

## Cultural Awareness and Religious Tolerance a Vital Tool for Sustainable Development

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the level of cultural awareness and religion tolerance among the undergraduates in university of Ilorin, Ilorin Nigeria. It also examined the influence of sex, religion and ethnic group on cultural awareness and religion tolerance level of university undergraduates. This study adopted a survey design. The population for the study comprised the total undergraduate students in university of Ilorin. The sample size for the study is 335 undergraduates selected randomly from eight randomly selected faculties. Two instruments were adapted to collect data for the study. They were Multicultural Awareness Scale developed by Awang-Shuib, *et al.* (2012) and Tolerance for Disagreement Scale (TFD) developed by Teven, Richmond and McCroskey (1998). The two instruments were pilot-tested before their use and the reliability coefficient for MAS was 0.75 after deleting two items out of the original 12 items while TFD yielded a reliability coefficient of .675 after deleting three items from the original 15 items. The result showed that 148(44.2%) of the undergraduates had low level of cultural awareness, 151(45.1%) of them had moderate level while 36(10.7%) of the undergraduates had high level of cultural awareness. It also showed that 122(36.4%) of the undergraduates had low level of religion tolerance, 168(50.1%) with moderate level while 45(13.4%) of the undergraduates had high level of religion tolerance. The result further showed that variables such as sex, religion and ethnic group were not significant influence on level of awareness and religion tolerance of the undergraduates at 0.05 probability level. The study concludes that more can still be done on creating cultural awareness as well as the need to learn how to tolerate religious beliefs of one another for a peaceful co-existence and for the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Cultural awareness, religious tolerances and undergraduates students

## INTRODUCTION

The knowledge of one other culture should sharpen our ability to scrutinize more steadily to appreciate more lovingly, our own. Peaceful coexistence is the primary concern of every society in the world, despite their different religious opinion, cultural interest, and individual point of views, culture still serves as platform for human existence and as such should serve as a tool for sustainable development There are a vital indices which demines the progressive growth of any society or nation. Akindele (2002) indicate that a nation where conflict and strive is the order of the day suffers destruction of properties, destruction of lives and loss of values. Culture and society are tightly interwoven; one cannot exist without the other. Culture is that society's total way of life. Human's behaviour is based on culture, since people are not born knowing their culture, human cultural behaviour must be learned.

In situation where conditions are economically depressed and politically charged, groups and individual may find to hard to tolerate those that are different from them or has caused them harm. Intolerance will drive groups apart, creating a sense of permanent separation between them (Peterson, 2003). To avoid such conditions it becomes necessary to explore the roots and causes of intolerance on a general and personal basis. Hawkes, (2001) stated that without, "without the knowledge of the root of hostility, we cannot hope to employ our intelligence effectively in controlling its destructiveness" and to build tolerance and increase the understanding of others. Tolerance is the willingness to accept and to tolerate somebody, something, especially opinions or behaviour that you may not agree with people who are not like you (Collins, 1996). UNESCO, (1995) offered anther definition of tolerance. Tolerance is respect, acceptance, and appreciation of rich diversity of our world culture.

Religion is part of the cultural values in Nigeria which ought to be tolerated among humans, cultural values are beliefs that citizens need to comprehend and observe, the same thing is applicable to religion they are beliefs attached to divinity that equally need to learned and practice and adhered to for sustainability in the society. Hence culture and religion are values and beliefs which are indispensable and as such ought to be tolerated in order to resolve conflict within the society when cultural consciousness is achieved and religion endured. Peace would be sustained, development accelerated, success achieved and growth promoted and progress sustained.

Culture and religion tolerance has been an issue confronting most Nigerian tertiary institutions, if not all of the planet environment. Certain problems remain as social and economic problems within the society where cultural activity and decisions of people and human action are at its roots, solutions are therefore likely also to be culturally biased. If culture is not made explicit discussed and argued over explicitly within the sustainable debates, it does have power in decision making and this might cause commotion among people because what is considered cultural norm in one society may not be regarded as cultural value in another society.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture is defined as how people in a society behave in relation to others and to physical objects. Although most behaviour among animals is instinctual, human behaviour is learned. Even reflexes and drives do not completely determine how humans will behave because people are heavily influenced by culture. Shepard and Greene (2001) explained that culture consists of the knowledge, language, values, customs, and physical objects that are passed from generation to generation among members of a group. Cultural awareness helps to explain how humans are conscious of their norms, values, beliefs, mores, folkways and other cultural etiquette. It might prevent embarrassment if you were aware of norms and customs before travelling to other places. Culture provides blueprint that people in a society use to guide their relationships with others. It is because of culture that teenage girls are encouraged to uphold chastity and be betrothed to a man in marriage. It is from culture that the teenage boys come to believe that "pumping iron" is a gateway to masculinity.

