Research Article

Exploring Radicalisation Phenomenon Among Muslims in Ghana: Challenges And Prospects

Nurul-Haqq Yahuza[1], Kabuye Uthman Sulaiman[2], Ahmad El-Muhammady Bin Uthman El-Muhammady[3]

1. International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC-IIUM), Malaysia;
   nhaqq98@gmail.com ✉
2. International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC-IIUM), Malaysia;
   kabuye@iium@edu.my
3. International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC-IIUM), Malaysia;
   elmuhammady@iium.edu.my

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Abstract. Radicalisation is a phenomenon that advocates and promotes violence related with or justified by specific ideological, political, social, or religious views. Conflicts is the major engine of these violent extremism and radicalisation, with nations participating in a violent conflict or witnessing high levels of political terror. This has accounted for more than 99 percent of all terrorist related deaths. The acts of terrorism and violent extremism are confronting reality in the globe and an ongoing threat in Ghana and beyond. The study focuses on radicalisation and violent extremism, i.e. youth involvement in engaging in terrorism activities in Ghana. It explores the root causes of radicalisation, ideological factors, socio-economic systems, and external (regional and international) factors to radicalisation and violent extremism. The study also seeks to understand the counter measures adopted by the government to address the issues and evaluates its strength and weaknesses

in order to propose improvement. The following factors are presented against the background that youth radicalisation in Ghana is an increasing phenomenon, and a better knowledge of the process and the elements involved with radicalisation and youth membership in violent extremist organizations is required. The methodology employed was qualitative, hence interviews were conducted. The findings show that the major challenges to radicalisation in Ghana were the case of unemployment and the influx of audio tapes /videos of Nigerian scholars into the Ghanaian Islamic mainstream media/Saudi graduates. Other challenges that were also identified by respondents as elements that drives Muslim youths towards radicalisation included extreme love for religious leaders. It was suggested that in order to solve the issue of radicalisation, there should be programs that aims at promoting dialogue and reconciliation among Muslims in Ghana, and also eeliminating all forms of extremist ideologies. again, educating Muslims in Ghana on what Islam says about radicalisation and the dangers associated with it.

Keywords: Radicalisation, Terrorism, Muslims, Ideology, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Ghana is a country in West Africa, along the Gulf of Guinea. Ghana, which lies in the centre of the Gulf of Guinea coast, 2,420 km of land borders with three countries: Burkina Faso (602 km) to the north, Ivory Coast (720 km) to the west, and Togo (1,098 km) to the east. To the south are the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean. Ghana has been justifiably hailed as an oasis of peace and a role model for democratic governance in Africa despite being in a sub-region that in the past has been plagued by civil wars and political instability.

Ghana's democratic foundations have grown for over two decades as the country experienced eight consecutive elections without slipping into nationwide violence. Since 2001, there have also been three peaceful transfers of power between Ghana's two dominant political parties, the current ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) – the main opposition party. This makes Ghana rather unique in the African context, as most African countries since the proliferation of multiparty elections in the early 1990s have experienced some form of electoral violence.[1]

These achievements, notwithstanding, the comparative picture masks significant weaknesses within the Ghanaian state itself. Ghana's population is predominantly made up of young people, with over 60% of the population below the age of 25. This young population presents both opportunities and challenges for the country, as it seeks to provide education, healthcare, and employment opportunities for its youth.[2]

Despite the progress made, Ghana still faces several challenges, including poverty, inequality, and corruption. The country is also vulnerable to climate change and environmental degradation, with deforestation and soil erosion being major

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[1] Oduro, Franklin; Selvik, Lisa-Marie; Dupuy, Kendra. *Democratic Backsliding in Africa?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023). pp. 112–136, doi:10.1093/oso/9780192867322.003.0005
[2] Ibid, Oduro, Franklin et'al, 2023

issues. These issues when not addressed, could lure youths into cases of radicalisation.[3]

Radicalisation is the process of a person subscribing to extremist ideology. This can include legitimising support for, or use of, terrorist violence. The majority of people who commit terrorism offences do so of their own agency and dedication to an ideological cause.[4]

Radicalisation is a phenomenon that advocates and promotes violence related with or justified by specific ideological, political, social, or religious views. Conflicts is the major engine of these violent extremism and radicalisation, with nations participating in a violent conflict or witnessing high levels of political terror. This has accounted for more than 99 percent of all terrorist related deaths. The acts of terrorism and violent extremism are confronting reality in the globe and an ongoing threat in Ghana and beyond.

Radicalisation has been a major source of worry across the world. It has been connected to the loss of life as well as generating fear in inhabitants of both developing and wealthy countries. The majority of radicalized adolescents and youths were employed, highly educated, and involved in their communities. Negative feelings of discrimination, political persecution, and the impact of spiritual leaders were important motivators for radicalisation.[5] The drivers of radicalisation in the British Isles were extremist ideologies that enthralled teenage and young people, and members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) were seen as celebrities.[6] Added to that, western Jihadists are driven by psychological issues such as identity difficulties, personality trait and relative deprivation within a group. Most adolescents and youths, according to Erikson 's psychosocial theory, are at the stages of growth where they are striving for an identity.[7] It has also been discovered that radicalisation terrorism has been linked to Muslim adolescents and youth, notably Muslim adolescents and young who seek to cause disturbance and devastation.[8] It can also be

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[3] Ibid, Oduro, Franklin et'al, 2023

[4] United Kingdom. Channel duty guidance: Protecting people susceptible to radicalisation. 2023. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651e71d9e4e658001459d997/14.320_HO_Channel_Duty_Guidance_v3_Final_Web.pdf (accessed on 18th November 2023).

[5] Precht, T. "Home Grown Terrorism Islamist. An Assessment of the Factors Influencing Islamist Extremism and Suggestions or Counter Radicalisation Measures. Danish Ministry of Justice. 2007. Available at: https://www.justitsministeriet.dk/sites/default/files/media/Arbejdsomraader/Forskning/Forskningspuljen/2011/2007/Home_grown_terrorism_and_Islamist_radicalisation_in_Europe_-_an_assessment_of_influencing_factors__2_.pdf

[6] Allen, K. "Breeding ground: Analysing higher education in the United Kingdom and the Allure of Islamic extremism". *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 4, (2015): 238-248.

