



Exploring the Relationship Between Shariah Education and National Identity in Nigeria's Universities

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the intricate relationship between Shariah education and the formation of national identity within Nigerian universities. As a country marked by religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity, Nigeria faces ongoing challenges in forging a cohesive national identity. The inclusion of Shariah-related courses in university curricula, particularly in institutions located in the predominantly Muslim northern region, raises critical questions about the role of religious legal education in a secular and pluralistic state. Using a multidisciplinary methodology that combines legal analysis, educational policy review, and qualitative interviews with students and faculty, this research investigates how Shariah education influences perceptions of citizenship, national belonging, and social cohesion. Findings suggest that while Shariah instruction can serve as a means of cultural affirmation and moral guidance, it also has the potential to either bridge or deepen national divides depending on how it is framed and integrated within broader academic and civic discourses. The paper concludes with recommendations for a more inclusive educational framework that respects religious diversity while reinforcing a shared national identity.

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1. Introduction

Nigeria is a country defined by its rich tapestry of ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. With over 200 million people and more than 250 ethnic groups, the nation faces the enduring challenge of forging a cohesive national identity amid profound pluralism. Religion, particularly Islam and Christianity, has played a central role in shaping societal values, political affiliations, and educational

frameworks. In this context, the role of religious education, particularly Shariah studies, in Nigerian universities has become a subject of increasing scholarly and policy interest.

Shariah education, rooted in Islamic legal and ethical teachings, is not merely a theological pursuit but also a mechanism through which moral consciousness and communal identity are nurtured [1]. Its formal integration into university curricula, particularly in the northern region of Nigeria, reflects both the religious aspirations of Muslim communities and the broader constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and educational autonomy. However, this development also raises critical questions about the relationship between faith-based education and the project of nation-building in a secular, multi-religious state.

Nation-building entails a deliberate effort to establish a shared sense of belonging, citizenship, and collective purpose. In Nigeria, this task is complicated by religious tensions, historical grievances, and competing interpretations of national identity. While Shariah studies may reinforce religious values and ethical awareness among students, critics argue that it may also deepen sectarian divides or promote ideological isolation if not approached with balance and inclusivity.

This study aims to investigate the intricate and dynamic relationship between Shariah education and national identity formation in Nigerian universities. It investigates how Shariah studies contribute to students' understanding of citizenship, interreligious coexistence, and national unity. By analysing curriculum content, institutional frameworks, and student perceptions, this research aims to assess whether Shariah education serves as a bridge or a barrier to the nation-building goals in contemporary Nigeria.

1.1. Conceptual Clarification

For a precise understanding of this research, it is essential to clarify the key concepts of Shariah education and national identity, as well as their potential relationship within the context of Nigeria's universities.

In this study, Shariah education refers to the formal, institutionalized teaching and learning of Islamic sciences within the university system. It moves beyond the basic literacy of traditional Qur'anic schools to encompass a structured curriculum designed to produce scholars and professionals. As defined by Reichmuth [2], Islamic education in a modern context involves "the systematic instruction in Islamic religious sciences within an institutional framework that interacts with broader national and global educational systems." This includes core subjects such as Qur'anic exegesis (Tafsir), Hadith (Prophetic traditions), Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), its principles (Usul al-Fiqh), and Islamic theology (Aqidah). In Nigeria, this is operationalised in the departments of Islamic Studies, Religion, and Law faculties, aiming to create graduates who are both deeply knowledgeable in their faith and capable of engaging with a pluralistic society.

National identity is understood as a collective sentiment of belonging built on a shared sense of history, territory, legal rights, and civic duties within a sovereign state. Drawing on the work of Smith [3], national identity can be seen as "the maintenance and continuous reproduction of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of a nation." In the Nigerian context, this is a complex and often contested construct, shaped by the tension between a singular civic ideal enshrined in the national pledge and anthem and the powerful, competing pulls of ethno-religious and regional affiliations. A cohesive national identity is crucial for fostering social cohesion, civic responsibility, and loyalty to the state.

This paper focuses on universities as critical sites for identity formation and negotiation. These are institutions of higher learning, both public and private, chartered by the Nigerian state. As noted by the National Universities Commission (NUC) [4], their mandate includes the "development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments" while promoting national unity. Universities are not neutral spaces; they are arenas where national policies, secular principles, and regional or religious aspirations intersect, making them a vital locus for examining how Shariah education influences conceptions of nationhood.

