INTERSECTIONS OF RELIGION AND EDUCATION IN SOUTH-WEST, NIGERIA: EXAMINING ETHICAL AND BIBLICAL VIEWPOINTS

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Abstract

The discourse about education is inadequate without the involvement or attachment of religion. In the Nigerian educational system, religion remains a powerful influence that shapes opinions and social norms. Through the lens of Biblical teachings, this study explored the multifaceted relationships between religion and education. It looked at how these different areas shape values and social norms. The study aimed to clarify the role of religion in education and its consequences for individual and collective well-being by examining Biblical narratives, principles, and historical contexts. The study discovered that there is a convergence of education and religion that calls for safe collaboration for the development of the nation. The study concludes that religion has been essential to the growth of education in South-West Nigeria. It has aided in the founding of educational institutions, the incorporation of values education, and the development of student leadership. It is recommended that religious education provided in schools must adhere to strict quality standards and refrain from endorsing radical or intolerable religious beliefs. Regular reviews of curricula are necessary to guarantee their correctness, fairness, and conformity to academic standards. Religious leaders must be willing to promote educational policies that promote unity and deter discrimination or violence based on religion.

Keywords: Intersection of Religion, Education, Biblical Viewpoint, South West Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria's 1999 Constitution, which guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, places a strong emphasis on protecting the fundamental elements of religion in the nation. This clause of the constitution ensures that every Nigerian has the freedom to practice any religion he/she chooses and the freedom to convert to a different religion or belief system without being forced to. It forbids discrimination based on religious convictions and places a strong emphasis on preserving religious diversity. Section 38 is also an affirmation of Nigeria's commitment to

religious pluralism and tolerance, which is essential for preserving social harmony and peace in a nation with a diverse religious landscape. (Nwabueze, 2016).

The fundamental tenets and goals of education in Nigeria are outlined in the constitution, specifically in Sections 18 to 24. It places a strong emphasis on every Nigerian child's right to an education, the government's obligations in this area, and the role that educational institutions play in fostering national cohesion. Nigeria has laws governing education, though they do not specifically refer to a "Constitution on Education." Rather, Nigerian education is governed by several laws, policies, and guidelines that are detailed in the country's constitution along with other laws and policies that are specifically related to education.

Social norms, moral principles, and educational approaches intersect and diverge around the complex relationship between religion and education in South-West Nigeria. Famous for its unique fusion of modern and Yoruba customs, this area is a great place to study the relationship between religious beliefs, primarily influenced by Christianity and Islam, and educational paradigms (Falola & Heaton, 2008). In this context, there is a complex relationship between religion and education that affects not only educational policies but also societal structures, individual beliefs, and practices. Religious instruction is crucial in forming moral frameworks and directing curriculum since it is grounded in both Biblical and ethical imperatives (Olupona, 2008). In addition to guiding moral growth on an individual basis, these teachings have an impact on institutional procedures and community values in educational settings.

Religiously based ethical considerations frequently impact curriculum development, moral education, and student virtue-building choices. The incorporation of Biblical perspectives exacerbates this dynamic since ethical standards and educational goals are shaped by how sacred texts are interpreted (Adegbija, 2001). These intersections present opportunities and challenges for educators, legislators, and community leaders alike as they shed light on the difficult balancing act between secular educational goals and religious convictions.

Examining how South-West Nigeria negotiates the nexus between religion and education, with an emphasis on Biblical and ethical perspectives, this study explored these complexities. This study shed light on the cultural dynamics that shape educational practices and societal norms in the area by examining the conflicts, opportunities for growth, and implications of these intersections. Moreover, this investigation adds to more extensive academic conversations about how religion influences cultural identities, educational systems, and moral leadership in various international contexts. This study shed light on the complex relationship between religion and education in South-West Nigeria through a thorough analysis of the literature, historical viewpoints, and current observations.

Religion in South-West, Nigeria

In South-West Nigeria, religion is a multifaceted structure woven from various indigenous beliefs, Islam, and Christianity. This region, which is primarily home to the Yoruba ethnic group, is renowned for the coexistence of numerous religious traditions and its rich cultural legacy. A pantheon of deities known as Orishas, ancestral worship, and sacred practices are all integral parts of the Yoruba spirituality that is indigenous to South-West Nigeria. Yoruba religion is typified by its animistic beliefs, polytheistic structure, and emphasis on spiritual connections with nature and ancestors. It is also known as Ifá or Orisha worship (Babalola, 2013). The historical foundation of South-West Nigeria is this Ifá or Orisha worship which was predominantly practiced in the region before the introduction of Islam and Christianity.

