

**PERCEPTION OF SELECTED EDUCATION STUDENTS ON EXPLORING NIGERIA'S  
ETHNO-RELIGIOUS MULTIPLICITIES FOR NATIONAL UNITY**

**BY**

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**Abstract**

*Nigeria's national unity has over a century been an impeded panacea for national peace and mutual co-existence due to its diversified ethnic profile and religious disparities characterised by a mixture of fake patriotism and mutual suspicion; evidenced in deadly conflicts among the several ethnic and religious groups. Therefore, this paper examines the perception of some selected education students on exploring Nigeria's ethno-religious multiplicities for national unity. In realizing this objective, the paper adopted a descriptive survey research type with a sample of 200 selected undergraduate students drawn from the four apprehended levels: 100 level to 400 level through a random sampling technique. A 10-item researcher's designed questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Exploring Nigeria's Ethno-Religious Multiplicities for an Even National Unity (QSNERMENU)" was used as the main instrument for data collection and was subjected to face and content validity by Test and Measurement experts. One research question and one hypothesis were formulated for study. The research question was answered using mean and standard deviation while the null hypothesis was tested with the use of t-test statistical method at 0.05 level of significance. From the data collected, analysed, and the results presented, it was found out that ethno-religious multiplicities cause hindrance to national unity, social life, loss of economic sources of livelihood and psychological trauma. Thus, it was recommended among others that, there is a need for Nigerians irrespective of ethnic or religious differences to cultivate the spirit of love for the country and should be willing to sacrifice for it – for the purpose of common growth and development.*

**Keywords:** *Ethno-Religious, Multiplicity, National unity, Perception and Students*

**Introduction**

A long time before the achievement of freedom, Nigeria's constitutional development experiences were mainly about the chief objective of overseeing identity which had given obvious signs of sabotaging the country's growth. Ethnicity is a societal marvel that is established in relations amongst persons of diverse cultural clusters within a political scheme where dialect and culture are the furthestmost protuberant features. The development of tongues within languages was one of the ways in which ethnicity – both small-scale and large-scale – turn out to be fixed in Nigeria. Although there are over 400 languages in Nigeria, only three are well thought-out to be imperative while the rest are considered trivial languages. Nevertheless, the dispersal of these languages is directly relational to both radical and socio-economic influence, and consequently the language group to which one fit in describes his/ her status in the society. As an addendum, Nwodo (2021) states that "at the point when the British rulers, in the mid twentieth century, constrained the 200 and fifty ethnic factions that make up Nigeria into a regional substance, their significant interference was to keep law, control and to make the monetary double-dealing of Nigeria as simple as possible".

The Hausa-Fulani and other minor cultural groups that populate the north of the country are Muslims while the Igbo and the other minor groups residing in the South are mainly Christians. Clusters lying in the middle include a combination of Christians and Muslims while the Yoruba found in the Southwest are practically half Muslim and half Christian. This Muslim North and Christian South dichotomy augment cultural diversifications in Nigeria, especially in Northern Nigeria where Islamic identity plays a central role (Paden, 2007; Okpanachi, 2010). Nearly the whole Northern half of the country comprises of states with Sharia rule. Of course, concessions should not be disregarded for both parts of the country. There is a substantial populace of Muslims in the South, especially in the Southwest, and an ample number amongst the Benin in Edo State. Even in the Southeast, amongst the Igbo, there has been a growing number of Muslims, causing the governors of some Igbo-speaking states to introduce state programmes for Muslims.

The equivalent goes for Christians in the North, where the generous number of Christians can't be ignored in any examination of strict groupings in Nigeria. Nigeria is the most jam-packed African nation with a populace of around 182 million by 2015 (World Population Prospects, 2015). On the off chance that we notice them sequentially for example, the 1963 Census guaranteed 36% Christian, 48% Muslim and 16% other. In any case, the Demographic and Health Survey gave 53% Christian, 45% Muslim and 2% other in 2008. Similarly, Afro barometer found 56% Christian, 43% Muslim and 1% other, also in 2008. And finally, Pew Forum declared 46% for Christians, 52% for Muslims and 1% for others in 2009 (Pew Research Centre, 2010). Whatever the exact percentages are, Nigeria is a country with very large Christian and Muslim populations. This makes the country a probable fault line between the two different identities. In this sense, Nigeria, with the largest Christian plus Muslim population in the world, can be defined as a 'cleft country' and then a 'test case' of Huntington's Clash of Civilisations thesis (Paden, 2007; Olojo, 2014). Mbogu (2014) clearly lays credence to the above point when he states that religion and ethnicity as they present themselves in Nigeria have become critical factors in ethno-religious conflicts.

