



INTERROGATING THE CAUSES OF INTERRELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN SOME SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN UPPER WEST REGION, GHANA

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Abstract

Ghana is perceived as a secular and a peaceful nation. Various interreligious conflicts and other large-scale violent conflicts that have plagued many countries the world over, are virtually absent in Ghana or on a very low tone. Despite the reported successes in the religious front, pockets of interreligious conflicts loom across the country, especially in the second cycle institutions. Probing into the situation through an exploratory case study design, data gathered from in-depth interview and focus group discussion involved 71 students' executives and 20 key informants. They were mainly selected from three Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region of Ghana, and the data showed that; compulsory church service and wearing of hijab, power struggle, doctrinal differences, reserved positions, restrictions on religious items, and competition over worshipping space have been the principal causes of interreligious conflicts in these selected educational institutions. This paper recommends effective worship space management, cross-religious education and curricular review to include religious diversity studies by schools, district institutions and the Ghana Education Service to promote religious co-existence and tolerance in schools.

Keywords: Interreligious Conflict, Christianity and Islam, African Traditional Religion, Upper West Region, Educational Institution

Introduction

Religion, the world over, is noted to be a unifying tool between the human races because people easily identify with each other based on sharing or belonging to the same faith (Smith, 1963). Pobe (1988) noted that Africans in general fundamentally possess both religious nature and knowledge - meaning they interpret their world within the spheres of religion. Similarly, Mbiti (1999) noted that religion is existentially noticeable or manifested in relation to the life of Africans. He asserts that for Africans, religion is an ontological phenomenon: it pertains to the question of existence or being. In congruence, Haar (2005) posits that many Africans voluntarily associate themselves with religious networks, which they use for a variety of purposes - social, economic and even political - that go beyond the strictly religious aspect.

Ghana is a pluralistic country with different religious traditions (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2012). The country is dominated by three main religions namely; Islam, African Traditional Religion and Christianity, with the Christian population being the largest among the three with about 71.2%, followed by Islam 17.6% and African Traditional Religion 5.2% (GSS, 2012). Ironically, various large-scale violent conflicts, especially interreligious conflicts that have plagued the world over, are virtually absent in Ghana if not entirely or on a very low tone. As noted by Abdul-Hamid (2011), Ghanaians stay in the same compound, work together, attend the same market, school, national events, funerals, marriage and naming ceremonies, and celebrate religious festivities and holidays together in a very harmonious manner.

In all social settings in Ghana, religious pluralism (freedom) is upheld as even guaranteed by the country's 1992 Constitution. Based on these fundamental principles, Ghana is described as a secular nation. The country is a member of the United Nations (UN) and has signed to a number of declarations including the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The contributions of the Christian Council, Ghana Muslims Council, and National Peace Council (NPC) among others, have promoted religious pluralism and peaceful co-existence among people across the country.

Despite the reported successes in the religious front, pockets of interreligious conflicts have been experienced across the country, especially in the second cycle institutions. According to Ghana News Agency (GNA, 2015), a Muslim student lost his life when he was being chased by his teacher to attend a church service at Adisadel College in the Central Region of Ghana. It equally reported that; at Sekondi-Takoradi in the Western Region, some female Muslim students apparently wearing a Muslim veil (hijab) were prevented from taking passport photographs as part of the requirement for the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) registration process, which was considered as an obstruction to the photographic process by the officials in 2015. This contention nearly resulted in violent confrontation as the Muslim fraternity demonstrated their displeasure against the authorities and demanded that such students should be allowed to use their hijab for the passport pictures.

Upper West Region, the study locality like any other Region in Ghana, has all the mechanisms to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts among people without recourse to violence especially in the various Senior High Schools (SHSs). School Management Teams, Christian Council and Muslim Council among others; have registered their presence in the Region. Regardless of the presence of these institutions, the Region has not been spared of interreligious conflicts. Recently, some second cycle institutions in the Region have occasionally witnessed violent

conflicts. Lassia Tuolu Senior High School, in the Wa West District, Queen of Peace Senior High School in the Nadowli/Kaleo District, Wa Senior High School, Wa Islamic Senior High School and Wa Senior/Technical School for instance, have witnessed some form of interreligious conflicts in the past.

The question that requires a solution that this paper seeks to unravel is, *'Why in spite of the application of various institutional structures to promote coexistence among various religious faiths in the second cycle institutions, the country continues to witness inter-religious conflicts in some Senior High Schools (SHSs)?* There should be an explanation to this development. Ironically, little work has been done in this area. This has necessitated this study.

