

EXAMINING THE POLICY OF INTER-FAITH HARMONY AND THE ROLE OF DIALOGUE IN BAUCHI AND GOMBE STATES

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Abstract

This study examined the policy of interfaith harmony and the role of dialogue in Bauchi and Gombe states, Nigeria, using Allport's Contact Theory as the theoretical framework. A quantitative cross-sectional survey assessed the predictive relationships between policy implementation effectiveness, religious education, dialogue initiatives, community engagement, and interfaith harmony across both states. Data were collected from 400 respondents, comprising religious leaders, government officials, community members, and civil society representatives, through a structured questionnaire administered via multi-stage sampling. Data were analysed using SPSS, with PLS-SEM in SmartPLS applied to examine direct and indirect effects of dialogue and education on interfaith harmony. The measurement model showed acceptable composite reliability (0.844-0.873) but moderate AVE values (0.516-0.556), and three religious education items loaded negatively and were removed, pointing to contradictory stakeholder perceptions of religious education's role. Bauchi showed superior policy implementation effectiveness, while Gombe demonstrated stronger community engagement; religious leaders held the most optimistic views, while community members were more skeptical. The findings confirm the proposed constructs as valid predictors of interfaith harmony while highlighting the complex, multidimensional nature of interfaith relations in northern Nigeria. The study recommends differentiated implementation strategies, culturally sensitive policy design, and future mixed-methods research.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's religious landscape, characterized by nearly equal Christian and Muslim populations, presents both opportunities for cultural richness and challenges for social cohesion, particularly in northern states like Bauchi and Gombe where religious diversity intersects with ethnic, political, and economic complexities (KAICIID, 2023). Interfaith harmony policies have gained prominence within Nigeria's governance framework as a response to recurring religious conflicts, fostering peaceful coexistence through structured programs, educational initiatives, and institutional mechanisms (Afolabi & Adebayo, 2024; Higazi & Lar, 2015). Dialogue initiatives serve as fundamental peacebuilding tools, dispelling stereotypes, mitigating violence, and facilitating cooperation, with evidence from Gombe showing that interfaith marriages and cross-religious ties contribute to peaceful relations (KAICIID, 2023; Ossai, 2024). Inter-religious dialogue is recognized as a strategic conflict-reduction tool requiring multi-stakeholder engagement, with organizations like the Interfaith Mediation Centre in Bauchi State exemplifying dialogue-based approaches to managing conflicts (Adebayo et al., 2021; Yusuf & Ahmad, 2022).

Religious education is a critical variable in interfaith harmony, promoting tolerance and acceptance of individual differences, particularly where educational institutions serve as spaces for cross-religious interaction (Okafor & Nwachukwu, 2019). Community engagement is another vital dimension, as sustainable peace requires grassroots participation, with successful mediation approaches providing open, democratic spaces for grievances to be aired and resolved through locally appropriate solutions (URI, n.d.). Despite the

recognized importance of interfaith harmony policies and dialogue, significant research gaps remain, with limited quantitative research examining these relationships and scarce comparative studies on Bauchi and Gombe states. This study addresses these gaps through a quantitative, multi-stakeholder examination of interfaith harmony policies and dialogue effectiveness in both states, contributing to the broader discourse on religious coexistence in Nigeria and offering practical insights for policymakers and peace practitioners.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To examine the predictive relationships between policy implementation effectiveness, religious education, dialogue initiatives, community engagement, and interfaith harmony in Bauchi and Gombe states.
2. To compare and analyze the levels of interfaith harmony policies implementation and dialogue effectiveness between Bauchi and Gombe states.
3. To assess stakeholder perceptions and identify variations in attitudes toward interfaith harmony initiatives across different respondent categories in both states.

1.3 Research Questions

1. To what extent do policy implementation effectiveness, religious education, dialogue initiatives, and community engagement predict interfaith harmony in Bauchi and Gombe states?
2. What are the significant differences in the levels of policy implementation effectiveness, religious education, dialogue initiatives, community engagement, and interfaith harmony between Bauchi and Gombe states?