1. **Islam**
   Through trade and cultural exchange, Islam significantly grew in power in the region, especially after the 14th century. The majority of Muslims in modern times are Yoruba, who comprise a substantial section of the populace in cities like Lagos, Ibadan, and Abeokuta. Sufi brotherhoods, regional clerics known as alfas, and educational establishments known as madrasas or Islamic schools have all had an impact on the spread of Islam in South-West Nigeria (Peel, 2000).

2. **Christianity**
   During the 19th century, European missionaries brought Christianity to South-West Nigeria. Since then, it has spread to include a number of denominations, such as Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Pentecostalism. Syncretic religions, like the Aladura churches, which fuse Christian elements with Yoruba spirituality, are the result of the region's experience with blending Christian practices with indigenous beliefs (Adeboye, 2006).

In South-West Nigeria, religion affects social norms, family structures, and political dynamics, among other aspects of daily life. Religious celebrations, like Eid and the Osun Osogbo festival, act as community events that strengthen spiritual and cultural ties (Falola, 2001). Even with the coexistence of multiple faiths, there have occasionally been tensions and conflicts in South-West Nigeria; these are typically associated with religious extremism, interfaith marriages, and disagreements between religious doctrines and cultural practices (Olupona, 2008). In a nutshell, religion in South-West Nigeria is shaped by the dynamic interaction of various religious traditions, including Islam, Christianity, and indigenous customs, which in turn shapes the region's historical narratives, social cohesiveness, and sense of cultural identity.

Education in South-West, Nigeria

Rich historical legacies, a wide range of educational institutions, and notable socioeconomic effects are characteristics of education in South-West Nigeria. Combining traditional, Islamic, Christian, and modern educational systems, this region, which includes states like Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti, plays a significant role in Nigeria's educational landscape. Deep historical roots in pre-colonial times can be found in South-West Nigeria's education system, which uses initiation rites, storytelling, and apprenticeship to transfer knowledge. Christian missionaries arrived in the 19th century and established schools to disseminate Christianity and European knowledge, marking the beginning of formal Western education (Adeyemi, 2007). Currently, there are major investments in both public and private educational institutions in South-West Nigeria, where the educational system is divided into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Prestigious universities in the area, including the University of Lagos, Obafemi Awolowo University, and the University of Ibadan, are important for research, innovation, and the development of human capital (Babalola, 2010).

In South-West Nigeria, religion still has an impact on education. Christian and Islamic viewpoints both shape moral instruction, curriculum content, and school administration. To preserve cultural heritage and advance community development, the region also values indigenous knowledge systems, which are incorporated into educational practices (Ajayi & Goma, 2018).

Notwithstanding advancements, South-West Nigeria still has problems with education, such as low funding, poor infrastructure, differences in urban and rural residents' access to high-quality education, and problems with the calibre of teachers and the relevance of the curriculum. There

are continuous attempts to tackle these issues using policy modifications, collaborations with global organisations, and community involvement programmes (Adeyemi, 2015). In South-West Nigeria, education is the result of a fusion of religious, traditional, and contemporary influences. It plays a major role in human capital formation, cultural preservation, and regional development. Encouraging inclusive and sustainable educational growth in the region requires concerted efforts to address obstacles and seize opportunities.

The Roles of Religion in Education

Throughout history, religion has had a significant influence on education in a variety of global societies and cultures. This influence takes many forms, ranging from the founding and management of educational institutions to the teaching of morality and ethics. Both Christian and Islamic viewpoints are present in South-West Nigerian educational institutions, impacting the formation of ethical principles and values in education. Moral education is frequently influenced by religious teachings, which guide students on matters like integrity, decency, empathy, and volunteer work. The goal of this integration is to instil religious values in students that support social cohesion and moral behaviour (Babalola, 2013). In South-West Nigeria, religion has a big impact on education. It affects everything from curriculum content to moral instruction to school administration to the overall educational experience.

All over times past, the evolution of formal education systems has been greatly aided by religious institutions. Religious teachings served as the foundation for early educational curricula in ancient civilizations like Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China. These teachings transmitted moral values, cosmological beliefs, and useful knowledge necessary for communal life (Hunt, 2012). Throughout medieval Europe, education was primarily provided by religious authorities through monastic and cathedral schools, which prioritized Christian doctrine in addition to classical studies. To promote theological studies and knowledge, religious orders frequently played a role in the Middle Ages' founding of universities, such as the University of Paris and the University of Bologna (Rüegg, 2003).

