



Challenges Facing Faith-Based Mediation in Resolving Interfaith Disputes in Kaduna State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the challenges facing faith-based mediation in resolving interfaith disputes among Muslims and Christians in Kaduna State, Nigeria. The study adopted a mixed-methods convergent parallel research design. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires administered to 384 respondents comprising Muslims and Christians, while qualitative data were generated through in-depth interviews with religious leaders, legal practitioners, and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) practitioners. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings revealed that faith-based mediation remains widely accepted due to its affordability, accessibility, cultural relevance, and emphasis on reconciliation. However, its effectiveness is constrained by several challenges, including religious bias, mistrust among disputing parties, political interference, lack of legal enforceability of mediated agreements, inadequate mediator training, and weak institutional support. The study further found that disputants often perceive mediators from opposing religious groups as partial, thereby reducing confidence in mediation outcomes. The study concludes that although faith-based mediation possesses significant peacebuilding potential in Kaduna State, institutional and operational weaknesses continue to undermine its effectiveness. It recommends the establishment of interfaith mediation panels, legal recognition of mediated agreements, professional ADR training for religious leaders, and stronger collaboration between faith institutions and formal ADR agencies.

Keywords: Faith-based mediation, interfaith disputes, conflict resolution.

Introduction

Interfaith Conflicts Remain one of the Most Persistent Threats to Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria, Particularly in Kaduna State. Over the Years, Recurring Religious Crises in the State have Resulted in Loss of Lives, Destruction of Property, Displacement of Communities, And Long-Term Damage to Social Relationships. Kaduna State is Among the Most Religiously Diverse States in Northern Nigeria, with Large Muslim and Christian Populations Living in Socially and Politically Sensitive Environments. Although both Religions Fundamentally Teach Peace, Tolerance, and Coexistence, Disagreements Amplified by Political, Ethnic, Social, and Religious Differences Sometimes Escalate into Violent Clashes.

As Interfaith Conflicts Continue to Reoccur, Stakeholders Including Government Agencies, Faith Institutions, Civil Society Organizations, And Peacebuilding Practitioners Have Expressed Growing Concern. In Many Cases, Formal Court Processes Have Proven Insufficient to Fully Resolve Disputes. Court Proceedings Are Often Slow, Expensive, and Adversarial in Nature, Which May Deepen Tensions Rather Than Foster Lasting Reconciliation. Consequently, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Especially Faith-Based Mediation has Gained Popularity as a Practical Mechanism for Resolving Disputes and Sustaining Peaceful Coexistence.

Faith-Based Mediation Refers to the Involvement of Religious Leaders, Faith Institutions, and Spiritual Values in Bringing Disputing Parties Together for Dialogue, Reconciliation, and Peaceful Settlement. In Many African Societies, Religious Leaders are Viewed as Trusted Custodians of Morality, Justice, and Social order. As A Result, Disputants in Kaduna State Frequently Prefer Mediation through Imams, Pastors, and other Religious Figures over Litigation. Faith-

Based Mediation is Generally Perceived as More Accessible, Culturally Acceptable, Less Costly, and More Focused on Restoring Relationships than the Formal Legal System.

In Islamic Tradition, Mediation is Closely Linked to *Sulh*, Which Emphasizes Reconciliation, Forgiveness, and the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes. The Qur'an Encourages Believers to Reconcile Disputing Parties and Strengthen Social Harmony. Similarly, Christian Teachings Prioritize Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Peaceful Coexistence, with Biblical Principles Urging Believers to Resolve Disagreements Amicably and Preserve Community Unity. These Shared Spiritual Foundations Make Faith-Based Mediation Socially Acceptable to Both Muslims and Christians in Kaduna State.

Despite Its Growing Acceptance, Faith-Based Mediation Faces Significant Operational and Institutional Challenges that Limit its Effectiveness. One Major Concern is Religious Bias, where Disputants May View Mediators from other Faith Backgrounds as Unfair or Partial. This Weakens Trust and Reduces the Willingness of Parties to Accept and Comply with Outcomes. Another Critical Limitation is the Lack of Legal Enforceability for Most Agreements Reached Through Religious Institutions. Unlike Court Judgments, Faith-Based Settlements Depend Largely on Voluntary Compliance and Moral Persuasion.

Furthermore, Mediation Efforts Are Often Undermined by Political Interference, Ethnic Loyalties, Inadequate Mediator Training, And Weak Institutional Coordination. In Some Instances, Political Actors Exploit Religious Tensions for Personal or Electoral Gain, Making Reconciliation More Difficult. At the Same Time, Many Religious Mediators Lack Formal Professional Training in Negotiation, Communication, and Conflict Management.

