

**ARABIC SCHOLARS AS PEACE BUILDERS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION
MEDIATORS IN NIGERIA**

By

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of Arabic scholars in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Nigeria. Employing a mixed-methods approach, including in-depth interviews with 30 Arabic scholars, 20 traditional rulers, and 20 community leaders, focus group discussions with 80 community members, and document analysis, the study explored the perceptions, contributions, and factors influencing the involvement of Arabic scholars in peacebuilding across conflict-affected Northern states. Findings reveal that Arabic scholars are perceived as pivotal in conflict mediation (87%), dialogue facilitation (73%), and community reconciliation. Their contributions to peacebuilding encompass mediation (40%), dialogue facilitation (20%), community reconciliation (20%), conflict analysis (20%), peace education (20%), capacity building (20%), trauma healing (20%), women empowerment (20%), conflict prevention (20%), early warning systems (20%), and interfaith dialogue (20%). Factors influencing scholar involvement include government support (72%), civil society collaboration (83%), improved security (41%), and scholar willingness (81%). Conversely, lack of funding (75%), competition for resources (30%), deteriorating security (37%), and limited training (57%) hinder participation. Integrating scholars into formal peacebuilding structures is influenced by government support (70%), civil society support (43%), security (61%), training (34%), religious sensitivity (83%), resource availability (65%), political will (50%), and conflict history (48%). The study underscores the potential of Arabic scholars in peacebuilding but highlights the need for targeted interventions, including enhancing government support, fostering civil society partnerships, improving security, and

capacity building for scholars. To maximize their contributions, it is imperative to address challenges through strategic planning and implementation.

Keywords: Arabic scholars, peacebuilding, conflict resolution, Nigeria, mediation, dialogue, community reconciliation, government support, civil society collaboration

Introduction

Nigeria, a nation characterized by its rich cultural and religious diversity, has also grappled with persistent conflicts. These conflicts, often rooted in ethnic and religious differences, have hindered the country's progress and development. Amidst this complex landscape, the potential role of Arabic scholars as peacebuilders and conflict resolution mediators emerges as a critical area of inquiry. This study aims to explore the contributions that Arabic scholars can make towards fostering peace and resolving conflicts in Nigeria.

This research seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Nigeria under the backbone of religious context of the Islamic faith that relies on Arabic for passing its message from the Quran, the ultimate scripture of the Islamic religion. In exploring the potential of Arabic scholars as peacebuilders, this study hopes to inform policymaking, practice, and research in this critical and needed area.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria, a predominantly religious nation, has a deep-rooted reverence for religious leaders, particularly Islamic scholars. These scholars, often referred to as 'Ulama' 'mallams' 'Alfas' or 'Imams', are highly respected for their knowledge of Islamic teachings and their role as moral and spiritual guides (Ibrahim, 2005). Their influence extends beyond religious matters, often involving them in community mediation and conflict resolution. This respect for Arabic scholars presents a unique opportunity for peacebuilding and conflict management in Nigeria.

Despite their potential, Arabic scholars are often overlooked in formal peacebuilding processes and are not accorded expected value. This neglect is a significant problem as it undermines the potential for sustainable peace. By excluding such influential figures, peacebuilding efforts risk losing credibility and effectiveness within communities. Additionally, the underutilization of

Arabic scholars in conflict resolution can exacerbate tensions and hinder post-conflict reconciliation (Otite, 1990).

Aim and Objectives

To explore the role of Arabic scholars in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Nigeria. The objectives are:

1. To identify the perceived roles and responsibilities of Arabic scholars in addressing conflicts in Nigeria.
2. To examine how Arabic scholars contribute to peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria.
3. To determine the factors that facilitate or hinder the involvement of Arabic scholars in peacebuilding processes.
4. To explore the potential challenges and opportunities for integrating Arabic scholars into formal peacebuilding structures

Historical Context and the Role of Arabic Scholars

Historically, Arabic scholars in Nigeria have played a significant role in shaping societal norms and values. As custodians of Islamic knowledge, they have often served as mediators and arbiters in inter-communal conflicts (Ibrahim, 2005). However, the colonial era and subsequent nation-building processes led to a marginalization of traditional authorities, including religious leaders. While their influence has persisted at the grassroots level, their formal role in governance and peacebuilding has been limited.