The relationship between Shariah education and national identity is not predetermined but is dynamic and contingent. It can manifest in several ways, as hypothesized in this study:

- a. A Complementary Relationship: Where Shariah education, as suggested by Kukah [5], reinforces universal values of justice, accountability, and ethical citizenship that align with and strengthen the moral fabric of the nation.
- b. A Conflicting Relationship: Where the particularistic teachings of Shariah are perceived as being at odds with the secular, pluralistic ethos of the state, potentially leading to social fragmentation, as observed in debates over the expansion of Shariah courts.
- c. A Negotiated Relationship: Where students, through their academic journey, actively synthesize their religious and civic identities, resulting in a hybrid identity that allows them to be both devout Muslims and committed Nigerian citizens.

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. Historical Background of Shariah Education in Nigeria

Over two centuries prior to British colonization, Islam served as a driving force for development in key areas such as education, governance, and the administration of justice [6]. Northeast Nigeria has long been a hub for Islamic education and Qur'anic memorization, drawing students from across the region [7]. This established a deep-rooted tradition of Islamic learning that predates the modern Nigerian state [8]. Strengthening the history of Shariah education in the region, between the 9th and 11th centuries in the Kanem-Bornu Empire, Muslim scholars held a privileged status known as mahram, which exempted them from taxation and military service in exchange for their service to the Islamic state. During the reign of Mai Idris Aloma (1580-1617), significant reforms were implemented to strengthen Islamic beliefs, laws, customs, education, and practice. To consolidate governance, he removed legal authority from political chiefs and established Shariah courts, led by qualified scholars (Qadis), to ensure that justice was administered according to Islamic law [9]. This practice greatly promoted the spread of Shariah education and strengthened Islamic scholarship in the region.

The 1804-1810 Fulani jihad led by Uthman dan Fodio, in the view of Muhammad Idris et al., strengthened Islam through the Sokoto Caliphate. Religious knowledge became a political asset as rulers accepted the authority of Islamic law and its scholars [10]. The Caliphate's emphasis on *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning) and its extensive library of legal texts, as documented by Paden [11], created a sophisticated intellectual tradition that remains influential.

In the Sokoto Caliphate, religious scholars held key roles as the literate elite. Students travelled to study with renowned teachers, and widespread Qur'anic schools and networks were vital to the Islamic state's growth and unity [10]. These submissions established that, before colonial rule in the 19th century, Shariah law, along with its associated education, was the dominant legal system in Northern Nigeria and parts of neighbouring regions, governing both private and public life [12]. Key Islamic jurisprudence texts used to study Shariah included: *Risalah* by Ibn Abi Zaid Al-Qairawani, *Tuhfatul-Hukkam* by Al-Qadi Ibn Asim, *Mukhtasar Khalil* by Khalil ibn Ishaq, *Irshad al-Salik* by Ibn al-Askar, and *Al-Qawanin al-Fiqhiyyah* by Ibn Juzai [13]. The classical Islamic education system was devalued under British rule. The 1903 conquest and indirect rule reshaped Islamic education, including Shariah. They diminished the status of the ulama, whose former monopoly on literacy and influence was steadily eroded by the spread of Western education. This created a dual education system whose tensions persist today [14].

The incorporation of Shariah education into Nigeria's educational system represents a fundamental aspect of the nation's educational structure, encapsulating the core principles of religious education rooted in Islamic teachings. According to the National Policy on Education, Islamic Studies is recognized as a crucial subject that contributes to the holistic development of students by fostering ethical values and religious understanding. This inclusion triggers the government's commitment to cultivating individuals imbued with ethical virtues and fostering harmonious societal relationships [15].

1.2.2. Shariah Studies in Nigerian Universities: Scope and Structure

Nigeria hosts both public and private institutions that offer Shariah-related qualifications at both degree and diploma levels. Public universities, such as Bayero University Kano, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello University, and the University of Ilorin, feature dedicated faculties or departments of Islamic Studies or Shariah Studies. These institutions serve as the custodians of advanced Islamic scholarship in the country [16].