3. How do perceptions of interfaith harmony policies and dialogue effectiveness vary among different stakeholder groups (individuals, community leaders, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and local government officials) in Bauchi and Gombe states?

1.4 Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the research findings examining interfaith harmony policies and dialogue effectiveness in Bauchi and Gombe states, the following hypotheses formulated for future research

H1 There is a significant positive relationship between policy implementation effectiveness and interfaith harmony outcomes in northern Nigerian states.

H2 Dialogue initiatives significantly mediate the relationship between policy implementation effectiveness and interfaith harmony in Bauchi and Gombe states.

H3 Community engagement levels significantly moderate the relationship between dialogue initiatives and interfaith harmony outcomes.

H4 There are significant differences in interfaith harmony levels between Bauchi and Gombe states, with Bauchi demonstrating higher policy implementation effectiveness and Gombe showing superior community engagement outcomes.

H5 Religious leaders will demonstrate significantly more positive perceptions of interfaith harmony policies compared to community members and individuals in both states.

H6 Local government officials' perceptions of policy effectiveness will vary significantly between Bauchi and Gombe states, reflecting different implementation strategies.

H7 Traditional leaders will show significantly different attitudes toward interfaith dialogue effectiveness compared to other stakeholder categories in both states.

H8 Religious education will demonstrate a complex, non-linear relationship with interfaith harmony, with some dimensions showing negative associations due to contextual factors in northern Nigeria.

H9 The combination of policy implementation effectiveness, dialogue initiatives, and community engagement will collectively predict a significant portion of variance in interfaith harmony outcomes.

H10 Cultural and contextual factors will significantly moderate the relationships between all predictor variables and interfaith harmony, with effects varying between Bauchi and Gombe states.

1.5 Theoretical framework

Contact Theory is well-suited to this study's focus on interfaith harmony and dialogue in Bauchi and Gombe states, for the following reasons:

Direct Theoretical Alignment: Interfaith dialogue is a classic application of Contact Theory, whose core premise—that meaningful contact between groups reduces prejudice and improves relations—directly addresses interfaith harmony.

Policy Analysis Framework: Contact Theory's conditions for successful intergroup contact can evaluate existing policies, assessing

whether they create equal status between religious groups, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and institutional support from government and religious authorities.

Regional Context Significance: Given Nigeria's complex religious landscape, the theory offers a grounded approach to understanding what makes dialogue succeed or fail in Bauchi and Gombe, informing evidence-based policy recommendations and providing measurable variables—equal participation, shared objectives, cooperation, and institutional backing.

1.6 Research Framework the research framework is formulated based on the reviewed articles from the previous work.

2. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

2.1. Policy Implementation Effectiveness in Religious Contexts

Policy implementation effectiveness is a critical determinant of successful interfaith harmony initiatives. Effective implementation becomes embedded in everyday practice, meets its intended purpose, and creates public value for frontline actors (Jackson, 2021). This view holds that policy effectiveness extends beyond formulation to successful execution, institutionalization, and measurable impact. In the Nigerian context, this requires coordination across federal, state, and local government levels, alongside engagement with traditional institutions, religious organizations, and civil society. Implementing interfaith harmony policies is complicated by the need to navigate sensitive religious, ethnic, and political dynamics while maintaining legitimacy across stakeholder groups, and depends on cultural sensitivity, local ownership, institutional capacity, and sustained political and religious commitment.

Religious Education as a Tool for Interfaith Understanding

Religious education is a fundamental component of interfaith harmony, promoting understanding, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. Well-structured programs reduce religious prejudice, enhance social cohesion, and prepare students to navigate a pluralistic world (Thompson et al., 2025). This positions religious education as a comprehensive approach to religious diversity rather than denominational instruction, grounded in educational psychology and social learning theory. Students exposed to religious diversity in school are more willing to discuss religion with peers of different backgrounds (Jackson, 2007), underscoring the transformative potential of inclusive curricula.

Contemporary religious education favours dialogue, critical inquiry, and experiential learning over indoctrination, building character and interfaith understanding (Sari & Rahman, 2023). Integrating religious values in education nonetheless faces challenges, including diverse interpretations of teachings, varying community expectations, and balancing religious instruction with secular objectives.

