

## Article

# Islamic Religious Education Textbooks in a Pluralist Nigeria

Patricia Enedudu Idoko 

Department of Philosophy & Theology, DeSales University, Center Valley, PA 18034, USA;  
patricia.idoko@desales.edu

**Abstract:** Pluralism and religious diversity offer opportunities for deep learning across cultures and religions. However, in some cases, religious diversity also results in tensions and conflicts in communities because religious differences polarize people of different faith traditions. This article analyzes how religious instruction textbooks used in public junior high schools in Nigeria promote integration and inclusion. In particular, the paper will examine the approved texts used in teaching Islamic Religious Studies (IRS). In analyzing the IRS textbooks, the article focuses on two major points: how the texts present Islam to the students, and how students are equipped to deal with the question of contrasting truth claims within and outside their faith traditions. This article argues that the IRS textbooks used in high school in Nigeria should expand their discussion on Islam to include open interaction about the religious differences within and across religious traditions. I argue that IRS textbooks need to prepare students to deal with different theological truth claims in a way that is both self- and other-respecting. To compose a text that engages religious pluralism, I propose that the approach of teaching religious education in junior secondary schools in Ghana should be used as a model, as it could offer Nigeria some insights on how to teach religious knowledge from a pluralistic approach.

**Keywords:** Islam; religious textbooks; Ghana; pluralism; integration; Nigeria



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## 1. Introduction

Nigeria is a country with almost an equal population of Christians and Muslims (Find Easy 2021). The relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is complex. The two religious traditions have had over a century of interaction but in recent times have struggled to bring themselves into conversation with each other. The incessant tensions between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria are manifestations of inadequate progress made on the need for peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims. Scholars attribute the volatile situation to reasons such as a failed government, which lacks the ability to deal adequately with the crisis disrupting Nigerians' social-political life; politicians' inability to establish a civil society; the amalgamation of the predominantly Muslim and Christian South by the British; and a failed educational system, which does not adequately prepare Christian and Muslim students to live in a pluralistic society.

This article aims to examine religious plurality in Islamic Religious Education textbooks in Nigeria, using techniques of literary analysis, comparison, analogy, and contrast. I focus on textbooks because they are the fundamental source for learning and for shaping the attitude of students. According to Tom Hutchison and Eunice Torres, textbooks guide and help students organize their learning both inside and outside the classroom, and when they study on their own, do their homework, and prepare for a test (Hutchinson and Torres 1994). Hutchison and Torres add that "No teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook." (Hutchinson and Torres 1994, p. 315) The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also points out that textbooks can help to combat prejudice, present pluralism as an asset, and encourage mutual understanding based on respect for the right to express one's beliefs. They contribute to

promoting tolerance, critical thinking in the face of divisive stereotyping and discrimination, and the independence of individual choice (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Library (UNESCO) (2017)). Ezekiel Abdullahi Babagario notes, “education often serves as a panacea for peace if used in the right way.” (Babagario 2019). Doing it the right way so that it will orient the behavior of students towards peace must take into account the cognitive formation of students, as argued by Rowland Onyenali. One critical factor in cognitive formation is the kind of textbooks that are used. It is for this reason that I focus on analyzing the current textbooks used for religious instruction and proposing what should go into the use of textbooks for religious education to address Nigeria’s pluralistic concerns.

The first section examines the content and character of Islamic education, particularly focusing on junior secondary schools (JSS) in Nigeria. First, it gives a synopsis of the aim of Islamic Religious Studies (IRS) as stipulated by the Federal Ministry of Education. Second, it introduces and explains Islamic education’s main features and sub-divisions, namely the *Arabic Alphabet*, the Qur’an, Hadith, *Tawhid*, *Fiqh*, *Sirah*, and *Tahdhib*.<sup>1</sup> Third, it analyzes the content of two government-approved textbooks, namely, the *Islamic Studies for Junior Secondary Schools* and *The New Junior Islamic Studies Textbook*, used for teaching IRS in Nigeria. The themes I examine include how Islam is presented, how students are taught good morals, and how categories of inclusion and exclusion are configured in the textbooks, as well as their implications for preparing students to wrestle with the different religious views in pluralist Nigeria. Finally, I examine whether or not some important Islamic themes do not receive attention in the textbooks. I argue that IRS textbooks miss opportunities to nurture Muslim students’ respect for other religions. They also do not adequately prepare students to interact with practitioners of other religions. Also, the absence of some vital concepts from the textbooks prevents Muslim students from fully grasping the diversity within Islam. I argue that the writers of the Islamic Religious textbooks may have adopted the concept of *taqlid* (imitation).<sup>2</sup> I note that Ghana’s methodology for teaching religious instruction geared towards helping students to live in a pluralistic context could help shape Nigeria’s approach to religious instruction. There are four issues of methodological interest that clarify my arguments, namely, the focus on religious education textbooks, the choice of junior high schools, the proposal for a pluralistic framework for organizing the textbooks, and the comparison with Ghana.

## 2. Islamic Religious Studies (IRS) in Nigeria Today

IRS is taught to Muslims in public schools. It is designed from various textual traditions in Islam. Though IRS developed from the Qur’anic school and *Makarantun Ilmi*—the two elementary stages (*ibtida’i*) of traditional Muslim education—it has a broader scope than traditional Muslim education since it encompasses a more advanced knowledge that covers several levels of traditional Muslim education (Ajani et al. 2013).

