**A Correlational Analysis of Multi-Cultural Education and Religious Tolerance among Undergraduate Social Studies Students in Delta and Edo States**

**Abstract**

*This study investigated the relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States, Nigeria. The study was guided by three research questions and three hypotheses tested at a 0.05 level of significance. A descriptive correlational survey design was adopted to examine how exposure to multicultural education influences students' attitudes toward religious diversity. The population comprised all 573 undergraduate Social Studies students across four public universities in Delta and Edo States: Delta State University, Abraka; University of Delta, Agbor; University of Benin, Benin City; and Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. Due to the manageable size of the population, no sampling was employed; the entire population participated in the study. Data were collected using a researcher-designed structured instrument titled Multicultural Education and Religious Tolerance Questionnaire (MERT-Q), which included sections on demographics, multicultural education, and religious tolerance. The instrument was validated by experts and yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82 after pilot testing. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) and inferential statistics including regression and multiple regression analyses using SPSS version 25. Findings revealed a strong and statistically significant relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance (R = 0.97, R² = 0.94), indicating that multicultural education accounted for 94% of the variance in students’ religious tolerance levels. Gender had no significant moderating effect, while location was found to significantly influence the relationship, with students in urban areas displaying higher tolerance levels. The study concluded that multicultural education is a powerful predictor of religious tolerance and recommended that Social Studies educators integrate value-based multicultural content, especially in rural institutions, to bridge tolerance gaps. Educational policies should also institutionalize multicultural education as a strategy for promoting social harmony and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria’s pluralistic society.*

**Keywords**: Multicultural education, religious tolerance, undergraduate students, gender, location, Social Studies

**Introduction**

Nigeria, as a pluralistic society, is characterized by its rich diversity in language, culture, ethnicity, and religion. While this multicultural makeup presents opportunities for intercultural enrichment and national cohesion, it also poses significant challenges to unity, especially when diversity is not properly managed. Religious intolerance, often rooted in misinterpretation, prejudice, and lack of intercultural education, continues to threaten peaceful coexistence in many parts of the country. In response to these challenges, **multicultural education** has been increasingly emphasized as a pedagogical and philosophical approach to foster tolerance, promote social harmony, and shape inclusive attitudes, particularly among the youth who are more susceptible to social influences.

Multicultural education refers to pedagogical strategies and content that aim to help learners appreciate, respect, and navigate cultural differences while promoting social justice, equity, and equal opportunity (Hunduma & Mekuria, 2024). It seems to foster a mindset that values diversity, discourages discrimination, and supports peaceful coexistence among people of different backgrounds. According to Devaki and Sunkesula (2025), multicultural education is built on the principles of pluralism and fairness, which are critical in cultivating tolerance across religious, cultural, and ethnic divides. Through the Social Studies curriculum, students are exposed to topics that integrate value-based education, civic responsibility, and appreciation for diversity, enabling them to develop a well-informed and inclusive worldview.

According to Fitria (2023), multicultural education, the ultimate goal of this educational approach is to reform schools and other educational institutions so that all students, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds, have an equal chance to learn. He emphasizes that multicultural education should permeate all aspects of school practices and policies—including curriculum content, teaching strategies, teacher-student relationships, and institutional culture. In line with this, **Nieto (2017)** assert that multicultural education must go beyond celebratory inclusion of ethnic holidays or foods and instead challenge systemic inequalities and stereotypes that promote exclusion and intolerance.

Empirical studies have reinforced the value of multicultural education in promoting peace and tolerance. Structured multicultural education helps learners cultivate empathy, reduce prejudice, and develop an understanding of others' perspectives—skills essential for navigating religious and ethnic diversity in pluralistic societies (Hartinah et al., 2023). Multicultural education, when delivered effectively, can strengthen social bonds, reduce religiously motivated conflict, and support national integration by promoting tolerance in daily interactions (Tyas and Naibaho, 2020).

The relevance of multicultural education is even more pronounced in Nigeria, a country often challenged by ethno-religious conflicts and identity-based discrimination. Blackmer and Akila (2024) argues that the deep-rooted divisions between Nigeria's various political, economic, and religious institutions have made multicultural education through Social Studies indispensable, especially at primary and secondary school levels. He emphasizes that children begin to observe and internalize ethnic and religious prejudices early in life, and as such, educators must deliberately instill in them values of unity, empathy, and respect for cultural diversity. The challenge, however, lies in ensuring that this form of education is properly integrated into the curriculum and supported by teachers trained in inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies.