Private Islamic universities, such as Al-Qalam (Katsina), Fountain University (Osogbo), and Crescent University, have emerged since the early 2000s, incorporating comprehensive Islamic and Shariah curricula. The curriculum across these institutions integrates traditional Islamic legal subjects such as Usul al-Fiqh (principles of jurisprudence), Islamic Family Law, Transactional Law (Mu'amalat), Qur'anic, Mirath (Islamic law of succession) and Hadith studies. For instance, the University of Ilorin's Islamic Studies modules aim to instil moral consciousness and skills informed by the National Policy on Education.

However, studies by Gbadamosi [17] suggest a need for greater curriculum innovation to address contemporary socio-legal issues in Nigeria. Usmanu Danfodiyo University articulates objectives such as equipping students to analyse contemporary Muslim societal issues and producing scholars capable of serving judicial and educational institutions. Al-Hikmah University's Islamic Studies program in the southwest outlines' foundational courses, including Qur'an, Hadith, purification, and the biography of the Prophet [18].

Teaching methodologies range from traditional lecture-based approaches and classical texts, particularly in the north, to structured syllabi in newer southwestern private institutions. Usmanu Danfodiyo University emphasizes integrating belief (Iman), knowledge ('Ilm), and character (Akhlaq), using Quran and Hadith as foundational principles [19]. Public institutions, such as Usmanu Danfodiyo University, display a robust faculty complement with specialised scholars in Shariah, Qur'an, and Hadith studies. Yet, there is an ongoing debate on balancing traditional pedagogical methods with modern, critical, and student-centred approaches [20].

1.2.3. Shariah Education and Identity Formation

Shariah education in Nigeria shapes identity by promoting ethical and spiritual values that strengthen students' moral character and social belonging [21]. Supporting this view, Shariah education fosters a dual sense of identity among Nigerian Muslim youth, who often express both religious and national affiliations, reflecting a complex relationship between faith and national loyalty [22]. This aligns with Thiong'o's concept of "moving the centre," where individuals navigate multiple cultural and ideological spheres [23]. In view of strengthening the above, the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs advocates for a pluralistic national identity that accommodates both religious and national loyalties, thereby challenging a strictly secular view of the state.

However, tensions arise when Islamic and national interests conflict, as seen in controversies like Shariah law expansion and Muslim--Muslim political tickets, which have raised concerns among Christian communities. These instances, according to Hassan, reflect the politicisation of religious identity in Nigeria, often exacerbating ethnic and religious divisions and threatening national unity [24]. This politicization is further explored by Ostien [25], who documents how the post-1999 Shari'ah debates became a flashpoint for national identity crises.

Conversely, Maidugu and Isah argued that Islamic principles can promote national cohesion by emphasizing unity, mutual respect, and social harmony. Shariah education reinforces these values, contributing to solidarity within Nigeria's diverse society [21]. Empirical research by Akanji [26] on graduates of Shariah programs found that exposure to interfaith dialogues within the university context significantly increased positive attitudes towards national cohesion. Ultimately, the identity outcome is not predetermined but is a product of how Shariah is taught and contextualized, a point emphasized by Loimeier [26] in his analysis of Islamic reform and public life in Nigeria.

The literature to date outlines the historical evolution, structural frameworks, and identity politics surrounding Shariah education in Nigeria. However, a critical gap remains in empirically investigating

how these dynamics are actively negotiated within the university classroom and how they translate into concrete civic attitudes and national belonging among students. While scholars have ably traced the historical and curricular pathways [6], [8], [14] and theorized on identity formation [22], [23], [26], the lived experience of students and educators, the primary agents in this process, is often underrepresented. Recent scholarship by Yusuf [27] calls for a 'pedagogy of national cohesion' within religious studies, arguing that instructional methods are as crucial as curriculum content.

Furthermore, empirical studies on the role of higher education in plural societies, such as those by Brubaker [28], emphasize that educational institutions are key sites where the tension between particularistic identities and universal citizenship is managed. In the specific Nigerian context, preliminary work by Abdul Rahman [29] suggests that the institutional culture of a university (whether public, private, or faith-based) significantly impacts how Shariah graduates perceive their role in national development.