### 2.1. The Aim of Islamic Religious Studies (IRS) in Junior Secondary Schools

The Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) introduced IRS into the National Education Curriculum in the 1950s.<sup>3</sup> The main focus of the syllabus was to introduce Muslims to the basic tenets of Islam. However, some Muslim scholars voiced reservations about the syllabus. They argued that the content was narrow in scope and fell short of creating well-formed individuals. Additionally, the syllabus did not capture important concepts, such as Islamic funeral rites (*Janazah*). Ahmed Aliyu Gyallesu, an Islamic lecturer at the University of Zaria, Nigeria, argues that the objectives were not stated in measurable terms. They seemed to be instructional in orientation and directed at teachers’, instead of students’, behavior (Gyallesu 2016). In 1984, NERDC reviewed the IRS syllabus and other subjects and developed a new IRS syllabus that incorporated the critiques leveled against the previous one. It covered almost every important area of Muslim life and stipulated that Islamic Studies was to be geared towards students’ spiritual, moral, social, and intellectual formation. The 2004 National Education Policy on Islamic

Studies reemphasized the Federal Ministry of Education's stance by stating that the aim of Islamic Studies in secondary schools was to form religiously, morally, and academically well-adjusted individuals who can think critically. In other words, Islamic Studies aims to prepare students to become committed Muslims and good citizens.<sup>4</sup>

To achieve these broad aims, the National Curriculum of Secondary Schools outlines the following as the essential aims of teaching IRS:

1. To provide a basic understanding of Islam as a monotheistic religion.
2. To enable students to cultivate a sense of gratitude to Allah in complete submission to His will and His guidance in every aspect of life.
3. To awaken in students the consciousness of Allah as the foundation of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth.
4. To encourage the pursuit and application of knowledge in various fields.
5. To equip students with a social, intellectual, and moral formation that enables them to be balanced and well-developed persons in the community.
6. To awaken in the heart of students the consciousness of the presence of Allah as a witness of people's actions, thoughts, and behaviors.<sup>5</sup>

From the above discussion of the aims of IRS, it is worth noting that the overarching aim of IRS in secondary schools is the formation of a sound personal character rooted in the Islamic faith that equips students to affect their society positively. Thus, IRS focuses on the firm formation of Muslim students so that they can view Islam as a way of life that purifies and prepares them not only to live rightly but also to develop a good moral attitude through following the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunna.<sup>6</sup> Stated differently, the growth and development of an ideal Muslim is not only central to IRS but is also its final goal.

Some Islamic scholars have affirmed the overarching aim of IRS stated above. Syed Muhammad al-Naquib al-Attas argues that the comprehensive and integrated approach to education in Islam is directed toward the "balanced growth of the total personality through training man's spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings, and bodily senses such that faith is infused into the whole of his personality." (Naguib 1979, pp. 41–45). Saheed Badmus Suraju, a professor at the Department of Islamic Studies, Al-Hikmah University Ilorin, has also opined that by emphasizing the intellectual and spiritual formation of the students, IRS prepares students to become well-disciplined Muslims (Suraju 2017). Salako T. Ajani, Bhasah A. Bakar, and Harison M. Sidek also note that IRS functions as the foundation for the student's spiritual and social formation. From a moral perspective, IRS trains students to develop good relationships with God and their neighbors. Socially, IRS prepares students to specialize in different fields, especially fields that would help build a society where social justice prevails since IRS provides a standard of values and judgment that could be applied to all spheres and activities of human life (Ajani et al. 2013).

## 2.2. The Features of Islamic Religious Studies (IRS) Curriculum

The constitutive elements of the IRS curriculum are the Arabic Alphabet, the Qur'an, Hadith, *Tawhid*, *Fiqh*, *Sirah*, and *Tahdhib*.<sup>7</sup> Arabic is the sacred language of Islam. The curriculum considers the studies of the Arabic language pertinent to the understanding of IRS. This principally is because Arabic is the language of the Qur'an, which is also the primary source of the study of IRS. Therefore, sufficient command of the Arabic language or at least a certain degree of competency is required to understand Islamic Studies.

The Qur'an is the most Sacred Scripture of Islam and the foundation of Islamic Studies. The curriculum uses Qur'anic references as a starting point in teaching IRS. There is a focus on the correct recitation of the Qur'an, and suras in the Qur'an are assigned to students to recite; this mainly is because the recitation of the Qur'an in the original Arabic text forms the most significant part of Muslim prayer. The Hadith are the recorded sayings and actions of the prophet Muhammad that were not collected in the Qur'an. The Hadith further explains the basic principles of the Qur'an and shows in some detail how the prophet practiced Islam. The Hadith also conveys specific moral teachings by the prophet

to his followers. The Hadith, therefore, together with the Qur'an, constitute trustworthy sources of values and morality for Muslims.<sup>8</sup>

*Tawhid* is understood as the “oneness of God” or “unification of the godhead.” It encompasses the fundamental beliefs of Islam as stated in the Qur'an.<sup>9</sup> Three components of *tawhid* are enumerated as follows: *Tawhid ar-Rububiyar* (maintaining the Unity of Lordship), *tawhid al-Asmaa was-Sifaat* (maintaining the Unity of Allah's Names and Attributes), and *tawhid al-Ebaadah* (maintaining the Unity of Allah's Worship). These three components of *tawhid* are emphasized because they are interconnected and inseparable. The omission of one means the omission of all and is referred to as *shirk*.<sup>10</sup>

*Fiqh*, or Islamic jurisprudence, covers both formal worship and legal matters. The formal worship includes prayer (*salat*), charity (*zakat*), fasting (*sawm*), and pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), while legal matters cover Muslim marriage (*nikah*), divorce (*talaq*), and punishment (*hudud*). According to the Islamic religious curriculum, formal worship and legal matters have spiritual, moral, and social dimensions that help unite the community, foster love, and exemplify human equality and dignity. They also instill sympathy and command care for the weak and needy and arouse God-consciousness in the individual and the community.<sup>11</sup>

The *Sirah*, the biography of the prophet, is studied partly for its historical information and partly for the moral lessons to be learned so that Muslims will emulate the prophet's behavior.<sup>12</sup> *Tahdhib* puts particular emphasis on the moral and social teachings, which are derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. It also includes an examination of what is moral and immoral. These six branches of Islamic Studies are interconnected and interdependent, with the Qur'an and the Hadith serving as the primary sources for all six components.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. The Islamic Religious Education Textbooks

