

FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST NATIONAL INTEGRATION AS EXPRESSED BY YOUTHS IN OYO STATE: IMPLICATIONS FOR GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

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Abstract

This study investigated factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was employed in this study. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select 403 respondents in Oyo State. A research instrument, titled: "Factors Militating against National Integration Questionnaire (FMANIQ)" was used to collect data from the respondents. The content validity was done by five lecturers from the Department of Social Work at the University of Ibadan and the reliability was ascertained by test-retest method with coefficient of 0.78. The data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that; unemployment, youth restiveness, media influence promoting division, religious intolerance, social discrimination, socioeconomic disparities, historical grievances, environmental degradation, lack of access to basic services like healthcare, electricity, sanitation and education, lack of intercultural dialogue were among the major factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State. Further findings showed that there were no significant differences in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on gender and age. However, there was a significant difference in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on religion. It was recommended that; youths should be empowered with skills for employment through government-invested development programmes, tackling unemployment and fostering national integration. Guidance counsellors, in partnership with the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other key stakeholders, should organise seminars and workshops to identify and address challenges militating against national integration among youths in Oyo State and the entire Nigeria.

Keywords: Factors militating, National integration, Youths, Counselling, Oyo State

Introduction

Nigeria has a highly diverse population, consisting of over 250 ethno-linguistic groups, some of which are larger than many independent states across contemporary Africa. National integration aims to enhance respect and tolerance among people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This process involves uniting ethnic and religious groups into a harmonious society while ensuring equal opportunities for all. It fosters patriotism and national pride, recognising and valuing diversity, encouraging mutual coexistence and maintaining the distinct identities of various groups within society.

National integration, as defined by Ibrahim and Adigun (2022), is the process of creating unity within a society to foster harmony in all aspects. According to Ogwuche, Adikwu, and Shamo (2021), national integration refers to the collective dedication of individuals within a society to the nation, ensuring that personal or group interests do not undermine the nation's stability, goals,

objectives, or principles. However, in contemporary times, tribalism and religion have unfortunately become significant sources of tension, challenging Nigeria's efforts to build a united and modern nation. Ibrahim, Durosaro, and Garba (2021) observed that efforts by Nigeria to promote national integration have encountered significant challenges. The country grapples with various crises, including Boko Haram insurgency, kidnapping, theft, murder, militancy in the Niger Delta region, armed robbery, protests by different groups, attacks on churches and mosques, corruption, youth unrest, ethnic conflicts, negative political and electoral practices, and religious rivalries. These issues pose significant threats to peace, conflict resolution, economic progress, security, and national integration in Nigeria.

A country achieves successful integration when violence is minimised, and resources are distributed fairly. It is evident that many youths harbour concerns regarding the prevailing issues of insecurity, unresolved land disputes, nepotism, favouritism, marginalisation, religious conflicts, and underdevelopment in Nigeria. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2024), youths, typically defined as individuals aged between 18 and 35 years, constitute a significant portion of the Nigerian population, estimated at 88.9 million. These youths possess diverse needs that necessitate attention for their holistic development and adaptation. Ibrahim, Durosaro, and Garba (2021) outlined various needs of youths, including educational, emotional, social, and psychological aspects, which must be addressed to facilitate their growth. These needs encompass aspects such as achieving personal autonomy, striving towards a coherent personality framework, developing a life philosophy, understanding personal strengths and weaknesses, fostering independence from parental influence, and adapting to changes resulting from socio-economic dynamics, among others.

In Nigeria today, unemployment poses a significant threat to national integration, as many youths struggle to secure jobs that provide financial stability (Christian, 2021; Obi, 2023). This challenge contributes to numerous social issues and criminal activities, including poverty, hunger, theft, armed robbery, vandalism, kidnapping, political violence, prostitution, and other illegal acts that fuel unrest and insecurity. Haralambos (2021) stressed the need for rural development to curb mass migration to cities, cautioning that unchecked urban unemployment could severely undermine peace and stability. Poverty, which frequently stems from youth unemployment, has escalated to a critical level in Nigeria, driving much of the violence witnessed across the nation (Ogwuche, Adikwu, & Shamo, 2021).