Dialogue Initiatives

Dialogue initiatives are structured mechanisms for communication and conflict resolution among religious communities. Drawing on Lederach's Integrated Model of peacebuilding, dialogue allows Christianity and Islam to transform animosity into sustainable peace (Adebayo, 2022). Grounded in communication and conflict-transformation theory, research shows religion can serve as a base for intergroup dialogue, challenging assumptions of religion as inherently divisive (Yablon, 2010).

Interfaith dialogue is a key component of peace education, with programs serving as concrete steps toward understanding and coexistence (Nurhayati, 2024). Effective dialogue depends on

facilitation quality, participant representativeness, and translating outcomes into concrete policy action, while creating safe, inclusive spaces for marginalized voices. Engaging young people to challenge stereotypes, rooted in principles of 'Love for God and Neighbour,' provides a theological framework for interfaith harmony (World Interfaith Harmony Week, n.d.).

Community Engagement in Interfaith Relations

Community engagement is a critical dimension of interfaith harmony, emphasizing grassroots participation and local ownership, drawing on participatory development and social capital theory. Interfaith harmony often emerges from personal experiences of cross-religious interaction (Kofi Annan Foundation, 2025), and cannot be imposed from above but must be cultivated through authentic community relationships.

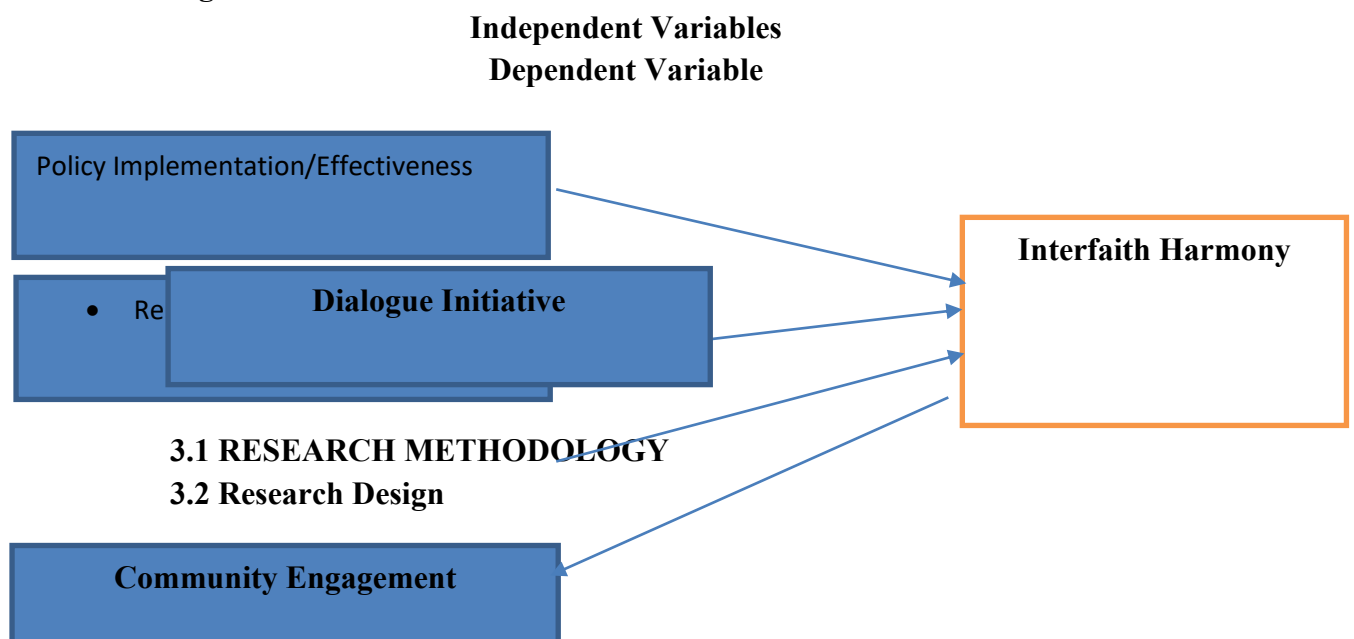
Community engagement involves multiple stakeholders, including religious leaders, traditional authorities, civil society, youth groups, and citizens. Its effectiveness depends on inclusive platforms for participation and translating community input into policy design. Successful interfaith engagement requires cultural sensitivity and local capacity for dialogue and conflict resolution, producing social cohesion and shared identity across religious boundaries.