I have selected two popular textbooks used in teaching IRS. These are *Islamic Studies for Junior Secondary Schools* by Bridget Aisha Lemu and *the New Junior Islamic Studies Textbook* by M.A. Balogun, F.I Muhammad, and W.O.A Nasiru.<sup>14</sup> The *Islamic Studies for Junior Secondary Schools* is a work in three volumes designed to cover the first three years of Islamic studies in secondary school. Each book is divided into three primary themes: The Qur'an and Hadith; *Tawhid* and *Fiqh*; and *Sirah* and *Tahdhib*. Individual lessons include portions of suras to ensure students get the proper interpretation, special commentaries to aid understanding of the Qur'an; translation of notable passages to facilitate the reading of the Qur'an; provision of a summary of critical issues discussed in each unit; examination type questions at the end of each unit to aid revision and also to evaluate students' comprehension of the topic discussed, and a glossary of Islamic terms at the end of each book. Fundamental moral values are highlighted throughout the entire text. Each IRS lesson is allotted 40 min three times a week. *The New Junior Islamic Studies Series* is a three-book series.<sup>15</sup> Each textbook has been topically arranged in the following order: prayer and worship, history of Islam, the Qur'an, the Hadith, and Islamic law. Each chapter ends with an exercise to test the student's level of understanding.

The contents of both book series show that the authors met the requirements of the Federal Ministry of Education Islamic Studies Curriculum and the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC). In treating the various topics, they used the aforementioned six features of Islamic Studies as stipulated in the curriculum. They stressed the significant characteristics of being a good Muslim and how to cultivate values that promote a sense of responsibility, self-reliance, economic development, and patriotism. Both authors point out that the Qur'an is the last Revelation from Allah, and it is the most sacred book in Islam. They introduce students to the Qur'an at the beginning of every unit of the class lesson. Students are expected to memorize the suras in Arabic for use in their daily prayers. There is a translation of the suras in English to enable the students to understand the meaning of what they are reciting. In addition to the recitation of the Qur'an, students are taught the basic features of the Qur'an: how it was revealed, preserved, compiled into a book, and standardized.

It is important to note that both Lemu and Balogun et al. acknowledge other books recognized in the Qur'an that are considered sacred by other faiths. In Book 2, Lemu points out that many prophets preached before Muhammad; some of these prophets received revelations from God that were then written down. Four such books mentioned in the Qur'an are the Torah (*Taurat*), the Psalms (*Zabur*), the Gospel (*Injil*), and the Qur'an itself.<sup>16</sup> Lemu explains that it is an article of faith for Muslims to believe that Allah gave these books to the prophets concerned, and that the prophets guided their people through these books toward submission to Allah. However, some of these books were not written down and preserved like Muslims believe the Qur'an was. Consequently, according to the author, the messages of the other books were altered and became corrupt. In Book 2, Balogun et al. also note that the four books (*Taurat*, *Zabur*, *Injil*, and the Qur'an) are divine and that Allah sent the prophets who brought them.<sup>17</sup>

These authors also address the importance of Hadith. According to Balogun et al. and Lemu, a Hadith is a reported saying of the prophet Muhammad or an account of his actions. It is important to study the Hadith because they provide insight into how Muhammad practiced Islam. Balogun et al. and Lemu explain that the Qur'an says, "you have in the Prophet of Allah a beautiful pattern of conduct" (Qur'an 33:21). Thus, it is essential to learn the things that made the prophet a great Muslim. Also, the Hadith is significant because it helps elaborate and explain some verses of the Qur'an.<sup>18</sup> Both authors use the Hadith from Imam Nawawi, which combines the two reliable and authoritative collections (Sahih of al Bukhari, d.256 AH/870, and Sahih Muslim, d.261 AH/875 CE).<sup>19</sup> According to Balogun et al. and Lemu, these Hadiths convey the essence of Islam in a comprehensive and holistic way.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.1. Assessment of the Islamic Religious Studies (IRS) Textbook

#### 3.1.1. Projection of Other Religions

It is worth noting that there is no direct attack on other religions in the textbooks. For example, Lemu points out a common factor between the three Abrahamic religions. She states that Christians, Jews, and Muslims worship the same God. Muslims should respect all the earlier religious traditions as stated in the Qur'an: "Say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you: our God and your God is one and into Him do we surrender" (Qur'an 29: 46). Lemu explains that the reason why Islam has much in common with the earlier books (*Taurat*, *Zabur*, and *Injil*) is that they all come from the same source: the one God. Islam is different in some ways from the earlier religions because, over the centuries, followers of those religions have departed from the original teachings of the prophets in some respects. However, she adds that these differences do not prevent Muslims from having friendly relationships with non-Muslims.<sup>21</sup> While Lemu tries to promote a good relationship between Christians and Muslims, her explanation has a polemical connotation in that it implies that the texts and practices of Jews and Christians deviate from the revelation of God to the prophets of those communities.

While Lemu's approach to non-Muslim religions in her text has some polemical tone, it is less polemical compared to Islamic religious education textbooks in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. In conjunction with the Institute for Gulf Affairs (formerly the Saudi Institute), the Center for Religious Freedom (also known as Freedom House) conducted research to examine the level of hateful messages and intolerance in these Saudi and Pakistani textbooks.<sup>22</sup> The researchers focused on how the texts treated religions other than the Saudi state's Wahhabi sect of Islam.<sup>23</sup> Their research shows that the Saudi and Pakistani textbooks in primary and secondary schools propagate an ideology of hate and violence toward people of other religions.<sup>24</sup> It also notes that other Muslim sects, such as Sunni Muslims who are not members of the Wahhabi sect, are denigrated. The reviewers also observe that the textbooks teach that Jews and Christians are enemies of Islam and that the conflict between these three religions is perpetual.

Saudi Arabia is not the only nation with school textbooks filled with expressions of hatred and violence toward other religions. In a study conducted in 2015 by the Peace



and Education Foundation (P.E.F.)—a Pakistan-based NGO dedicated to promoting peace and tolerance—it was discovered that public school textbooks in Pakistan, used by over 41 million children, portray other religions negatively and stereotypically. These books teach that an Islam-centered perspective is the only valid and rational school of thought. For example, the Punjabi textbook teaches that Islam is “superior” to all other religions.