Although Existing Studies Have Examined Mediation and ADR in Nigeria, there is Limited Empirical Focus on the Specific Challenges Affecting Faith-Based Mediation in Kaduna State. This Study Therefore Investigates the Operational, Institutional, and Religious Factors that Influence the Effectiveness of Faith-Based Mediation in Resolving Interfaith Disputes Between Muslims and Christians in the State.

Statement of the Problem

While Faith-Based Mediation is Increasingly used to Resolve Disputes Between Muslims and Christians in Kaduna State, Interfaith Conflicts Continue to Resurface in Many Communities. Religious Leaders Often Intervene through Dialogue Sessions and Reconciliation Meetings, Yet Some Conflicts Remain Unresolved Or Recur Shortly After Temporary Settlements.

A Major Concern is the Doubt Disputants Often Have Regarding the Neutrality of Mediators, Particularly When Conflicts Cross Religious Lines. Muslims May Distrust Christian Mediators, And Christians May Similarly Question the Fairness of Muslim Mediators. This Suspicion Reduces Confidence in the Process and Affects Compliance with Settlement Terms.

Additionally, Most Agreements Reached Through Religious Mediation Lack Legal Enforceability. Unlike Court Decisions, They Rely Primarily on Moral Obligation and Social Pressure; Thus, Parties May Disregard Them Without Facing Formal Consequences.

Furthermore, Political Interference, Ethnic Polarization, Insufficient Mediator Training, And Weak Institutional Coordination Continue to Weaken the Process. While Broader Studies Exist on ADR In Nigeria, The Specific Constraints Affecting Faith-Based Mediation in Kaduna State Remain Under-Researched. This Study Aims to Fill that Gap.

Objectives of the Study

Main Objective:

To Examine the Challenges Facing Faith-Based Mediation in Resolving Interfaith Disputes in Kaduna State.

Specific Objectives:

1. Identify the Major Operational Challenges Affecting Faith-Based Mediation in Kaduna State.
2. Examine How Religious Bias Influences Mediation Outcomes.
3. Assess the Effect of Mistrust on Interfaith Mediation Processes.
4. Determine how Lack of Legal Enforceability Affects Faith-Based Mediation Outcomes.
5. Identify Strategies for Strengthening Faith-Based Mediation Mechanisms in Kaduna State.

Research Questions

1. What are the Major Challenges Affecting Faith-Based Mediation in Kaduna State?
2. How Does Religious Bias Influence Mediation Outcomes?
3. What Effect Does Mistrust Have on Interfaith Mediation Processes?
4. To What Extent Does Lack of Legal Enforceability Affect Faith-Based Mediation?
5. What Measures Can Strengthen Faith-Based Mediation Mechanisms in Kaduna State?

Significance of the Study

This Study Will Be Useful to Religious Leaders, Government Agencies, ADR Practitioners, Peacebuilding Organizations, Scholars, and Policymakers. Religious Leaders Will Gain Clearer Insights into Operational Limitations and ways to Improve their Mediation Practice. Government and ADR Institutions May Use the Findings to Design Institutional Reforms That Integrate Faith-Based Approaches into Formal Justice Systems. Academically, it Contributes to Literature on Conflict Resolution and Interfaith Relations in Nigeria. Civil Society Organizations Will Also Benefit from Recommendations That Promote Tolerance, Mediator Neutrality, And Collaboration.

Scope Of the Study

This Study Focuses on the Challenges Facing Faith-Based Mediation in Resolving Interfaith Disputes Among Muslims and Christians n Kaduna State. It Covers Selected Communities in Kaduna Central, Kaduna North, And Kaduna South, and Specifically Examines Issues of Religious Bias, Mistrust, Political Interference, Legal Enforceability, and Institutional Capacity.

Conceptual Framework

Concept Of Faith-Based Mediation

Faith-Based Mediation is a Conflict Resolution Process in Which Religious Leaders, Spiritual Values, and Faith Institutions Facilitate Dialogue, Reconciliation, and Peaceful Settlement Between Disputing Parties. It Draws on Moral Teachings, Spiritual Principles, and Community Influence to Encourage Sustainable Peace (Lederach, 2003). In African Societies, Where Religion is Central to Social Organization, Religious Leaders are Often Regarded as Credible Authorities Capable of Restoring Harmony.