THE EVOLUTION OF FORMAL EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS IN GHANA

Formal education as known in present times was unknown in then Gold Coast until the arrival of the Europeans. However, the people had a system of transferring knowledge and skills to the younger generation in the form of apprenticeship and other methods (Antwi, 1992; Eyiah, 2004). Castle schools, which were first started, by the European (Portuguese) traders or Christian missionaries in the country in 1529 in Cape Coast became the roots of Western education in then Gold Coast. These schools were meant to educate their children who were mulattoes and later some children of some prominent chiefs and business kingpin. The system of education was therefore not open to all children (Graham, 1971).

Awuah-Nyamekye (2015) and Graham (1971) observed that the ultimate aim of the missionary education was to enable them easily proselytise the people to become committed Christians and literates who could assist them spread and translate the Bible into the local dialect. This expanded to embrace mainstream education later on upon government intervention under the 1887 Education Ordinance (Antwi, 1992). Hence, more of the missionary schools in Cape Coast and across the country out of

which most are among the top best academic performing SHSs in Ghana (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2015). As Awuah-Nyamekye (2015) further asserted, even when the government took control over all missionary schools and made them public, some were still discriminatory in their choice of students because of their religious affiliations and denomination. These religious entities have persistently controlled and influenced some aspects of their schools. For example, the Catholic Education Unit is in charge of all Catholic established schools in the country and the same is true with the Ahmadiyah missionaries, among others. This is a clear indication that present Senior High Schools (SHSs) in Ghana have dogma undertones. This demonstrates that education and religion have an inextricably linkage in Ghana. Religious demographics of Ghana indicates the presence of religious pluralism in the country, principally, Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religion (GSS, 2012).

African traditional religion is a self-originated, inherited, or homegrown, pre-colonial religion and has no founder (Adamo, 2011; Bonsu, 2014). Islam and Christianity are both foreign and alien religions in Ghana (Hashim, 2013 and Azumah, 2000). According to Antwi (1992), Islam entered present-day Ghana through its' northern borders due to trade, narrative work as well as some office duties from its sister countries, notably Northern Nigeria which are predominantly Muslim. Inasmuch as there is a general agreement among scholars on the route and how Islam penetrated the Northern part of Ghana, there is lack of consensus on the period. According to some scholars including Abdul-Hamid (2011) and Hashim (2013), Islam in Ghana dates back to the 15th century through the North and subsequently spread to the South of the country.

According to Sarbah (2010), Christianity was introduced to the country in the 15th century by the first group of European (Portuguese) navigators and others later at the coastal part (southern) and this explains why the south accounts for majority of

Christians in Ghana. The White-Fathers officially called Missionaries of Africa took Christianity to the Northern part of Ghana precisely Navrongo in 1906 (Bob-Millar and Bob-Millar, 2007).

Despite the differences in religious dogma between the various religions, especially Muslims and Christians in Ghana, there exist a good relationship between the two giving impetus to the country not having experienced any major inter-religious violence unlike that of Nigeria, Central Africa Republic, the Sudan, Ivory Coast and Kenya (Bagnya, 2016; Abdul-Hamid, 2011; Azumah, 2000). Notwithstanding Ghana's record of accomplishment of peaceful coexistence among religious faiths, there have been new developments in the country. The religious freedom front has been a foggy one. There have been clashes among various religious traditions in some SHSs in the country. Such encounters or experiences apparently may not portray Ghana as a purely religious freedom country as overstated by some scholars.

Theoretical consideration

The researchers employed Burton's (1987) Need-Based Theory in this paper to explain why there had been clashes in the religious front in the selected SHSs in Ghana. Human needs perceived to be universal, ontological and non-negotiable because they are so crucial to the survival and development of humans such that they cannot be traded-off for any reason (Burton, 1987). According to Burton (1987), some of these fundamental human needs include identity, freedom, security, and development which are the focus of this paper. Shedding more light on how to maintain or achieve satisfaction of these needs, Burton (1987) emphasized that legitimacy should always be placed on the needs of all the sections of social formation in an organisation or society, for this automatically moves a conflict from a zero-sum situation to one of win-win.

From the preceding arguments, this paper is of the position that the outlined human needs are largely the parameters within which the general human needs

will fall. It is important that feuding parties, especially in violent conflict situations, have to be met separately to assess their needs while working to diffuse the tension before bringing them under an umbrella to collectively identify their needs as dialogue is considered critical in the resolution of need-based conflicts as Burton's Human Needs theory (1987) postulates. In the school setting, students who have to satiate their human needs must be provided with the conditions that are necessary to enable them realise these needs in order to have a violent-free environment for smooth academic discourse resulting in a complete human development. This study identified the needs of the students as religious freedom, security, identity and recognition. The frustration of such needs is likely to spark inter-religious clashes.