Despite the idealism surrounding multicultural education, some scholars also point to its complexities and challenges. Multiculturalism could promote inclusivity and trigger political and social resistance, particularly when it is perceived as a threat to dominant cultural norms. Similarly, **West (2015)** observed that multicultural education must actively engage students in dialogue about power dynamics, privilege, and systemic discrimination if it is to effect real change. Nonetheless, these challenges do not negate the value of multicultural education—instead, they underscore the need for critical, reflective, and context-specific approaches.

In the context of religious tolerance, multicultural education plays a transformative role. Religious tolerance, as used in this study, refers to the ability and willingness to respect, accept, and peacefully coexist with people who hold different religious beliefs and practices. Tolerance is not merely passive endurance but active respect for others' rights to freedom of worship, thought, and expression. Tolerance is essential for social stability and peace in diverse societies, as it fosters mutual understanding, reduces the likelihood of conflict, and promotes coexistence among individuals of different religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds (Wahyono et al., 2024). They argue that in pluralistic societies where diversity is the norm, tolerance acts as a social glue that binds communities together by encouraging respect for differing beliefs and practices. Without tolerance, societal interactions may be marked by prejudice, hostility, and division, ultimately threatening national unity and the foundations of peaceful coexistence. Therefore, cultivating tolerance through education and public policy is crucial for sustainable peace and democratic development. Rasdi (2022) explain that religious conflicts often emerge from ignorance, miscommunication, and lack of mutual understanding—problems that can be mitigated through well-designed multicultural education programs. The study of the role of religious tolerance in modern democratic societies has enabled a deeper understanding of the significance of this concept for ensuring stability and social harmony in the context of globalization and cultural pluralism. The findings of this research confirm that religious tolerance not only guarantees freedom of conscience, but also constitutes a necessary condition for strengthening social cohesion and the functioning of democracy (Kieliszek, 2025). The analysis of theoretical approaches to religious tolerance has made it possible to identify key principles—such as mutual respect, recognition of diversity, and inclusive dialogue—as foundational elements for building peaceful coexistence. Thus, promoting religious tolerance remains essential for democratic resilience in increasingly multicultural societies.

Furthermore, contextual variables such as **gender** and **residential location** have been identified as significant factors influencing students' attitudes toward religious tolerance. Studies show that **female students often demonstrate greater openness and empathy** in interfaith settings compared to their male counterparts (Autiero & Nese, 2023). In contrast, **urban students, due to frequent exposure to cultural and religious diversity, are more likely to develop tolerant worldviews** than students in rural settings, where homogeneity may reinforce narrow perspectives (Nesterova et al., 2022**)**.

Despite the growing body of literature supporting the link between multicultural education and religious tolerance, there remains a **research gap** in localized studies that specifically explore this relationship within the Nigerian context, particularly among university students in **Delta and Edo States**. These states are home to a wide array of ethnic and religious groups, making them ideal settings for examining how multicultural education shapes tolerance among young adults pursuing Social Studies.

 **Purpose of the Study**

 The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. find out relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States;
2. ascertain the relationship among multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States based on gender?
3. find out the relationship among multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States based on their location and

**Research Questions**

 The following research questions were stated to guide the study.

1. What is the relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States?
2. What is the relationship among Multicultural Education and Religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States based on Gender?
3. What is the relationship among multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States bases on their location?

**Hypotheses**

 The following formulated hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of confidence.

1. There is no significant relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States.
2. There is no significant relationship among multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States based on gender.
3. There is no significant relationship among multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States based on their location.

**Methodology**

This study employed a **survey research design**, which was considered appropriate for examining the relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States. The survey design facilitated the collection of quantitative data from the target population and allowed the researcher to explore relationships among key variables including multicultural education, religious tolerance, gender, and location. This design enabled systematic data collection and the use of statistical methods to test hypotheses and address the research questions.