Corruption stands as a significant impediment to national integration and a major cause of conflict in Nigeria. It has deeply permeated various sectors of society, including all levels of government and diverse segments of the population (Usman & Adeboye, 2021). Corruption manifests in a myriad of forms, ranging from illicit trade practices such as smuggling and human trafficking to financial misappropriation, bribery, and abuse of office. Nigeria has unfortunately become a society where corruption is not only tolerated but also glorified, leading to conflicting perceptions among youths regarding its morality and implications (Osamwonyi, 2016). When efforts to combat corruption lack unity and coherence, the problem persists and becomes increasingly challenging to address. Even anti-corruption agencies themselves are not immune to this pervasive social malaise, further complicating the fight against corruption (Usman, & Adeboye, 2021).

Unresolved land disputes greatly undermine national integration among youths in Nigeria, often sparking conflicts between ethnic and communal groups (Obi, 2023). Disputes over land ownership, boundaries, and resource control create deep-rooted tensions that lead to hostility, violence, and division. Many of these conflicts arise from historical claims, political influence, and

weak land management policies, making resolution challenging. When left unaddressed, these disputes foster resentment and a sense of exclusion among affected youths, increasing their susceptibility to radicalisation, militancy, and social unrest (Adeleke, 2022). Furthermore, land conflicts contribute to forced displacement, disrupting education and economic activities, which further widens social divisions. The absence of effective conflict resolution strategies, such as mediation and transparent legal frameworks, worsens the situation, making it difficult to build trust and unity (Ibrahim, Durosaro & Garba, 2021).

Religious intolerance exacerbates national divisions, particularly between Christians and Muslims, causing conflicts, especially in Northern Nigeria. Extremist groups like Boko Haram exploit these divides, recruiting impressionable youths into violent campaigns that further destabilise the country (Eze, 2021). Religious leaders can sometimes worsen tensions by promoting divisive rhetoric rather than encouraging interfaith harmony. This mistrust between youths from different religious backgrounds makes it difficult to foster national integration. Religious intolerance influences not only worship but also political and social interactions among young people. The ongoing religious conflicts alienate many youths, deepening divisions and perpetuating cycles of mistrust (Adaralegbe, 2024). Since religion in Nigeria is often intertwined with ethnic identities, these conflicts become even more complex and harder to resolve.

Political manipulation and economic inequality significantly hinder national integration among Nigerian youths (Adeleke, 2022). Many politicians exploit ethnic and religious tensions to further their agendas, particularly during elections, leading to youths being used as instruments of violence and unrest. This exploitation erodes trust in the political system and discourages constructive engagement in national processes (Obi, 2023). Economic inequality exacerbates feelings of exclusion, pushing marginalised youths toward divisive ideologies. Poor education leaves them ill-equipped to understand the value of national integration, making them vulnerable to divisive rhetoric (Usman & Adeboye, 2021). Additionally, social media spreads misinformation that inflames ethnic and religious tensions, further complicating efforts toward unity among youths.

Revenue allocation in Nigeria remains a major political issue, with debates centering on how to distribute funds fairly among the states (Olukoju, 2024). Oil-producing regions favour the derivation principle, while northern states advocate for population-based allocation. Despite special considerations for oil-producing areas, the current system lacks broad acceptance among ethnic groups, threatening national unity (Musa & Yakubu, 2022). This issue also affects Nigerian youth, especially in regions where inequality in resource distribution is perceived. In oil-rich areas, youth feel marginalised, leading to unrest and militant activities. However, youths in less affluent areas may feel disadvantaged, increasing frustration. These tensions contribute to social unrest, religious violence, and political instability among youths across the country (Adaralegbe, 2024).