[7] Michael King & Donald M. Taylor. The Radicalization of Homegrown Jihadists: A Review of Theoretical Models and Social Psychological Evidence Terrorism and Political Violence. Volume 23, Issue 4. (2011)

[8] Lynch, O. "British Muslim Youth: Radicalisation, Terrorism and the Construction of the "Other"." *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 6(2), 2013: 241-261.

stated that Nigerian people joined Boko Haram to protest secular westernization in Nigeria, notably democratic elections and co-educational learning.[9]

The pervasive unwillingness of governments and international organizations to adjust policies and viewpoints to the realities of youth has resulted in undesirable and preventable outcomes. In Sub-Saharan Africa, an increase in the youthful population aged 15–24 is associated with a substantially lower prevalence of social disturbance. This demonstrates that there must be a reason that motivates youngsters to join violent organizations.[10] Hummer[11] contends, based on Mercy Corps research, that causes of youth violence are more directly linked to concerns of weak governance and marginalization. To ensure that counter-violent extremism discourse and initiatives do not further dehumanise and condemn young people or entire communities, they must be critically studied and critiqued. Furthermore, there is a need to ensure that this critique does not gloss over the uncomfortable and challenging problems at the heart of the terrorist problem.[12]

Over the last two years especially, there is almost no week that passes without a news item or the other reporting terrorists attack somewhere in West African. The numerous attacks and kidnappings by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Algeria and attacks in Northern Mali including the Sahel region are some examples. More closer to Ghana in Nigeria, Boko Haram has stepped up its attacks against civilians and the Nigerian security services. Boko Haram is a Nigeria-based militant Islamist group which has caused mayhem in various parts of Nigeria. They have carried out bombing, assassinations and abductions in both Nigeria and Cameroon. Their main objective is to topple the Nigerian government and create an Islamic state based on their version of Islam. The attacks by Boko Haram are not only frequent but with increasing casualties and damage. The situation in Nigeria especially has recently raised questions about the state of preparedness of West African countries, especially Ghana, in dealing with radicalisation which in turn resort to terrorist activities. With Muslims being tagged especially in terrorist activities worldwide, the current study is therefore timely in seeking to investigate the prevention of radicalisation among Muslims in Ghana, and by focusing on the challenges and prospects thereof.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are various views by scholars and commentators on terrorism or acts of terrorism. These views are nearly as diverse as the number of writers and commentators who have tried to make sense of this new and compounding challenge

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[9] Zenn, J. and Pearson, E. "Women, Gender and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram". *Journal of Terrorism Research*, 5(1). 2014: doi:10.15664/jtr.828.

[10] Urdal, H. and Hoelsher, K.,. Urban Youth Bulges and Social Disorder An Empirical Study of Asian and Sub-Saharan African Cities. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 5110*, (2009). [online] Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1503804 [Accessed 1st June 2023].

[11] Hummer, L. *Youth & consequences: Unemployment, Injustice and Violence*.(2015). Available at: https://www.mercycorps. org/research-resources/youth-consequencesunemployment-injustice-and violence [Accessed 25th May 2023].

[12] Ibid, Hummer, L. 2015.

confronting the entire sub-region; especially when it involves issues preventing radicalisation among Muslims in Ghana.

In an attempt to understand the Radicalisation Phenomenon Among Muslims in Ghana, 2012-2022: Root Causes and Preventive Measures, several studies have been undertaken or commissioned. To begin with, the ECOWAS Commission conducted a Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (CRVA) in Ghana in 2017, which unearthed evidence of political violence manifesting through the politicization of communal conflicts, activities of politically-affiliated youth vigilante groups, and election related violence as threats facing Ghana.

What drives youths to radicalisation?

Furthermore, the African Union Commission's (AUC) Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment (CSVRA) and Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategy report (2019) identified, among several issues, inadequate coordination and limited information sharing among security sector agents; extremism, radicalisation, religious fundamentalism and terrorism; porous borders and irregular migration; the politicization of state security agencies; criminality and organized crime including human trafficking and smuggling' inadequate capacity and resources of state security agents as key security sector risks in Ghana. These Reports further identified electoral violence, vigilantism, and land and chieftaincy disputes as key governance-level risks in Ghana.

Again, the 2021 'Tracking Violent Extremism Spillover from the Sahel to Littoral West Africa' report by ELVA in cooperation with ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate and WANEP identified the challenges associated with increasing extremist activity.

The issue of doctrinal differences, poverty, marginalisation, unemployment, chieftaincy conflicts and political vigilantism

It is within this broad context and other factors that other vulnerabilities are located. Aning and Abdallah had previously argued that issues of doctrinal and interpretational differences among the various Islamic groupings, youth bulge and funding support from the Gulf states constitute key drivers of radicalisation and extremism among Muslims in Ghana. The study carried out several FGDs and interviews in Wa, Bolgatanga and Tamale and provided strong indications of the nexus between the youth bulge and tension among different Islamic groups.[13]

Similar studies discuss issues of poverty, marginalisation, unemployment, chieftaincy conflicts and political vigilantism as some of these drivers contributing to this discourse.[14]

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[13] Aning, K. & Abdallah, M.. "Islamic radicalization and violence in Ghana". *Conflict, Security & Development*, 13:2, (2013): 149-167.

[14] Awudu, F. 2015. 'Islamic Radicalization in West Africa: An Examination of the Case of Tamale, Northern region', A Thesis Submitted to the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, (KAIPTC).