Contrary to the above, there is no direct attack on other religions in Nigeria’s Muslim textbooks. However, since this chapter focuses on how Muslim students are prepared to interact with students of other religions in Nigeria, there are three important points worth flagging. First, the authors of the text fail to establish the common recognition that Christians, Muslims, and Jews share in Abraham’s faith, although they present Abraham in different ways. As I mentioned, Lemu only notes that Christians, Muslims, and Jews believe in One God and that Islam respects the early prophets. For Islam, Abraham represents the supreme example for believers (*Hanifism*), whereas, for Jews and Christians, he is their father in faith. There are a few selected biblical texts to support this claim: Genesis 12, 15, and 17; and Galatians 3:6–4:31. So, the three so-called “Abrahamic” religious traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) respect Abraham from different perspectives (Daou and Tabbara 2017, p. 50). If the common patrimony of all religions were emphasized, it would more likely provide a resource for students in their formative years to think more positively and empathetically about students belonging to other religions.

Second, when other religions are mentioned, it is to justify Islam as a chosen religion (Lemu 2013). For example, in unit 5 of the text by Balogun et al., there is mention of Jews in Banu Nadir, but it is about how the Jews plotted to kill Muhammad. It explains that, in retaliation, Muhammad besieged Banu Nadir for six nights and expelled Jews from the city; their properties were shared among the *muhajirun* (immigrants).<sup>25</sup>

Third, the way Jesus (*Isa*) is presented in the textbooks, though justifiable from an Islamic perspective, opens up the door to reinforcing in students the idea of “us” versus “them.” There is indeed a vast irreconcilable theological difference between Christian and Muslim narratives about the role and person of Jesus. For Islam, Jesus is not God but a great Prophet who is well respected. On the other hand, Christianity views Jesus as God-Made-Man, the center of Christian belief. In both Muslim texts, the authors presented Muslims’ understanding of the person of Jesus but remain silent on how Christians understand Jesus. Such silence does not help students to understand the key theological difference between Christians and Muslims; it avoids the bone of contention that has been debated for centuries.

IRS texts could help students understand that different interpretations of the same events, figures, or persons can be found within all religions. If the authors had engaged the Christian tradition, they would have created an interreligious learning experience and fostered integration. Rowland Onyenali cautions: “Interreligious learning does not demand equality of religious truth. Encountering other religions does not imply taking a position of superiority.” (Onyenali 2013). Instead, it is “a constructive contention with differences which results in knowledge, not only of the other but also of the religious tradition of the reflecting subject. It allows one to critically and constructively reflect on one’s religion and other religions.” (Onyenali 2013, p. 143). Such constructive engagement may reduce the incidence of certain forms of violence.

Consider that in 1998, in a secondary school in Zamfara state, Nigeria, a Christian and a Muslim student got into an argument concerning the divinity of Jesus. The Muslim student stated that he learned that Jesus was a prophet, but that Jesus cannot be God since God cannot have a son. He added that since God is one and has no equal, the claim by Christians that Jesus is God is false. John, the Christian student, argued that Jesus is God-Made-Man, who died and rose from the dead, but Muhammad died and could not rise. John’s statement about Muhammad’s inability to rise from the dead infuriated the Muslim student. He left the classroom, got a hand knife, returned to the classroom, and drove the knife into John’s head, leaving him dead (Personal Experience).

The case of John is not peculiar. Another horrific interreligious conflict incident in the classroom occurred on Thursday, 12 May 2022. Deborah Samuel, a Christian and a nineteen-year-old student of Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, Nigeria, was lynched and burnt by a mob of her Muslim classmates. The latter claimed she blasphemed against the prophet Muhammad (Zikoko 2022). According to her coursemate, Deborah had been asked how she passed her last semester's examinations. Deborah attributed her success to Jesus by saying, "Jesus o." This religious response did not go well with her Muslim classmates, and they requested that she retract the statement, but Deborah was unwavering. Her response to the request was, "Holy Ghost fire! There's nothing that will happen to us . . ." (Zikoko 2022). Deborah was not only stoned to death but her remains were set on fire to ensure that her bones were reduced to ashes.

The absence of more in-depth content addressing the complexity of religious plurality in Islamic Religious education remains a serious concern. In his reaction to the gruesome killing of Deborah, Obuagu Anikwe argued, "If a college cannot teach its students and make them accept that the world is made up of people with different ideas and beliefs and that no one idea or belief is necessarily better than another, it is not worthy of being called a college. The stoning to death of a college student by fellow students for religious reasons is an indictment on the school faculty." (Raphael 2022).

The unfortunate deaths of John and Deborah at the hands of their classmates reveal an ignorance of the religious other as well as how the lack of lessons on religious plurality in IRS textbooks has great consequences for Muslim students who are exposed daily to a pluralist school environment. Kunzman Robert asserts that it is a necessity, especially in a pluralist community such as Nigeria, that students be introduced to the study of other religions before graduation from college, to better prepare them to deal with differences in the workforce that might have different cultural and/or religious values (Kunzman 2006). It is of utmost importance to learn strategies for interacting with others because promoting peaceful coexistence between religions is an entirely necessary and laudatory "[act] of civic responsibility in today's world" (Selengut 2003).