Examining the influence of gender, age, and religion on national integration among youths involves understanding their interaction and impact. Gender shapes perceptions through experiences of discrimination, role expectations, and access to opportunities, leading to differing views on integration (Ogwuche, Adikwu, & Shamo, 2021). For instance, studies have shown that women often express higher levels of concern about gender discrimination, which can influence their sense of national belonging and integration (Etekpe & Amadi, 2020; Ibrahim & Adigun, 2022). Age introduces generational differences, with younger youths possibly holding more idealistic views compared to the more nuanced perspectives of older youths. Additionally, technological influences vary across age groups, affecting their engagement with national issues (Haralambos, 2021). Younger individuals, being more active on social media, may encounter more polarised views,

which can impact their expressions of national unity. Religion plays a crucial role, with beliefs shaping views on national identity and integration. Inter-religious relations and regional religious tensions also influence youths' expressions, with areas experiencing religious conflicts facing more significant integration challenges (Adeleke, 2022).

Several research studies related to national integration had been conducted in Nigeria. For instance, Adewale and Shittu (2021) studied on effects of **ethnic diversity** on national integration among Nigerian youths. The research found that ethnic bias and tribalism create deep divisions that prevent unity. Young people often form social circles along ethnic lines, which hamper the development of a collective national identity. Musa and Yakubu (2022) focused on the effects of **religious conflicts** on national integration among Northern Nigerian youths. The findings revealed that religious intolerance and extremism among youths have led to deep-seated divisions. These conflicts not only cause disunity but also perpetuate violence. The study stressed the need for religious tolerance education to combat this problem. Fashola and Ogunleye (2020) examined the impact of **unemployment** on national integration among youths in South-western Nigeria. Unemployment rates were found to be alarmingly high, leading to disenchantment among youths. The research discovered that joblessness often drives youths into activities that further divide the nation, such as political thuggery and sectarian violence. Economic disillusionment fosters resentment and leads to disunity. The study argued that creating employment opportunities could serve as a unifying factor. Oladipo and Bello (2021) studied on the role of **political thuggery** in disrupting national integration among Nigerian youths. The findings showed that political thuggery encourages regionalism, further dividing the nation along ethnic lines. Political violence has become a tool used by some politicians to manipulate youths for electoral gain. This often exacerbates ethnic and regional divisions.

Etekpe and Amadi (2020) examined *the influence of youth restiveness on national integration in the Niger-delta*. The findings revealed that these frustrations have led to widespread discontent among youths, which hinders national integration. Environmental degradation and economic marginalization were the key factors. The findings also emphasised that youth restiveness in the region was fueled by grievances related to resource control and marginalisation. Nwankwo and Okeke (2021) investigated *role of corruption in national disintegration among Nigerian youths*. Corruption, particularly in leadership, was found to be a significant source of distrust among youths. The findings revealed that corruption exacerbates regional and ethnic divisions, as certain groups feel marginalised. Youths tend to associate corruption with a lack of accountability, which undermines their trust in the government.

Usman and Adeboye (2021) studied on *misinformation and its impact on national integration among Nigerian youths*. The findings revealed that misinformation, particularly on social media, exacerbates ethnic and religious tensions. Young people are often exposed to fake news that deepens mistrust between different groups. Ibrahim and Adigun (2022) carried out a study on *youth perception of government policies and national integration in Nigeria*. The findings revealed that many youths feel that government policies disproportionately favour certain regions or groups. This sense of inequality leads to feelings of resentment, which hinders national integration. Ajayi and Onyekwere (2020) worked on *cultural diversity and national integration by the Nigerian youth*. While cultural diversity is often seen as strength, the findings revealed that it can lead to division when not managed properly. The lack of policies promoting inclusion and mutual respect among different cultural groups was identified as a major issue. Youths are particularly vulnerable to cultural polarisation. Although despite the efforts of earlier researchers on national integration, to the best knowledge of the researchers, none of the previous researchers had conducted a study on

factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State; the main focus of this study was to advance knowledge and fill the existing gap from the aforementioned studies in literature. Therefore, the study contributed and filled the gap by investigating factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State. Also, the influence of moderating variables such as gender, age, and religion were examined on factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State.