Ghana's current vulnerability to violent extremism

Aning and Amedzrator[15] have also argued for a more nuanced and differentiated appreciation of the various risk factors which are present and can contribute to heightening and precipitating the possible operations of extremist organizations including; (a) structural motivators, (b) individual incentives, and (c) enabling factors. While these factors paint a picture of some of the underlying issues in the country, Ghana's current vulnerability to violent extremism appears to exhibit a complex set of interactive factors spanning both internal and external factors. Among others, ineffective border controls, illegal small-scale or artisanal mining (Galamsey) and related use of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) and social exclusion all contribute in differing dimensions to the potential for radicalisation and violent extremism, and therefore need to be further interrogated in addition to various forms of 35 conflicts— the dynamics of which will be discussed in the following section.[16]

Conflict dynamics and violent extremism

The various literatures also indicated that, Ghana, unlike many West African countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, and Guinea, has not experienced full-blown civil conflicts. However, it is characterized by many localized conflicts that continue to threaten its peace and stability. Research indicate that, while none of the ten administrative regions in the 36 country (now 16 administrative regions) is resilient from one form of conflict or the other, the three northern regions (now five) have recorded a number of conflicts, including inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic disputes that were the consequences of chieftaincy, land/boundary, identity disputes, and contestations over resources.[17]

The historical factors

To understand the nature and causes of conflicts in Northern Ghana, there is a need to examine historical factors which reflect principally in the structures created by colonial administrations/policies to exploit and deliberately breed mistrust between ethnic groups and how these underlying dynamics have been compounded by post-independence politics.[18] To facilitate indirect colonial governance, the two main systems of traditional rule and social organisation in northern Ghana, (the hierarchical and acephalous) were interfered with through the creation of 'foreign and intrusive' chieftaincy structures that also affected the land tenure systems.

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[15] Aning, Kwesi & Kwaku Danso (Eds.). *Managing Election-related Violence for democratic Stability in Ghana.* Eds. (Accra: FES, 2012).

[16] Ibid, Aning, Kwesi & Kwaku Danso (Eds.) 2012.

[17] Salifu, E.S. and Longi, F.T. 'Conflicts in Northern Ghana: Search for Solutions, Stakeholders and Way Forward', Institute for Continuous Education and Interdisciplinary Studies, University for (2013).

[18] Kendie, S. B. *Conflict Management and Peace Building for Poverty Reduction*. Tamale: GILLBT Press, 2010.

This historical antecedent partially underpins the persisting inter-ethnic, chieftaincy and related land conflicts in northern Ghana.[19] Additionally, while intra-religious tensions and agro-pastoralist conflicts continue to create insecurities in certain parts of the country, persisting divisions between the two dominant political parties the NPP and NDC have resulted in politically related violence, and since the early 2000s produced a dangerous phenomenon characterized as political vigilantism.[20]

The gap in literature

Literature exists on radicalisation of young people in Ghana; even though the focus seems to be on the Northern part of the country. The gap in in the following literatures reviewed above, indicate that, the stability of Ghana's democratic practice has arguably not translated into addressing socio-economic and governance challenges, characterized by limited active citizenship, endemic corruption, rent-seeking activities and clientelism, stalling local governance and weak macro-economic fundamentals that continue to persist. The current research intends to fill that gap. In fact, the nexus between democracy and the distribution of its socio-economic dividends are at best tenuous in the Northern regions.

Another gap that this research seeks to cover focuses on the contrasting approaches taken at the national and local levels in defining and constructing the sources, nature, and direction of extremist threats facing Ghana. While state and official pronouncements appear to perceive the threat as mainly external, and thus focus more on preventing a spillover and infiltration of extremists from neighbouring countries, locals appear to be more concerned about how internal socio-economic and political factors are driving survival strategies and subtle cross-border interactions that expose desperate populations, especially the youth, to radicalism.

Consequently, there are perceptible differences in views on whether the emphasis should be placed on security measures along the borders, surveillance operations and policing of public places or efforts at addressing structural inequalities and insulating the youth in Ghana in general against recourse to extremism and radicalisation rather than limited discussions on Northern Ghana.

Official statements suggest that an externally-driven extremist attack is imminent, prompting a shift in emphasis from 'prevention' to 'pre-emption'. Nonetheless, the Report argues that care must be taken not to neglect internal vulnerabilities that expose populations to extremism, and thus pays attention to both internal and external sources of vulnerability, particularly on the interactions between them, the regional nuances, and the ways in which they manifest in the five northern regions. The current research seeks to fill the gap inclusively, by looking at

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[19] Aapengua, C. M. *The Dagbon Conflict and Cognitive Processes. Northern Ghana Peace.* (2012). October 9 2012 Available at http:/northernghanapeace.typepad.com/northern_ghana_peace/2008/10/the-dagbon-conf.html

[20] Attuquayefio, P. & Darkwa, L. "Towards Elections 2016: Addressing the Phenomenon of Political Vigilantism" (LECIAD Policy Brief, 2016).

both internal and external factors that are major causes of radicalisation in Ghana and how they could be resolved.

METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative study based not only on the relativist ontology but also on the interpretivist constructivist epistemology and research paradigm respectively. Constructivist research paradigm acknowledges the active role played by social actors in the continual process of creating truth and meaning about the world while the interpretivist epistemological perspective seeks the "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67).[21] Interpretivism thus acknowledges that knowledge is understood as not only subjective but also encompassing the subjective views of the actors involved.

This study employed an exploratory case study design. A case study design is relevant as it enables detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. It also allows for an inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.[22] This was my intention in the present study. The case study design helped in understanding the Radicalisation Phenomenon especially among Muslims in Ghana, thus extending experience or adding strength to what is already known through previous studies and research.

Sample and sampling procedure

The nature of a study dictates to a large extent not only the research methods but also the types of participants.[23] Generally, researchers use either probability or nonprobability sampling methods. Whereas, probability sampling seeks to ensure every case in the population has equal and non-zero chance of being selected, non-probability sampling operates on reasons other than mathematical probability (Bloor & Wood, 2006).[24]

For this study, I used purposive sampling, which is a non-probability kind of sampling useful in identifying primary participants.[25] Purposive sampling is utilized where detailed and in-depth analysis is considered more significant and there is less concern with statistical accuracy such as in research that adopts an interpretive and constructionist paradigm (Durrheim, Painter, & Blanche, 2006).[26] In addition, the

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[21] Crotty, M. *The Foundations of Social Research.* (London: Sage Publications, 1998).

[22] Yin, R.K. Case Study Research: Design and Methods. (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1984).

[23] Hycner, R. H. 1998. Some Guidelines for the Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Data. In Bryman & R. G. Burgess (Eds.), *Qualitative Research.* Vol. 3, (London: Sage), pp. 143-164.

