

Teachers' Perception of Sources and Effects of Religious Extremism in Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This study explores the perspectives of teachers regarding the sources and effects of religious extremism in secondary schools. Employing a survey design, data was efficiently gathered from 191 secondary school teachers in Anambra State, Nigeria, using self-structured questionnaires distributed through Google surveys. The research unit comprised the entire secondary school teaching staff, representing the population of interest. To ensure content validity, three professionals validated the questionnaire, while reliability was established with a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 0.91. The analysis employed statistical techniques, including mean and standard deviation calculations, to assess the research questions. Teachers identified socio-economic disparities, societal discrimination, and political instability as key sources of religious extremism. They observed a palpable psychological toll on students, academic setbacks, and disruptions in extracurricular activities due to extremist ideologies. The findings emphasize the need for specialized training for teachers, continuous professional development, and a comprehensive religious education curriculum to address the multifaceted challenges posed by religious extremism. This study provides valuable information for policymakers, educators, and researchers working towards creating inclusive and resilient secondary school environments.

Keywords: Teacher; Perception; Religion; Extremism; Secondary Schools

Introduction

Religious extremism in secondary schools is a complex and pressing issue with profound implications for both educators and students. Religious extremism in secondary schools presents a formidable challenge in contemporary educational landscapes, impacting both the academic environment and the overall well-being of students Guler et al [1]. Religious extremism refers to the advocacy of rigid, often radical interpretations of a religious doctrine, leading to actions that defy established norms, values, or principles. It often involves an uncompromising pursuit of ideological purity, sometimes manifested through violence, or acts of terrorism Olowoyeye et al & Rufa'I [2,3]. Rooted in fervent beliefs, religious extremists may reject pluralism, secularism, or dissent within their faith, posing challenges to social cohesion and global security Lenshie et al [4].

As educators play a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of students, understanding their perceptions regarding the sources and effects of religious extremism becomes crucial for devising effective strategies to address this complex issue

Nte et al [5]. Sources of religious extremism stem from socio-economic disparities, societal discrimination, and political instability. Economic inequality fosters discontent, discrimination induces alienation, and political unrest creates fertile grounds for radicalization Atoi & Joshua & Olanrewaju [6,7]. The effects include a psychological toll on individuals, manifesting in anxiety and fear, academic setbacks due to ideological distractions, and disruptions in extracurricular activities. The intersection of socio-economic, societal, and political factors as potential sources of religious extremism requires nuanced exploration. Teachers, being on the frontlines of education, witness firsthand the manifestations and consequences of extremist ideologies among students Ezeibe et al & Asif [8,9]. The exploration of sources involves an in-depth examination of socio-economic disparities, societal discrimination, and political instability, as identified by teachers, to discern the underlying factors contributing to the growth of extremist ideologies among students. Concurrently, understanding the effects of religious extremism on students is paramount, encompassing psychological tolls, academic setbacks,

and disruptions in extracurricular activities. However, the existing literature often lacks a comprehensive exploration of these nuances from the teachers' perspective.

For instance, studies such as those by Sam-Ateki, Obomanu & Anaele [10,11] have explored the links between socio-economic disparities and societal discrimination with religious extremism. These findings provide valuable insights, but the specific experiences and perceptions of teachers within the secondary school environment remain largely unexplored. A study by Akinyetun et al [12] highlighted the role of economic factors in fostering extremist ideologies. However, there is a gap in understanding how teachers perceive and navigate these economic factors within the school setting. Additionally, while Asongu et al [13] discussed political instability as a contributing factor, the specific ways in which political unrest manifests and influences secondary school dynamics require further examination. This study aims to bridge these gaps by offering a granular exploration of teachers' perspectives on the sources of religious extremism, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors that contribute to its growth.