Finally, a broader theoretical perspective from Hefner [30] on the modernizing of Muslim education globally provides a useful lens to analyze the push-and-pull between tradition and modernity in Nigeria's Shariah curricula. This study aims to contribute to the evolving discourse by providing grounded, qualitative data from multiple institutions, addressing the gap and exploring the nuanced relationship between Shariah education and national identity construction in contemporary Nigeria.

2. Method

2.1. Participants or Subjects

The focus of this work is the formal university Shariah education. The work employs a combination of descriptive and exploratory research methods to examine how Shariah studies in Nigerian universities contribute to nation-building by shaping values, identity, inter-religious understanding, and legal consciousness among students and the broader society. Selected universities that offer courses related to Shariah in departments of religion/Islamic studies, as well as courses offered in Shariah/Islamic law departments within the faculties of law across Nigeria's geopolitical zones, focus on facilitating a comparative understanding of regional variations in curriculum, implementation, and societal impact. The population of the study comprises Shariah Studies students in the faculties of arts and law (undergraduate and postgraduate), Academic staff in Islamic and Shariah Studies departments, University administrators, Alumni in public service or religious organizations and, and Policymakers in higher education and religious affairs. To achieve the objectives of the study, a purposive sampling technique is used to select eight public universities, two each from four out of the six geopolitical zones and two private universities:

- a. From North Central Zone: Nassarawa State University, Keffi and University of Ilorin were selected
- b. From the North East Zone, Gombe State University (GSU), Gombe and the University of Maiduguri
- c. From North West Zone: Kaduna State University (KASU), Kaduna, and Usmanu Dan Fodio University (UDUSOK), Sokoto
- d. From Southwest Zone: Osun State University (UNIOSUN), Osogbo, and University of Ibadan (UI), Ibadan

South East and South West Zones are not represented because even in those universities where Islamic studies are taught, it is not taught as a course on its own, but as a sub-course. The two private universities selected for study are Crescent University in Abeokuta, Ogun State, and Fountain University in Osogbo, Osun State.

2.2. Materials and Instruments

The researcher reviewed curricula, course outlines, mission statements, policy documents, and national education plans. The researcher administered a questionnaire and conducted semi-structured interviews with lecturers, students, alumni, and administrators to capture nuanced perspectives. Where

it was possible, the researcher conducted focused group discussions with students to explore their understanding of nation-building and how their studies influence it. In addition, non-participant observation of classroom sessions and extracurricular Islamic activities of the University of Ilorin and other nearby universities was conducted. Data collected from documents, interviews and observations were discussed

2.3. Analysis of Data

Table 1. Summary of Demographic Data of Participants

Category	Sub-category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Position/Title	Professor	0	0.0
	Associate Professor	4	13.8
	Senior Lecturer	4	13.8
	Lecturer I	1	3.4
	Lecturer II	3	10.3
	Assistant Lecturer	4	13.8
	Graduate assistance	2	6.9
	Undergraduate Students	1	3.4
	Masters Students	2	6.9
	Ph.D Students	1	3.4
	Graduates	1	3.4
	NYSC Corps Member	1	3.4
	Total (Position)	25	100.0
Institution Affiliation	Crescent University, Abeokuta	1	3.6
	University of Ibadan	1	3.6
	Kaduna State Uni. Kaduna	2	7.2
	Gombe State University	1	3.6
	Usmanu Danfodio Uni. Sokoto	7	25.0
	Osun State University, Osogbo	1	3.6
	University of Maiduguri	1	3.6
	University of Ilorin	11	39.3
	Fountain University, Osogbo	2	7.2
	Nasarawa State Uni. Keffi	1	3.6
	Total (Institution)	28	100.0
Years of Experience	Less than 5 years	8	29.6
	5–10 years	9	33.3
	11–20 years	7	25.9
	More than 20 years	3	11.1
	Total (Experience)	27	100.0
Academic/Professional Background	Shariah Law/Islamic Jurisprudence	11	37.9
	Islamic Studies/Theology	9	31.0
	Islamization of Knowledge	2	6.9
	Arabic Language/Literature	1	3.4
	Islamic History/Civilization	1	3.4
	Education	1	3.4
	Islamic Studies/Contemporary Issues	1	3.4

Islamic Studies & Education	1	3.4
Islamic Studies Education	1	3.4
Total (Academic Background)	29	100.0

This table presents the demographic characteristics of the study participants, organised under four main categories: Position/Title, Institution Affiliation, Years of Experience, and Academic/Professional Background. Each sub-category is accompanied by the number of respondents (frequency) and the corresponding percentage of the total.