Research Question

The research question was raised and answered in the study:

1. What are the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on age.
3. There is no significant difference in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on religion.

Methodology

The researchers employed a descriptive survey design because the study investigated factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State. Descriptive survey design involves collecting data through questionnaires, or interviews to answer research questions about the status, attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours of a specific group or population. The study population consisted of youths aged between 18 and 35 years in Oyo State. According to data from the Oyo State Agency for Youth Development (2024), the total youth population within this age range in Oyo State was estimated to be 1,100,368. Following guidelines provided by Research Advisors (2006), a sample size of 384 was deemed appropriate given the size of the population. To account for potential attrition, an additional 5% (19 individuals) was added to the sample, resulting in a total sample size of 403 respondents. The study encompassed all three Senatorial districts within Oyo State.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted in selecting samples for the study. At the first stage, purposive sampling technique was used to select the three senatorial districts (Oyo North, Oyo South, and Oyo Central) in Oyo State, Nigeria. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in survey. At stage 2, proportional sampling technique was used to select appropriate number of respondents in each selected senatorial district (Oyo North =161, Oyo South=110, and Oyo Central =132) in Oyo State. Proportional sampling is a method of sampling in which the investigator divides a finite population into sub population and then selects a sample from each stratum in proportion to its size.

Table 1: Selected Youths in Each Senatorial District in Oyo State, Nigeria

S/N	District	Population of youths	Selected Sample size
1	Oyo North	440,029	161
2	Oyo Central	360,142	132
3	Oyo South	300, 197	110
Grand Total		1,100, 368	403

Source: Oyo State Agency for Youth Development, 2024

At stage 3, the selection of the sample was based on simple random technique. This is a sampling procedure in which each sample has equal probability of being selected. A sample chosen randomly is meant to be an unbiased representation of the total population. According to Turney and George (2024), simple random sampling technique is a method in which each sampling unit or individual in the population has equal chances of being included in a desired sample. In all a total of 403 respondents were selected for the study.

The researcher designed the instrument for data collection based on the literature review and titled: "Factors Militating against National Integration Questionnaire (FMANIQ)". The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by five lecturers from the Department of Social Work at the University of Ibadan. Reliability was assessed through the test-retest method, wherein the instrument was administered twice to a group of youths in Ilorin South Local Government with a two-week interval. The correlation of the two sets of scores was assessed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.78.

The questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A gathered demographic data, while Section B addressed factors militating against national integration among youths. Section B was structured using a four-point Likert-type rating scale format: Strongly Agree = 4 points, Agree = 3 points, Disagree = 2 points and Strongly Disagree = 1 point. The benchmark for the instrument was established by summing the response points and dividing by 4, resulting in a mean score of 2.5 (i.e., $4+3+2+1=10/4=2.5$). Mean scores of 2.5 and above were considered as factors militating against national integration among youths, while mean scores below 2.50 were not. The null hypotheses were tested using Independent t-test at a significance level of 0.05.

Results

The study selected 403 participants using a simple sampling technique, and all of them were provided with the questionnaire. However, only 400 filled questionnaires were returned and considered for data analysis.

Demographic Data of the Respondents

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents Based on Gender, Age and Religion

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	202	50.5
Female	198	49.5
Total	400	100.0
Age		
18-26 years	245	61.25
27-35years	155	38.75
Total	400	100.0
Religion		
Christian	210	52.5
Muslim	190	47.5
Total	400	100.0

Table 2 presented that 202 representing (50.5%) of the respondents were male, while 198 representing (49.5%) of the respondents were female, indicating that a higher number of male respondents participated more than female counterparts. Based on age, 245 representing (61.25%) of the respondents were between 18 and 26years; while 155 representing (38.75%) of the respondents were between 27 and 35years, this indicated that 18 and 26 age groups had the highest level of participation. Based on religion, 210 representing (52.5%) of the respondents were Christians and 190 (47.5%) of the respondents were Muslims, thus this showed that Christian respondents participated more than Muslims in this study.