Theological differences and misunderstandings have continued to be sources of conflict, especially in educational institutions. Rosalind Hackett points out that over the last two decades, educational institutions have been connected to the growth of religious conflict. She argues that the various instances of religious violence show that religion has been weaponized in institutions of higher learning, namely universities and Colleges of Education. She also asserts that incidents of religious violence on campuses are "micro-cosmic versions of more macrocosmic socio-political trends" (Hackett 1999). The violent relationship between Christians and Muslims in recent times is attributed to the rise in Islamic fundamentalism and the response by Pentecostals. One of the places where Islamic fundamentalism is rife is college campuses. The late 1980s witnessed some clashes between Christians and Muslims at Bayero University (Kano), the Ahmadu Bello University (Zaria), and the College of Education in Kafachan, spearheaded by the Muslim Students Society (MSS) (Kalu 2004, p. 255). The incident at Kafachan, in particular, which occurred in March 1987, had a deleterious effect on lives and property (Kalu 2004, p. 255). The incident started with a disagreement between the Muslim Student Society (MSS) and the Fellowship of Christian Students (FCS) over the content of a message preached by a Muslim convert. This disagreement led to a conflict between the Fellowship of Christian Students (FCS) and the Muslim Students Society (MSS). The violence spread to the city, and Christians and Muslims retaliated against each other by burning churches, mosques, and properties. The mayhem spread to other towns in the state.<sup>26</sup>

Teaching students to understand the tradition of other religions may stem the tide of religious violence borne out of feelings of religious superiority, fear, and mistrust (Ipgrave 2004). As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. has noted, "people fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they have not communicated with each other" (News Center 1962, p. 2). Religious differences should not be an obstacle to healthy relationships and peaceful

coexistence. Christians and Muslims could find common ground and build on their shared stories, such as Jesus' birth by the Virgin Mary and the remarkable miracles performed by Jesus, as recounted both in the Qur'an and in the Bible.

In the above discussions, I note how IRS texts in Nigeria present Islam and how they miss opportunities to provide the necessary information to nurture Muslim students' respect for and interactions with other religions and their practitioners. I also wish to state that the absence of certain vital concepts from the textbooks prevents Muslim students from fully grasping the diversity within Islam and specific historical facts that still play out in present-day Nigeria, namely, the pluralism of sects within Islam.

### 3.1.2. The Plurality of Sects within Islam

The Muslim textbooks avoid discussion of intrareligious plurality. For example, there is no discussion of Islamic sectarianism in the IRS textbooks. Islam is presented to students as a unified entity with no reference to the different Islamic movements, organizations, and ideologies. In other words, the authors did not address pluralism within Islam. Ayse Demirel Ucan points out that, "Ignoring inter-and intra-religious diversity in the curriculum does not help to achieve a comprehensive, inclusive Islamic religious education for all" (Ucan 2019). Islamic religious education needs "a structure within which differences can meet, listen to, and learn from each other" (Ipgrave 2004). There is, therefore, the need to point students to the broad spectrum of Islamic movements such as Islamic traditionalism, Sufi Orders (*Qadiriyya* and *Tijaniyya*), Salafi/Wahhabi revivalism, modernist and insurgent Islamism, trade-Islamic and Christo-Islamic syncretism, and deviant "Islamic" cultism in Nigeria (Hassan et al. 2015). These sects are fragmented along doctrinal, ethnic, and class lines. Each sect promotes its distinctiveness and cohesion by reorienting its members into exclusive identities through distinctive practices and rituals. Each set also claims to be the right path.

One Islamic movement worth noting here is the Jama'atu Ahl as-Sunnah li-Da'awati wal-Jihad (JASDJ), popularly known as Boko Haram, which translates to "Western education is forbidden." Its focus on education sets this movement apart from other radical Islamists. The origin of Boko Haram is unclear, as no account is sufficient to explain the complexity within this group. One account suggests the rise of Boko Haram as a force to oppose the government of former Christian President Goodluck Jonathan (2010–2015) (Walker 2012). Another interpretation holds that Boko Haram was a response to the alleged oppression of the northern people. In contrast, others maintain that the insurgence was because of poverty and illiteracy in the North (Walker 2012). None of these claims paint a complete picture of the militant group. However, the statement of belief of the militant group might offer some insights about their identity. In 2011, Boko Haram came up with a statement of faith:

*We want to reiterate that we are warriors who are carrying out Jihad (religious war) in Nigeria and our struggle is based on the traditions of the holy prophet. We will never accept any system of government apart from the one stipulated by Islam because that is the only way that the Muslims can be liberated. We do not believe in any system of government, be it traditional or orthodox, except the Islamic system, which is why we will keep on fighting against democracy, capitalism, socialism, and whatever. We will not allow the Nigerian Constitution to replace the laws that have been enshrined in the Holy Qur'an; we will not allow adulterated conventional education (Boko) to replace Islamic teachings. We will not respect the Nigerian government because it is illegal. We will continue to fight its military and the police because they are not protecting Islam. We do not believe in the Nigerian judicial system and we will fight anyone who assists the government in perpetrating illegalities. (Ahmad 2009)*

Madiha Afzal asserts that Boko Haram's ideology directly attacks Western education, Nigeria's democracy, and its constitution (Afzal 2020). The attack on Western education by the militant group might be a reaction against Britain's imposition of western education in the North. Northern Nigeria had a formidable Islamic system of education before



the inception of British colonial rule in 1900, the Qur'anic school, *Makarantar allo* (Tablet school), and *Makarantun Ilimi* (School of knowledge) (Tibenderana 2003). The medium of instruction in the North was Arabic and Hausa; on the other hand, the South was modeled on Western/Christian education. The different education models resulted in the southern part of Nigeria becoming the hub of intellectual activities because Missionary education was modeled on Western education. After the northern and southern protectorates were merged in 1914, there was a visible gap in the advantages accrued to those who benefited from the Western education system and those who did not. This was principally because knowledge of English was an important criterion for gaining bureaucratic positions. Hence, most people in the North were disadvantaged compared to their counterparts from the South.

Madiha Afzal argues that the education system in Nigeria played a fundamental role in the grievances of northern Muslims against the Nigerian state (Afzal 2020). First, northern Muslims saw Western education as ideologically incompatible with Islamic belief. The imposition of Western education, they claimed, weakened the Islamic faith. Second, Western education was also responsible for poor educational outcomes in the North. Third, poor educational outcomes were then seen as accounting for the lack of job opportunities. James J. Hentz puts it differently: "The dominance of secular education as advanced in the South has held the north back" (Hentz 2018). Fourth, Western education was detested because it was responsible for the corruption of politicians and government leaders (Thurston 2018). Linking the backwardness of the North to Western education, Boko Haram called for the liberation of the North from Western education and corrupt government, guaranteeing its followers a better future.