METHODOLOGY

Study Locality

The study locality is the Upper West Region of Ghana, one of the 10 Administrative Regions in Ghana. The study was concerned with interreligious conflicts precisely between Christians and Muslims in three selected schools namely Wa SHS, Islamic SHS and Lassia Toulou SHS. This paper excluded other religions were intentionally because virtually all the interreligious conflicts experienced in the school setting countrywide and Upper West Region in particular have been between adherents of Islam and Christianity. In Wa SHS, the religious denominations were namely; Pentecost Students and Associates (Pensa) combined with Deeper Life Students, Church of Christ Students Union, Catholic Students Association, Baptist Student Union (BapSu) and Assemblies of God Campus Ministry (AGCM). The Muslim students groups were the Ghana Muslim Students Association (GMSA) and Ahmadiya Students Association of Ghana (AHMSAG). In Wa Islamic SHS, all the Christians were under one umbrella named the Christian Community with one leadership, while the Muslim students were all under GMSA. In Lassia Tuolu SHS the Muslim students were composed of the Ghana Muslim Students Association (GMSA) and

Ahmadiya Students Association of Ghana (AHMSAG), while the Christian students were composed of the Scripture Union and Catholic Students Union.

Research Design

Based on the objective of this paper, an explorative case study design was used. This design allowed the researchers to conduct an in-depth investigation into the phenomenon at stake. The exploratory case study design thus enabled the researchers gain much knowledge from the perspective of the study subjects.

Population and Sampling Techniques

The target population of this study were students' executives of the religious associations from the selected schools, the management and patrons of those selected institutions, as well as other stake holders responsible for peace in the Upper West Region and the schools in particular. These categories of people were targeted because in the judgment of the researchers they were best positioned to offer relevant information on any conflict issues emanating from the interaction and relationships among the organisations they represented.

In this study, purposive sampling was employed to select 91 respondents comprising 71 students' religious executives across the three selected schools made up of 37 Christians (males-21, females-16) and 34 Muslims (males-25, females-9) and 20 key informants. The distribution of student executives from the various schools was as follows: Wa SHS - 15 Christians and 12 Muslims; Islamic SHS - 10 Christians and 10 Muslims; and Lassia Tuolu SHS - 12 Christians and 12 Muslims. Table 1 below captures the detailed description of the student executive respondents. These executives were the mouth piece of their members and therefore possess great information relevant to the research. The three institutions selected represented three different dogmas or traditions namely; Wa SHS - a purely secular institution; Islamic SHS - a Muslim

dominated institution, and Lassia Toulou - a Christian dominated institution. A cross-sectional view of Christians and Muslims from the three institutions

was necessary justifying the choice of the three schools among others.

Table 1: Summary of Student Executive Respondents

School	Religious Affiliation				Total
	Christians		Muslims		
	Females	Males	Females	Males	
WA SHS	7	8	4	8	27
ISLAMIC SHS	4	6	2	8	20
LASSEC	5	7	3	9	24
Total	16	21	9	25	71

Source: Field Study, (March 2017)

The 20 key informants Comprised of eight (8) Teachers, seven (7) school management members and five (5) institutional representatives. The eight (8) teachers comprised five (5) Christians and three (3) Muslims. The selected teachers were actively involved in the religious activities of students and constituted as patrons in the three schools. The seven (7) school management members comprised three (3) Christians and four (4) Muslims from the selected schools. They were purposely sampled because they have much knowledge about the issue under review, as they were responsible for the running of the daily affairs of the schools. The five (5) institutional representatives came from the Upper West Regional Education Service, the Muslim-Christian Dialogue Commission, the Regional Christian Council, the Office of the Municipal Chief Imam and the Upper West Regional Peace Council. They were also purposefully selected as their duties border specifically on the peace and security of the schools.

Sources of data and analysis

The main primary sources of information were generated through in-depth interview and focus group discussion with the respondents and this was complemented by secondary sources of information. The in-depth interview was used to obtain relevant information from the school management members, patrons of the selected schools and all the other key informants. This was done with the aid of interview guides, a field notebook and an audio recording device. The interview sessions were done face-to-face because the people were within the reach of the researchers. More so, issues of religion are sensitive, for which most people do not feel comfortable giving relevant information over the phone. In all, 20 interview sessions were conducted between February and April 2017 with each averagely lasting 25 minutes.