Although the wide-ranging presupposition is that ethnic uniqueness is a more prominent and stable source of identity in Nigeria, some researchers have established that religion was more substantial than ethnicity as a source of identity and conflict in Nigeria (Ruby & Shah, 2007; Pew Research Centre, 2010). In fact, in the Hausa-Fulani North, religious identity is more pronounced than ethnic identity and only serves to arouse ethnicity (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). Consequently, of the two major ethnic consortia in the country, the Yoruba are more likely to classify themselves with their cultural group than are the Northern Hausa-Fulani (Lewis & Bratton, 2000; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). Nigeria has three major religious identities: Christian, Islam and traditional religions (Omorogbe & Omohan, 2005; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). Traditional religions are the most sedentary of the three groups, 'numbering several hundreds of ethnic groups and sub-groups, villages, clans, and kin groups; and, involving the worship of different gods and goddesses' (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). On the other hand, Christian and Muslim identities have continued to be the mainstay of religious disparity and conflict (Lewis & Bratton, 2000; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). This differentiation underlies the North-South dichotomy.

Multiplicity or diversity is also mirrored to some extent in the ethnic and religious affiliations of the Nigeria's populace. Religion is a critical component in any discussion of human diversity. To situate religion within the context of difference and how difference is constructed, it must be acknowledged that a range of religions are represented in Nigeria. Statistics from the 2015 Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey, which met a broadly delegate test of 7,620 ladies (matured somewhere in the range of 15 and 59) and 2,346 men (matured somewhere in the range of 15 and 49), indicated that 50.4% of Nigeria's populace are Muslims, 48.2% are Christians, and 1.4% hold fast to different religions. A couple of years after the fact, these figures appear not to have changed a lot, as a 2009 National Religious Survey on Nigerian Christians announced 15% Protestants, 13.7% Catholics, and 19.6% other Christian categories. Likewise, a 2009 overview by Pew announced that the Nigerian Muslim populace was 50.4%. By 2010, in any case, figures appeared to support the Christian populace, as a recent report led by Pew saw the Christian populace increment to 50.8% (80,510,000). Sequel to the above, there are recent discussions on how male and female alike perceive matters of religions, cultural or ethnic affiliations and national topics. This could be due to the low inclinations that female individuals have for matters of communal differences and conflicts as opposed to the strong exuberance that male persons have manifested for political issues – over time. Most females are perceived to be weak, ceremonial, emotional and uninterested in no matters that do not contribute to their individual personal wellbeing. Thus, it became so necessary that a study such as this one should hinge upon the differences of thoughts or perceptions that define gender variabilities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The vastness and heterogenous nature of Nigeria's populace and her religious diverseness is obviously not vague. And consequently, that these multiplicities would not bring about ferocious conflicts driven by hatred and acrimony is apparently not debated. However, religion, which has always been a driver that motivates individuals to moral formations and collaborative living, unity, and peace – through scriptural texts and scholarly talks – have recently been hijacked by some so-called political figures and community leaders for personal gains, ideological change, and leadership. Therefore, there is a need for individuals to identify and be reoriented regarding any religious or cultural group that disunites a nation and create tensions, fears, and intolerance for that nation to strive and reach its full potentials that which it was planned for. These religions and cultural groups could be manipulative traps to engage societies and

deviate them from more important matters and induce threats. However, based on personal observations and reports from news media and police bulletins, it could be induced that most noncivil actions that threatens national unity, peace and progress are majorly perpetrated by male persons. This is such that even if the existing multiplicities have brought about ferocious conflicts among people, gender has a significant role to play in ascertaining the need to explore those differences for the purpose of national unity and peace.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general purpose of this paper is to examine the perception of selected undergraduate students on exploring Nigeria's ethno-religious multiplicities for national unity. Precisely, the paper seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To assess the perception of selected undergraduate students on the need to explore Nigeria's ethno-religious multiplicities for an even national unity
2. To determine the influence of gender on perception of selected undergraduate students on the need to explore Nigeria's ethno-religious multiplicities for an even national unity

### **Research Questions**

The following two research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. How do undergraduate education students perceive the need to explore Nigeria's ethno-religious multiplicities for an even national unity?

### **Null Hypothesis**

H<sub>01</sub>: Gender has no significant influence on the perception of the students on the need to explore Nigeria's ethno-religious multiplicities for an even national unity.

### **Methodology**

This paper adopts the descriptive survey research type in the collection and analysis of data. This is in line with Collins, Shofiu, and Medinat (2016), who upheld that descriptive survey research has a shared feature of assessing people's attitudes and views towards circumstances. The target population of this study was the undergraduate students in Ahmadu bello university as at the 2018/2019 academic year while 200 respondents were proportionately selected from the four apprehended levels in the university. The instrument for data collection was titled "Questionnaire on Exploring Nigeria's Ethno-Religious Multiplicities for an Even National Unity (QSNERMENU)". The questionnaire comprises researchers designed 10-items conforming to the modified four-point Likert scales of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with weighted scores of 4, 3, 2 and 1. It was subjected to face and content validation by some lecturers in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Twenty copies of the QSNERMENU were administered to undergraduate students, not included in the sampled section, through a test-retest method for an interval of two weeks. The two sets of scores were thereby lay open to Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) technique where a reliability coefficient of 0.81\* was attained. The arithmetic Mean was used to answer research question one with an acceptable criterion of 2.76\* while t-test statistic was used to test the only research hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

### **Results**

Research Question 1: How do students perceive the need to explore Nigeria's ethno-religious multiplicities for an even national unity?