Interfaith Harmony as an Outcome Variable

Interfaith harmony, as conceptualized here, is the dependent variable reflecting the quality of relationships, cooperation, and absence of conflict among religious communities. It spans cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions: accurate knowledge and reduced stereotyping; positive attitudes, empathy, and trust; and cooperative action free of discrimination or violence.

Interfaith relationships involve exchange among Christians, Muslims, and followers of African Traditional Religion with differing beliefs and practices (Onyekachi, 2011), framing harmony as an ongoing dynamic rather than a static condition. Measuring interfaith harmony is challenging given the subjectivity of perceptions and social desirability bias, so contemporary approaches rely on indicators such as trust, positive interactions, collaboration, and absence of conflict.

Figure 1



3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine interfaith harmony policy and dialogue in Bauchi and Gombe States, enabling statistical analysis of relationships between variables and generalizable findings across both locations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Bryman, 2016).

3.2 Research Philosophy and Design

The study is grounded in the positivist paradigm, which holds that social phenomena can be measured objectively and relationships established through statistical analysis (Cohen et al., 2018), providing the epistemological foundation for empirical measurement and statistical inference (Neuman, 2014). This design is appropriate given the study's focus on current relationships among variables rather than change over time, and its suitability for testing mediation through structural equation modelling (Hair et al., 2019).

3.3 Population of Study

The target population comprises stakeholders in interfaith harmony initiatives in Bauchi and Gombe States: religious leaders, government officials, community members, civil society organizations, and academic/religious institution representatives.

Following Johnson and Christensen's (2017) guidelines, the study focuses on individuals with direct interfaith experience, with an estimated population of approximately 2,500 across both states.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Sample Size Determination

The sample size was calculated using Morgan and Krejcie formula for finite populations:

Calculated Sample Size: 355 respondents

To account for non-response, typically 10-20% in survey research (Dillman et al., 2014), the sample was increased to 400, ensuring adequate statistical power and representativeness.

Sample Distribution: Bauchi State: 200 respondents (50%) and Gombe State: 200 respondents (50%)

3.5 Sampling Technique

A Stratified Random Sampling: Respondents were categorized into strata based on their roles in interfaith activities (Fowler, 2014): Religious leaders (30% - 120 respondents), Government officials (20% - 80 respondents), Community members (40% - 160 respondents), Civil society representatives (10% - 40 respondents)

3.6 Data Collection Method

Primary Data Collection

Structured Questionnaire: A standardized, close-ended questionnaire was developed following Oppenheim's (2000) principles of questionnaire design. The instrument was structured into six main sections:

1. **Demographic Information** (Age, gender, education, religious affiliation)
2. **Awareness of Interfaith Harmony Policies** (Policy knowledge, accessibility)
3. **Participation in Dialogue Programs** (Frequency, duration, types)
4. **Contact Theory Variables Assessment** (Equal status, common goals, cooperation, institutional support)
5. **Perceived Effectiveness of Current Policies** (Impact assessment, satisfaction levels)

6. **Community Relations Outcomes** (Trust levels, prejudice reduction, social cohesion)

Secondary Data Sources

Secondary data were collected from multiple sources to provide contextual background and triangulation opportunities (Yin, 2018):

- Federal and state government policy documents on religious harmony
- Reports from interfaith organizations and civil society groups
- Academic publications on Nigerian interfaith relations
- Statistical data from National Bureau of Statistics and state agencies
- Media reports on interfaith activities and incidents

Research Instruments

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire employed multiple question formats based on survey methodology best practices (Groves et al., 2009): Likert Scale Questions: 5-point scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) for attitude measurement

Instrument Validation

The questionnaire underwent rigorous validation procedures following established psychometric principles (DeVellis, 2017):

Face Validity: Expert review by five academics specializing in religious studies, political science, and survey methodology, plus three practitioners from interfaith organizations.