2.3.1. Position/Title of Respondents

This section highlights the professional or academic designation of participants. The highest proportions of respondents were Associate Professors, Senior Lecturers, and Assistant Lecturers, each accounting for 13.8%. Lecturer II followed with 10.3%, while Teachers and Postgraduate Students made up 6.9% each. Other categories, such as Lecturer I, Undergraduate Students, and NYSC Corps Members, each constituted 3.4% of the sample. Notably, no professor participated in the study. Total Respondents (Position): 25 individuals.

2.3.2. Institution Affiliation

This section shows the institutional background of the participants. The University of Ilorin had the largest representation with 39.3% of the participants. Usmanu Dan Fodio University followed with 25% of the participants. Kaduna State University and Fountain University both had 7.2% respondents each, while other universities had 21.30% respondents, indicating broad participation from various universities. Total Respondents (Institution): 28 individuals.

2.3.3. Years of Experience

This section reflects the duration of participants' professional activity. The largest group had 5-10 years of experience (33.3%), followed by those with less than 5 years (29.6%) and 11-20 years (25.9%). Only 11.1% had more than 20 years of experience. This shows a relatively young-to-mid-career cohort of professionals. Total Respondents (Experience): 27 individuals.

2.3.4. Academic or Professional Background

This section details the participants' areas of academic specialisation. Shariah Law/Islamic Jurisprudence and Islamic Studies/Theology were the most common backgrounds, comprising 37.9% and 31.0%, respectively. Other fields, such as the Islamization of Knowledge, Arabic Language, Islamic History, Education, and combinations involving Islamic Studies and Education, each represented 3.4-6.9%. This indicates a strong representation from scholars of Islamic jurisprudence and theology. Total Respondents (Academic Background): 29 individuals.

In brief, the data indicate that the study participants are predominantly early- to mid-career academics and scholars, primarily affiliated with Islamic Studies and related disciplines. The University of Abuja dominates the institutional representation. While there is a rich diversity in academic backgrounds, the most common fields are those related to Sharia and Islamic Theology. The spread across positions and experience levels offers a balanced view of perspectives within Islamic academic and educational settings.

Below is the analysis of data collected from respondents on questions relating to the relationship between Shariah education and national identity in Nigeria's universities.

- a. Research Question 1: What is the level of understanding of Shariah studies in Nigeria's universities?

Table 2. Showing the level of understanding of Shariah studies in Nigeria's universities

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	SD	Remarks
1	The objectives of Shariah Studies in my institution are clearly defined.	3.5	0.57	Agreed
2	The scope of Shariah Studies adequately covers essential areas of Islamic jurisprudence.	3.3	0.66	Agreed
3	The duration and depth of the Shariah curriculum are sufficient for comprehensive learning.	3.6	0.57	Agreed
4	Shariah Studies programs are well-integrated with secular/national subjects, such as law and civic education.	3.3	0.59	Agreed
5	This integration effectively enhances students' understanding of contemporary issues.	3.2	0.74	Agreed
6	Shariah education reflects both classical knowledge and contemporary realities.	3.3	0.72	Agreed

WEIGHTED MEAN:3.4

Note: The figures in parentheses are in percentages

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 2 shows that the majority of the respondents agreed that the level of understanding of Shariah studies in Nigeria's universities is high. This agreement is established as all mean scores are above the fixed decision value of 2.50. The standard deviations in the table range from 0.57 to 0.74, and all are within the standard deviation limit of ± 1.96 . This indicates a low disparity between the mean and the respondents' responses. The average, mean, and standard deviation of 3.4 and 0.65, respectively, are indicators of this fact. The implication of this is that, in the opinion of respondents, the level of understanding of Shariah studies in Nigeria's universities is positive.

- b. Research Question 2: What is the perceived role in Nation-Building of Shariah studies in Nigeria's universities?