[24] Bloor, M. & Wood, F. Reflexivity. In *Keywords in qualitative methods.* (London: SAGE, 2006), pp. 146-147.

[25] Welman, J. C., & Kruger, S. J. *Research Methodology for the Business and Administrative Sciences.* (Johannesburg: International Thompson, 1999).

[26] Durkheim, K., Painter, D., & Blanche, M. T. *Research in practice: Applied Methods for the Social Sciences.* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2006).

research uses snowball sampling which entailed asking participants to recommend other relevant participants to the study.[27]

1.   **Methods/Research instruments**

As part of the study, the research shall be collected using both primary and secondary data. Secondary data will be obtained through archival research while primary data will be obtained through oral and written interviews.

2.   **Interviews**

An interview is a face-to-face interpersonal situation in which the interviewer asks the interviewee questions designed to elicit responses significant to the research problem.[28] The questions used in interviews help the researcher not only gather data but also gain insight into the thoughts, feelings, beliefs and experiences of people. Interviews used in qualitative research such as this one, not only strives to appreciate the world from the perspectives of the respondents but also explore their experiences.[29] In this study, I shall use semi structured interviews, written interviews as well as a focus group discussion (FGD).

3.   **Semi structured Interviews**

In semi-structured interviews, the researcher sets the outline for the topics to be covered in the interview. However, the interviewee's response determines to some extent the direction of the interview.[30] In this study, the semi-structured interview was based on an interview schedule. In total, about five (5) face-to-face interviews will be conducted.

4.   **Focus group discussion (FGD)**

A focus group discussion is a kind of interview that involves a researcher engaging a group of respondents who possess certain characteristics in a discussion on a certain issue or topic.[31] Focus group discussions are different from individual interviews because, just like in everyday life, participants influence and are in turn influenced by others. In addition, not burdened by the need to be neutral, the moderator provides a prompt that triggers a discussion where the collective opinion is given more significance than the aggregate view.[32]

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The following include the discussion of findings on *Exploring Radicalisation Phenomenon Among Muslims in Ghana: Challenges and Prospects.* It includes interviews conducted with selected respondents in Ghana.

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[27] Crabtree, B. F., & Miller, W. L. (Eds.). *Doing Qualitative Research: Research Methods for Primary Care.* (Vol. 3). (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 1992).

[28] Dilshan, R. M., & Latif, M. I. "Focus Group Interview as a Tool for Qualitative Research: An Analysis." *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences* (PJSS), 33(1), (2013), 191-198. Retrieved from http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.704.3482&rep=rep1&type=pdf

[29] Ibid, Dilshad & Latif, 2013

[30] Stuckey, H. Three types of interviews: Qualitative research methods in social health. Journal of Social Health and Diabetes, 01(02), (2013), 056-059. doi:10.4103/2321-0656.115294

[31] Op.cit, Dilshad & Latif, 2013

[32] Op.cit, Dilshad & Latif, 2013

What is your understanding of radicalisation phenomenon among Muslims in Ghana?

On the question of what radicalisation phenomenon represents, some respondents were of the view that it is the process where Muslims imbibe ideologies and force them to be adopted as a way of social reform or change.[33] Among Ghanaian Muslims, radicalisation primarily occurs via a direct and/or an indirect attempt by religious elites—teachers, preachers, etc.—to lure their students and followers alike into believing everything they say, preach, or teach on its face value, whether right or wrong in line with universally accepted best practices standards.[34]

Some other respondents held that the radicalisation phenomenon among Muslims in Ghana may refer to extreme actions or utterances by some Muslims in confronting religious issues and changes surrounding them.[35]

According to Mr. Amir, can involve an adoption of extreme beliefs and ideologies;

Radicalisation also refers to the process by which an individual adopts extreme beliefs, ideologies, or Political views, often leading to a willingness to engage in violent or disruptive actions. That said among Muslims in Ghana, the radicalisation phenomena can be seen where politicians in their quest to gain political power with the backing of our youth seen as vessels for promoting violence. Another example is the influence some religious leaders have on our youth in brainwashing them with certain beliefs and principles that do not fall in line with the teachings of the religion.[36]

According to Mr. Apusiga, radicalisation can refer to a disagreement due to doctrinal or ideological differences. In his words, he opined that:

Radicalisation among Muslims in Ghana can be referred to the disagreement or disputes among the various Muslim groups in Ghana due to doctrinal or ideological differences. Example, the ideal of Mauleed celebrationis something that often creates disagreement among the Tijania and the Ahlul Sunna wal Jama'a due to differences in their understanding on Qur'an and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad.[37]

In other responses, radicalisation has been attributed to belief in extreme religious ideas that may allow individuals to act in a manner that is odd to the usual behavior of Muslims.[38]

This notwithstanding, Imam Ali believed that Muslims in Ghana fortunately are generally not classified as radicals. He further indicated that:

History of Islam in Ghana down to 50 years ago has not recorded any form of continues radical activities. It would as well be fair that, there has been relatively controlled strides within a brief period of instances where there were clashes between the two dominant Muslim fashions; the Tijaniyyah and Ahlul-Sunnah wal jama'a groups. The common faces during the period were Shaikh Abdullahi Ahmad Maikano

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[33] Bilqis Jamal is a student at the Ghana School of Law.
[34] Ayatullah Saeed is Graduate student.
[35] Engineer Najeeb Mohammed is a Technical Support Engineer at Delta Air Condition Company Limited.
[36] Mr. Amir Jamal is a Computer Engineering Graduate
[37] Mr. Apusiga Samad is Businessman
[38] Laila Idris is a Gradute Student from the Ghana Institute of Journalism.

from Tijaniyya faction, and Sheikh Abdulsamad of blessed memory and Shaikh Taufic Albakari and Shaikh Alfa Ajura of Tamale.[39]

Radicalisation has also been seen as a process by which an individual or a group adopts extreme political, religious, or ideological views that justify violence against others who do not share or accept those views. According to Professor Khalidu, Radicalisation can lead to violent extremism and terrorism, which pose serious threats to the peace and security of the society. He posited that:

Radicalisation among Muslims in Ghana is an emerging threat that has been linked to Religious influences and personal motivations. Some Muslims in Ghana may be exposed to radical interpretations of Islam through online platforms, transnational networks, or local preachers, which can challenge their moderate and tolerant views. Some radical groups may use religious rhetoric and symbols to justify violence and recruit followers. Some Muslims in Ghana may have personal reasons to join radical groups, such as seeking adventure, excitement, recognition, or revenge. Some radical groups may appeal to their psychological needs and offer them a sense of purpose, direction, or fulfillment.[40]

The view of Professor Khalidu is shared by Imam Bala, who believe that his understanding of the phenomenon of radicalisation amongst the youth in Ghana is that, it is a gradual process of intellectual acceptance or participation in extremism and terrorism in any form whatsoever against an opposition.[41]

Whilst some respondents viewed radicalisation as inciting one group against the other due to differences in religious beliefs or opinions with regards to their world view,[42] others also look at radicalisation among Muslim youths in Ghana as the misbehaviours of the youth that contradicts the laws of the Ghanaian constitution.[43]

What drives youths to radicalisation in Ghana?

On the question of what drives youths towards radicalisation in Ghana, various factors were presented by respondents including lack of proper education or low level of literacy, political Influence, and Injustice among the youth. Beyond that, some respondents attributed the phenomenon to poverty, dogmatism, and economic hardships. The case of unemployment and the influx of audio tapes /videos of Nigerian scholars into the Ghanaian Islamic mainstream media/Saudi graduates can be identified as some reasons that drives Ghanaian Muslim youths towards radicalisation.

Other factors that were also identified by respondents as elements that drives Muslim youths towards radicalisation included extreme love for religious leaders. That is because some Muslim youths have become addicted to the teachings and preachings of some religious leaders to the extent that any opposition to any of these leaders generate into violence or hate speech. The same applies to sectariarism and lack of in-depth understanding of the opposing side, the case of misrepresentation

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[39] Imam Ali Chief is a substantial Imam at Ghana National Mosque
[40] Professor Khalidu Shafiu is a Lecturer at Ibn Khaldun University, Turkey.
[41] Imam Bala Musa is the substantial Imam at Darkuman Central Mosque, Accra.
[42] Mr. Sani Mohammed is a High School Teacher at ICODEHS Senior High School, Accra
[43] Flying Officer Ibrahim Mohammed is an Imam in the Ghana Air Forces

and /or misinterpretation of fundamental teachings in Islam might also be a factor. Most of the respondents also believed that external influences may be a factor.

According to Engineer Najeeb, the radicalisation phenomenon among Muslims in Ghana may arise from the environment the Muslim youth find themselves growing up. He opined that:

Most Muslim populace in Ghana find themselves growing up in deprived or underprivileged communities and slums which may expose them to vices. (Engineer Najeeb, January 2024).

The above issues have been summarily presented by Professor Khalidu, when interviewed on 10th January 2024 as follows:

Many youths in Ghana face challenges in accessing quality education, decent employment, and social services, which can limit their prospects and aspirations. Some radical groups may offer them material incentives, such as money, weapons, or travel, to join their cause. Also, some youths in Ghana may be attracted by the radical ideology and worldview of some radical groups, which may claim to have the ultimate truth, justice, or salvation. Some radical groups may use religious texts, symbols, or leaders to legitimise and justify their actions and goals. (Professor Khalidu, January 2024).

How does extremist ideology plays its role in radicalising Muslim youths in Ghana?

Data collected from the field of research indicates that extremist ideology most often makes the youth think that what they are being taught by the extremists is the truth. This makes them behave in a way that is contrary to the teachings of Islam causing more harm to the Muslim society. On the other hand, some respondents held that mobilizing underemployed or unemployed youth, inciting the youth against contemporary developments in the ever-evolving society as well as politically motivating the youth using propaganda play major roles in radicalizing Muslim youths in Ghana.

Extremist ideology plays its role in radicalizing Muslim youths in Ghana primarily via the internet because social media allows extremist ideologies to spread rapidly. Moreover, the globalization of the world makes it easy for our youth to get access to new values, thus influencing their perspectives and nurturing a feeling of unity with worldwide extremist movement. As explained by Engineer Najeeb;

Extremist ideology plays a major role in radicalisation since this youth learn and practice wrong fundamental extremist ideologies from some scholars and institutions. Their words and actions are based on these extremist ideologies which leads to radical activities (Engineer Najeeb, January 2024).

Some respondents asserted that extremist ideologies are sometimes indoctrinated into kids at a very younger age. They grow up believing and acting on these ideas. Often times, proponents of extreme religious concepts try to exploit emotional feelings of young Muslims to get them to engage in radical religious behaviours. Extremist ideology is a set of beliefs that advocate or justify violence against others who do not share or accept those beliefs.

Extremist ideology can play a role in radicalising Muslim youths in Ghana by Manipulating their emotions. Extremist ideology can exploit the anger, fear, resentment, or frustration that some Muslim youths may feel towards the state,

society, or other groups, and channel them into hatred, intolerance, or aggression. Extremist ideology can also appeal to their compassion, sympathy, or solidarity with the suffering or oppressed Muslims in other parts of the world, and urge them to take action to defend or support them. In the words of Professor Khalidu;

Extremist ideology can also influence the way some Muslim youths view themselves, others, and the world, and create a distorted or biased reality. Extremist ideology can also reinforce their existing prejudices, stereotypes, or misconceptions, and make them resistant to alternative or moderate perspectives. Extremist ideology can also present a simplistic or binary view of the world, where there is only good or evil, us or them, and no room for compromise or dialogue. (Professor Khalidu, January 2024).

What can be observed from the various responses are that most of the youth who finds themselves in various Islamic sects do not exhibit religious tolerance to welcome the rituals of their colleagues as sacred and that is creating radicalism among Muslims youth in Ghana. Extremist ideologies through the use of sectarism as a tool plays a role in radicalizing the youth since they are brainwashed to belief and act in ways that are not advisable.

How do we counter and prevent radicalisation among Muslim youths in Ghana?