The **population** for the study consisted of all 573 undergraduate Social Studies students enrolled in four universities across Delta and Edo States. These universities included Delta State University, Abraka; University of Delta, Agbor; University of Benin, Benin City; and Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. Given the relatively small population size, a **purposive sampling technique** was used, with the entire population serving as the sample. This census approach ensured comprehensive representation and enhanced the reliability and validity of the study findings. Data were collected using a **researcher-designed structured questionnaire** titled Multicultural Education and Religious Tolerance Questionnaire (MERT-Q). The questionnaire was divided into three sections: Section A gathered demographic information such as state, gender, academic level, and location (urban or rural); Section B measured students’ perceptions of multicultural education, focusing on awareness, attitudes, and skills related to cultural and religious diversity; Section C assessed students’ religious tolerance levels, including their openness to interfaith dialogue and respect for religious differences. Items in Sections B and C were measured on a **four-point Likert scale**: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). This scaling method was chosen to capture varying degrees of agreement and to allow for quantitative analysis of attitudes and perceptions toward multicultural education and religious tolerance. To ensure **validity**, the instrument was subjected to expert review by three specialists—two from the Department of Social Studies Education and one from the Department of Educational Measurement and Evaluation at Delta State University, Abraka. Their recommendations on item relevance, clarity, and structure were incorporated, improving the instrument’s face and content validity. A **pilot study** involving 30 undergraduate Social Studies students from a university outside the main sample was conducted to assess reliability. The instrument yielded a **Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.82**, indicating good internal consistency. Before data collection commenced, ethical clearance and administrative permissions were obtained from all participating universities. Participants were informed about the study’s purpose, assured of confidentiality, and made aware that participation was voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaires were administered **physically** by trained research assistants, and completed copies were collected immediately to ensure data integrity and completeness. Data were analyzed using the **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25**. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were used to summarize demographic characteristics. To test the research hypotheses and answer the research questions, **regression analysis** was conducted to examine the predictive relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance. Furthermore, **multiple regression analysis** was utilized to explore the moderating effects of gender and location on this relationship. All statistical tests were conducted at a **0.05 level of significance** to determine the presence of significant relationships. This methodology provided a comprehensive and rigorous approach to investigating how multicultural education influences religious tolerance among undergraduate students, offering valuable insights for curriculum development and educational policy aimed at fostering peaceful coexistence in Nigeria’s diverse society.

**Results**

**Demographic Data**

The demographic data in the study was categorized according to two states in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

**Table 1: Demographic Data According to States**

| **States** | **Number** | **Percentage (%)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Delta State |  163 |  28.5 |
| Edo State |  410 |  71.5 |
| **Total** |  **573** |  **100.0** |

Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of undergraduate Social Studies students selected for the study across two states in the South-South region of Nigeria. Out of a total of 573 respondents, Edo State had the higher representation with 410 students (71.5%), while Delta State accounted for 163 students (28.5%). This reflects the complete inclusion of all Social Studies students from the four sampled universities across both states, as the entire population was used for the study due to its relatively small size.

**Hypothesis 1:**

There is no significant relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States.

**Table 2: Regression analysis of the relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Model | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F |  Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 44483.383 | 1 | 44483.383 | 13239.263 | .000b |
| Residual | 1918.537 | 571 | 3.360 |  |  |
| Total | 46401.920 | 572 |  |  |  |
| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| B | Std. Error | Beta  |
| 1 | (Constant) | -1.410 | .601 |  | -2.348 | .019 |
| MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION | 1.055 | .009 | .979 | 115.062 | .000 |

alpha =0.05; R =0.97a; R2 =0.94; R% =94

Dependent Variable: religious tolerance

Predictors: (Constant), multicultural education

Table 2 shows a regression, which was used to run the between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States. Result showed that multicultural education can predict religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students. It explain that 94% of the variance in religious tolerance, R2 =0.94, F (1, 571) = 13239.26, P < 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is declined, indicating a significant relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States. The unstandardized coefficient for predicting religious tolerance from multicultural education is 1.06 while the standardized coefficient (Beta) = 0.97, t =115.06

**Hypothesis 2:**

There is no significant relationship among multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States based on gender.

**Table 3: Multiple regression analysis among multicultural education and religious tolerance between undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States based on gender**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| B | Std. Error | Beta |
|  | (Constant) | -1.253 | .631 |  | -1.985 | .048 |
| MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION | 1.056 | .009 | .979 | 114.929 | .000 |
| GENDER | -.125 | .154 | -.007 | -.811 | .417 |

Table 3 shows a regression, which was used to run the significant relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States based on gender. From the result, multicultural education had a beta weight of 1.06, t = 114.93, while gender had a beta weight of -0.34, t = -0.13. The results showed that multicultural education is significant at alpha level of 0.05 while gender is not. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted which implies that there no significant relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States based on gender

**Hypothesis 3:**

There is no significant relationship among multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States based on their location.