Since 2009, Boko Haram has killed tens of thousands of people in Nigeria and has displaced more than two million others. In 2014, about 300 schoolgirls were abducted from their hostel in Chibok, a northeastern Nigerian village, and by 2016, 611 teachers had been killed and 19,000 teachers displaced. In 2015, Boko Haram was ranked the world's deadliest terrorist group by the Global Terrorism Index, ahead of the Islamic State group (ISIS) (Pisa and Hume 2015). Helping students to understand the ideology of Boko Haram is crucial to defeating the group.

Rotraud Wielandt notes that it has become common in most Islamic countries for politicians, religious workers, and educationalists to refrain, both in their public utterances and in the expositions of Islam in textbooks, from drawing attention to the various branches and sects in the Muslim world. Wielandt adds that most often, the different sects or schools of law, and the disagreement and controversy displayed concerning the proper understanding of this or that aspect of the faith, are rarely discussed (Wielandt 1993). Wielandt states two reasons why the plurality of sects within Islam is hardly mentioned in religious textbooks. First, most Muslim countries have an inherited threat of superior external power from the colonial era. Thus, any acceptance of dissident views or opinions within Islam is felt to be an act of betrayal of one's faith and community to the non-Muslims. Therefore, the discussion about the plurality of sects within Islam is avoided as much as possible. Second, some Muslim countries are faced with the challenge of polarized political views. Wielandt explains that to counteract the debilitating effects of all this, most Muslim countries have tried to conceal the fact of religious disagreement as far as possible. They use Islam as a factor in support of national unity (Wielandt 1993, p. 6). For this reason, the policy has been to avoid all mention of controversial themes as far as possible in religious education (Wielandt 1993, p. 6).

The prevalence and nature of religious violence in northern Nigeria cannot be understood adequately outside this development of Islamic sects. Thus, the absence of a discussion of the plurality of denominations in the IRS textbooks weakens attempts to understand the complexities of Islamic diversities and the tensions within different Islamic groups in northern Nigeria.

The absence of a discussion on pluralism in the text could be associated with the influence of the dominant sect, the Sunni (Maliki) School. The Sunni (Maliki) School of law influenced the way in which the textbooks for teaching IRS were written and the emphasis

that certain themes in the textbooks received.<sup>27</sup> In explaining this assertion, I lay out the content of two earlier books by the Maliki School of thought: *The Risalah* by Abi-Zayd al Qayrawani and the *Handbook on Islam* by Shaykh Usman dan Fodio.<sup>28</sup> Next, I bring these texts into conversation with the textbooks written by Balogun et al. and Lemu. Then, I interrogated the Sunni (Maliki) texts and the two textbooks written by Balogun et al. and Lemu used for teaching IRS in Nigeria. The Islamic Religious textbooks used in Nigeria are closely related to the *Risalah* in content and structure. The six themes discussed in the IRS texts were directly taken from the Sunni (Maliki) texts.

Based on the similarities between the IRS and Sunni (Maliki) texts, one could argue that the writers of the Islamic Religious textbooks may have adopted the concept of *taqlid*.<sup>29</sup> The practice of *taqlid* is often justified by the claim that an earlier generation of Muslims had a better understanding of Islam because of their close contact with the Prophet. Hence, their teachings are considered sacred and worthy of emulation for the present generation of Muslims (Abdullah 2015, p. 45). Another reason why I suggest that the writers may have adopted *taqlid* is that *taqlid* does not give room for a critical appraisal of current challenges (Abdullah 2015, p. 45). From my analysis, the writers mostly focused on themes in the *Risalah* without paying attention to the current challenges associated with pluralism in Nigeria. In addition, *taqlid* conforms to the work of its predecessors without adding any substantive new ideas. Similarly, the composition of the *Islamic Religious Studies* textbooks conforms to the basic themes of the *Risalah* without any significant changes or the addition of new material.

In the preceding section, I stressed the importance of introducing students to the various Islamic sects or schools, even if briefly. Exposing students to pluralism within their faith tradition would prepare them to value and respect differences that promote mutual understanding.

#### 4. The Way Forward

##### *Ghana Religious Education Textbooks and Plurality*

The present IRS in Nigeria needs to be revised to be more compatible with the pluralistic values in the country. Hanna Onyi Yusuf points out that the lack of knowledge of other religions in basic education has a fundamental consequence for peacebuilding and religious tolerance (Yusuf 2013). Similarly, Rosalind I. J. Hackett notes that the current religious curriculum, which encourages a confessional approach to religious education, is a significant contribution to religious polarization in Nigeria (Hackett 1999, p. 538). She states that if the education system is not modeled to include tolerance and freedom, the desire for peaceful coexistence would be a mirage (Hackett 1999, p. 561). I argue that the textbooks used in teaching religious education in junior secondary schools in Ghana could offer Nigeria some insights on how to teach religious knowledge from a pluralistic approach. I suggest Ghana because the textbooks for teaching Religious and Moral Education uses the tenets of Ghana's three major religious traditions—African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam—to teach students about other religious traditions and promote integration (Twumasi and Adade 2018, p. 2). Since the themes in the textbooks are usually discussed from the viewpoint of African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam, students learn about their faith and other religious traditions by engaging all three religions concurrently. By so doing, students learn how to integrate with persons of different religious backgrounds and to live in a pluralistic context.

Ghana's approach affirms Perry Schmidt-Leukel's notion of religious pluralism as a "specific theory and evaluation of religious diversity." Religious pluralism "first assumes that religious truth exists—and in a sense must exist—in a diversity of forms, which are then assessed as equally valid despite their being different" (Schmidt-Leukel 2017). Religious pluralism also underscores that "each of the major religious traditions, in its own way, proclaims a path leading to an ultimate well-being, salvation, or liberation, which is connected to some kind of transcendent or ultimate reality." (Schmidt-Leukel 2017, p. 24).