In South-West Nigerian schools, religious studies constitute a substantial portion of the curriculum, encompassing subjects such as comparative religious studies, Islam, and Christianity. These courses help students develop religious literacy and understanding among various religious communities by giving them a foundational understanding of their respective faiths (Olupona, 2008). In South-West Nigeria, religious organizations—especially Christian and Islamic ones—often take an active part in the administration and control of schools. Religious organisations own and run a large number of schools; as such, they have an impact on funding, curriculum development, hiring teachers, and general educational policy (Adeyemi, 2015).

Preserving Indigenous Yoruba cultural practices and beliefs is another function of education in South-West Nigeria. Ajayi and Goma (2018) state that to foster students' cultural identity and heritage, traditional religious festivals, rites of passage, and oral traditions are incorporated into schools. Religious education in South-West Nigeria has its share of difficulties, despite its benefits. With worries about bias, religious indoctrination, and the secular nature of public education, discussions concerning the scope and content of religious education are common. Maintaining inclusivity for students from different religious backgrounds and striking a balance between religious instruction and national educational goals are still difficult tasks (Olupona, 2008).

The roles that religion plays in education today differ greatly amongst nations and educational systems. More contemporary roles of religion in education are:

1. **Value and Ethics**: Morality, ethics, and behaviour guidelines based on religious precepts are frequently taught in religious education. Carr (2001) states that the programme aims to imbue students with virtues like compassion, honesty, and justice, thereby promoting their moral growth and character development.
2. **Curriculum and Programme**: Theology, comparative religious studies, and world religions are just a few of the subjects covered in the religious studies courses that are offered in many educational systems. These classes educate students about various religious traditions, encouraging religious literacy and fostering mutual respect and tolerance among various religious communities (Jackson, 2015).
3. **School Governance and Administration**: Schools that are owned and run by religious organisations exist in certain nations; these include educational establishments that are Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Islamic, and Hindu. These educational institutions frequently incorporate religious teachings into their pedagogy and policies, which has an impact on admissions standards, course offerings, and day-to-day operations (Bruce, 1996). The latest development is the establishment of private universities by religious bodies in Nigeria namely Redeemer's University Ede, Osun State Nigeria, Caleb University, Imota, Lagos, by the Christians and Crescent University, Abeokuta, Ogun State and Summit University, Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria owned by the Muslims.
4. **Cultural Preservation**: Education plays a critical role in maintaining indigenous religious beliefs, rituals, and practices in areas where religion is deeply entwined with cultural identity, such as parts of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Olupona (2008) states that schools have the authority to integrate religious and cultural customs into their curricula to preserve communal harmony and foster cultural legacy.

In South-West Nigeria, religion influences values, curricula, governance, and cultural preservation, among other aspects of education. The integration of religious teachings into the educational framework poses certain challenges that call for careful navigation and dialogue, even as it promotes moral development and cultural identity. An understanding of religion's enduring influence and current relevance in educational settings is made possible by this thorough overview, which highlights the various ways in which religion and education intersect globally.

Religious Influence on Education in South West, Nigeria: Historical Context

Indigenous educational systems were well-established in South-West Nigeria before the arrival of Western missionaries and Islamic scholars. These systems, which included age-grade systems, apprenticeship programmes, and specialised training in farming, crafts, and leadership, differed among various ethnic groups, including the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa-Fulani (Adegbite, 2004). Islam brought Islamic scholarship and educational institutions to South-West Nigeria through trade and cultural exchange. Under the direction of local Islamic teachers (Alfas), students (Talibes) studied Arabic, and Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), and memorised the Quran in Quranic schools (Makaranta). According to Ogunbiyi (2006), these schools were instrumental in the dissemination of Islamic knowledge and literacy throughout the area.

Western missionaries, mostly from Britain and later America, first arrived in South-West Nigeria in the 19th century. These missionaries founded missions that included schools as part of their evangelical efforts. They represented a variety of Christian denominations, including Anglican,

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Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian (Adeyemi, 2007). The Western missionary's efforts in bringing growth and development to the nation's birth;

1. Church Missionary Society (CMS): The CMS, for example, established educational institutions like St. Andrew's College in Oyo (1896) and the CMS Grammar School in Lagos (1859). The goal of these schools was to prepare students for leadership positions in the colonial administration by combining Christian education with a Western-style education (Falola & Heaton, 2008).
2. Additional Missionary Attempts: In a similar vein, other Christian denominations started schools all over the area. Methodist missions founded educational institutions such as Wesley College in Ibadan (1905), and the Baptist Missionary Society founded the Baptist Academy in Lagos (1855). In South-West Nigeria, these schools made a substantial contribution to the dissemination of knowledge, literacy, and Western values (Adeyemi, 2007).