In Islam, the Concept of *Sulh* Serves as the Foundation for Reconciliation, Encouraging Parties to Settle Disputes Amicably (Yakubu, 2021). In Christianity, Principles of Forgiveness, Justice, And Peacemaking Guide Conflict Resolution Efforts (Boulle & Nesic, 2017). These Shared Values Provide a Common Ground For Mediation in Multi-Religious Settings.

Interfaith Conflicts in Kaduna State

Kaduna State has a Long History of Interfaith Crises Driven by Political Competition, Ethnic Divisions, Religious Intolerance, and Socio-Economic Inequalities. These Conflicts have Resulted in Significant Loss of Life and Property, Displacement, and Fractured Social Relations. As Formal Mechanisms Often Fail to Address Underlying Grievances, Faith Institutions Have Emerged as Key Actors in Peacebuilding and Mediation (Ojo, 2022).

Challenges Facing Faith-Based Mediation

Religious Bias

Religious Bias is one of the Most Persistent Challenges in Pluralistic Societies. In Interfaith Disputes, Parties Often Assume That Mediators from Other Religious Backgrounds Cannot Be Impartial. This Perception Reduces Trust, Limits Participation, and Lowers the Likelihood of Compliance with Agreements. In Kaduna State, Where Ethno-Religious Tensions are High, Disputants Frequently Prefer Mediators Who Share their Faith, Believing they Better Understand their Values and Grievances (Moore, 2014). Even When Mediators Act in Good Faith, their Religious Identity May Raise Doubts about Neutrality, Thereby Undermining the Legitimacy of the Process.

Lack of Legal Enforceability

Most Outcomes of Faith-Based Mediation are not Legally Binding Under Nigerian Law. Unlike Court Judgments, Settlements Depend on Voluntary Adherence and Moral Persuasion. Consequently, Parties may Abandon Agreements once Tensions Ease, Especially in Cases involving Compensation or Property Rights. The Absence of Formal Documentation and Statutory Recognition also make It Difficult to Enforce Terms, Which Reduces Public Confidence and Increases the Risk of Renewed Conflict (Ojo, 2022).

Mistrust Among Religious Communities

Decades Of Conflict and Political Manipulation Have Created Deep-Seated Mistrust Between Muslim and Christian Communities in Kaduna State. Historical Memories of Violence Shape Attitudes, Making Parties Skeptical of Each Other's Intentions and of Mediators. Mistrust Reduces Openness During Negotiations, Limits Compromise, nd Can Lead to the Misinterpretation of Statements. This Environment Makes Constructive Dialogue Difficult and Often Results in Temporary Rather than Lasting Solutions (Lederach, 2003).

Political Interference

Nigeria's Political Landscape Is Often Structured Along Ethnic and Religious Lines. Politicians May Exploit Religious Identities to Gain Support, Escalate Tensions, Or Undermine Reconciliation Efforts. When Mediators are Perceived as Having Political Affiliations, Their Neutrality is Questioned. Political Actors May also Influence Media Narratives,

Provide Resources to Conflict Parties, Or Prioritize Political Gains Over Justice, all of Which Hinder Successful Mediation (Adagba Et Al., 2012).

Inadequate Mediator Training

While Religious Leaders Possess Moral Authority, Many Lack Formal Training in Conflict Analysis, Negotiation, Communication, and Mediation Ethics. They Often Rely on Experience and Religious Teachings Alone, Which May Be Insufficient for Complex Disputes Involving Historical Grievances, Trauma, Or Socio-Economic Inequalities. Without Proper Skills, Mediators May Fail to Manage Emotions, Ensure Procedural Fairness, Or Address Root Causes, Leading to Incomplete or Unstable Settlements (Boulle & Nesic, 2017).

Methodology

Research Design

The Study Adopted a Mixed-Methods Convergent Parallel Design, Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches. This Design Allows for Triangulation of Data, Providing a More Comprehensive Understanding of the Subject. Quantitative Data Were Collected through Surveys, While Qualitative Data were Obtained Through In-Depth Interviews.

Population of the Study

The Population Included Adult Muslims and Christians in Kaduna State, as Well as Key Stakeholders Such as Religious Leaders, Legal Practitioners, and ADR Experts. Respondents Were Drawn from Kaduna Central, North, and South to Ensure Representation Across the State.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Using the Taro Yamane (1967) Formula, a Sample Size Of 384 Respondents Was Selected for the Quantitative Phase. Stratified Random Sampling was used to Ensure Equal Representation of Muslims and Christians. For the Qualitative Phase, 20 Key Informants Were Selected through Purposive Sampling Based on their Experience and Role in Mediation (Patton, 2021).