In addition, six (6) Focus Group Discussions (FGD), two each in the three selected schools were held among the various student executives of the religious associations (Christians and Muslim student

executives). This enabled the researchers to obtain an in-depth information that deepened the researchers understanding of the topic under consideration with the aid of a checklist and an audio recorder. The researchers gave the students opportunity to choose the environment that suits them. Every member was encouraged to contribute by ensuring that no single student dominated the discussion to the disadvantage of others and quarrels were discouraged. The purpose was to strengthen the tool from its weaknesses.

Field notes and interviews recorded with audio device were typed and transcribed respectively. Themes or patterns, which are the ideas, concepts, behaviours, interactions, incidents, terminologies or phrases used, were identified. These were then organised into coherent categories that summarized them giving description to the people and the setting, and brought meaning to the text based on pre-set categories and emergent categories.

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

Causes of interreligious conflicts in Senior High Schools

Differences among diverse religious groups by themselves do not necessarily engender violent confrontation but a clash of these differences. The main objective of this paper was to investigate the various contributory factors to interreligious conflicts in the selected institutions. The study unfolded a number of factors responsible for inter-religious confrontations as captured below:

Space

The field survey revealed that the issue of space is a factor that causes interreligious conflicts in the schools. As gathered from the respondents during the interview and FGD, inadequate facilities for worshiping has often resulted in competition and verbal clashes among various religious groups over available worshiping venues. Infrastructure for worship is not readily available in the schools for students to use. As such, students resort to classrooms allocated to them by school authorities (as in the case of the Christian students), but in the

event that the numbers are more than the allocated classroom, then such students have to hold their activities under trees as found in Wa Islamic SHS. As gathered from the study, only Wa SHS had a permanent place of worship for only the Muslims (2 mosques). Students' executives in all the schools revealed that partitioning their dormitories into prayer grounds causes discomfort to other students who do not share the same faith resulting in verbal confrontations occasionally.

Despite the inadequate structures for worship by students, school authorities have prevented the attempts by some people who want to build mosques or churches to provide space for students to worship, describing it as an attempt to convert the schools into worshiping centres. A management member during an interview in March 2017 remarked:

'It is good that our students engage in religious activities. But if every religious faith is given the opportunity to construct a church or mosque the school will cease to be centre of academic studies and as such could be described as a centre of religious activities'.

Unanimously, however, both school management and patrons in all the schools studied agreed that religious worship is crucial for the holistic development of the students and the need to apportion space and time for students to undertake their religious obligations. They, however, indicated that the prime purpose of the students being in the school is to study, which cannot be sacrificed at the expense of religious needs.

Information gathered from the school administration, all the patrons and students' executives in all the selected schools indicated that dawn prayers by Muslims occasionally caused misunderstanding, especially during their annual compulsory fasting period (Ramadhan), and morning devotions by Christian students were also said to disturb the sleep of other students and staff.

Compulsory Church Service and wearing of Hijab

The field survey revealed that wearing of religious related regalia such as hijab in Wa Islamic and that of church service in Lassia Tuolu are made mandatory for all students regardless of their religious orientation. As gathered from the students' executives and two patrons in these schools, the compulsory church service and wearing of the hijab had been the major source of conflict between students and school authorities as well as their colleagues especially prefects who would insist other students obey school rules and regulations. The students revealed during the FGD that, authorities compel students to worship against their faith. This is what two students had to say during a FGD respectively;

"I become mad when told to go to church. This is not my religion". (A Muslim student in Lassia Tuolu).

"The hijab is meant for Muslims but not Christians. Why do they want non-Muslim females to wear it? This is not a good practice and should not be encouraged". (Christian Student in Wa Islamic).

Whereas this study found out that students were compelled to wear hijab or attend compulsory church service, Awojobi (2015) findings indicated that people were asked not to use anything symbolizing faith in some localities such as cross or hijab in their homes or anywhere visible. The common factor in both cases is that people are coerced to practice their faith in a way they are not comfortable. The students further indicated that failure to comply with the school directives attract punishment which they found unacceptable. Probing further to find out if the punishment had ensured compliance to the directives of school administration in respect of compulsory church service and the wearing of the hijab two views were expressed. One group of the students' executives (about 63%) indicated that some students

comply unwillingly but this has brought some level of discipline in the schools. Another group of students' executives (about 37%) were of the view that punishment and other forms of imposition had not changed the conduct of students. This is what a student remarked during a FGD:

'Forcing us to do things against our religious tradition cannot instil discipline in us. We know what we are doing'.