**Table 4: Multiple regression analysis among multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States based on location**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | Standardized Coefficients | T | Sig. |
| B | Std. Error | Beta |
|  | (Constant) | -.615 | .655 |  | -.940 | .348 |
| MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION | 1.053 | .009 | .977 | 115.232 | .000 |
| LOCATION | -.451 | .153 | -.025 | -2.945 | .003 |
| a. Dependent Variable: RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE |

Table 4 shows a regression, which was used to run the significant relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States based on location. From the result, multicultural education had a beta weight of 1.05, t = 115.23 while location had a beta weight of -0.45, t = -2.95. The results showed that multicultural education and location are significant at alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is declined which implies that there is a significant relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States based on location

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study reveal that multicultural education has a significant relationship with religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States. This suggests that students who are systematically exposed to multicultural education are more inclined to develop inclusive attitudes, openness to religious pluralism, and respect for diverse belief systems. Multicultural education, by integrating content that highlights multiple perspectives, histories, and traditions, fosters cognitive and emotional development that is crucial for cultivating religious tolerance. This outcome is consistent with the views of Rosadi et al. (2024), who emphasized that multicultural education is deeply rooted in the principles of pluralism, equity, and justice—values that are essential in nurturing learners’ capacity for peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. Through curriculum that promotes these values, students become more reflective and empathetic toward individuals with differing religious orientations. In a similar vein, Firdaus and Suwendi (2025) asserted that multicultural education plays a transformative role in reducing ethnocentric thinking and fostering essential democratic values such as empathy, inclusivity, and social cohesion. By actively engaging students in learning that highlights the contributions and worldviews of various cultural and religious groups, multicultural education minimizes tendencies toward religious stereotyping, bias, and conflict. It creates a platform for students to critically examine their assumptions, engage in interfaith dialogues, and appreciate the shared humanity that underpins different religious traditions. Therefore, the positive correlation between multicultural education and religious tolerance is not coincidental but indicative of the pedagogical power of inclusive and culturally responsive education.

Additionally, the study found no significant relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance when analyzed by gender. This implies that both male and female students demonstrated comparable levels of religious tolerance as a result of exposure to multicultural content. This finding supports the argument by Autiero and Nese (2023), who posited that although some studies suggest females may naturally exhibit greater openness to religious and cultural diversity, structured educational experiences—particularly those grounded in multicultural principles—can effectively mitigate gender-based attitudinal differences. Exposure to a consistent curriculum that promotes understanding and respect for religious differences appears to have a leveling effect, resulting in similar tolerance levels across genders. Verkuyten and Slooter (2017) similarly maintained that sustained engagement with multicultural education content has the potential to reduce prejudicial attitudes irrespective of gender, as it reinforces universal values of respect, dialogue, and shared coexistence.

Finally, the study discovered a significant relationship between students’ location and their level of religious tolerance, indicating that students residing in urban areas were more likely to exhibit higher levels of religious tolerance than their rural counterparts. This finding aligns with the work of Nesterova et al. (2022), who argued that urban environments—due to their higher population diversity and frequent exposure to multiple religious and cultural groups—tend to encourage greater intercultural competence, awareness, and tolerance. Urban centers often serve as melting pots of religious and cultural interaction, offering students greater opportunities to encounter and engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Such interactions can break down stereotypes and foster mutual understanding. Batool and Akram (2024) further reinforced this point by emphasizing that intergroup contact in urban areas plays a crucial role in facilitating social learning, empathy, and the reduction of religious prejudice. In contrast, rural environments may offer fewer opportunities for cross-cultural or interreligious engagement, thus potentially limiting the development of religious tolerance among students in those settings.

**Conclusion**

This study explored the relationship between multicultural education and religious tolerance among undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta and Edo States. The findings showed that multicultural education is a strong predictor of religious tolerance, indicating that students exposed to diverse cultural perspectives are more likely to embrace religious acceptance and peaceful coexistence. Such education enhances students’ civic values, empathy, and mutual respect in a pluralistic society. The study also affirmed that multicultural education is essential in addressing religious intolerance and cultural bias in Nigeria’s multi-ethnic context. It helps students appreciate diversity and promotes social harmony. While gender did not significantly affect this relationship, location did—students in urban areas demonstrated higher levels of religious tolerance than those in rural areas, likely due to greater exposure to religious and cultural diversity.

**Recommendations**

1. Social Studies educators should be trained and encouraged to incorporate multicultural content that promotes empathy, respect, and tolerance in their classroom interactions.
2. The National Universities Commission (NUC) should ensure that value-laden multicultural education is embedded into the general studies and Social Studies curriculum across Nigerian universities.
3. Educational policies should support and institutionalize multicultural and religious tolerance education across both urban and rural settings to reduce location-based disparities.
4. Stakeholders in education should promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue programs, especially in rural-based institutions, to foster a culture of inclusion and mutual respect.
5. Government and school administrators should facilitate access to diverse religious and cultural learning experiences through field trips, exchange programs, and community engagement activities.
6. Further research should be conducted to explore how other socio-cultural variables such as ethnicity, economic background, and religious affiliation influence the relationship between multicultural education and tolerance.

**Ethical Approval:**

As per international standards or university standards written ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

**Consent**

As per international standards or university standards, Participants’ written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

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