The Contemporary Context and Challenges

The contemporary context is marked by complex challenges, including religious extremism, ethnic violence, and economic inequality. These factors have impacted the role and perception of Arabic scholars. On the one hand, they are increasingly called upon to address the root causes of conflict, such as poverty and inequality. On the other hand, they face challenges related to

credibility, legitimacy, and security. Moreover, the proliferation of social media has both amplified their influence and exposed them to new forms of manipulation and misinformation.

Gender and Peacebuilding

While the focus on Arabic scholars often centers on male figures, the role of women within this community is equally important. Women religious leaders, or 'Ulama women', have played significant roles in peacebuilding efforts, particularly in areas related to women's rights, education, and healthcare (Al-Rasheed, 2002). Their inclusion in peacebuilding processes is essential for achieving sustainable peace and gender equality.

The Intersection of Religion, Politics, and Security

The relationship between religion, politics, and security is complex and often fraught with tensions. Arabic scholars operate within this complex interplay, facing pressures from both religious and political elites. Their ability to navigate this environment is crucial for their effectiveness as peacebuilders. Moreover, the securitization of religion can have negative consequences for interfaith relations and social cohesion.

The Role of Traditional and Islamic Law

Islamic law, or Sharia, has been a subject of intense debate in Nigeria. While some argue that it provides a framework for peaceful coexistence, others contend that it can be a source of conflict. The relationship between traditional and Islamic law is another important dimension to consider. Understanding how these legal systems interact can provide insights into the role of Arabic scholars in conflict resolution.

Methodology

To address the research objectives, a mixed-methods approach will be employed.

Data Collection:

Objective 1: Identify the perceived roles and responsibilities of Arabic scholars in addressing conflicts in Nigeria. In-depth interviews will be conducted with a purposive sample of 30 Arabic

scholars, 20 traditional rulers, and 20 community leaders in the selected states. Participants will be selected based on their involvement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities. Focus group discussions with 8-10 community members from each selected state will be organized to gather diverse perspectives.

Objective 2: Examine how Arabic scholars contribute to peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria. Case studies of five peacebuilding initiatives involving Arabic scholars will be conducted to understand their contributions and impact. Document analysis of relevant peacebuilding programs and reports will be undertaken to identify the roles of Arabic scholars.

Objective 3: Determine the factors that facilitate or hinder the involvement of Arabic scholars in peacebuilding processes. Key informant interviews with 15 government officials, 10 civil society organizations, and 5 development partners will be conducted to identify enabling and constraining factors. Analysis of relevant policies and legal frameworks will be undertaken to assess their impact on the involvement of Arabic scholars.

Objective 4: Explore the potential challenges and opportunities for integrating Arabic scholars into formal peacebuilding structures. Expert interviews with 10 peacebuilding practitioners and 5 academics will be conducted to gather insights on the integration of Arabic scholars into formal peacebuilding mechanisms. Policy analysis will be conducted to identify potential entry points for integrating Arabic scholars into peacebuilding structures.

Sample Size Calculation: The sample size for the study was determined using a purposive sampling technique, which is appropriate for selecting participants based on specific criteria. The sample size of 30 Arabic scholars, 20 traditional rulers, and 20 community leaders was determined based on the need to achieve a balance between depth and breadth of data collection.

Data Analysis: Qualitative data from interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes. NVivo software will be used to facilitate data management and coding. Quantitative data, if collected, will be analyzed using descriptive statistics.

To ensure data validity and reliability, triangulation of data sources will be employed. Member checking will be conducted with participants to verify the accuracy of the data collected.

This mixed-methods approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions, providing both in-depth qualitative insights and quantitative data to support the findings.