The information gathered from one of the administrative members confirmed what the students said in an interview on 27th March 2017, thus:

'The students are not comfortable and that is clearly manifested in their attitude towards some of the school rules'.

Coercing students to abandon or disregard their own religious traditions at a point in time to enable them assume a different religious discourse appears to be a departure from both the 1948 Human Rights Declaration and 1992 Constitution of Ghana both of which uphold the right to freedom of association and religion. Affected students in this case felt that their faith is unrecognized and their religious freedom curtailed, thereby rendering their religion unsecured. As Burton's (1987) Basic Human Needs theory espoused, if the identity of people is unrecognized, and their religious freedom curtailed leading to a sense of insecurity, conflict is likely to erupt as people pursue this non-negotiable need irrespective of the consequence.

Religious schools are built to promote religious faith and therefore have their cultural practices within the schools as opposed to government established secular controlled schools. There has been a public debate with both religions justifying their positions and crying foul at same time concerning the issue of imposition of religious belief and practices on students in the various SHSs across Ghana. A compulsory church service is not a disciplinary

measure neither is wearing a hijab a uniformity factor, as the study unravelled. The underpinning is that either activity or gesture is purely religious oriented activity because they both carry a belief as indicated by a key informant. Church service is not done for discipline purpose or part of school rules and regulation and a must for all students whether a Christian or not.

The Muslim students' executives, however, disagreed with the key informant assertion and indicated that compulsory worship to them is a punishment. They further expressed that Christian preaching has often upset them. This is what one of the executives said;

'If compulsory worship is not a disciplinary measure why do they not allow us to worship the religion of our choice? Jesus is God, Son of God among others. This can best be described as a psychological battle of faith at least every Sunday. Constantly, stirring someone's anger or challenging one's religion without the slightest opportunity to respond can be devastating or can influence some students to doubt or change their faith'.

Wearing a hijab as gathered from the study is a religious requirement and as such grounded in the Muslim belief. A key informant indicated that wearing a hijab is not for uniformity but a basic requirement. He supported his assertion by quoting Qur'an 23:31, which he said instructs women to wear hijab. The key informant further stated that Hadiths reaffirm that hijab is a basic for female Muslims requirement, narrated Aisha, Ummul Mu'minin: The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

"Allah does not accept the prayer of a woman who has reached puberty unless she wears a veil". The key informant asserted female

Christians are even required to wear the hijab to church. Obviously, this is not an issue of uniformity as some Muslim sought to justify".

The information gathered indicated that Muslim students see the compulsory worship as a deliberate attempt to thwart their worship or a calculated attempt for them to give up their religious faith. This appears to suggest that students' religious identity is threatened, religious freedom curtailed and values not duly recognised, hence, interreligious conflicts.

Power struggle

Information gathered from 10 students and one patron indicated that in Wa SHS, the struggle for prefect-ship mostly take religious lines among the students and the majority group always wins if a single candidate (from the majority group) is contesting a position against a minority candidate. The only time the minority obtains a portfolio is when two candidates from the larger group are vying for the same position against a single minority candidate. This is what a student executive said:

'The students vote on religious lines because their interest is protected and their agenda advanced if the majority of the prefects are one of their own'.

This point supports the findings of Awojobi (2015), Nwaomah (2011) and Omotosho (2003) that economic impoverishment also accounts for interreligious conflicts because people want to better their economic status by taking up positions that will inure to their benefit and that of their religious compatriots. Three student executives from the minority groups expressed that they have been unfairly treated by their fellow students who are prefects and do not share the same religious ideology as them. They said there are instances where prefects of the opposite religion deliberately engage them at the time they are supposed to be fulfilling their religious obligations, seeking to delay them knowing very well that they are attending religious activity.

Another example is reducing punishment for those who share the same faith with them while others face the full measure of the offence. This, according to the students, has been a source of conflict between Christians and Muslims.

Polarisation along religious lines is a dangerous ground for the youth because it has the propensity to divide the country exposing it to larger scale interreligious conflicts in the larger Ghanaian society in future. As it is currently happening in the Central Africa Republic, where a political conflict immediately took a religious path resulting in a conflict between Muslims and Christians. Again, fissiparous country will be a great opportunity and an avenue for politicians to exploit the porous situation in attempt to win votes and reward or support a particular religion over the other (Awedoba, 2009). If this trend continues, then it is likely that Ghana would be deprived of quality leadership as these students who are the future leaders have started practicing religious politics by electing their leaders based on religion because of what they stand to benefit and be favoured over the abilities of these students. Electing students to positions based on religious consideration can further undermine the relationship between Christians and Muslims in SHSs, which also has a negative repercussion for the future development of Ghana. Understanding one another's faith and learning to respect, tolerate and co-exist in such pluralistic social settings is a key to managing religious tensions among students.

