

Religious Tolerance in Ilorin Emirate: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Background: In multiple societies, such as Nigeria, where various religious communities coexist, religious tolerance is an essential value. An exceptional example of long-lasting interfaith cooperation impacted by Islamic teachings and sociocultural fusion is the Ilorin Emirate.

Objectives: The purpose of this study is to investigate the idea of religious tolerance from an Islamic viewpoint, as well as how it has historically and socially been used in the Ilorin Emirate and what that means for societal cohesion and peace.

Method: This study uses a qualitative methodology with thematic, historical, and textual analysis. Both original sources, such as the Qur'an and Hadith, and secondary sources, such as academic literature and historical documents pertaining to the Ilorin Emirate, are used to gather data.

Results: Justice ('adl), compassion (rahmah), piety (taqwā), and wisdom (hikmah) are the four fundamental characteristics that shape religious tolerance in the Ilorin Emirate. Patterns of institutional integration, interfaith social interaction, and educational influence all reflect these ideas. The report also highlights important issues that jeopardize the longevity of tolerance, such as radical ideologies, political exploitation of religion, and socioeconomic disparity.

Conclusion: By connecting Islamic theological ideas with their real-world implementation in a regional setting, this study adds to the body of literature and shows how religion can be a basis for long-term interfaith harmony. The results emphasize how crucial it is to improve religious leadership, education, and interfaith communication in order to preserve social harmony in plural society.

A. Introduction

In contemporary countries where religious variety, ethnicity, and culture collide, religious tolerance continues to be a major topic of discussion. A community's maturity and social consciousness are demonstrated by its capacity to accept many religious traditions without bias. Nigeria, one of the most religiously diverse nations in Africa, has seen firsthand the resilience and vulnerability of such cohabitation. Religion can be a source of conflict when misinterpreted or politicized, yet it also acts as a unifying identity and moral compass in many places (Bakare, 2025).

The Ilorin Emirate is a unique example of religious inclusiveness and concord within this national framework. Ilorin has developed into a cosmopolitan hub where Muslims, Christians, and followers of indigenous beliefs have mingled for centuries. It is situated at the intersection of the primarily Muslim

northern Nigeria and the predominantly Christian southern Nigeria. Islamic principles and social cohesion have always been balanced by the Emirate's leadership, academic institutions, and traditional rulers. However, this delicate balance has started to be threatened by the increasing impact of globalization, denominational competition, and political manipulation (Ezeudu & Saadu, 2025).

Islamic doctrines, which serve as the Ilorin Emirate's moral and religious foundation, place a strong emphasis on justice (*'adl*), peaceful cooperation, and tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*). Muslims are commanded by the Qur'an to treat others with wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and compassion (*raḥmah*). These ideas have traditionally influenced interfaith interaction in Muslim societies, especially Ilorin Emirate; they are not only theological abstractions (Khahar et al., 2025).

However, in light of current issues like globalization, the political instrumentalization of religion, and the rise of extremist ideologies, prior research has not thoroughly examined the integration between Islamic theological principles of tolerance and their practical manifestation within the socio-political and cultural dynamics of Ilorin Emirate. There is still a gap in connecting Islamic theoretical underpinnings with actual interfaith practices in a methodical and analytical framework, even though previous works have explored religious tolerance in Nigeria in general or looked at Ilorin's historical evolution (Gbadeyan, 2012).

The following research questions are addressed in this study in light of this gap:

- (1) What is the conceptual definition of religious tolerance in Islamic teachings?
- (2) How has the Ilorin Emirate traditionally applied these lessons?
- (3) What are the current issues influencing the Emirate's religious tolerance?
- (4) What effects does religious tolerance have on regional growth, social cohesiveness, and peace?

By offering an integrative analysis that links Islamic normative teachings with historical and modern reality in Ilorin Emirate, this study seeks to close the discovered gap. This study makes three main contributions to science: first, it provides a conceptual synthesis of Islamic principles of tolerance based on scholarly discourse and the Qur'an; second, it contextualizes these principles within the particular socio-historical setting of Ilorin Emirate; and third, it offers a critical assessment of contemporary issues along with useful recommendations for fostering interfaith harmony in plural societies.

Literature Review

Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives on Religious Tolerance

Many people believe that in pluralistic cultures, religious tolerance is both a moral virtue and a sociopolitical requirement. (Ghozali et al., 2025) emphasizes tolerance's significance in averting social conflict and promoting national progress, defining it as an active engagement based on mutual respect rather than passive acceptance. In a similar vein, (Seran, 2025) sees tolerance as a means of maintaining diversity within a cohesive social system.