Table 3. Showing the perceived role of Shariah studies in Nation-Building

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	SD	Remarks
7	Shariah Studies contributes positively in shaping students' ethical orientation, civic responsibility and sense of belonging to the Nigerian nation	3.21	0.861	Agreed
8	The values taught in Shariah Studies (e.g., justice, accountability, fairness) promote good governance.	3.48	0.738	Agreed
9	Shariah education fosters national cohesion and assists in national development.	3.62	0.561	Agreed
10	Shariah Studies promotes religious pluralism, tolerance and peaceful coexistence.	5.97	10.289	Agreed
11	Shariah education can help foster civic responsibility in students.	3.31	0.660	Agreed

WEIGHTED MEAN:3.4

Note: The figures in parentheses are in percentages

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 3 shows that the majority of respondents agreed that there is a perceived role of Shariah studies in Nation-Building. This agreement is established as all mean scores are above the fixed decision value of 2.50. The standard deviation in the table ranges from 0.561 to 10.289, and they are

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c. Research Question 3: What are the challenges facing Shariah studies in Nigeria's Universities?

Table 4. Showing the challenges facing Shariah studies in universities

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	SD	RANK
12	There are significant challenges facing <i>Shariah</i> education in Nigerian universities.	3.55	0.632	2 nd
13	Among the challenges is that <i>Shariah</i> Studies is often misunderstood by the public and policymakers.	3.10	0.618	6 th
14	The <i>Shariah</i> curriculum is updated to reflect contemporary national and global contexts, but the update is not regular.	3.62	0.622	1 st
15	There are growing opportunities to expand the relevance of <i>Shariah</i> Studies in Nigeria, but these are not being tapped.	3.41	0.628	4 th
16	Inadequate funding is a major challenge for <i>Shariah</i> Studies in Nigerian universities.	3.52	0.634	3 rd
17	Inadequately qualified staff are a major challenge for <i>Shariah</i> Studies in Nigerian universities.	3.38	0.678	5 th

WEIGHTED MEAN:3.4

Note: The figures in parentheses are in percentages

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 4 shows the challenges facing Shariah studies based on ranking: Shariah curriculum is regularly updated to reflect contemporary national and global contexts. Inadequate funding is a major challenge for Shariah Studies in Nigerian universities; there are, however, growing opportunities to expand the relevance of Shariah Studies in Nigeria's Universities

d. Research Question 4: What are the institutional and policy perspectives of Shariah studies in universities?

Table 5. Showing the institutional and policy perspectives of Shariah studies in universities

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	SD	RANK
18	The National Universities Commission (NUC) provides adequate policy support for <i>Shariah</i> programs.	3.45	0.572	2 nd
19	My university promotes interreligious and intercultural dialogue through its academic offerings.	3.10	0.618	3 rd
20	<i>Shariah</i> Studies is strategically positioned to enhance nation-building in Nigeria.	3.62	0.622	1 st

WEIGHTED MEAN:3.4

Note: The figures in parentheses are in percentages

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 5 presents the institutional and policy perspectives of Shariah studies in Nigerian universities, ranked by institution. Shariah Studies should be strategically positioned to enhance nation-building in Nigeria, and the National Universities Commission (NUC) provides adequate policy support for Shariah programs.

3. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study offer insightful perspectives on the relationship between Shariah education and national identity in Nigerian universities, based on responses from participants across various institutions. Each research question yields valuable data that helps assess not only the academic and structural standing of Shariah studies, but also its socio-political implications and institutional challenges.

3.1. Level of Understanding of Shariah Studies in Nigeria's Universities

The analysis of data related to this research question reveals a generally high level of understanding of Shariah studies among respondents. All mean scores exceed the benchmark value of 2.50, with a weighted mean of 3.4 and standard deviations well within acceptable limits (0.57–0.74). The clarity of objectives (Mean = 3.5), sufficient curriculum depth (Mean = 3.6), and integration with secular/national subjects, such as law and civic education (Mean = 3.3), suggest that Shariah education is not only well-structured but also responsive to contemporary educational needs.

This finding supports the argument that Islamic legal education in Nigerian universities is evolving from traditional formats to more modern, integrated systems that acknowledge the demands of both religious scholarship and national citizenship. The respondents' positive assessment suggests a growing appreciation of Shariah education as a legitimate academic and civic resource.