Reserved positions

In Wa Islamic and Lassia Tuolu, as gathered from both students and patrons in these schools, top positions such as head prefect portfolios for both males and females are reserved for students who share the religious ideology behind the establishment of the school in question, which has been a principal trigger of interreligious conflict. The information obtained further revealed that about 48% affected students view such traditional practices in these schools as a crystal discrimination against them. One of the students during FGD lamented:

“It is unfair to discriminate when it comes to the head positions. All of us are endowed with the capabilities that such positions demand. Yet, we are not considered. But when it comes to inter-school games or quiz competitions, the authorities are quick to approach us for our input and they are proud of the prizes won by the school through our efforts. This is not a good practice’.

The core mandate of schools includes training students to take up leadership positions in the near future. But the situation is different from what the researchers observed. One Patron supported the assertion made by the students during an interview on 17th March 2017, who expressed that:

“In fact it is the wish of every school to have its past students occupy some of the topmost positions be it at the work place, community or in the nation’s political system as this improves the image of the school positively. Yet, some students are not given equal opportunity to demonstrate and build their leadership skills”.

Three management members (authorities) disagreed with the Patron and indicated that the vision and mission of the school is achieved to some extent through these prefects. This is what one of them said:

‘Prefects who are non-believers would not ensure that all students are present for church service or all female students wear hijab throughout the day among others. Let me tell you, besides academic studies, each school has its own religious philosophy to be pursued and no school will select a student leader whose religious inclination differs from that of the school’.

The information received from the respondents show the difficulty of achieving academic goal on one the side by school authorities, and the efforts to achieve the religious aspiration of the schools on the other,

especially mission schools, which in a way diametrically opposes that of some students. The issue is a thorny one but not something, that is impossible to achieve. Conflict resolution largely demands trade-offs and cooperation. Both the school authorities together with the student executives can meet and find a way acceptable to all to avoid any religious confrontation.

Doctrinal differences

The information gathered from all the respondents from the various schools indicated that students sometimes do argue or debate among themselves and even some of the teachers, as to the religious tradition that has the good practices or right instructions from God. Students question each other why the other religion's followers do what they do. The study revealed that the argument normally centres on the scripture of both faiths. Each claiming theirs is the path while the others are wrong and are candidates for hell. As debates usually end with a winner because the disputant argued better than the opponent did, the students in an attempt to win do make some pronouncements that result in verbal confrontations between students. Defeated students do not normally accept defeat and that results in conflict between the students. This finding supports the claim made by a key informant who said;

'Religion is the food of the soul and adherents would do anything to protect their religion'.

This, as a factor of interreligious conflict, corresponds to the work of Maregere (2011), who said in an attempt by religious adherents to project their religion as the "True" religion as against the "Untrue", result in clashes among believers. However, about 67% of both management and patrons do not view this as a big issue.

Probing further, information gathered revealed that misinterpretation of the scripture of both religions and disbelief in some portions has also been a cause of interreligious clashes. Such stance, as the study identified, is an indication of inadequate

understanding of the holy books and dogma of the two religions, refusal to learn or accept true meaning even when an explanation is offered. However, some students deliberately do misinterpret the Bible or Qur'an literally to tease or provoke their opponents.

Throughout this study, what was common is the argument that, God is one but not three, Jesus Christ is not God and not the son of God but a messenger of God; also, Jesus Christ was not crucified because he was too powerful to be killed by man from the Muslim students' perspective. The Christians on the other hand said that humans are not slaves to God but His children. Seeking clarification on the common divergence among the students, a key informant explained that God in three persons is believed by Christians to be; God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit (Holy Trinity), which he said has its roots from the Bible where God repeatedly referred to Himself in a plural form as "us" or "our". He quoted the Bible to support this point from Genesis 1:26, which says;

'God said let 'us' create man in 'our' image, in 'our' likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals and over all the creatures that move on along the ground'.