However, these formulations frequently ignore the theological underpinnings of tolerance, especially in Islamic theology, and instead frame it largely in sociological and political terms. Islamic literature, on the other hand, views tolerance as a moral duty that stems from fundamental values like justice (*'adl*) and kindness (*iḥsān*). According to (Ismail et al., 2023), tolerance in Islam is inextricably linked to the larger idea of peace (*salām*), which includes both social and spiritual aspects.

This viewpoint is further expanded by recent international investigations. For example, (Hasbi et al., 2023) point out that rather than being solely influenced by doctrinal teachings, religious tolerance in Muslim communities is frequently determined by institutional structures and historical relationships. This implies that tolerance is a lived social practice shaped by circumstance in addition to being a theological concept.

Islamic Perspective in Contemporary Scholarly Discourse

The entire aspect of Islamic tolerance, which encompasses respect, communication, and the defense of minority rights, is repeatedly emphasized in scholarly discussions on the subject. (Kalatini et al., 2025) demonstrates how Islamic government has historically accepted religious diversity by using the Prophet Muhammad's contracts with non-Muslim communities.

However, different interpretations are offered by modern researchers. While (Rohmh et al., 2025) offers Islamic tolerance as a foundation for peaceful coexistence and national progress, (Ezeudu & Saadu, 2025) contends that political unrest and security issues frequently limit its applicability in contemporary Nigeria.

This discrepancy shows that while Islamic teachings offer a solid normative basis, their actual application differs greatly depending on the situation.

Additionally, new research that has been published in international publications highlights the necessity of reinterpreting traditional Islamic ideas in light of globalization. (Almahfali & Avery, 2023) asserts that in order to maintain meaningful interfaith interaction, modern Muslim societies must balance ancient beliefs with the current human rights debate. This demonstrates a persistent conflict between theological principles and contemporary sociopolitical reality.

Previous Studies on Ilorin Emirate: A Critical Comparison

Studies that have already been done on the Ilorin Emirate mostly concentrate on its sociopolitical organization and historical development. (Ridwan et al., 2022) emphasizes the Emirate's dual cultural-religious nature as a Yoruba and Islamic community, whereas (Yusuf & Shuaib, 2025) stress the influence of Islamic administration in forming the Emirate's identity.

Although these works give insightful historical perspectives, they typically take a descriptive approach, providing little analytical engagement with the operationalization of Islamic ideals of tolerance in regular interfaith relations. Similar to this, (Jatau & Maza, 2023) make a connection between religious tolerance and national development, but they don't go into detail on how this tolerance is maintained locally.

Local case studies like Ilorin are essential for comprehending how religious tolerance operates in practice, according to more recent international research. (Azubuikwe et al., 2024), for instance, contend that micro-level analyses highlight the significance of socioeconomic considerations, informal institutions, and community leadership in preserving interreligious harmony.

It is clear from the discussion above that earlier research has made a substantial contribution to our understanding of religious tolerance from historical, theological, and sociological angles. Integrative analysis that methodically links Islamic theological ideas with their actual application in particular local situations, like the Ilorin Emirate, is still lacking, nevertheless.

Specifically, previous research has not adequately explored the ways in which modern issues like globalization, political manipulation, and the rise of extremist ideas within the Emirate intersect with traditional Islamic principles of tolerance.

Therefore, by critically examining religious tolerance in Ilorin Emirate from an Islamic viewpoint and integrating both historical insights and current scholarly discussions, this work frames itself as a link between theory and practice.

B. Research Methods

In order to investigate religious tolerance in the Ilorin Emirate from an Islamic perspective, this study uses a qualitative research design. Because it enables a thorough examination of religious ideas, historical advancements, and sociocultural practices within their natural setting, the qualitative technique is deemed appropriate (Almedy, 2025).

Both primary and secondary data sources are used in the study. The Qur'an and Hadith, two ancient Islamic writings that are essential for comprehending Islamic tolerance ideals, are the sources of primary facts. Scholarly publications, journal articles, theses, and historical documents about the Ilorin Emirate, religious tolerance, and interfaith relations in Nigeria make up secondary data. These resources give the study contextual and analytical support (Setiawan et al., 2023).