Many factors were identified from the field of research as measures that can counter and prevent radicalisation among Muslim youths in Ghana. Key among them included:

- Educating the Muslim youths on the proper teachings of Islam as well as the dangers of radicalisation.
- Some respondent held that government should create employment opportunities to economically empower Muslim youths
- Enforcing law and order in accordance with the constitution.
- Fostering intra-religious dialogue amongst leaders

Majority of the respondents opined that in order to counter and prevent radicalisation among Muslim youths in Ghana, we should make Islamic education a necessity in Muslim communities in order to teach Muslims the commandments of Allah and His rulings. There is also the need to put in place ways to keep reminding Muslims to stay focused on the religion in order not to go astray. It is also essential to elevate the economic development of the youth as economic hardship is one of the main causes of radicalisation.

The same sentiment is expressed by Engineer Najeeb, who believe that we can counter radicalisation through intensive education of Muslim youth on the correct fundamentals of Islam as established by the Sunnah, in the light of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, peace and community building. Engineer Najeeb added that,

The youth in these communities should also be encouraged to be well educated in both religion and secular aspects, and be well equipped with skills that will make them beneficial to their families and communities. (Engineer Najeeb, January 2024).

From the statements above, it can be viewed that radicalisation can be countered and prevented by means of education. This therefore mean that Muslim

scholars who occupy positions of power in society should be use their platform to touch on the subject matter of radicalisation and the reasons it is not needed. Education should be given to upcoming Muslim preachers as well. Some respondents even recommended introducing to these preachers critical thinking and practical reasoning, philosophy and Psychology into their educational curricular. Training the scholars from the Middle-East and Hausa land refresher courses on peaceful co-existence and the Ghanaian culture as well.

It is important to note that there is no easy or quick solution to counter and prevent radicalisation among Muslim youths in Ghana, as it requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that involves multiple actors and sectors. However, below are some strategies presented by Professor Khalidu that can be adopted to help mitigate or counter it;

•Enhancing the quality and accessibility of education for Muslim youths, especially in the areas of critical thinking, media literacy, intercultural dialogue, and human rights. Raising awareness among Muslim youths, parents, teachers, and community leaders about the signs, risks, and consequences of radicalisation, and how to report or seek help if they encounter or suspect any radical activities or influences.

•Addressing the socio-economic grievances and inequalities that may affect Muslim youths, and providing them with opportunities and support to improve their livelihoods, skills, and aspirations. Fostering a sense of belonging and identity among Muslim youths, and respecting and celebrating their diversity and contributions to the society. Encouraging positive interactions and cooperation between Muslim youths and other groups, and preventing or resolving any conflicts or tensions that may arise.

•Challenging and exposing the false or misleading claims, arguments, or evidence that extremist groups use to recruit or radicalise Muslim youths, and offering alternative or moderate perspectives. Amplifying the voices and stories of Muslim youths who have rejected or left radical groups, and highlighting the negative impacts of violence and extremism on themselves, their families, and their communities. Supporting and empowering Muslim youths to speak out and act against extremism and violence, and to promote peace and tolerance (Professor Khalidu, January 2024).

Are there specific programs in Muslims communities that guides Muslims away from radicalisation in Ghana? Please explain your answer

With regards to whether there are specific programs in Muslim communities that guides Muslims away from radicalisation, respondents presented mixed opinions on the issue. Some respondents either not knowing of one, or there is none. In an interviewed with Ayatullah Saeed, he held that;

there are no specific programs. Ghanaian Muslim youth get radicalized or otherwise based on the kind of information transmitted to them and the kind of pedagogy applied to them by their teachers, etc. That is to say, they get radicalized through indoctrination. (Ayatullah Saeed, January 2024).

The view of Ayatullah Saeed is also shared by Mr. Apusiga who indicated that there is no such program. Mr. Apusiga explained that Ghanaian Muslims are only educated on Islamic extremism during the sermons on Friday (Mr. Apusiga, January 2024).

On the other hand, some respondents believed that there are specific programs in Muslim communities that guides Muslims away from radicalisation. According to Bilqis Jamal;

There are some TV and radio programs by Marhaba FM and Gaskia TV that educate the youth about the dangers of radicalisation. Examples of such program is 'Tunasarwa' on Marhaba Fm and 'Rayuwa' on Gaskia TV. Added to this there are some Muslim youth activists on social media that also use their platform to educate the youth to stay away from radicalisation. Example is Peace Dawah Media. (Bilqis Jamal, January 2024)

What this mean is that there are some programs that aim to guide Muslims away from radicalisation through the basic teachings of Islam. Some of these programs include *Islam in Focus,* which is aired every Sunday at 9am on Radio Universe. The program aims to debunk misrepresented concepts on Islam. The program on Marhaba FM invite Muslim scholars from various part of the country to deliberate on issues that guide and remind youths on how to live a meaningful life.

Engineer Najeeb however has a mixed view on the issue. Even though he accepted there are some of such programs, yet he recounted that they are not many. In an interview with him on 12th January 2024, he outlined that:

There are not many of such programs here in Ghana aside the national agenda championed by the office of the National Chief Imam whose individual effort in promoting peaceful coexistence and condemning radicalism is unmatched. There are also few workshops and sermons by some clerics who occasionally discuss the issues of radicalisation in order to maintain the peaceful coexistence we enjoy in Ghana. (Engineer Najeeb, January 2024).

Another respondent, Professor Khalidu, also asserted that there are some specific programs in Muslim communities that aim to guide Muslims away from radicalisation in Ghana. Some examples are:

•The Islamic Peace and Security Council of Ghana (IPASEC): This is a non-governmental organisation that works to promote peace, security, and interfaith harmony among Muslims and other religious groups in Ghana. IPASEC conducts research, advocacy, education, and dialogue on issues related to radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism, and provides guidance and counselling to Muslim youths who may be vulnerable or affected by these phenomena.

•The Ghana Muslim Mission (GMM): This is a religious organisation that represents the Ahmadiyya sect of Islam in Ghana. GMM promotes a moderate and peaceful interpretation of Islam that rejects violence and extremism, and respects the diversity and pluralism of the society. GMM organises various activities and programs for Muslim youths, such as seminars, workshops, camps, sports, and arts, to enhance their knowledge, skills, and values, and to foster their integration and participation in the society.