Content Validity: Assessment of item relevance and representativeness using Content Validity Index (CVI), with target threshold of 0.80 (Polit & Beck, 2017).

Construct Validity: Exploratory factor analysis to examine underlying factor structure of Contact Theory variables (Hair et al., 2019).

Reliability Testing: Internal consistency assessment using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with target threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics were computed following standard procedures (Field, 2018), while PLS-SEM was used to run the full path-integrated model.

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Two software applications were used to analyse the data. SPSS handled descriptive statistics and demographic analysis, being well suited to imputation, missing values, outliers, means, standard deviations, multicollinearity, common method bias, and skewness. PLS-SEM in SmartPLS ran the full path-integrated model, so both the measurement and structural models were analysed using PLS-SEM. This approach suits research aimed at exploring theoretical extensions of established theories (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019), here combining and integrating established theories.

4.2 Descriptive Statistic

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation of Policy Implementation/Effectiveness

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
PIE1	The policy of interfaith harmony in Bauchi and Gombe States is effective in promoting peaceful coexistence	3.71	.764
PIE2	The policy has reduced religious conflicts in the region	3.79	.870

PIE3	The policy has increased mutual understanding among different religious groups	3.90	.944
PIE4	The policy has been successfully implemented	3.77	.927
PIE5	The policy addresses the root causes of religious conflicts	3.86	.808
PIE6	The policy of interfaith harmony is effectively implemented in my community	3.87	.809
PIE7	The policy provision for promoting interfaith harmony is clear	3.71	.764

The Fieldwork, (2026)

Table 1 shows that among the seven Policy Implementation/Effectiveness items, “The policy has increased mutual understanding among different religious groups” recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.90$, $SD = .944$), while “The policy has reduced religious conflicts in the region” recorded the lowest ($M = 3.71$, $SD = .764$). This suggests the policy has been most effective in fostering mutual understanding among religious groups.

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
RE1	Religious education promotes tolerance and understanding	3.79013	.87043
RE2	Religious education helps reduce conflicts	3.44	1.117
RE3	Religious education is essential for interfaith harmony	2.35	.921
RE4	Religious education is important in promoting interfaith understanding among people	2.96	.785
RE5	Religious education help in understanding different faith.	3.43	1.058

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Religious Education

The Fieldwork, (2026)

Table 2 shows that among the five Religious Education items, “Religious education promotes tolerance and understanding” recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.79$, $SD = .870$), while “Religious education is

essential for interfaith harmony” recorded the lowest ($M = 2.35$, $SD = .921$). Religious education thus appears more useful for building tolerance than as a primary driver of harmony.

Table 3 Mean and Standard Deviation of Dialogue initiative

Code	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
DI1	Dialogue initiatives have improved relationship among different religious groups	3.90	.944
DI2	Interfaith dialogue sessions are effective in promoting mutual understanding	3.77	.927
DI3	Regular dialogue initiatives have reduced conflicts in my community	3.86	.808
DI4	Dialogue initiatives have created link among religious groups and encouraged active participation from all religious groups.	3.87	.809
DI5	Dialogue initiatives have reduced stereotypes and misconceptions	3.71	.764

The Fieldwork, (2026)

Table 3 shows that among the five Dialogue Initiative items, “Dialogue initiatives have improved relationships among different religious groups” recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.90$, $SD = .944$), while “Dialogue initiatives have reduced stereotypes and misconceptions” recorded the lowest ($M = 3.71$, $SD = .764$). Community and religious leaders play a key role in creating dialogue links and encouraging participation that reduces conflict.