The study uses thematic analysis and content analysis methods to examine the data. In order to find important notions like justice (ʿadl), compassion (rahmah), piety (taqwā), and wisdom (hikmah), content analysis is used to methodically examine textual sources, especially Islamic texts and scholarly literature. In the meantime, recurrent patterns pertaining to leadership positions, interfaith connections, and sociopolitical processes within the Ilorin Emirate are categorized and interpreted using thematic analysis. An organized and thorough comprehension of both normative precepts and empirical realities is made possible by this dual analytical method (Kwuelum, 2024).

Additionally, this study uses a historical methodology to track the evolution of religious tolerance in the Ilorin Emirate from its founding in the 18th century to the present. This method aids in placing Islamic teachings in the perspective of changing sociopolitical circumstances (Suleiman, 2023).

The study uses source triangulation, which involves cross-examining several data sources, such as religious scriptures, historical narratives, and current scholarly studies, to guarantee the validity and dependability of the conclusions. This process of triangulation reduces the possibility of bias resulting from dependence on a single source and increases the reliability of the interpretations (Morgan, 2024).

Overall, the study offers a thorough and reliable examination of religious tolerance in the Ilorin Emirate because to the combination of qualitative methodology, multi-source data, systematic analytical methodologies, and triangulation.

C. Results and Discussion

Results

Historical Construction of Religious Tolerance in Ilorin Emirate

The study's conclusions show that religious tolerance in the Ilorin Emirate is a historically created phenomena influenced by Islamic reformist movements and sociopolitical integration rather than just a cultural coincidence. A government system based on Islamic principles was implemented when Sheikh Alimi established Ilorin as an Islamic emirate in the late 18th century, taking into account pre-existing Yoruba sociocultural systems (Suleiman et al., 2025).

Studies of Islamization in West Africa have shown that this dual system produced a hybrid socio-religious milieu where Islamic authority coexisted with native customs (Niang, 2021). The analysis also shows that this integration strengthened long-term interfaith stability by allowing non-Muslim populations to preserve their religious identity while taking part in the larger political system (Dagnew et al., 2025).

Thematic Findings on Islamic Principles of Tolerance

This study uses thematic analysis to identify four main themes justice ('adl), compassion (rahmah), piety (taqwā), and wisdom (hikmah) that support religious tolerance in the Ilorin Emirate. Braun and Clarke's qualitative analytical frameworks, which emphasize pattern recognition in meaning-making processes, are consistent with the application of theme categorization (Ahmed et al., 2025).

1. Justice ('Adl) as Institutional Foundation

According to the research, one of the main tenets of interreligious relations is justice. The Qur'anic command makes this clear:

“يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ”

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even against yourselves or your kin. (Q4:135)

This passage illustrates how justice in Islam is unbiased and universal, serving as the foundation for treating people equally regardless of their religious beliefs. The results show that this idea is mirrored in the Ilorin Emirate's governance framework, which applies both Islamic and customary rules to guarantee equity across religious communities (Haq et al., 2024).

2. Compassion (Rahmah) as Social Practice

The results show that, especially through shared community actions, compassion serves as a social mechanism that improves interfaith relations. Such connections, according to empirical research on religion and social cohesion, lessen intergroup conflict and promote trust in plural communities (Munawwaroh & Kustana, 2026).

3. Piety (*Taqwā*) as Ethical Control

According to the study, *taqwā* inhibits prejudice by acting as an internal moral regulator. The following verse from the Qur'an supports this:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
”أَتْقَاكُمْ“

O mankind! We created you from a male and a female and made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you before Allah is the most righteous of you. (Q49:13)

This verse emphasizes that tolerance is a moral duty rather than a social compromise and emphasizes that diversity is divinely designed.

4. Wisdom (*Hikmah*) as Communication Strategy

The results also show that interfaith engagement tactics are shaped by wisdom. The Qur'an gives instructions:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ

“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction” (Q16:125).

This principle supports dialogical engagement and discourages coercion, aligning with contemporary conflict-resolution frameworks.

Discussion

The study's conclusions show that religious tolerance in the Ilorin Emirate is firmly anchored in Islamic moral precepts and supported by sociocultural customs. This bolsters the claim that, when correctly understood and applied, religion especially Islam can serve as a positive influence in fostering peaceful coexistence (Jailani, 2025).