•The Ghana Muslim Students' Association (GMSA): This is a student organisation that represents the interests and welfare of Muslim students in Ghana. GMSA works to empower Muslim students to excel in their academic, social, and spiritual pursuits, and to contribute positively to the development of the nation. GMSA also engages in outreach and advocacy on issues affecting Muslim students, such as discrimination, marginalisation, or radicalisation, and collaborates with other stakeholders to address them. (Professor Khalidu, January 2024)

Have there been any measure by government in trying to collaborate with Muslim communities in Ghana on how to deradicalise Muslims? Kindly explain your answer

The contention as to whether there have been measures by government in trying to collaborate with Muslim communities in Ghana on how to deradicalise Muslims, most of the respondents had little or no idea. However other respondents were of the view that there have been some collaborations between the government and the Muslim communities. To them, the government has created various initiatives with the aim of engaging Muslim leaders, scholars and organizations to tackle the main causes of radicalisation. In an interview with Ayatullah Saeed, he was of the view that;

there have been a few attempts. But the attempts were inadequate and less effective due to the type of approach. For the government's approach to be highly effective, it must require dealing with them from the top-down, and putting in place measures to prevent or reduce interference by foreign governments and institutions. (Ayatullah Saeed, January 2024).

According to Engineer Najeeb, Ghana has made some deliberate efforts through the establishment of the Peace Council of Ghana of which the Muslim community is a part of. He reiterated that:

The goal is to champion tolerance and peaceful coexistence among all religions. On occasions such as Eid and other Islamic platforms some government officials also take advantage to highlight on the issue. I personally think that more collaborations can be done to address the issue. (Engineer Najeeb, January 2024).

In similar vein, Professor Khalidu also stressed that there have been some measures by the government of Ghana to collaborate with Muslim communities on how to deradicalise Muslims who may be involved or influenced by extremist groups. Some examples are:

i.   The National Peace Council (NPC): This is a statutory body that was established by the government in 2011 to facilitate and coordinate the efforts of relevant stakeholders in the promotion of peace and security in Ghana. The NPC works closely with the Muslim communities and leaders, as well as other religious and civil society groups, to prevent and resolve conflicts, promote dialogue and tolerance, and address the root causes and drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism.

ii.   The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE): This is a constitutional body that was established by the government in 1993 to educate and sensitise the citizens on their rights and responsibilities, and to foster democratic

values and principles in Ghana. The NCCE conducts various programs and campaigns for the Muslim communities and youths, such as public lectures, workshops, debates, and quizzes, to enhance their civic awareness, participation, and patriotism, and to counter the extremist narratives and propaganda that may undermine the national unity and cohesion.

iii. The National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS): This is the administrative and technical arm of the National Security Council, which is the highest decision-making body on security matters in Ghana. The NSCS oversees and coordinates the implementation of the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism, which was launched by the government in 2019. The NSCS engages and consults with the Muslim communities and stakeholders, and supports their initiatives and projects that aim to prevent and counter radicalisation and violent extremism among Muslims in Ghana. (Professor Khalidu, January 2024)

What are the strength and weaknesses of counter-terrorism strategy in Ghana and how to improve it?

The respondents presented various strength and weaknesses in Ghana's fight against terrorism. For some of the respondents, Ghana's strength has been improving security at the borders, providing security for her citizens, and enhancing religious diversity and interreligious dialogue. It has also helped promote multiculturalism.

From the number of respondents interviewed, it can be indicated that some strength of counter terrorism strategy in Ghana, include government involving and empowering its citizens as watchdogs to report any suspicious terrorism-related activities. In an interview with Ayatullah Saeed, he asserted that with these methods, trust is built and community members are likely to share information about suspicious activities. Also, we stand to benefit from international cooperation. Working with other countries facilitates access to information about alleged terrorists and their activities. This helps the country identify potential threats.

On the other hand, Professor Khalidu identified two key areas as the strengths of counter-terrorism strategies in Ghana, they include:

•Comprehensive and holistic: The strategy covers the four pillars of prevention, protection, response, and recovery, and addresses the various aspects and dimensions of the radicalisation and violent extremism phenomenon, such as ideological, political, social, economic, and psychological.

•Inclusive and participatory: The strategy involves and engages a wide range of stakeholders and partners, such as the government, security agencies, civil society, religious groups, media, academia, and international organisations, and seeks to build trust, cooperation, and coordination among them.

The research also identified some areas that serve as weaknesses in Ghana's counter-terrorism endeavours, these include but not limited to;

•Lack of resources and capacity: The strategy faces constraints and gaps in terms of the human, financial, and technical resources and capacity to effectively and efficiently implement its activities and programs. The strategy also faces challenges in ensuring the sustainability and scalability of its interventions and outcomes.

•Lack of awareness and communication: The strategy suffers from a low level of awareness and understanding among the public and the target groups, especially the Muslim communities and youths, about its objectives, principles, and benefits. The strategy also lacks a clear and consistent communication and outreach strategy to disseminate its messages and achievements, and to counter the extremist narratives and propaganda.

•The problems of capacity building and the lack of public awareness: Among the many weaknesses of counter-terrorism strategy in Ghana are the problems of capacity building and the lack of public awareness. We don't have many able and strong security organizations. There is also insufficiency of trained staff in skilled counterterrorism strategy, intelligence analysis and investigation. There is also not enough light being shed a out the adverse effects of terrorism, what is entails and the benefits of reporting suspicious activities because this will help in early prevention of any terrorist attack.

Certain suggestions were presented by respondents as ways for improvement upon counter-terrorism in Ghana;

•Mobilise and allocate more resources and capacity: The strategy needs to secure and increase the funding and support from the government, donors, and partners, and to allocate them efficiently and transparently to the priority areas and activities. The strategy also needs to enhance and develop the skills and knowledge of the staff and personnel involved in its implementation, and to provide them with the necessary tools and equipment.