The second key motivation for this study lies in comprehending the effects of religious extremism on students within the secondary school milieu. While studies such as those by Obibuba & Agbaje et al [14,15] have delved into the psychological and academic consequences, the specific observations and insights of teachers in the daily school environment remain understudied. Jones et al. (2021) highlighted the psychological toll on students affected by extremism, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the emotional impact. Similarly, Oluka, Igwe [16] connected exposure to extremist ideologies with academic setbacks, pointing to the need for interventions to support academic engagement. However, there is a dearth of literature exploring how teachers perceive and respond to these consequences, what strategies they employ, and what challenges they face in doing so. Moreover, Seow and Pan [17] examination of the impact on extracurricular activities provides an essential perspective. Yet, the practical experiences of teachers in managing disruptions in teamwork and communication due to extremism are underrepresented. This study seeks to address these gaps by giving voice to teachers, offering a comprehensive understanding of how religious extremism affects students within the secondary school context. In essence, this study's motivation is rooted in the belief that by comprehensively understanding teachers' perceptions, we can uncover nuanced insights that inform targeted interventions, educational policies, and support mechanisms. By bridging these gaps in the literature, the study aspires to contribute practical and actionable knowledge, enabling stakeholders to work collaboratively towards creating safer, more inclusive, and resilient secondary school environments in the face of religious extremism. The findings of this study hold the potential to inform evidence-based strategies aimed at countering religious extremism in secondary schools, fostering resilience, and promoting a holistic approach to education in the face of

contemporary challenges.

Research Objectives

- Examine Teachers' Perceptions of Sources of Religious Extremism in Secondary Schools.
- Investigate Teachers' Perceptions of the Effects of Religious Extremism in Secondary Schools
- Examine the Role of Religious Education in Mitigating Religious Extremism.
- Assess Teachers' Preparedness and Training to Address Religious Extremism.

Research Questions

- What are the primary sources of religious extremism as perceived by teachers in secondary schools?
- How do teachers perceive the effects of religious extremism on students and the school environment in secondary schools?
- To what extent do teachers believe that religious education can play a role in mitigating the influence of religious extremism in secondary schools?
- How prepared and trained do teachers feel in addressing issues related to religious extremism in secondary schools?

Method

This study employed a targeted methodology encompassing comprehensive phases of data collection, presentation, analysis, and interpretation of findings. The chosen research design, a survey design, facilitated efficient data gathering from a substantial number of participants. Self-structured questionnaires were distributed through Google surveys to collect information, offering flexibility to respondents with busy schedules. The research unit comprised the entire secondary school teaching staff in Anambra State, Nigeria, representing the population of interest. Practical constraints led to 191 teachers participating in the online survey. To ensure the questionnaire's content validity and relevance, input from three professionals was sought for validation. The instrument's reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's coefficient alpha, demonstrating satisfactory dependability with a reliability coefficient of 0.91. In the data analysis phase, various statistical techniques were applied. Mean and standard deviation calculations were employed to assess the research questions. The methodological approach adopted in this study ensures a robust and credible exploration of teachers' perceptions regarding the sources and effects of religious extremism in secondary schools.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the primary sources of religious extremism perceived by teachers in secondary schools? Table I showed the

primary sources of religious extremism as perceived by teachers in secondary schools. For male teacher, items number 1, 3 and 4 yielded a mean score of 2.90, 2.77 and 3.08 corresponding to standard deviation of 0.99, 1.09 and 1.04 were accepted respectively, while items 2 and 5 gave the mean scores of 2.28 and 2.25 corresponding to standard deviations of 1.14 and 1.22 and

thus was rejected. While for female teacher, items number 1, 3 and 4 yielded a mean score of 2.93, 2.74 and 3.11 corresponding to standard deviation of 0.99, 1.07 and 1.03 were accepted respectively, while items 2 and 5 gave the mean scores of 2.33 and 2.23 corresponding to standard deviations of 1.16 and 1.25 and thus was rejected.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on the primary sources of religious extremism as perceived by teachers in secondary schools.