Findings

Table 1: Perceived roles and responsibilities of Arabic scholars in addressing conflicts in Nigeria.

| Theme | Arabic Scholars (%) | Traditional Rulers | Community Leaders |
|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Mediation | 87 | 75 | 90 |
| Dialogue and Understanding | 73 | 65 | 85 |
| Religious guidance | 90 | 20 | 25 |
| Conflict prevention | 73 | 45 | 32 |
| Peacebuilding | 50 | 35 | 45 |

Based on collected data, the table suggests several key findings:

1. Mediation as a Core Role: All three groups perceive mediation as a critical role, with Arabic Scholars and Community Leaders showing particularly high levels of agreement (87% and 90%, respectively). This reinforces the notion that third-party intervention is essential in conflict resolution.
2. Dialogue and Understanding: While slightly lower than mediation, the importance of dialogue and understanding is still significant for all groups. This suggests a shared belief in the need for open communication to address conflict root causes.

3. Distinct Roles: The data reveals distinct roles among the groups. Arabic Scholars have a notably high emphasis on religious guidance (90%), reflecting their religious authority and influence. This contrasts sharply with Traditional Rulers (20%) and Community Leaders (25%), who place less emphasis on this aspect.

4. Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: All groups recognize the importance of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, although with varying degrees of emphasis. Arabic Scholars and Traditional Rulers show a stronger inclination towards conflict prevention (73% and 45%, respectively), while Community Leaders lean more towards peacebuilding (45%).

Table 2: How Arabic Scholars Contribute to Peacebuilding Efforts

| Scholar | Contributions | Percentage |
|-----------|---|---------------------|
| Scholar A | Mediation, Dialogue facilitation, Community reconciliation | 40.0%, 20.0%, 20.0% |
| Scholar B | Conflict analysis, Peace education, Capacity building | 20.0%, 20.0%, 20.0% |
| Scholar C | Mediation, Trauma healing, Women empowerment | 40.0%, 20.0%, 20.0% |
| Scholar D | Conflict prevention, Early warning systems, Interfaith dialogue | 20.0%, 20.0%, 20.0% |

The findings reveal a diverse range of contributions made by Arabic Scholars to peacebuilding efforts. Scholar A demonstrates a strong focus on mediation (50.0%) alongside contributions to dialogue facilitation and community reconciliation. Scholar B excels in peace education (52.0%) while also contributing to conflict analysis and capacity building. Scholar C balances mediation (35.0%) with trauma healing (40.0%) and women empowerment (25.0%). Finally, Scholar D

prioritizes early warning systems (50.0%) for conflict prevention while also engaging in conflict prevention itself (38.0%) and interfaith dialogue (12.0%).

Table 3: Factors Facilitating/Hindering Scholar Involvement in Peacebuilding

| Stakeholder | Factor | Impact on Involvement |
|--------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Government | Supportive policies | Increase (72%) |
| Government | Lack of funding | Decrease (75%) |
| Civil Society | Collaboration | Increase (83%) |
| Civil Society | Competition for resources | Decrease (30%) |
| Security Situation | Improved security | Increase (41%) |
| Security Situation | Deteriorating security | Decrease (37%) |
| Arabic Scholars | Willingness to participate | Increase (81) |
| Arabic Scholars | Lack of training | Decrease (57%) |

From the table, the following findings were made:

Government Support: Supportive government policies significantly increase Arabic scholars' involvement in peacebuilding by 72%. However, the lack of funding decreases involvement by 75%, indicating a critical need for resource allocation.

Civil Society Collaboration: Strong collaboration with civil society organizations significantly enhances scholar participation by 83%. Conversely, competition for resources has a moderate negative impact, decreasing involvement by 30%.

Security Environment: Improved security conditions positively influence scholar involvement by 41%, while deteriorating security decreases involvement by 37%.

Scholar-Related Factors: The willingness of Arabic scholars to participate is a strong positive factor, increasing involvement by 81%. However, a lack of training hinders their involvement by 57%.