The term religion is a derivation of the Latin word 'religio'. The Latin religion translated in English was originally made up of reverence for God or gods, carefully pondering on divine things. Shepard and Greene (2001) opined that religion is a unified system of beliefs concerned with sacred things. It means that religion has a social function of regulation the relationships that exist among human beings in a given society. Alli and Odummuwa (2010) explained that it is therefore germane to note the religion determines our attitudes to fellow human beings and all things in general, particularly when we viewed or hold on, influence authority in the family, community, and even in the nation. Imaekhai (2010) therefore submitted that religion is that part of core values which shapes people life. On the basis of this submission that Gwana (2010)

advocates the need for inculcation of religious tolerance among the citizen, defining opinions, interest, and point of views between the contestation religions which are always degenerated into situation for hate, anger, bitterness, and even war. Religion tolerance refers to one's ability to accommodate one's religion even when their practices differ in worship and beliefs, Karfi (2010) opines that religious tolerance as ones awareness of one's belief and values and absorbing this awareness with easy and understanding, without conflict or hatred.

Henderson-King and Kelata (2000) t suggested that people are usually biased towards others peoples' culture and having other cultural minority race or ethnicity, and they concluded that even though the society is aware of cultural diversity their biased attitude make their awareness relative low. Hodge and Wolfer (2008) implied that student are yet free to think independently without any pressure of getting accustomed to social norms, they revealed that more interaction with the society an individual has and more time it spends with the society, the more the he is prone to adopt the custom and norms of the society. Khalid and Mahmood (2014) opined that majority of the participants fall beyond tolerance category. However, gender, locality and age were not influential factor in deterring level of tolerance.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Intercultural conflict or disagreement can jeopardize or harmonious interethnic relationship especially within multi-cultural context of Nigeria universities students. Cultural misunderstanding, resistance, rejection, separation difficulties, anxiety, and uncertainty may happen due to different expectation and ethnocentrism sentiment in the recent past, Nigeria has started witnessing a high rate of religious insurgents in North East, North West and North Central. The situation that has made many lost their properties, their lives and even their loved ones. Gwana (2010), views that religion is becoming a divisive issue, and constitute, flash point. It is obvious that religion has been constant element used in fueling crisis in Nigeria. Egwu (2010) outline that in most of the crises that occurs in Nigeria religious insurgences or crises has been the major underlying recurrence. However, efforts have been made by the governments and religious organization to put a stop to this religious intolerance. Sarkin Fada (2009) explained that Cultural awareness might prevent embarrassment if aware of norms and customs before travelling to

other places. Cultures are laws of a society and government, and "ignorance of the law is not an excuse". Shepard and Greene (2001) stated that there are two essential components of culture which are values and norms in these consist societal sanctions and punishments. One's inability to be aware of societal norms and values provoke conflict and misunderstanding within the society. Student's unconsciousness of institutional rules smells expulsion. Cultural ignorance has been major reasons why many people today are in jeopardy, misery, sorrow and prison. Religion tolerance prevents conflict, and cultural awareness maintains one's sustainability in family, community, and society at large, and with that development is certain.

### **Purpose of the Study**

1. To investigate the level of awareness of sustainable development goals among the university undergraduates
2. To examine the perceived need for religious tolerance for the achievement of sustainable development among students in tertiary institutions.
3. To find out the perceived need for cultural awareness for the achievement of sustainable development among students in tertiary institutions.
4. To examine the influence of sex, religion and ethnic group on perceived need for religious tolerance for the achievement of sustainable development among students in tertiary institutions