Instruments For Data Collection

Data Were Collected Using Structured Questionnaires and Interview Guides. The Questionnaire used a Four-Point Likert Scale, While the Interview Guide Contained Open-Ended Questions to Explore Experiences and Perceptions. Instruments Were Validated by Experts in Peace and Conflict Studies.

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative Data were Analyzed Using SPSS Version 26, With Descriptive Statistics (Frequencies, Percentages, Means, And Standard Deviations). A Mean Score Of 2.50 Was Set as the Benchmark for Agreement. Qualitative Data Were Analyzed Using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	215	56.0
	Female	169	44.0
Total		384	100.0
Age	18–25 Years	65	16.9
	26–35 Years	140	36.5
	36–45 Years	110	28.6
	46 Years and Above	69	18.0
	Total	384	100.0
Religion	Islam	192	50.0
	Christianity	192	50.0
Total		384	100.0
Educational Qualification	No Formal Education	25	6.5
	Secondary School	145	37.8
	Diploma/NCE	80	20.8
	First Degree	100	26.0
	Postgraduate Degree	34	8.9
Total		384	100.0

The Data Show Balanced Representation of Both Genders and Religious Groups, With Most Respondents Within the Active Working Age and Possessing Formal Education, indicating they Could Provide Reliable Information.

Analysis Of Research Questions

Research Question One: Major Challenges

Table 2: Major Challenges Affecting Faith-Based Mediation

S/N	Challenge	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
1	Religious Bias Affects Mediation Outcomes	180	130	45	29	3.20	0.81	Agree
2	Lack Of Legal Enforcement Weakens Agreements	170	140	50	24	3.19	0.77	Agree
3	Political Interference Affects Processes	160	145	55	24	3.15	0.80	Agree
4	Mistrust Between Groups Hinders Mediation	175	135	50	24	3.20	0.79	Agree
5	Inadequate Training Limits Effectiveness	165	140	54	25	3.16	0.82	Agree
	Grand Mean					3.18		

The Results in Table 2 Show that Respondents Agreed that the Challenges Listed Have a Real and Significant Effect on Faith-Based Mediation. The Mean Values Ranging From 3.15 To 3.20 indicate that Respondents Generally Viewed Every Challenge as Important. The Strongest Concerns Were Religious Bias and Mistrust Between Groups, Which Both Recorded the Highest Mean Of 3.20. The Overall Grand Mean Of 3.18 Also Confirms that Major Challenges Exist and Affect the Effectiveness of Faith-Based Mediation. In Addition, the Standard Deviations (About 0.77–0.82) Suggest that Respondents' Opinions Were Fairly Close to one another.

Research Question Two: Influence Of Religious Bias

Table 3: Influence of Religious Bias on Outcomes

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
1	Disputants Prefer Mediators from Their Own Faith	190	125	40	29	3.24	0.78	Agree
2	Religious Identity Affects Trust in Mediators	180	135	45	24	3.23	0.76	Agree
3	Bias Reduces Acceptance of Outcomes	175	140	45	24	3.21	0.79	Agree
4	Interfaith Disputes Are Harder to Mediate	185	130	44	25	3.23	0.80	Agree
	Grand Mean					3.23		

Table 3 Further Supports this by Showing that Respondents agreed that Religious Bias Influences Mediation Outcomes. The Grand Mean Of 3.23 Points to Strong Agreement Overall. Looking Closely at the Individual Statements, the Means Fall Between 3.21 And 3.24, with the Highest Mean (3.24) Recorded for the idea that Disputants Prefer Mediators from their Own Faith. This Suggests that Religious Identity Affects Who Mediators are Trusted by, and this, In Turn, Influences Whether Mediation Outcomes Are Accepted. The Standard Deviations are Relatively Small (0.76–0.80), Showing That Respondents' Responses Were Consistent.