Research Question: What are the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State?

Table 3: Mean and Rank Order of Factors Militating against National Integration as Expressed by Youths in Oyo State

N	Items	Mean	SD	Rank	Remark
12	Unemployment	3.89	0.84	1 st	Agreed
8	Youth restiveness	3.87	0.95	2 nd	Agreed
11	Media influence promoting division	3.85	0.68	3 rd	Agreed
5	Social discrimination	3.81	0.55	4 th	Agreed
9	Historical grievances	3.77	0.83	5 th	Agreed
7	Language barriers	3.69	0.76	6 th	Agreed
14	Regional disparities in development	3.64	0.68	7 th	Agreed
15	Ethnic and tribal divisions	3.61	0.59	8 th	Agreed
2	Religious intolerance	3.60	0.83	9 th	Agreed
6	Socioeconomic disparities	3.57	0.61	10 th	Agreed
4	Security threats (i.e. terrorism and insurgency)	3.53	0.72	11 th	Agreed
13	Lack of transparency in government	3.51	0.64	12 th	Agreed
3	Environmental degradation	3.49	0.54	13 th	Agreed
1	Lack of access to basic services (i.e. healthcare, electricity, sanitation, and education)	3.46	0.69	14 th	Agreed
10	Lack of intercultural dialogue	3.41	0.73	15 th	Agreed

Researcher's Fieldwork, 2025

Table 3 showed the mean and rank order of factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State. The table showed that all items were expressed by youths as factors militating against national integration in Oyo State, because all the items were ranked above the mid-mean score of 2.50. Therefore, items with mean values of 3.89, 3.87 and 3.85 respectively preceded others and were ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. The items were unemployment, youth restiveness, and media influence promoting division. In addition, items 3, 1 and 10 with mean values of 3.49, 3.46 and 3.41 were the least ranked items, that is, 13th, 14th and 15th. They indicated environmental degradation, lack of access to basic services like healthcare, electricity, sanitation, and education, and lack of intercultural dialogue.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on gender

Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test showing Factors Militating against National Integration as Expressed by Youths in Oyo State Based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. value	p-value
Male	202	54.08	6.83	398	1.83	1.96	0.079
Female	198	52.75	6.97				

Table 4 showed that the calculated t-value of 1.83 was less than the critical t-value of 1.96, thus, the hypothesis was accepted. This implied that there was no significant difference in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on gender.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on age

Table 5: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test showing Factors Militating against National Integration as Expressed by Youths in Oyo State based on Age

Age	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	p-value
18-26 years	245	53.86	7.05	398	1.56	1.96	0.058
27 -35years	155	52.72	6.72				

Table 5 revealed that the calculated t-value of 1.56 was less than the critical t-value of 1.96, thus, the hypothesis was accepted. This implied that there was no significant difference in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on age.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on religion

Table 6: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test showing Factors Militating against National Integration as Expressed by Youths in Oyo State based on Religion

Religion	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	p-value
Christian	210	54.02	6.99	398	2.10*	1.96	0.017
Muslim	190	52.49	6.76				

Table 6 showed that the calculated t-value of 2.10 was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96, thus, the hypothesis was rejected. This implied that there was a significant difference in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on religion.

Discussion

The study's findings revealed that youths expressed several factors as hindrances to national integration, including unemployment, youth restiveness, media influence promoting division, lack of intercultural dialogue, environmental degradation, and inadequate access to basic services such as healthcare, electricity, sanitation and education. These findings aligned with previous research by Ibrahim and Adigun (2022), who identified unemployment, lack of basic services, and ethno-religious conflicts as significant factors contributing to national disintegration in Nigeria. Additionally, the findings are consistent with Arogundade's (2014) study, which highlighted bad governance, corruption, weak institutions, and a lack of adherence to values such as transparency and accountability as obstacles to national integration in Nigeria. The reason supporting this finding might be that youths are facing similar challenges when it comes to factors militating against national integration, and some of these factors include economic disparities, lack educational opportunities, unemployment, restiveness, and regional disparities in development. These factors contribute to sense of division, making it challenging for youths to fully engage in activities that promote unity and national integration.