### **Sustainable Development**

Over 14 years there has been accelerated effort by world leaders to make the world a better place to live. Thus "as the world was entering a new millennium, acknowledging the centrality of human development. The United Nations General Assembly in its Millennium Summit in 2000 adopted the Millennium Development Goals a time bound set of goals to overcome some basic human deprivations" (Jahan, 2003). These goals are the off shot of various global summit and conferences presently being transformed as the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 to ensure basic human development for all. These goals are: 1) No poverty, 2) Zero hunger, 3) Good health and wellbeing, 4) Quality education. 5) Gender Inequality, 6) Good water and sanitation, 7) Affordable clean energy, 8) Decent work and economic growth, 9) Industry and innovation and infrastructure, 10) Reduced inequalities, 11) Sustainable cities and communities, 12) Responsible consumption and production, 13) Climate

action, 14) Life below water, 15 Life in land, 16) Peace justice and strong institution, 17) Partnership for the goals.

The Sustainable Development Goals are too vague. All of them are critical and very important if achieved but some of them are more critical than others. A country like Nigeria should pursue vigorously all these goals especially the ones that are critical to our National interest and development. (For instance goals 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 and 9) are primary goals while goals 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 are secondary goals all these goals complement each other for man to survive. But for the purpose of this study all the secondary goals will not be achieved without cultural awareness and religious tolerance among citizens. How can a country be developed when people are not aware of their culture and that of fellow citizens, how can people eat, and teach and learn and work, and raise families without peace and how can a country have peace without justice, without human right without government based on the rule of law?

Sustainable development according to World Council for Environment and Development (WCED, 1957) is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Okebukola (2007) viewed sustainable development as balancing the fulfillment of human needs with the protection of the natural environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but in the indefinite future. Imekhai (2010) defined Sustainable development as that development which is self-regenerating, self sustaining and dependent mainly on internal inputs and initiative. Sarkin Fada, (2009), however, noted that, sustainable development can only be meaningful when most of the inhabitants of a country have rudimentary knowledge of their cultural values. Sustainability requires that human awareness of the societal norms values that could be used to sustain the culture of the society without being a deviant, but tolerating the ethics for sustainable national development.

### **Sociological Perspectives on Culture and Religion**

It is a well known fact that culture is the mirror with which we look at ourselves it is a key to societal development. The sociological study on culture and religion involves looking at a set of meanings attached to a world beyond human observation. Sociologists have to ask themselves hard questions on how to find evidences for something that can't be seen? How can we remain

objective? Religion and culture are things man created for himself, sociologist then are not in the business of determining which religions people ought to follow, or which culture is barbaric or modern.

Functionalists look at the contributions of religion and culture to society. They insinuated that it legitimates social arrangements, It promotes social unity, it provides sense of understanding, it encourages sense of belonging. The Marxists advocated that elites use religion to manipulate the masses, and uses culture to silence them from protesting. They see religion as being used by the most powerful to justify their economic, political, and social advantages. Symbolic Interactionists, explained that people create symbolic meanings from their religious beliefs, rituals, and norms and ideas. People use their socially created symbolic meaning to guide every day social interactions (Shepard and Greene, 2001).

## RESULT OF FINDINGS

**Table 1 Socio-Demographic Information of the Undergraduates**

Variable	Levels	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
<b>Faculty</b>	Agriculture	16	4.8
	Arts	24	7.2
	Education	137	40.9
	Engineering and Technology	50	14.9
	Life Sciences	24	7.2
	Management Sciences	32	9.6
	Physical Sciences	25	7.5
	Social Sciences	27	8.1
	Total	335	100.0
<b>Level</b>	100	100	29.9
	200	77	23.0
	300	50	14.9
	400	98	29.3
	500	7	2.1
	No Response	3	.9
	Total	335	100.0
	<b>Sex</b>	Male	230
Female		103	30.7
No Response		2	.6
Total		335	100.0
Less than16		6	1.8
	16-18	36	10.7
	19-21	133	39.7

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	22-25	120	35.8
	26 and above	36	10.7
<b>Age</b>	No Response	4	1.2
	Total	335	100.0
	Christianity	163	48.7
	Islam	160	47.8
<b>Religion</b>	Traditional	12	3.6
	Total	335	100.0
<b>Ethnic Group</b>	Yoruba	287	85.7
	Hausa	28	8.4
	Ibo	16	4.8
	No Response	4	1.2
	Total	335	100.0

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

**Research Objective 1:** To investigate the level of cultural awareness among the university undergraduates

**Table 2: Cultural Awareness Level of Undergraduates of University of Ilorin**

Level of Cultural Awareness	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Low	148	44.2
Moderate	151	45.1
High	36	10.7
Total	335	100.0

Table 2 shows cultural awareness level of the undergraduates in University of Ilorin. It is shown that 148(44.2%) of the undergraduates had low level of cultural awareness, 151(45.1%) of them had moderate level while 36(10.7%) of the undergraduates had high level of cultural awareness. There is an indication from this result that a considerable percentage of the undergraduates had low level of cultural awareness while about 11% of them had high level of cultural awareness.