From a theoretical standpoint, the results support (Zahara et al., 2024) notion of tolerance as an active moral engagement as opposed to passive acceptance. This study, however, expands the idea by demonstrating that, in the Ilorin setting, tolerance is not just a sociological construct but also a theologically grounded practice that comes straight from Qur'anic concepts like wisdom (*ḥikmah*), justice (*‘adl*), and compassion (*rahmah*).

The results align with the findings of (Anas et al., 2025) who contend that institutional and social mechanisms, rather than just doctrinal teachings, are frequently responsible for maintaining religious harmony when compared to international research. This study, however, offers an alternative viewpoint by showing that social behaviors and doctrinal teachings in the Ilorin Emirate are intricately linked rather than functioning separately. This implies that Islamic theology influences interfaith relations more directly and practically than was previously highlighted in global studies.

The results also corroborate (Hasbi et al., 2023), who emphasize the importance of community contacts and local institutions in preserving religious harmony. This claim is supported by the Ilorin case, which also shows how religious principles ingrained in educational and leadership frameworks have a big impact on these local mechanisms. This suggests that tolerance in Ilorin is both legitimized by religion and socially produced.

The study does, however, also point out significant differences from some modern viewpoints. The results of this study indicate that traditional Islamic teachings, when properly understood, already contain sufficient ethical foundations to support pluralism and coexistence without requiring fundamental reinterpretation, despite (Khahar et al., 2025) emphasis on the need to reinterpret Islamic principles in accordance with contemporary liberal frameworks. This calls into question the notion that Islamic tolerance needs to be updated in order to be relevant.

Critically, the study shows that both internal and external forces, such as radical ideologies, political manipulation, and socioeconomic inequalities, are posing a growing danger to the viability of religious tolerance in Ilorin. This bolsters the claim made by (Onakuse & Jatula, 2021) that Nigerian religious tolerance is extremely susceptible to security and political factors. However, our study goes one step further by showing that these difficulties stem from the misinterpretation and instrumentalization of Islamic teachings rather than the teachings themselves.

Overall, this study supports the scholarly claim that religious tolerance should be viewed as a multifaceted concept that incorporates theology, history, and sociopolitical dynamics rather than only as a sociological phenomenon. This study advances a more nuanced understanding of how religion can serve as a foundation for enduring peace in plural communities as well as a source of unity by placing Islamic precepts within the lived reality of Ilorin Emirate.

Suggestions

1. **Strengthen Interfaith Institutions:**

Establish permanent interfaith dialogue platforms supported by government and traditional authorities to foster ongoing communication and trust.

2. **Enhance Religious Education:**

Promote curricula in Islamic and Christian schools that emphasize tolerance, respect for human dignity, and shared civic values.

3. **Empower Religious Leaders:**

Provide training for Imams, pastors, and community leaders in conflict resolution and peacebuilding techniques.

4. **Encourage Joint Community Projects:**

Develop interfaith social initiatives such as youth empowerment, health campaigns, and environmental programs that unite diverse groups around common goals.

5. **Support Inclusive Governance:**

Ensure fair representation of all religious groups in local councils, education boards, and policy-making bodies to strengthen social equity.

6. **Combat Extremism through Media and Scholarship:**

Use radio, television, and social media to promote authentic interpretations of Islamic teachings on peace and coexistence.

7. **Promote Economic Justice:**

Address poverty and unemployment, which often serve as breeding grounds for intolerance, by prioritizing community-based economic programs.

Through these steps, Ilorin Emirate can consolidate its legacy as a beacon of interfaith harmony and serve as a model for religious coexistence throughout Nigeria and the wider Muslim world.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that Islamic ethical principles, such as justice (*‘adl*), compassion (*raḥmah*), piety (*taqwā*), and wisdom (*ḥikmah*), are the foundation of religious tolerance in the Ilorin Emirate. These principles are reflected in both institutional structures and daily social interactions, allowing for peaceful coexistence in a plural society. By combining Islamic theological concepts with their real-world application in a particular sociocultural setting, this study advances science by proving that religion can be the basis for social stability and interfaith cooperation. From a pragmatic and policy standpoint, the results emphasize the significance of bolstering interfaith communication, encouraging inclusive education, and augmenting the function of religious leaders in preserving social harmony and averting religious strife. It is advised that

more empirical and comparative studies be conducted in the future to investigate how religious tolerance is practiced in various geographical areas and to look at how modern issues like globalization and internet influence affect interfaith relations.

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F. Author Contribution Statement

The authors solely conceived, designed, and wrote this study.

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