Findings showed that there was no significant difference in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on gender. This implied that the expression of both male and female youths were not significantly different on the factors militating against national integration in Oyo State. This is not in support of the findings of Adebayo and Afolabi's (2024) research that found gender differences in perceptions of factors militating against national integration in Osun State. Hence, the reason for this finding might be that socioeconomic disparities, youth unemployment, lack of access to basic amenities, and social inequalities affect all members of society, regardless of gender. These concerns are likely to result in similar expressions among male and female respondents.

Findings indicated that there was no significant difference in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on age. This implied that the expression of youths were not significantly different on the factors militating against national integration in Oyo State based on age. Peer groups and social circles may play a significant role in shaping individual's expressions. Youth in these age groups often interact with one another and may share and reinforce their expressions on national integration.

Findings also revealed that there was a significant difference in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on religion. This implied that the expression of Muslim and Christian youths were significantly different on the factors militating against national integration in Oyo State. The finding contradicted that of Adekunle (2024) whose study revealed that Christian and Muslim students had no significant difference in the factors

militating against national integration in Ogun State. Religious beliefs could shape one's worldview and perspectives on national integration. Therefore, Muslim and Christians could have different religious teachings and interpretations that influence their expressions on factors militating against national integration.

Implications of Findings for Guidance and Counselling

The presence of unemployment, youth restiveness, ethnic and tribal divisions, religious differences, media influence promoting division, historical grievances, language barriers, and social discrimination poses significant challenges to development and peaceful coexistence among youths. These challenges have important implications for the practice of counselling. Counselling, as a profession, plays a crucial role in helping individuals understand themselves, manage their life activities, develop their own perspectives, and make rational decisions. Guidance counsellors are tasked with instilling and maintaining desirable behaviours among their clients. Therefore, the implication of this study underscores the urgent need for Nigeria to recognise, embrace, and integrate professional counselling into all empowerment and developmental programmes aimed at youths.

Guidance counsellors should proactively address the issue of unemployment, which is currently plaguing not only Oyo State but also the entire Nigeria. They should demonstrate their expertise, proficiency, and creativity in tackling this problem by providing youths with the necessary psychological empowerment to succeed as productive members of society. To achieve this, guidance counsellors can employ various techniques and strategies, including vocational education, career days, workshops, hands-on training, transformative approaches, and field trips. By equipping youths with the appropriate skills and abilities for the workforce, counsellors can help them become responsible future leaders and integrated citizens, thus contributing to national integration efforts.

Counsellors should play a vital role in educating youths about the detrimental effects of discrimination and prejudice, fostering inclusivity within society. They should equip young individuals with enhanced communication skills, enabling them to engage in productive dialogues with people from diverse backgrounds. By collaborating with media outlets and offering guidance to youths, counsellors can leverage media platforms to promote messages of conflict resolution, peace, and mutual understanding, empowering youths to address disputes constructively. Also, counsellors can utilise media channels to educate youths about the rich tapestry of cultures, traditions, and perspectives within their nation, cultivating tolerance for diversity. Encouraging youth participation in community-based media initiatives focused on unity and shared values further reinforces these efforts.

Counsellors should play a crucial role in bridging the gap between religious institutions and young people, facilitating national integration by emphasising unity, tolerance, and shared values while respecting individual religious beliefs. They can underscore common values across religions, focusing on principles such as compassion, love, and social justice that can unify diverse groups. Organising interfaith events is another strategy counsellors can employ to bring together youths from various religious backgrounds, promoting harmony and mutual understanding. Counsellors can also utilise history as a tool for promoting cultural awareness, celebrating the rich diversity of traditions within the nation. By incorporating historical knowledge and narratives into counselling sessions and educational initiatives, counsellors contribute to nurturing a sense of national identity, unity, and integration among youths. Guidance and counselling services in schools serve as essential mechanisms for dispelling ignorance, illiteracy, and misinformation, crucial for fostering national integration and cohesion. These services should be extended to all members of the school

community and society at large to promote national unity. Counselling programmes implemented in schools and other educational institutions emphasise moral discipline, dedication to academics, hard work, and allegiance to constituted authorities. These attributes are fundamental for achieving national integration in Nigeria, especially considering that education shapes the minds of youth, who are the future leaders of the nation.