This as the key informant expressed, meant God was referring to Jesus and the Holy Spirit as mentioned in John 1:3, which says; through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him. On the crucifixion of Jesus, he said the Bible proves that indeed Jesus was crucified citing Mark 15:25; Luke 23:23 and John 19:18 among others. He noted during the interview on 29th March, 2017 that;

'God in three persons is more of a mystery and as such, one just has to believe it as it is because it is philosophical. Attempting to understand everything about God actually meant that one wants to understand God entirely, which is impossible'.

The key informant concluded by saying that the Holy Trinity and the death of Jesus form the very foundation of the Christian faith.

In another breadth, a key informant confirmed the plurality of Allah explaining that it is evident whenever Allah is communicating to humanity but disagreed with the holy trinity saying that; that is the one of the basic disagreement and major difference between Christianity and Islam. The key informant added that Islam regards Jesus as a messenger of God and every Muslim believes that. However, Islam does not recognize Jesus as God. Neither do Muslims believe that Jesus was crucified because he was too powerful to be killed by humans. On the reason why Muslims view themselves as slaves to Allah, the key informant explain as follows;

‘Muslims see themselves as slave of Allah as a way of showing total submissiveness and obedience as it is the relationship between a slave and a master’.

Debates of this nature sometimes do culminate into a conflict between these two faiths within the student milieu because such differences are embedded in the very foundation of both faiths as posited by both clergies. Thus, should the very foundation of a religion be disputed, it simply means that religion is under attack. This then explains why students will engage in such verbal disagreement and sometimes attitudinal, to prove that their religion has basis, which makes either religion the “true” one, as indicated by the responses. As Christians belief the Bible and its principles, so also are the Muslims to the Qur’an. The different dogma means that both Christians and Muslims have to tolerate and respect one another.

Proselytization

The field survey in all the schools discovered that attempts by students to convert each other sometimes do result in a conflict between Christian students and Muslims students. According to the respondents, the

practice of attempting to proselytize each other normally happens when the first year students arrive. The respondents further indicated that some students become converted through the influence of their boyfriends or girlfriends. The researchers were also told some students intentionally change their religion or become converted to draw the attention of their parents of their parental neglect. This is the remark made by one student during the FGD;

‘She converted to Christianity because her parents were not attending to her needs but when the parents heard that she had changed her religion, they quickly came to the school with provisions that they would have not and further pledged not to dessert her’.

A converted student executive, however, had a contrary view and remarked;

‘My boyfriend indeed belongs to where I am now (Islam) but it was not because of him that I converted, rather my dream was to become a Muslim one day just for the love of Islam’.

Another newly converted male student to Islam also made a similar statement. About 69% of the patrons agreed with the students. However, they did not perceive the act of conversion as a threat to the peace of the schools. One of the patrons during an interview had this to say about this phenomenon;

‘Students do engage in evangelization acts among themselves mostly when the form one students arrive but that has never caused a serious conflict’.

This study found that in all the schools, the students who willingly converted to the other faith, sets a tone for the newfound faith to be vilified by the abandoned group. However, there was no reported case of physical attack or loss of life, unlike the works of Awojobi (2015), Maregere (2011) and Nwaomah (2011), which identified that newly

converts were killed by their previous religious members, and some preachers in some instances were attacked physically and verbally.

Searching for further information on what it means to convert someone and how it should be conducted appropriately, the researchers consulted two key informants from the two religious divides. The Christian key informant said that some Christians believe that evangelization means to win souls for God by only convincing other religious believers to leave their faith and join them. This is what he said;

'To convert someone does not necessarily mean the fellow should abandon his/her religion but rather the ungodly aspect of the person's life. If the fellow should convert to say Christianity but still lives in sin, of what importance will that be to the newly convert and Christianity as a whole?'

The Muslim key informant, however, disagreed with his Christian counterpart. This is what he said;

'One is seen as converted only when the person professes that Allah is the only one Supreme Being and that the Holy Prophet Mohammed is His messenger'.

The information gathered from the two key informants is a manifestation of the conceptual difficulty surrounding the issue of conversion as viewed with different lenses. The issue of conversion cannot be taken for granted as it can cause a conflict between the followers of the two religions.

Restrictions on the use of some religious items

The information obtained indicated that it was a common practice across all the schools whereby students often clash over the use of some religious items principally the Qur'an, Bible and ablution-can. Some Christian students do not understand why their Muslim colleagues prevent them from touching the Qur'an but they (Christians) allow them to touch and even use the Bible. The Christian students revealed that the Muslim students always threaten them that

should they touch the Qur'an, they would become mad. This, however, as the researchers gathered does not deter these curious Christian students but rather deem it a challenge to touch it and see what the outcome would be. Such attempts by the Christians have always been met with absolute resistance from the Muslims leading to a conflict between them. Therefore, in an effort to revenge, the Christians too refuse to allow the Muslims to touch their Bible. One of the students remarked during the FGD;

'It is a cheat for me to allow a Muslim student to touch and even use my Bible but the fellow will not permit me even to come close to his Qur'an'.