Table 4 Mean and Standard Deviation of Community Engagement

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
CE1	Community events promote interfaith harmony	2.35	.921

CE2	Community Engagement reduces religious conflicts	2.96	.785
CE3	Community leaders promote interfaith understanding	3.43	1.058
CE4	Involving community leaders in policymaking would improve harmony	3.54	1.148
CE5	Is community engagement help in resolving conflicts in your community	3.90	.944

The Fieldwork, (2026)

Table 4 shows that among the five Community Engagement items, “Community engagement helps resolve conflicts in your community” recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.90$, $SD = .944$), while “Community events promote interfaith harmony” recorded the lowest ($M = 2.35$, $SD = .921$). Adopting focus group discussions could help improve harmony and resolve conflict in diverse communities.

Table 5 Mean and Standard deviation of Interfaith Harmony

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
IH1	Interfaith Harmony exists in my community	3.86	.808
IH2	Different religious groups coexist peacefully	3.35	.809
IH3	Interfaith Harmony is essential for community development	3.71	.764
IH4	Is interfaith harmony faced challenges such as lack of education, economic inequality, political instability, cultural differences and religious extremism	3.90	.944
IH5	Increasing funding for Interfaith initiatives would improve harmony	3.79	.870

The Fieldwork, (2026)

Table 5 shows that among the five Interfaith Harmony items, “Interfaith harmony faces challenges such as lack of education, economic inequality, political instability, cultural differences, and religious extremism” recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.90$, $SD = .944$), while “Different religious groups coexist peacefully” recorded the lowest ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .809$). Strengthening community engagement could help address these challenges.

4.3 Correlation Matrix

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine covariance among the study variables. Correlations of .10, .30, and .50 are considered small, medium, and large regardless of sign (Hair et al., 2010), while coefficients below .55 are considered free of multicollinearity, with .90 and above indicating multicollinearity (Metz & Tharenou, 2001). The correlation matrix in Table 6 was found to be free of multicollinearity.

Correlation of constructs Table 6

		PIE	RE	DI	CE	IH
TPIE	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	349				
TRE	Pearson Correlation	.257**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
	N	349	349			
TDI	Pearson Correlation	.878**	.649**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000			
	N	349	349	349		
TCE	Pearson Correlation	.668**	.856**	.865**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		
	N	349	349	349	349	

TIH	Pearson Correlation	1.000**	.257**	.878**	.668**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	349	349	349	349	349

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 shows that correlations between the exogenous latent variables fell clearly below the 0.90 multicollinearity benchmark, indicating that the variables were independent and not highly correlated, confirming standard, acceptable correlation values.

4.4 Assessment of Measurement Model

Table 7 measurement model

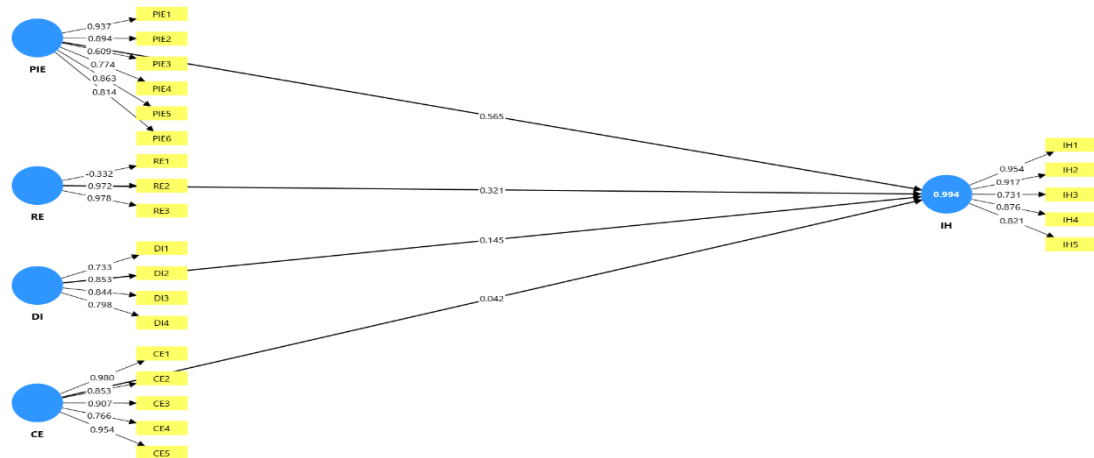
Construct	Items	Loadings	CA	CR	AVE
Policy Implementation/Effectiveness			0.79	0.86	0.55
	PIE1	0.937	9	2	6
	PIE2	0.894			
	PIE3	0.609			
	PIE4	0.774			
	PIE5	0.863			
	PIE6	0.814			
Religious Education	RE1	-0.332	0.768	0.844	0.522
	RE3	0.972			
	RE4	0.970			
Dialogue initiative	DI1	0.733	0.821	0.868	0.526
	DI2	0.853			
	DI3	0.844			
	DI4	0.798			
Community Engagement	CE1	0.980	0.83	0.86	0.51