According to the Ministry of Education, the purpose of teaching Religious and Moral Education (RME) in Ghanaian schools is to reinforce the informal religious and moral training young people acquire from their homes and communities. It also aims to help students who do not receive any moral formation at home to develop good morals.<sup>30</sup> The 2008 teaching syllabus for RME notes specific objectives. First, RME seeks “to help pupils to develop an awareness of the creator and the purpose of their existence.”<sup>31</sup> Second, RME also aims to help pupils “develop an understanding and tolerance of other people’s faith [and to] understand the differences between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors so that they can make the right decisions in any situation and thus become responsible citizens.”<sup>32</sup> Third, RME also proposes to help students “acquire the socio-cultural values inherent in the three major religions in Ghana (i.e., Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion), which will help them cope with the variety of moral choices they have to face in today’s rapidly changing world.”<sup>33</sup> The 2019 syllabus adds another objective. It states that RME aims to help students “develop the spirit of teamwork, collaboration, and togetherness in nation-building and increasingly develop the ability to respond to religious beliefs and practices in an informed, rational and responsible way.”<sup>34</sup>

RME textbooks help students understand the pluralistic religious world in which they live by introducing them to religious others and creating an environment for them to share their religious views respectfully, devoid of rancor. Students also get to see the commitment of others toward their religious beliefs. Buster G. Smith notes that exposure to the religious commitment of other faiths tends to make people more accepting of religious diversity (Smith 2007). The presentation of religious tenets as prescribed by each religious tradition helps to break down barriers of fear, mistrust, and “me” versus “them” that work against integration.

Additionally, RME textbooks foster integration by providing equal opportunity and space for the three religious traditions. Each religious tradition is given equal opportunity and hearing. The texts are arranged in a way that students listen to three traditions on the same topic. Such an approach prepares students to learn how to respectfully listen to faith stories that they might not agree with. Kay Lindahl notes that “when we learn how to listen to ideas that conflict with our own without becoming defensive, then we start to see each other as part of one family, the human family, we also learn the art of conversation; it is this type of conversation that can transform our world.” (Lindahl 2017, p. 85). Through such interactions, students are able to enter into what Francis Clooney calls the “depth of the other.” Clooney states that this kind of knowledge involves a deeper understanding and the recognition of the truth claim and the values others profess (Clooney 2010). Nayla Tabbara corroborates Clooney’s assertion that the recognition of the other must not stop at mere passive and distant respect of other religions without any effort to know more about them (Tabbara 2019). She adds that humans are created and called to know each other and to value other people’s traditions. She backs her assertion with a quotation from the Qur’an: “O you human beings! We have created you of a male and of a female, and we have formed you into peoples and tribes so that you might have knowledge of one of another” (Qur’an 49: 13).

Another way in which RME promotes interreligious learning that aims at integration lies in how some of the core doctrinal teachings of the three religious traditions are explained. RME authors employed the phenomenological approach, which “emphasizes the role Religious Education plays in providing pupils with information and knowledge about various worldviews and religious traditions.” (Åhs et al. 2016). It also highlights the “reduction and performance of empathetic interpolation.” (Ayanga 2008, p. 59). The concept of reduction does not focus on the question of truth and reality about the other religion. Instead, it focuses on the meaning embedded in that religious tradition. Similarly, empathetic interpolation views things from the perspective of the different faith traditions. The key idea is the attempt to understand what the faith of the other means to them instead of whether the belief they profess is true or not. For example, the discussion on salvation in Jesus Christ, the belief in Muhammad as the final prophet, and beliefs in African Tradi-

tional Religion focused on the doctrinal teachings in the respective religions without any assessment of the truth claims. By so doing, students understand the relevance of the core teachings as professed by the other religions' adherents.

The way in which RME textbooks present the teachings of African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam in an integrated manner is significant for a pluralistic society (Addai-Mununkum 2017). The textbooks form students through a combination of lectures, art, class interaction, role modeling, and reading of sacred texts to help them understand and respect the religious beliefs of other traditions and promote peaceful coexistence. As Awuah-Nyamekye notes, this way of forming students is key to understanding diversity in society (Awuah-Nyamekye 2010).

## 5. Conclusions

This article argues that the current textbooks used for teaching Islamic religious instructions in Nigeria, the Islamic Religious Studies textbooks, do not prepare students to live in a pluralistic environment because they do not directly engage issues of diversity and how to foster integration. Since my focus is to explore plurality in the IRS textbooks, I examine the Islamic religious studies textbooks and show that the textbooks were designed to train students in Islam and to help them witness to Allah. The textbooks, which were patterned after the *Risalah* and *the Handbook on Islam*, adopted a confessional and exclusive approach. Therefore, they did not engage other religions. Apart from not engaging other religions, it is worth noting that other issues of national interest, which are absent from the textbooks and are critical for enhancing integration in Nigeria, are the discussions of inter- and intra-religious differences (sectarianism). It is crucial to take these issues seriously because, currently, the violence associated with religion is caused by sects who use a limited understanding of jihad and ideologies to perpetrate violence in the name of Allah. Moreover, these sects usually recruit young children to perpetuate violence.

I examined the religious curriculum and textbooks used in teaching religious instruction in Ghana. I noted that the aims of Religious and Moral Education (RME) in Ghana include helping students to understand and tolerate other people's religions and enabling students to develop the ability to respond to religious beliefs and practices in an informed, rational, and responsible way. As a result, Ghana's RME textbooks promote integration in a way that is absent from Nigeria's religious instruction textbook. I have argued that the IRS texts used in Nigeria for religious instruction will benefit from Ghana's methodology for religious education.

The differences in the population and religious demographics of both countries do not take away the force of my argument.<sup>35</sup> I am not assuming that what happens in Ghana should be uncritically mapped to Nigeria's education landscape. I am interested in how the Ghanaian religious textbooks configure otherness and how they present the religious traditions of African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam in the same space to see if their approach offers some suggestions as to how to use the concept of religious pluralism in developing a textbook that will be useful for the Nigerian context. By doing so, I am hopeful that religious othering and potential violence can be avoided and a more productive integration can be achieved.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Federal Ministry of Education (2018) 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum Islamic Studies for Junior Secondary School (Years 1–3) (Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council 2018, v).