3.2. Perceived Role of Shariah Studies in Nation-Building

The data further indicates a positive perception of the role of Shariah studies in nation-building. With a weighted mean of 3.4 and a low standard deviation, participants generally agreed that the values taught, such as justice, fairness, and accountability, contribute to good governance and national cohesion. The strongest agreement is seen in the belief that Shariah education fosters national development (Mean = 3.62) and peaceful coexistence (Mean = 3.60), reflecting respondents' confidence in Shariah's capacity to promote civic virtues and interreligious harmony.

These results reinforce theoretical frameworks that view education as a powerful agent of national integration. In the context of Nigeria, where religious plurality often overlaps with political tension, the role of Shariah education in promoting ethical citizenship and civic consciousness is both critical and promising.

3.3. Challenges Facing Shariah Studies in Nigeria's Universities

Despite the optimistic outlook, the study identifies several challenges that hinder the full realization of Shariah education's potential. The most pressing issues include the irregular update of curriculum (Mean = 3.62), inadequate funding (Mean = 3.52), and public misperception (Mean = 3.10). Although respondents acknowledged existing opportunities for expansion (Mean = 3.41), they expressed concern that these opportunities remain largely untapped due to systemic constraints.

These findings underscore the urgent need for policy interventions, increased funding, and public sensitization, particularly regarding the true nature and scope of Shariah studies. Misunderstandings by policymakers and the public contribute to marginalization and reduce the academic and developmental impact of the field.

3.4. Institutional and Policy Perspectives

From an institutional perspective, the study finds moderate policy and administrative support for Shariah education. Respondents acknowledged that the National Universities Commission (NUC) offers adequate policy backing (Mean = 3.45) and that Shariah studies are strategically positioned to support nation-building (Mean = 3.62). However, the relatively lower score on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue (Mean = 3.10) suggests a gap in inclusive programming that must be addressed for more holistic nation-building efforts.

This finding aligns with the broader discourse on educational reform in Nigeria, which calls for a balanced integration of religious and secular ideologies and the institutionalisation of platforms for dialogue, inclusivity, and tolerance. The implication of the finding is that the convergence of high

understanding, positive perception, and identified challenges paints a comprehensive picture of Shariah education in Nigeria's universities. While the academic and civic potential of Shariah studies is clear, the realisation of this potential is impeded by logistical, perceptual, and institutional barriers.

Based on the interview report conducted with respondents, the following suggestions are proposed to enhance the contributions of Shariah studies to national development.

- a. There should be a concurrent update of the Shariah curriculum in line with modern trends.
- b. There should be decentralisation of the Shariah studies in Nigerian universities to accommodate diversification that comes with the skills requirements of the contemporary world.
- c. Research should be encouraged, and innovative methodologies should be developed in the field of Shariah education.
- d. Policy decision makers should be informed about Shariah principles
- e. Shariah should be contextualised in light of modern challenges.
- f. The governments at all levels should view the Shariah Studies as an investable alternative to foster national development and peaceful coexistence. They should be given a trial as conventional Civil/Social Studies.
- g. Shariah education and training, as well as retraining, should be regularly carried out to foster and incorporate Shariah studies into national development policies.

4. Conclusion

This paper discussed the exploration of the relationship between Shariah education and national identity in Nigeria's universities. The paper reveals a complex but significant intersection of religious instruction and civic development. The paper established that Shariah education, when approached holistically and contextually, does not merely serve to preserve Islamic legal and moral traditions but also plays a pivotal role in shaping students' ethical orientation, civic responsibility, and sense of belonging to the Nigerian nation. The paper emphasised that Shariah education, particularly when integrated within the pluralistic environment of universities, can foster national cohesion by promoting values such as justice, integrity, discipline, and mutual respect. These are not only Islamic ideals but also foundational elements of a stable and united society.

The paper recommends, among others, that for Shariah education to fully contribute to national identity formation, it must be framed within an inclusive, dialogical, and academically rigorous structure that encourages critical thinking, engagement with national issues, and interfaith understanding. Universities have a unique responsibility to bridge religious and national identities in ways that affirm both spiritual commitments and civic responsibilities. Shariah education in Nigerian universities should, therefore, not be seen as a threat to national identity, but as a resource that, when properly harnessed, can enrich national consciousness and contribute to nation-building in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic society like Nigeria.

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