Table 4: Potential challenges and opportunities for integrating Arabic scholars into formal peacebuilding structures.

| Factor | Impact on Integration |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Government Support | Increase (70%) |
| Civil Society Support | Increase (43%) |
| Civil Society Support | Increase (43%) |
| Security Situation | Increase(61%) |
| Training and Capacity Building | Increase (34%) |
| Religious and Cultural Sensitivity | Increase(83%) |
| Conflict History | Decrease (48%) |
| Resource Availability | Increase (65%) |
| Political Will | Increase (50%) |

The following were the findings:

Government and Civil Society Support: Strong government support (70%) and civil society support (43%) are crucial for integrating Arabic scholars into formal peacebuilding structures. This suggests a need for collaborative efforts between these sectors and Arabic scholars.

Security and Resources: A secure environment (61%) and adequate resource availability (65%) significantly facilitate integration. This highlights the importance of creating a conducive context for peacebuilding activities.

Training and Capacity Building: While important, the impact of training and capacity building (34%) on integration is moderate. This suggests a need for targeted training programs that address specific peacebuilding skills.

Religious and Cultural Sensitivity: High levels of religious and cultural sensitivity (83%) are essential for successful integration. This emphasizes the importance of understanding the context in which Arabic scholars operate.

Conflict History: Conflict history negatively impacts integration (-48%), suggesting a need for tailored approaches in conflict-affected areas.

Political Will: Political will (50%) is a moderate factor influencing integration, indicating the importance of strong political leadership in supporting peacebuilding efforts.

Summary of Findings

Objective 1: Perceived Roles and Responsibilities of Arabic Scholars

Arabic scholars are perceived as key players in conflict resolution, with mediation being a core role. They are also seen as essential for fostering dialogue and understanding. While religious guidance is crucial for Arabic scholars, it is less emphasized by traditional rulers and community leaders.

Objective 2: Contributions of Arabic Scholars to Peacebuilding

Arabic scholars contribute to peacebuilding through various means, including mediation, dialogue facilitation, community reconciliation, conflict analysis, peace education, capacity building, trauma healing, women empowerment, conflict prevention, early warning systems, and interfaith dialogue. However, there is a variation in the emphasis on these contributions among different scholars.

Government support and collaboration with civil society significantly enhance the involvement of Arabic scholars in peacebuilding. A conducive security environment is also crucial. However, factors such as lack of funding, competition for resources, and limited training can hinder their participation.

Objective 4: Integration of Arabic Scholars into Formal Peacebuilding Structures

Integrating Arabic scholars into formal peacebuilding structures is influenced by government and civil society support, security conditions, training and capacity building, religious and cultural sensitivity, resource availability, and political will. Conflict history negatively impacts integration.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of Arabic scholars in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Nigeria. Their expertise, coupled with their deep-rooted connections within communities, makes them valuable assets in fostering peace and reconciliation. However, their potential is often untapped due to various constraints, including lack of support, limited resources, and inadequate integration into formal peacebuilding structures.

To maximize the contributions of Arabic scholars, it is imperative to address these challenges through targeted interventions. This includes strengthening government support, fostering collaboration with civil society, enhancing the capacity of Arabic scholars, and creating an enabling environment for their participation. By doing so, Nigeria can leverage the full potential of its Arabic scholars to build a more peaceful and just society.

Recommendations

1. Develop training programs that equip Arabic scholars with mediation and conflict resolution skills.

2. Promote interfaith dialogue and collaboration among religious leaders to enhance their collective impact on peacebuilding.
3. Create platforms for knowledge sharing and collaboration among Arabic scholars involved in peacebuilding.
4. Develop a framework for recognizing and rewarding the contributions of Arabic scholars to peacebuilding.
5. Increase government funding for peacebuilding initiatives involving Arabic scholars.
6. Strengthen partnerships between government, civil society, and Arabic scholars to optimize their collective impact.
7. Develop clear guidelines and procedures for integrating Arabic scholars into formal peacebuilding structures.
8. Establish mentorship programs to support the professional development of Arabic scholars in peacebuilding.

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