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation of Response on Perception of Selected Education Students on Exploring Nigeria's Ethno-Religious Multiplicities for National Unity.

S/N	Items	Responses Categories				Mean	Standard Dev.
		SA	A	D	SD		
1	Nigeria's ethno-religious multiplicities is a blessing not a misfortune	100	45	31	24	2.94	1.08
2	If Nigerians could unite despite its diversities, there would be growth and development	115	48	20	17	3.02	1.07

3	Inter ethno-religious marriage is one important means to get Nigerian work again	93	69	27	11	3.02	0.92
4	The National youth Service Corps has made a positive impact in unifying the people	85	76	38	1	3.20	0.96
5	It is better for Nigeria to break apart than to unify	29	78	25	68	3.45	0.72

The result on Table 1, showed that the majority (with observed frequencies of 100, 115, 93, 85, and 29 [422]) strongly agreed that 'ethno-religious diversities have positively impacted Nigeria's growth and development and that inter ethno-religious marriage and the NYSC are two major factors to achieve unity' summarized in the five items are true compared to (24, 17, 11, 1, and 68 [121] observed frequencies) who disagreed. The result therefore implies that an even unity in Nigeria is attainable, despite the evident ethno-religious multiplicities.

### Hypothesis Testing

H<sub>01</sub>: Male and female students do not differ significantly in their perception of the need to explore Nigeria's ethno-religious multiplicities for an even national unity.

Table 2: T-test Analysis of Male and Female Students' Perception of the need to explore Nigeria's Ethno-religious Multiplicities for Even National Unity

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	p. value	decision
Need to explore Nigeria's ethno-religious multiplicities	Males	100	3.60	.493	199	-1.908	0.07	Accept Ho
	Females	100	3.73	.491				

Table 2 shows that the calculated p-value is greater than the alpha level of .05 and therefore, we accept the stated null hypothesis. This means that male and female students do not significantly differ in their perception of the need to explore Nigeria's ethno-religious multiplicities for an even national unity.

### Discussion

From the data analysed and results presented in tables 1 and 2, it is obvious from the students' perception that despite clear differences in ethnicity and religion; a strong and a unified Nigeria is probable because contacts among citizens of diverse ethno-religious upbringing is based on common understanding and when citizens hold the attitude of nonviolent co-existence. The result of the study is thus in line with the claim made by Adebayo (2003) that religion should be seen by advocates as a vehicle of social cohesion, peace, and unity. Sequel to the result of his work, there is a strong indication that even though a community may be diverse across tribes and religions, the presence of spiritual believes is completely enough to bind the people through clergies' admonitions and preaching, scriptural messages and emphasis on heaven and hell – as most monotheistic religions would discuss. Also, based on personal observations and talks with the people, mostly individuals only imbibe values and ethics necessary for community lives from religious organizations.

The study also confirms the opinion of Ladan (2010) that ethnicity or religion alone cannot fuel conflict among Nigerians but that misinterpretation and suspicion can arise only when it is manipulated for selfish motives. As in the case of a province among the northern provinces of Nigerian country, from 1987 when the state witnessed one of its major ethno-religious conflicts, the media came to the centre stage of what most commentators regard as partisanship. While it was expected to play the role of uniting the people, the way and manner some of the media reported the Kafanchan conflict in 1987 only led to the escalation of the conflict beyond Kafanchan to other parts of the state. Consequently, innocent lives of Christians and Muslims were lost. Property and worship places of both Christians and Muslims were also destroyed. The love, unity, trust, and mutual co-existence hitherto enjoyed between Christians and Muslims in the state were shattered.

However, a critical examination of table 1 reveals that inter-ethnoreligious marriage is a key driver of an even and workable national unity. This agrees with submission of Suberu, (2006); Uhummwuango and Epelle (2011) that social interaction and contact of ethnic and religious groups should rather bind them together because of individual group personal perception of common identity. Similarly, table 2, which reveals that male and female students do not differ significantly in their perception of the need to explore Nigeria's ethno-religious multiplicities for an even national unity, implies that the gender of the respondents may not have influenced their perception.

### **Conclusion**

The peace, harmony, and growth of Nigeria should be the key effort of every well-meaning individual and commercial establishment, in actions and in words not minding the multiplicities in ethnicity and religion. However, the general conclusion that comes out strongly is that ethno-religious conflicts cause hindrance to national unity, social life, loss of economic sources of livelihood and psychological trauma.

### **Recommendations**

Thus, from the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

1. Nigerians, irrespective of tribe or religion attachment must acquire how to disregard the alleged differences for national unity.
2. More consideration should be given to likenesses that bind us rather than those differences that always tend to split us as a nation.
3. Everyone who desires to leave to the coming generation had better encourage the intrinsic worth of shared understanding, acceptance, nonviolent co-existence, and compassion.
4. Inter-cultural marriage should be entrenched in the school curriculum especially at tertiary levels.

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