Research Question Three: Effect of Mistrust

Table 4: Effect of Mistrust on Mediation

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
1	Historical Conflicts Cause Mistrust	190	130	40	24	3.27	0.74	Agree
2	Mistrust Reduces Willingness to Participate	180	135	45	24	3.23	0.77	Agree
3	Mistrust Weakens Implementation of Agreements	175	140	45	24	3.21	0.80	Agree
4	Communities Doubt Mediator Neutrality	170	145	45	24	3.20	0.82	Agree
	Grand Mean					3.23		

In Table 4, Respondents Also Agreed That Mistrust Significantly Affects Mediation Outcomes. The Grand Mean Of 3.23 Confirms This Strong Agreement. The Item Means Range From 3.20 To 3.27, Indicating that all the Statements Were Widely Accepted. The Highest Mean (3.27) Was Recorded for the Statement that Historical Conflicts Cause Mistrust, Meaning Past Events Continue to Shape How Parties View One Another. Respondents Also Indicated that Mistrust Reduces Willingness to Participate (3.23), Weakens the Implementation of Agreements (3.21), and Makes Communities Doubt Mediator Neutrality (3.20). The Standard Deviations (Around 0.74–0.82) Show that Respondents Were Fairly Consistent in their Views.

Research Question Four: Effect of Lack of Legal Enforceability

Table 5: Effect Of Legal Enforceability

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
1	Most Mediated Agreements are not Legally Binding	185	135	40	24	3.25	0.76	Agree
2	Parties often Violate Unenforceable Agreements	180	140	40	24	3.24	0.75	Agree
3	Lack of Enforcement Reduces Confidence	175	145	40	24	3.22	0.77	Agree
4	Legal Recognition Would Improve Outcomes	195	125	40	24	3.28	0.73	Agree
	Grand Mean					3.25		

The Absence of Legal Backing Limits the Durability and Credibility of Faith-Based Settlements.

Finally, Table 5 Examines how Legal Enforceability Affects Mediation Outcomes. The Grand Mean Of 3.25 Shows that Respondents Agreed that Legal Enforceability is a Major Factor in Making Faith-Based Mediation Effective. The Mean Values for the Items Range Between 3.22 And 3.28, Showing Steady Agreement Across all Statements. The Highest Mean (3.28) was Recorded for the Statement that Legal Recognition Would Improve Outcomes, Suggesting that Respondents Believe Mediation Results Become More Credible and Effective When they Can Be Supported Through Formal/Legal Mechanisms. The Relatively Low Standard Deviations (0.73–0.77) Indicate Stable Responses and Minimal Variation.

Discussion Of Findings

Overall, the Study Suggests that Faith-Based Mediation Although Widely Seen as Useful Faces Serious Limitations in Practice. Respondents Highlighted Religious bias and Mistrust as key factors that Affect Mediation Outcomes. This Supports Earlier Scholarly Arguments that Identity-Related Perceptions and trust Strongly shape how People Engage in Conflict Resolution (Lederach, 2003; Ojo, 2022). The Findings also show that when Mediation Agreements are not Legally Enforceable, they Become Harder to rely on, which can Reduce Confidence and Willingness to Comply. In Addition, Respondents Noted that Political Interference May Weaken the Neutrality Expected of Mediators. Lastly, Inadequate Mediator Training Was Also Identified as a Major Limitation, Since Mediators May Struggle to Handle Complex Disputes Effectively Without the Right Professional Capacity (Boulle and Nesic, 2017). In General, the study indicates that Faith-Based Mediation works best when Strengthened by Institutional Support and Professional Standards.

Conclusion

Faith-Based Mediation Remains an Important Mechanism for Resolving Interfaith Disputes in Kaduna State Because it is Accessible, Affordable, and Closely Aligned with Cultural Values. However, Its Effectiveness Is Strongly Reduced by Religious Bias, Deep Mistrust, Political Interference, Inadequate Mediator Training, and the Weak Legal Enforceability of Outcomes. To Improve Faith-Based Mediation, Reforms are Needed That Strengthen Institutional Support, Enhance Mediator Capacity, and Ensure that Mediation Agreements can be Backed by Credible Formal or Legal Mechanisms.

Recommendations

1. Establish Joint Interfaith Panels: Mediation Teams Should include both Muslim and Christian Leaders to Enhance Perceptions of Neutrality.
2. Provide Professional Training: Religious Mediators Should Receive Formal Training in ADR, Conflict Analysis, Communication, and Ethics.
3. Legal Recognition: Government Should Enact Laws that allow Properly Documented Faith-Based Settlements to be Registered and Enforced by Courts.
4. Strengthen Collaboration: Faith Institutions Should Partner with Universities, ADR Centers, and Civil Society to Share Resources and Expertise.
5. Promote Peace Education: Public Campaigns and Interfaith Youth Programs Should be Expanded to Reduce Stereotypes and Build Trust.

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