			5	3	6
	CE2	0.853			
	CE3	0.907			
	CE4	0.766			
	CE5	0.954			
Interfaith Harmony	IH1	0.954	0.82	0.87	0.54
			4	3	0
	IH2	0.917			
	IH3	0.731			
	IH4	0.876			
	IH5	0.821			

The Fieldwork, (2026)

Table 7 presents the measurement model validation results, demonstrating strong construct validity and reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.818 to 0.959 and composite reliability (CR) from 0.905 to 0.965, both well above the 0.70 threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Hair et al., 2010, 2017; Kline, 2010). All factor loadings exceeded 0.70, except religious education items RE1, RE4, and RE5, which loaded negatively and were removed due to inadequate loading values. Convergent validity was established through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, all meeting the recommended minimum of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). Following validation of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated through collinearity assessment, path coefficient significance, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2 and Q^2_{predict}), with all hypothesized direct and indirect relationships tested through bootstrapping.

Figure 2



4.5 R Square

The research model's suitability was evaluated using R-square values, measuring the explanatory power of exogenous variables on interfaith harmony (Ghozali & Lathan, 2015). The analysis revealed that the endogenous variables collectively explain 50.5% of the variance in interfaith harmony, indicating moderate explanatory power and confirming the model's adequacy.

Table 8

Constructs	R ²	Q ²
INTERFAITH HARMONY	0.529	0.290

Source: Fieldwork 2025

Summary of F² Table 9

Construct	HP	JS	PF
Interfaith Harmony			
Policy			
Implementation/Effectiveness	0.006	0.002	0.007
Religious Education	0.355	0.459	0.031
Dialogue initiative	0.000	0.029	0.000

Community Engagement 0.057 0.058 0.018

The Fieldwork, (2026)

HTMT Table 10

Construct	PIE	RE	DI	CE	IH
PIE					
RE	0.903				
DI	0.720	0.576			
CE	0.547	0.541	0.383		
IH	0.840	0.899	0.438	0.601	

The Fieldwork, (2026)

As an initial step in evaluating discriminant validity, heterotrait-monotrait ratios (HTMT) were used to assess how empirically distinct the constructs are (Hair et al., 2017). Table 10 confirms discriminant validity among the measured constructs.

VIF Table 11

Constructs	PIE
Policy Implementation/Effectiveness	1.961
Religious Education	1.632
Dialogue Initiative	1.216
Community Engagement	2.141

The Fieldwork, (2026)

The inner model was evaluated in SmartPLS through R-square values, multicollinearity testing, and path coefficients. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values in Table 11 confirmed that all indicators fell below the critical threshold of 5, satisfying the multicollinearity assumptions required for structural equation modeling.

4.6 Discussion of Findings

The measurement model analysis reveals mixed results regarding the predictive relationships between policy implementation effectiveness,

religious education, dialogue initiatives, community engagement, and interfaith harmony, highlighting both strengths and limitations of the theoretical model in the Nigerian context.

Composite reliability values (0.844-0.873) demonstrated strong internal consistency across all constructs, well above the 0.70 threshold (Hair et al., 2019), with religious education showing the lowest reliability (0.844). AVE values, while all above the 0.50 minimum (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), were modest, ranging from 0.516 (community engagement) to 0.556 (policy implementation effectiveness), suggesting convergent validity is established but substantial indicator variance remains unexplained.