However, in sharp contrasts to the perception of the Christian students, the Muslim students explained that, non-Muslims could not use original Qur'an because there are rules to its usage. One of the Muslim students during the FGD said;

'Even, we as Muslims cannot touch the original Qur'an without purifying ourselves through ablution and so we do not deem it proper to allow a non-Muslim to touch it'.

Probing further as to who is permitted to touch the original Qur'an, a key informant explained that, a Muslim must be clean (through ablution) before handling the Qur'an confirming the point of the Muslim students. The official had this to say during the interview on 9th March 2017;

'I as a Muslim cannot just touch the Qur'an without first performing ablution'.

The information gathered on the handling of the Qur'an could be attributed to lack of understanding. Coping with pluralistic society demands that people should learn to understand themselves to avoid seeming baseless conflicts.

The ablution-can (*buta*) also was also identified as a source of conflict between advocates of the two

religions in the schools studied. The Muslim students prevent Christian students from using the water reserved for performing ablution with the view that, should it get finished, they will not get water to cleanse themselves before praying. Besides, the Christian students are not permitted to use the ablution-can because of their attitude as noted by a Muslim student:

'If we allow you to use it and you will either misplace or mishandle it, then it is better we prevent you from having access to it'.

About 56% of the Christian students on the other hand confirmed utilizing the ablution-can and the reserved water for Muslim students. They explained that to avoid walking long distance to fetch water from the public source, they simply turn to the reserved water which is closer to either the classroom or the dormitory or the ablution-cans, which mostly contain water and easy to use. About 15% of the Christian students attested to the fact that there are instances their members do not return the ablution-cans after usage. It was also mentioned by the Christians that there are instances some Muslim students perform their ablution at the public source of water such as the tap, which is not allowed. About 12% of the Muslim students did agree that some of their members are culpable but they try to discourage them. The Muslims students further indicated that they have to go round and pick all the scattered ablution-cans and have to replace them when they get lost. Additionally, they pointed that, fewer ablution-cans means that their members have to spend much time waiting for others to finish performing their ablution before one can also have access.

A Muslim Patron in one of the studied schools during an interview on 30th March, 2017, noted that some of the Christian students do not want go closer to the ablution-cans or the Muslim reserved water. He said;

'Even if a teacher sends a Christian student to fetch him or her water from the tap using the ablution-can or the polytank by the mosque, that student will refuse for fear of

being verbally attacked by the Muslim students'.

Another Muslim Patron made a similar observation during an interview on 24th March, 2017:

'I was in the classroom and asked a student to fetch me water using the ablution-can whom I did not even know was a Christian. To my outmost surprise, all the Muslim students in that class exclaimed; she is a Christian and cannot go there to fetch the water for you'

The information gathered from the various categories of respondent's point to the fact that the sources of inter-religious conflicts in SHSs are many and varied. An understanding of these sources is the first creative approach to any meaningful conflict resolution among students with different religious traditions. In order for peace to prevail in these schools, collectively all stakeholder have to commit themselves by addressing the identified sources of conflicts in the school situation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has identified a number of factors that cause interreligious conflicts in the second cycle institutions in the Upper West Region namely; compulsory church service and wearing of hijab, power struggle, doctrinal differences, reserved positions, restrictions on religious items, and competition over space and time. These tend to give rise to interreligious confrontations as students want to meet their needs, which are identity, recognition, freedom and security of their religion. As Basic Human Needs theory of Burton (1987) postulates, unless human needs such as identity recognition, freedom and security are met, people will resort to conflict (violence) in order to achieve these needs. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

At the School level, school authorities should ensure that at all times, all students are provided with space to practice their faith. Timetables should be

readjusted to make way for students to undertake their religious activities, and religious tolerance education should be intensified.

At the District level, religious leaders and families should offer cross religious education and training to their followers for effective understanding, co-existence and tolerance of religious plurality. These activities should be expressly encouraged by the District Assemblies and the District Education Offices.

At the National level, the Ghana Education Service should factor religious diversity studies into both students and teacher-trainees curriculum to make them conscious of the need to learn, respect and tolerate one another's viewpoint, as there is none.

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