Guidance counsellors should collaborate to establish a forum aimed at tackling the challenges hindering national integration, especially among Nigerian youth. Counsellors across Nigeria should facilitate platforms where leaders and various stakeholders in society can engage in regular dialogues with young people. This approach will create opportunities for valuable discussions and decisions on how to channel the energy of Nigerian youth towards productive endeavors, fostering peace, progress, and sustainable development in the country. Seminars and workshops should be organised by guidance counsellors in collaboration with the government, Non-Governmental Organisations and other stakeholders in order to discuss and address problems militating against national integration among youths in Oyo state and the entire Nigeria.

The primary objective of counselling is to empower individuals to gain insight into their thoughts, behaviours, and challenges, enabling them to make informed decisions and find solutions to their problems, thereby becoming productive members of society. It is crucial that professional counselling services are readily available to Nigerian youths, parents, caregivers, and political leaders at all levels of governance. Collaborative efforts between organisations like the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) or the Association of Professional Counsellors in Nigeria (APROCON) and the government should focus on promoting family and community counselling to address the diverse needs of Nigerian youths in terms of career guidance and personal-social counselling. The study believes that such initiatives will significantly contribute to promoting national integration in Nigeria.

The findings showed that there were no significant differences in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on age and gender. This implied that counsellors should address factors that hinder national integration and focus on fostering interethnic understanding, promoting cultural awareness and sensitivity, addressing prejudices and biases, facilitating dialogue and conflict resolution, and implementing educational programmes to promote unity and respect among youths regardless of age and gender. Further findings revealed that there was a significant difference in the factors militating against national integration as expressed by youths in Oyo State based on religion. This implied that religious differences could be a challenge to national integration; therefore, counsellors need to play a crucial role by promoting tolerance, understanding, and dialogue among different religious groups. Counsellors should facilitate workshops, group discussions, and counselling sessions aimed at fostering mutual respect, empathy, and peaceful coexistence among youths with diverse religious beliefs. Counsellors should also advocate for inclusive policies and initiatives that celebrate diversity while emphasising shared values and unity among youths regardless of their religious affiliations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed several factors hindering national integration as perceived by youths in Oyo State. These include unemployment, youth restiveness, divisive media influences, social discrimination, historical grievances, environmental degradation, limited access to essential services such as healthcare and education, and lack of intercultural dialogue. Addressing these challenges effectively requires targeted initiatives through guidance and counselling to empower youths in fostering national integration in Nigeria. Also, the findings indicated that there were no

significant differences in the factors militating against national integration based on age and gender among youths in Oyo State. However, a significant difference was observed in these factors based on religion. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

- Youths should be empowered with skills for employment through government-invested development programmes, tackling unemployment and fostering national integration.
- Youths should benefit from fair distribution of resources, including infrastructure and social services, a responsibility that lies with the government, to tackle disparities and grievances that may lead to restiveness.
- Youths should harness the power of social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and other online channels to promote national integration, unity, and inclusivity, rather than perpetuating divisive content and harmful ideologies.
- Youths should be educated in school about the history and diversity of the nation to develop a better understanding of the root causes of historical grievances, break down barrier, and build more united and equitable society.
- Youths of all ages and gender should have access to counselling and mentorship services. These services are specifically designed to address the challenges they face in promoting national integration, which is essential for building a united and cohesive society.
- Youths should be empowered by religious leaders to become agents of national unity, through sermons that transcend religious divides and promote a shared vision of a harmonious and integrated society.

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