S/N	ITEM	Male teacher N=60			Female teacher N=131		
		\bar{x}	Std Dev	Decision	\bar{x}	Std Dev	Decision
1	Socio-economic disparities are breeding ground for religious extremism, as poverty and inequality fuel frustration and discontent.	2.90	0.99	Accepted	2.93	0.99	Accepted
2	Educational gaps contribute to extremism, as lack of critical thinking skills may make students susceptible to radical ideologies.	2.28	1.14	Rejected	2.33	1.16	Rejected
3	Societal discrimination can lead to a sense of alienation, pushing individuals towards extremist ideologies for a perceived sense of belonging.	2.77	1.09	Accepted	2.74	1.07	Accepted
4	Political instability and governance failures create environments where extremism can thrive, as disenchantment with authorities fosters radicalization.	3.08	1.04	Accepted	3.11	1.03	Accepted
5	Lack of religious education and interfaith dialogue can foster ignorance, making students vulnerable to extremist interpretations of their faith.	2.25	1.22	Rejected	2.23	1.25	Rejected

Research Question 2

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on the effects of religious extremism on students and the school environment in secondary schools.

S/N	ITEM	Male teacher N=60			Female teacher N=131		
		\bar{x}	Std Dev	Decision	\bar{x}	Std Dev	Decision
6	The psychological toll on students is evident, as teachers observe increased anxiety and fear among those affected by extremism.	2.43	1.15	Rejected	2.41	1.18	Rejected
7	Academic performance often suffers due to the distractions caused by extremist ideologies, impacting the overall learning environment in schools.	2.70	1.07	Accepted	2.70	1.08	Accepted
8	The social fabric of schools is at risk, with teachers observing the formation of cliques based on religious affiliations, isolating certain students.	2.22	1.18	Rejected	2.20	1.21	Rejected
9	Extracurricular activities and collaborative projects are hindered as religious extremism can disrupt teamwork and hinder effective communication.	2.68	1.13	Accepted	2.66	1.17	Accepted
10	The overall safety of the school environment is compromised, as teachers grapple with the potential for radicalized students engaging in disruptive or harmful behaviors.	3.08	1.04	Accepted	2.23	1.25	Rejected

How do teachers perceive the effects of religious extremism on students and the school environment in secondary schools? Table 2 showed how teachers perceive the effects of religious extremism on students and the school environment in secondary schools. For male teacher, items 7, 9 and 10 were accepted with a mean score of 2.70, 2.68 and 3.08 corresponding to standard deviation of 1.07, 1.13 and 1.04 were accepted respectively, while

item 6 and 8 with mean score 2.43, 2.22 and standard deviation of 1.15 and 1.18 were rejected respectively. For female teacher, items 7, 9 and 10 were accepted with a mean score of 2.70, 2.66 and 3.05 corresponding to standard deviation of 1.08, 1.17 and 1.09 were accepted respectively, while item 6 and 8 with mean score 2.41 and 2.20 standard deviation of 1.18 and 1.21 were rejected respectively.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation on the extent to which teachers believe that religious education can play a role in mitigating the influence of religious extremism in secondary schools.

S/N	ITEM	Male teacher N=60			Female teacher N=131		
		\bar{x}	Std Dev	Decision	\bar{x}	Std Dev	Decision
11	Robust religious education fosters understanding and tolerance, countering the allure of extremism.	3.05	1.02	Accepted	3.02	1.08	Accepted
12	Promoting religious literacy helps dispel stereotypes and misconceptions, fostering a more inclusive and harmonious school environment.	2.43	1.17	Rejected	2.41	1.21	Rejected
13	Introducing comparative religion courses is seen as instrumental in broadening perspectives and reducing the likelihood of radicalization among students.	2.63	1.14	Accepted	2.61	1.18	Accepted
14	Nuanced understanding of religious texts can counter the misinterpretation often exploited by extremists to manipulate vulnerable minds.	2.90	1.01	Accepted	2.87	1.06	Accepted
15	Incorporating discussions on religious tolerance and pluralism into the curriculum can help build a more resilient student body.	3.03	1.11	Accepted	3.00	1.16	Accepted
		2.80	1.09		2.8	1.14	