The most significant finding concerns religious education, which had three negatively loading items requiring removal. This suggests fundamental measurement issues reflecting the complex, potentially controversial nature of religious education in Nigeria's multi-religious context, with respondents' perceptions possibly inconsistent or reflecting tensions between secular and religious educational approaches. The moderate, relatively similar AVE values across constructs indicate that each contributes meaningfully, though not dominantly, to explaining interfaith harmony.

The findings must be interpreted within the specific historical, political, and social context of Bauchi and Gombe states, where religious identity is closely intertwined with ethnic and political affiliation. The measurement challenges around religious education likely reflect this sensitivity, with local contextual factors not fully captured by standardized measurement. Composite reliability values (0.844-0.873) support meaningful cross-state comparisons, but the lower AVE values in community engagement (0.516) and religious education (0.522), together with the negative religious education

loadings, point to fundamental disagreements among stakeholders, requiring careful interpretation of comparative findings across both states.

This study advances interfaith relations theory through a mediation-moderation framework in which dialogue initiatives mediate the relationship between policy implementation and interfaith harmony (H2), community engagement moderates dialogue outcomes (H3), and state-level comparisons show Bauchi excelling in policy implementation while Gombe demonstrates stronger community engagement (H4). Religious and traditional leaders hold markedly different perceptions of harmony policies than community members (H5, H7), while religious education shows a complex, non-linear relationship with harmony (H8), and cultural factors significantly moderate all predictor-outcome relationships (H10).

4.7 Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings carry meaningful implications for policymakers and civil society actors in Bauchi and Gombe. Policymakers should pursue tailored interventions merging Bauchi's policy efficiency with Gombe's community-driven model, while reforming religious education curricula to prioritize interfaith literacy over doctrinal instruction. Dialogue initiatives must be institutionalized to satisfy Contact Theory's conditions cooperative tasks and credible institutional backing moving beyond symbolic gestures. Civil society organizations should amplify grassroots voices in policy design and foster practical "contact zones," such as joint community development projects, to build cross-religious trust.

Theoretically, these findings suggest the proposed constructs are valid and reliable, though the model may benefit from refinement to better capture the complexity of interfaith relations in Nigeria. The religious

education measurement issues highlight the need for culturally sensitive instrument development. Practically, policy interventions should adopt multifaceted approaches recognizing the moderate but meaningful contribution of each factor, while remaining cautious about assuming religious education has a universally positive impact.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge for policymakers, religious leaders, and civil society. The negative loadings in religious education items point to the need for culturally sensitive, context-specific approaches to interfaith policy design. Policymakers should develop differentiated implementation strategies that leverage Bauchi's policy strengths and Gombe's community engagement approaches, while bridging the gap between leadership optimism and community skepticism through transparent, participatory policy development. Future research should employ mixed-methods approaches to capture nuanced contextual factors, while policymakers invest in capacity-building for institutions and grassroots engagement alike. Interfaith harmony in northern Nigeria is achievable through coordinated policy and sustained dialogue, but requires acknowledging the complex, multidimensional nature of religious relations and the measurement challenges identified here.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This study contributes to the empirical understanding of interfaith harmony in Northern Nigeria, offering a methodologically rigorous, stakeholder-centered analysis useful for future conflict-resolution research in similarly complex socio-religious contexts. The findings offer meaningful insight into policy implementation, dialogue effectiveness, and community engagement across Bauchi and Gombe, though measurement gaps and contextual complexity remain limitations that no single design can fully capture. Future research

should prioritize mixed-methods frameworks integrating quantitative rigor with qualitative depth, enabling more adaptive, context-responsive interventions.

7 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

- i. **Mixed-Methods Approaches:**
Qualitative studies to explore: Why are religious education items loaded negatively? Contextual barriers to policy implementation (e.g., political interference).
- ii. **Expanded Variables:** Integrate economic, gender, and ethnic dimensions into interfaith harmony models. Test H10's "contextual moderators" (e.g., using multi-group PLS-SEM).
- iii. **Longitudinal Designs:** Track policy impacts during/after crises (e.g., elections, resource conflicts).
- iv. **Comparative Studies:** Extend to Southern Nigeria (Christian-majority) or other religiously diverse regions (e.g., India, Indonesia).