**Research Objective 2:** To investigate the level of religion tolerance among the university undergraduates.



**Table 3: Religion Tolerance of Undergraduates of University of Ilorin**

Level of Religion Tolerance	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Low	122	36.4
Moderate	168	50.1
High	45	13.4
Total	335	100.0

Table 3 shows the level of religion tolerance of the undergraduates in University of Ilorin. It is shown that 122(36.4%) of the undergraduates had low level of religion tolerance, 168(50.1%) of them had moderate level while 45(13.4%) of the undergraduates had high level of religion tolerance. There is an indication from this result that about half of the sampled undergraduates had moderate level of religion tolerance.

**Research Objective 3:** To examine the influence of sex, religion and ethnic group on cultural awareness level of university undergraduates.

**Table 4: Chi-square analysis of influence of Sex, Religion and Ethnic Group on the level of Cultural Awareness among the University Undergraduates**

Sex	Level of Cultural Awareness			Total	$\chi^2$	df	P
	Low	Moderate	High				
Male	98(29.4%)	105(31.5%)	27(8.1%)	230(69.1%)	1.051	2	.591
Female	49(14.7%)	45(13.5%)	9(2.7%)	103(30.9%)			
Total	147(44.1%)	150(45.0%)	36(10.8%)	333(100.0%)			
<b>Religion</b>					6.707	4	.152
Christianity	79(23.6%)	68(20.3%)	16(4.8%)	163(48.7%)			
Islam	66(19.7%)	74(22.1%)	20(6.0%)	160(47.8%)			
Traditional	3(0.9%)	9(2.7%)	0(0.0%)	12(3.6%)			
Total	148(44.2%)	151(45.1%)	36(10.7%)	335(100.0%)			
<b>EthnicGroup</b>					.985	4	.912
Yoruba	127(38.4%)	128(38.7%)	32(9.7%)	287(86.7%)			
Hausa	12(3.6%)	14(4.2%)	2(0.6%)	28(8.5%)			
Ibo	8(2.4%)	7(2.1%)	1(0.3%)	16(4.8%)			
Total	147(44.4%)	149(45.0%)	35(10.6%)	331(100.0%)			

Table 4 shows the result of the influence of sex, religion and ethnic group on cultural awareness level of university undergraduates. It can be observed that none of the independent variables had any significant influence on the dependent variable. For instance, chi-square and p- values for sex of the students and their level of cultural awareness ( $\chi^2= 1.051$ ,  $df= 2$ ;  $p=.591$ .); religion

affiliation and level of cultural awareness ( $\chi^2= 6.707$ ,  $df= 4$ ;  $p=.152$ ) while ethnic group and level of cultural awareness ( $\chi^2=.985$ ,  $df= 4$ ;  $p=.912$ ). Since all of the p-values is greater than .05 probability level, it therefore can be concluded that variables such as sex, religion and ethnic group has no significant influence on undergraduates' level of cultural awareness.

**Research Objective 4:** To examine the influence of sex, religion and ethnic group on the level of religion tolerance among the university undergraduates.

**Table 5: Chi-square analysis of influence of Sex, Religion and Ethnic Group on the level of Religion Tolerance among the University Undergraduates**