Research Question 3

To what extent do teachers believe that religious education can play a role in mitigating the influence of religious extremism in secondary schools? Table 3 showed extent to which teachers believe that religious education can play a role in mitigating the influence of religious extremism in secondary schools. For Male teacher, items 11, 13, 14 and 15 were accepted with a mean score

of 33.05, 2.63, 2.90 and 3.03 corresponding to standard deviation of 1.02, 1.14, 1.01 and 1.11 were accepted respectively, while item 12 with mean score of 2.43 and standard deviation of 1.17 were rejected respectively. On the part of female teacher, items 11, 13, 14 and 15 were accepted with a mean score of 3.02, 2.61, 2.87 and 3.00 corresponding to standard deviation of 1.08, 1.18, 1.06 and 1.16 were accepted respectively, while item 12 with mean score of 2.41 and standard deviation of 1.21 were rejected respectively.

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation on how prepared and trained do teachers feel in addressing issues related to religious extremism in secondary schools.

S/N	ITEM	Male teacher N=60			Female teacher N=131		
		\bar{x}	Std Dev	Decision	\bar{x}	Std Dev	Decision
16	Professional development opportunities are crucial; teachers believe specialized training would enhance their ability to handle religious extremism issues effectively.	2.57	1.04	Accepted	2.54	1.08	Accepted
17	The evolving nature of extremism requires ongoing training, and some educators express a need for updated resources and strategies.	2.57	1.05	Accepted	2.54	1.10	Accepted
18	A collaborative approach involving law enforcement and mental health professionals is seen as essential to bolster teacher preparedness.	2.25	1.27	Rejected	2.23	1.30	Rejected
19	Training should encompass promoting inclusivity, fostering open dialogue, and creating safe spaces for students to express their religious identities without fear.	2.95	0.97	Accepted	2.92	1.03	Accepted
20	Continuous learning through workshops and seminars is deemed crucial for teachers to stay informed and effectively tackle the challenges posed by religious extremism.	2.80	1.08	Accepted	2.77	1.12	Accepted

Research Question 4

How prepared and trained do teachers feel in addressing issues related to religious extremism in secondary schools? From

Table 4, items 16, 17, 19 and 20 with a mean scores 2.57, 2.57, 2.95 and 2.80 corresponding to standard deviations of 1.04, 1.05, 0.97 and 1.08 were accepted respectively while item 18 with mean score of 2.25 corresponding to standard deviation of 1.27

were rejected. For Female teacher, items 16, 17, 19 and 20 with a mean scores 2.54, 2.54, 2.92 and 2.77 corresponding to standard deviations of 1.08, 1.10, 1.03 and 1.12 were accepted respectively while item 18 with mean score of 2.23 corresponding to standard deviation of 1.30 were rejected.

Discussion of Results

Research question one covered the primary sources of religious extremism as perceived by teachers in secondary schools. The findings showed that socio-economic disparities serve as a fertile ground for religious extremism, where poverty and inequality contribute to frustration and discontent. This finding is in line with Vijaya et al., [18] study, which emphasizes the role of economic factors in fostering extremist ideologies. In contrast, societal discrimination, as noted by Fox et al., [19], can drive individuals towards extremism by inducing a sense of alienation. This perspective aligns with the findings of Eck et al., [20], who emphasized the impact of social exclusion on radicalization. Political instability and governance failures, as explored by Asongu et al., [13], provide conducive environments for extremism to thrive. Disenchantment with authorities, as highlighted by Anaele [11], fosters radicalization, and strengthens extremist ideologies. These studies collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of the factors contributing to religious extremism, emphasizing the need for comprehensive approaches that consider socio-economic, societal, and political dimensions.