•Improve and expand the awareness and communication: The strategy needs to develop and implement a comprehensive and effective communication and outreach strategy that uses various channels and platforms, such as the media, social media, events, and publications, to reach and engage the public and the target groups. The strategy also needs to improve and diversify its messages and content, and to tailor them to the specific needs and preferences of the different audiences and segments.

•To improve counterterrorism strategy, Ghana should work on strengthening its coordination with international partners. These partnerships promote greater cooperation and make the world safer. There is also a need for Clinton IOU's evaluation in order to adjust and refine strategies in hopes to develop counterterrorism tactics. This will also bell in identifying areas of improvement and allocating resources effectively.

•Eliminating all forms of extremist ideologies: Most of the respondents believed that in order to improve upon counter-terrorism strategy, the government will need to eliminate all forms of extremist ideologies and promote mutual respect for all religious groups in the country. The government needs to encourage tolerance among its citizens. There should be resources allocated for more education and training of the general populace on counter-terrorism. Added to that, soft actions must be taken on culprits who involve themselves in terrorism related activities.

Which role do Muslim scholars play in deradicalisation within various Muslim communities in Ghana?

It Is a fact that Muslim scholars have important role to play in the Muslim communities, especially when it has to do with deradicalisation. Muslim scholars and Imams have the opportunity of using different platforms including the pulpit to advise their audience against cases of radicalisation.

One of the respondents, Ayatullah Saeed, indicated that the major role of Muslim scholars in deradicalisation is to providing proper education to their adherents. They can serve as major agents for interfaith dialogue, especially between Muslims and people of other religious faith. This will create collaboration among various religious groupings thereby aiding countering problems associated to radicalisation.

According to Engineer Najeeb, the office of the National Chief Imam is the best institution to spearhead this cause. He opined that;

Local Imams can also take advantage of Friday sermons to occasionally admonish the communities against violence and radicalisation. They can also organize few symposia to discuss the issues or radicalisation and coexistence.(Engineer Najeeb, January, 2024)

Engineer Najeeb furher stressed that in 2023, a renowned scholar Mufti Menk and some other distinguished scholars were invited to Ghana under the "One-Ummah" initiative - Peace and Unity convention, to address related matters of peace, unity and radicalism in the Muslim community.

Professor Khalidu also emphasised that Muslim scholars play an important and influential role in deradicalisation within various Muslim communities in Ghana. Some of the roles he expatiated include the following:

Providing religious guidance and education: Muslim scholars can help Muslim youths and communities to understand and practice Islam in a moderate and peaceful way, and to avoid or reject the extremist interpretations and distortions of the religion. Muslim scholars can also teach Muslim youths and communities about the diversity and pluralism of Islam, and the respect and tolerance for other faiths and beliefs.

Countering extremist narratives and propaganda: Muslim scholars can challenge and refute the false or misleading claims, arguments, or evidence that extremist groups use to recruit or radicalise Muslims, and to offer alternative or moderate perspectives. Muslim scholars can also expose and denounce the negative impacts and consequences of violence and extremism on the Muslim communities and the society at large. (Professor Khalidu, January, 2024).

Data also collected from the field of research indicate that Muslim scholars play important roles in the deradicalisation efforts within the Muslim communities in Ghana. For most respondents interviewed, Muslim scholars contribute to educational programs for the understanding of Islam and promoting religious literacy. There are numerous Islamic schools found in our Muslim communities aiming to educate the Muslim child and guiding him to the right lath. Scholars also provide support to individuals through counseling.

SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of the measures which could be employed to curb radicalisation of the youth according to respondents are as follows:

1. Good parenting
2. Providing vocational skills and development training to the youths
3. Strengthening inter-religious dialogues
4. by promoting tolerance and workshop bringing the ummah and their scholars together and have a discussion about the issue
5. Sensitization campaigns against extremism
6. Educating Muslims in Ghana on what Islam says about radicalisation and the dangers associated with it.

In an interview with Professor Khalidu, he believes that some possible measures that I think could help to curb the issue of radicalisation among Muslims in Ghana are:

Promoting dialogue and reconciliation: Creating and facilitating platforms and opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation between Muslim communities and other groups, such as the government, security agencies, civil society, and other religious and ethnic groups, to address the sources and manifestations of conflicts, grievances, and mistrust, and to foster mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation.

*Empowering Muslim women and you*th: Supporting and enhancing the role and participation of Muslim women and youth in the prevention and countering of radicalisation and violent extremism, and in the promotion of peace and security, by providing them with education, training, resources, and networks, and by recognising and amplifying their voices and contributions.

Strengthening moderate and peaceful Islamic institutions and leadership: Supporting and enhancing the capacity and legitimacy of the moderate and peaceful Islamic institutions and leadership in Ghana, such as the Office of the National Chief Imam, the Islamic Peace and Security Council, and the Ghana Muslim Mission, to provide religious guidance and education, to counter extremist narratives and propaganda, and to engage and mentor Muslim communities and youth. (Professor Khalidu, January 2024).

Among other things, other recommendations presented by respondents as measures that curb the issue of radicalisation among Muslims in Ghana, as indicated by Mr. Amir,

There should be education and creating awareness on the dangers of this phenomenon either through schools or creation of programs. Also by granting children with the opportunity of going to school since they are the ones who can easily be swayed. Job creation is also very important too. (*Mr. Amir, January 2024*).

Engineer Najeeb also held that,

There should be accredited institutions and curriculum to streamline the fundamental teachings of Islam so that extreme ideologist are not promoted. We should also have more education through seminars and symposia to address radicalism. The Muslim communities should be supported to establish vocational training centers to

equip the youth with employable and entrepreneurial skills. (Engineer Najeeb, January 2024)

On this note, it can be concluded that key measures presented by respondents to curb the issue of radicalisation among Muslims in Ghana focuses on the enforcement of accurate Islamic teachings in Muslim communities. This means that there is the need to make sure children are brought up with the right Islamic background and a strong mindset so that they are not easily convinced by external ideologies. There is also the need to empower the Muslim communities, financially and politically to achieve this feat. Apart from that, also guaranteeing the freedoms of expression, religion, and assembly as well as collaborating with foreign governments and/or institutions to prevent them from teaching Ghanaian youth what will not protect the long-lived interreligious and inter-sectarian peace and stability.

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