctity of life, the settlement of disputes (sulh), patience (sabr), and justice (adl) are all emphasized in fundamental Islamic doctrines. Programs that use Hadith studies and Qur'anic interpretation to teach these concepts have the power to change people's perspectives and reduce conflict. Youth engagement in violent organizations has decreased as a result of Islamic peace teaching, claims Musa (2023).
- c. **Roles Islamic Scholars to Conflict Control:** Islamic scholars, or ulama, are essential in promoting peace and mediating disputes. They are regarded as legitimate peacemakers due to their moral authority and societal influence. Initiatives like the 2022 Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) peace campaign have shown how successful scholar-led discourse in resolving matters can be (Abdullahi and Sulaiman, 2023)). They further included that scholars in academic, played both roles as stakeholders in civic education and interfaith discussions, thereby promote mutual respect and concord across communities.
- d. **Western Approach to Conflict Management:** Western conceptions of conflict management place a strong emphasis on restorative justice, mediation, negotiation, and conflict transformation. Although they have been used in Nigeria, cultural mismatch frequently limits their efficacy. They work better, though, when modified and combined with Islamic ideas. Therefore, Obi and Adamu (2024) asserted that hybrid approaches of both Islamic education/principles and western education would thereby improve peace processes' sustainability and local ownership.

## Conclusion

In Northern Nigeria, Islamic education provides a spiritually based and culturally rooted method of managing conflicts. It creates an integrated framework that may address the underlying causes of violence when paired with Western peacebuilding techniques. A key component of this conflict management strategy must include Islamic scholars, Islamic education/principles, and educational reform. It was also noted that Northern Nigerian conflict stems from various socio-economic, political, and religious factors. Due to a lack of awareness of local reality, attempts to address these issues through military and Western-centric methods have only partially succeeded. Islamic education provides a religiously and culturally based road to lasting peace because of its emphasis on justice, peace, reconciliation, and moral integrity. Northern Nigeria may progress toward a more secure and peaceful future by empowering Islamic scholars, including peace teaching into places of worship, and embracing an inclusive paradigm that combines Western and Islamic dispute resolution techniques. Combining tradition with modernity, religion and reason, and local knowledge with international best practices is the way to peace.

## Recommendations

Having analyzed different strategies identified by reputable scholars to maintain peace, here are the recommendations to make them workable:

- a. Curriculum Reform: There is a need to include civic duty, tolerance, and peace education in the curricula of Nigerian schools.
- b. Scholar engagement: Engagement of both local and academic scholars on contemporary techniques for resolving disputes and promoting peace is timely needed to cut the conflict by the roots.
- c. Young empowerment: Engagement of the youths in religious education and vocational training is called for in order to lessen young radicalization and expose them to Islamic values and technological advancement to earn a living
- d. Government assistance: Government at all levels in Northern Nigeria are called upon to organize constantly a faith-based awareness on the evils of conflict and assist the youths morally and financially to access quality and affordable education
- e. Interfaith discussion: Organization of interfaith discussions among the religious leaders across the faiths to promote understanding, cooperation and to also encourage value-based sermons in all religious institutions
- f. Research and Monitoring: Keeping an eye on the efficacy of Islamic peace education initiatives by constituting a committee by the government to check the excesses of the preaching and compliance
- g. Parental control: Parents are encouraged to engage their children at home in moral values and to also provide for their immediate needs in order to reduce the level of youths' involvement in conflicts through enticement by worldly needs.

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