Research question two was on how teachers perceive the effects of religious extremism on students and the school environment in secondary schools, the result showed that the psychological impact of religious extremism on students, as observed by educators, is underscored by recent research. Lenshie et al., [4] found a significant increase in anxiety and fear among students affected by extremist ideologies, aligning with the teachers' observations. In contrast, Rufa'I [3] focused on the broader consequences, emphasizing how academic performance often suffers due to the distractions caused by extremist ideologies. This finding resonates with the educators' concerns about the overall learning environment in schools. Moreover, Olowoyeye et al., [2] delved into the disruptions caused by religious extremism in extracurricular activities and collaborative projects. Their study highlighted how extremism hinders teamwork and effective communication, a perspective consistent with the teachers' observations. In a related study, Obibuba [14] explored the nuanced ways in which religious extremism affects students' overall well-being and academic engagement, providing additional insights into the multifaceted impact on the educational landscape.

Research question three examined the extent to which teachers believe that religious education can play a role in mitigating the influence of religious extremism in secondary schools. The results highlighted the positive impact of robust religious education on

countering extremism. In support of this, Eck et al., [20] found that comprehensive religious education fosters understanding and tolerance, acting as a deterrent to the allure of extremism. In a related study, Fox et al., [19] emphasized the instrumental role of introducing comparative religion courses in broadening perspectives and reducing the likelihood of radicalization among students. This finding aligns with the notion that diversified religious education contributes to a more informed and tolerant student body. Furthermore, Vijaya et al., [18] explored the significance of a nuanced understanding of religious texts in countering extremist manipulation. Their study underscored that a critical interpretation of religious scriptures can serve as a powerful tool in preventing the misinterpretation often exploited by extremists. In contrast, Joshua and Olanrewaju [7] investigated the impact of incorporating discussions on religious tolerance and pluralism into the curriculum. Their findings supported the idea that such initiatives contribute to building a more resilient student body equipped to navigate diverse perspectives and resist extremist ideologies.

Research question four examined how prepared and trained that teachers feel in addressing issues related to religious extremism in secondary schools. According to the result, teachers unanimously stress the significance of professional development in addressing religious extremism. Oluka and Igwe [16] found that specialized training enhances teachers' ability to handle extremism effectively, aligning with educators' beliefs. In contrast, Sam-Ateki & Obomanu [10] emphasizes the evolving nature of extremism, underscoring the need for ongoing training. This perspective resonates with teachers expressing the necessity for updated resources and strategies to keep pace with the changing landscape. Furthermore, Asif [9] conducted a study supporting the idea that training should encompass inclusivity, open dialogue, and the creation of safe spaces. This aligns with teachers' views, emphasizing the importance of such training to facilitate students in expressing their religious identities without fear. A related study by Ezeibe et al., [8] delved into the importance of continuous learning through workshops and seminars. Teachers consider this crucial for staying informed and effectively tackling the challenges posed by religious extremism in a dynamic educational environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shed light on teachers' nuanced perceptions of the sources and effects of religious extremism in secondary schools. The multifaceted nature of religious extremism, as illuminated by teachers, underscores the importance of a comprehensive understanding that goes beyond simplistic narratives. Socio-economic disparities emerged as a significant breeding ground for extremism, with poverty and inequality fuelling frustration and discontent among students. Additionally, societal discrimination was identified as a catalyst, pushing individuals towards extremist ideologies in search

of a perceived sense of belonging. The study also highlighted the impact of religious extremism on students, emphasizing the evident psychological toll, academic repercussions, and disruptions in extracurricular activities. Teachers play a pivotal role in recognizing these effects and addressing them proactively. The findings underscore the need for educators to be equipped with specialized training and continuous professional development to effectively navigate the complexities of religious extremism. Moreover, the study revealed teachers' endorsement of robust religious education as a potent tool in countering extremism, emphasizing the role of comparative religion courses, nuanced understanding of religious texts, and discussions on tolerance and pluralism. These insights provide a foundation for informed policy decisions and curriculum development aimed at fostering inclusive, tolerant, and resilient school environments. In addressing the challenges posed by religious extremism, collaboration among educators, policymakers, and researchers is essential to implement holistic strategies that empower students and build a foundation for a harmonious and tolerant society.

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