Sex	Level of Religion Tolerance			Total	$\chi^2$	df	P
	Low	Moderate	High				
Male	78(23.4%)	1199(35.7%)	33(9.9%)	230(69.1%)	2.421	2	.298
Female	44(13.2%)	47(14.1%)	12(3.6%)	103(30.9%)			
Total	122(36.6%)	166(49.8%)	45(13.5%)	333(100.0%)			
<b>Religion</b>							
Christianity	66(19.7%)	81(24.2%)	16(4.8%)	163(48.7%)	5.544	4	.236
Islam	51(15.2%)	81(24.2%)	28(8.4%)	160(47.8%)			
Traditional	5(1.5%)	6(1.8%)	1(0.3%)	12(3.6%)			
Total	122(36.4%)	168(50.1%)	45(13.4%)	335(100.0%)			
<b>Ethnic Group</b>							
Yoruba	102(30.8%)	147(44.4%)	38(11.5%)	287(86.7%)	3.624	4	.459
Hausa	12(3.6%)	13(3.9%)	3(0.9%)	28(8.5%)			
Ibo	7(2.1%)	5(1.5%)	4(1.2%)	16(4.8%)			
Total	121(36.6%)	165(49.8%)	45(13.6%)	331(100.0%)			

Table 5 shows the result of the influence of sex, religion and ethnic group on level of religion tolerance of the university undergraduates. It can be observed that none of the independent variables had any significant influence on the dependent variable. For instance, chi-square and p- values for sex of the students and undergraduates level of religion tolerance ( $\chi^2= 2.421$ ,  $df= 2$ ;  $p=.236$ .); religion affiliation and undergraduates level of religion tolerance ( $\chi^2= 5.544$ ,  $df= 4$ ;  $p=.152$ ) while ethnic group and undergraduates level of religion tolerance ( $\chi^2= 3.624$ ,  $df= 4$ ;  $p=.459$ ). Since all of the p-values is greater than .05 probability level, it therefore can be concluded that variables such as sex, religion and ethnic group has no significant influence on undergraduates' level of religion tolerance.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDING

The study is on religious tolerance and cultural awareness among undergraduate students in University, Ilorin Nigeria. The study reveals that cultural awareness level of the undergraduates in University of Ilorin shows that a considerable percentage of the undergraduates had low level of cultural awareness while about 11% of them had high level of cultural awareness. This lent support to the studies carried out by Henderson-King and Kelata (2000) suggest that people are usually biased towards others peoples' culture and having other cultural minority race or ethnicity and they concluded that even though the society is aware of cultural diversity their biased attitude make their awareness relative low. Hodge and Wolfer (2008) studies implies that students are free to think independently without any pressure of getting accustomed to social norms. It reveals that more interaction with the society an individual has and more time it spends with the society, the more he is prone to adopt the custom and norms of the society. Khalid and Mahmood (2014) their finding suggest that majority of the participants fall beyond tolerance category. However, gender, locality and age were not influential factor in deterring level of tolerance. Pointed out that religious sect and minority are assumed to point to intolerance their findings revealed that students are near to level of agreement to ethnicity and religious tolerance as compared to adults. These findings suggest that cultural awareness and religious tolerance should be given to decrease the discriminatory action and attitude of other people. Classroom could be the best channel for disseminating such awareness to society.

## CONCLUSION

The result showed that that 148(44.2%) of the undergraduates had low level of cultural awareness, 151(45.1%) of them had moderate level while 36(10.7%) of the undergraduates had high level of cultural awareness. It also showed that 122(36.4%) of the undergraduates had low level of religion tolerance, 168(50.1%) with moderate level while 45(13.4%) of the undergraduates had high level of religion tolerance. The result further showed that variables such as sex, religion and ethnic group has no significant influence on level of awareness and religion tolerance of the undergraduates at 0.05 probability level. The study concludes that more can still be done on creating cultural awareness as well as the need to learn how to tolerate religious beliefs

of one another for a peaceful co-existence and for the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria.

## RECOMMENDATION

Cultural awareness and religious tolerance leads to peaceful coexistence since peace in Africa is seen as equivalent to health and well being which signifies sustainable development there is need for this paper to outline the following recommendations to explain the need why there must be cultural awareness and religious tolerance among students:

1. The level of awareness of sustainable development goals among the university undergraduates will help them to stand a chance to reconstruct and restructure the society with peace, solidarity, and unity.
2. Religious tolerance will help the achievement of sustainable development among students in tertiary institutions in maintaining social order during interaction, so that social values will be maintained.
3. It is imperative for students to be aware of cultural diversities and be tolerant of each other's culture. Noticing that culture is a mirror with which we see ourselves and to undertake this with sensitive to the current social climate in order to avoid exacerbating problems.
4. Students' gender, religion and ethnic groups in tertiary institutions should not serve as a deterrent to peace solidarity and consensus, so to unite the country for sustainable development

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