<sup>2</sup> Taqlid in Islamic jurisprudence is an imitation of another as authoritative in the matters of law. Literally, Taqlid means to imitate an author or a text without critical examination (Shamsy 2008).

- 3 Different opinions abound about why Islamic Studies was included in the National Education Curriculum. One version holds that Islamic Studies was included in the National Education Curriculum to diffuse the fear of Muslim parents who worried about their children being converted to Christianity because they saw government schools as replicates of missionary schools. Others think that the establishment of Muslim schools modeled after western education (by Muslim organizations such as Ansar-u-deen and Ahmadiyyah) and the introduction of government schools in the North paved the way for Islamic Studies. As a result of this new development, Islamic Studies was introduced into the Nigeria Educational Curriculum. (Busari 2018).
- 4 Federal Ministry of Education, “9 Year Basic Education Curriculum IRS for Junior Secondary School 1–3” i–v.
- 5 Federal Ministry of Education, i–v.
- 6 In Islam, sunna is the traditions and practices of the prophet Muhammad that constitute a model for Muslims to follow.
- 7 Federal Ministry of Education 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum Islamic Studies for Junior Secondary School 1–3 (Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council 2018, v).
- 8 Federal Ministry of Education 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum Islamic Studies for Junior Secondary School 1–3 (Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council 2018, vi).
- 9 Federal Ministry of Education, vi.
- 10 See note 9.
- 11 Federal Ministry of Education, vii.
- 12 See note 11.
- 13 Federal Ministry of Education, v.
- 14 These books are written by M.A. Balogun, F.I Muhammad, W.O.A Nasiru, and Bridget Aisha Lemu. The authors were members of the National Curricula of Islamic Studies preparatory committee, and both texts follow the new curriculum for Islamic studies by NERDC. Aisha Lemu (1940–2019) was a British-born author and religious educator. She studied at the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). She obtained her Postgraduate Certificate in Education. Lemu embraced Islam and moved to Nigeria in 1966 with her Nigerian husband to teach at the School for Arabic Studies. Lemu was a member of the Islamic Studies Panel, set up by the Nigerian Educational Research Council, which was to revise the national Islamic curriculum for different school levels. Balogun, F.I Muhammad, W.O.A Nasiru, and Lemu are renowned authors. Most schools in Nigeria accept their texts. Also, they interpret the philosophy of the curriculum as stipulated by the Curriculum Committee. The authors translated the six themes in the curriculum into easily teachable and learnable units. Complex Arabic words are simplified in a less daunting way. It is vital to mention that the authors are limited; they are not free to choose the topics/themes in the text. All IRS authors are given six themes with specific instructions. I am interested in these authors because of the structure and organization of the texts that make for easy comprehension.
- 15 The New Junior Islamic Studies Series was first published in 1983 by Islamic Education Trust Publication Minna in Nigeria but is now published by University Press P.L.C., Ibadan, Nigeria.
- 16 Aisha B. Lemu. *Islamic Studies for Junior Secondary School Book 2*, 118.
- 17 M.A. Balogun, F.I Muhammad, and W.O.A Nasiru. *Islamic Junior Secondary School Textbook Book 2*, 72.
- 18 Aisha B. Lemu. *Islamic Studies for Junior Secondary School Book 1*, 102.
- 19 Lemu, Book 1, 103.
- 20 See note 17.
- 21 Lemu, Book 2, 79.
- 22 Freedom House or Center for Religious Freedom is a component of U.S. foreign policy that monitors the status of freedom worldwide and advocates for democracy and human rights. It was founded in 1986, with its headquarters at Hudson Institute since January 2007. (Freedom House 2021).
- 23 Wahhabism is a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist movement, which traces its root to the 18th-century reformist and Islamic scholar, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (c. 1703–1792).
- 24 <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/CurriculumOfIntolerance.pdf> (accessed on 3 September 2022).
- 25 Banu Nadir was one of the major Jewish tribes that lived on the outskirts of Madinah (Balogun et al. 2011, pp. 160–61).
- 26 The *Jama’atu Izalat Al-Bidah Wa Iqamat Al-Sunna* movement (or the Izala movement), founded by Sheik Abubakar Gumi furthered the Islamist agenda among the youth (Ojo 2007, p. 178).
- 27 Muslims in Nigeria are predominantly of the Sunnis Maliki school of thought (Find Easy 2021).
- 28 Joseph Kenny notes that Risalah of al-Qayrawani is important because it is perhaps the earliest example of condensation in the Maliki School and because of its lasting popularity (Kenny 1983). Muhammad ibn Abdu al-Karim al Maghili (d.1505) was an Islamic scholar from Algeria. He is noted for his scholarly work on the spread of Islam in Northern Nigeria. He was the first scholar who introduced Maliki books to Hausaland. One of the prominent Maliki texts used in Nigeria is Risalah of Ibn Abi Zayd (Abdulumumini 2002).
- 29 Taqlid in Islamic jurisprudence is an imitation of another as authoritative in the matters of law (Shamsy 2008, p. 1).



- <sup>30</sup> Ministry of Education Science and Sports (2008), <https://mingycomputersgh.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/preamble-r-m-e-j-h-s.pdf> (accessed on 27 January 2020).
- <sup>31</sup> Ministry of Education Science and Sports, ii.
- <sup>32</sup> See note 31.
- <sup>33</sup> See note 31.
- <sup>34</sup> Ministry of Education Science and Sports, vii.
- <sup>35</sup> Ghana's Christian–Muslim population is different from Nigeria's. Nigeria has a Christian and Muslim population of 49 percent, respectively (Find Easy. <https://www.findeasy.in/population-of-nigeria/>, accessed 1 November 2022), and Ghana has a Christian and Muslim population of 71.1 and 17.6 percent, respectively. Also, Nigeria has nearly 211 million people and over 250 ethnic groups, compared to Ghana's almost 30 million people and over 100 ethnic groups. (Office International Religious Freedom 2021).

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