The basis for contemporary educational systems in the area was established when indigenous, Islamic, and Western educators founded schools in South-West Nigeria. These establishments facilitated entry to formal education, encouraged learning to read, and functioned as hubs for ethical and intellectual growth. Numerous of these institutions have developed into esteemed colleges, universities, and secondary schools that still influence Nigeria's current educational environment (Adegbite, 2004). The establishment of schools in South-West Nigeria is a historical reflection of the dynamic interaction between Islamic scholarship, native educational practices, and Western missionary endeavours. These programmes have had a long-lasting impact on the social, cultural, and educational fabric of the area, helping to shape its evolution over many centuries.

Difficulties and Detractors of Religion in Education

The role of religion in education is not without difficulties and detractors, despite its benefits:

1. Secularism and Pluralism: The proper place of religion in public education is a topic of continuous discussion in secular societies. These conversations are frequently shaped by worries about the separation of church and state, religious indoctrination, and treating students fairly who come from diverse religious backgrounds (Jackson, 2015).
2. Conflict and Intolerance: Disparities in religious practices and beliefs within educational environments have historically and currently given rise to conflicts. Tensions persist as evidenced by problems like the suppression of religious instruction, prejudice against religious minorities, and disagreements between evolution and creationism in scientific education (Carr, 2001).

The incorporation of religion in education in South-West Nigeria is not without problems, despite its benefits. Concerns about bias, religious indoctrination, and the secular nature of public education frequently surface in discussions concerning the scope and content of religious education. The remaining challenges include making sure that schools are inclusive of students from different religious backgrounds and striking a balance between national educational goals and religious teachings (Olupona, 2008).

Biblical Viewpoints on Education

Christian Biblical perspectives on education place a strong emphasis on virtue cultivation, moral development, and ethical behaviour in line with Biblical teachings. These viewpoints stem from the conviction that education should be about more than just information acquisition; it should

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also be about developing moral character and a sense of duty to God, others, and oneself. The Bible provides a wealth of information about the nature and goals of education. Biblical teachings emphasise the significance of education in forming character and promoting communal well-being, from the command to "train up a child in the way he should go" (Proverbs 22:6) to the emphasis on wisdom and knowledge as foundational virtues (Proverbs 1:7). Accounts such as the Exodus also demonstrate how education can change people's lives and free them from injustice and oppression. Viewpoints of the Bible on education will be examined in this manner, with a focus on two specific verses.

1. Proverbs 1:7: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." This verse suggests that education should be based on moral values and spiritual understanding because it emphasises the significance of reverence for God as the source of true wisdom and knowledge.
2. Deuteronomy 6:6-7: "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." This verse highlights the duty of parents and teachers to instil Biblical lessons in the next generation continually, incorporating moral education into everyday activities and educational procedures.

Christian Perspectives

1. Collaboration of Faith and Learning: Seeing all knowledge and education as a part of God's creation, Christian educators support the integration of faith with academic disciplines. In addition to helping students develop their critical thinking abilities, this viewpoint encourages them to view the world through a biblical lens, allowing them to discern truth, beauty, and goodness in their studies (Holmes, 1987).
2. Character Development: From a Christian perspective, education seeks to mould students' personalities in addition to imparting knowledge. Developing virtues like humility, compassion, justice, and integrity. Jesus Christ served as an example of these traits, and the Bible emphasises their importance, requiring Christians to possess the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).
3. Service and Social Responsibilities: Christian education places great emphasis on the importance of social responsibility and serving others as fundamental components of discipleship. Through community service, justice advocacy, and providing care for the marginalised, students are encouraged to put the lessons of the Bible into practice (Matthew 25:35–40).

Biblical perspectives on education place a strong emphasis on character development grounded in biblical virtues, integrating faith with learning, and fostering a sense of social responsibility and service. These viewpoints offer a framework for comprehending education as a means of achieving spiritual maturity and morally upright living in line with Christian values, in addition to intellectual growth.

Conclusion

In South-West Nigeria, Christian education has aided in social transformation and community development in addition to academic instruction. Numerous Christian school alumni have made significant contributions to the advancement of the region and influenced societal norms in fields like business, politics, healthcare, and education (Babalola, 2010). In conclusion, religion has

been essential to the growth of education in South-West Nigeria. It has aided in the founding of educational institutions, the incorporation of values education, and the development of student leadership. The region is still impacted by the legacy of Christian education, which promotes societal advancement, moral integrity, and intellectual development. The enduring influence of Christianity and its foundational principles will probably continue to shape the educational ethos and aspirations of South-West Nigeria as it navigates future educational challenges.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The fact that religion has a pronounced effect on education, it is necessary that religious leaders create a standard religious educational system that continues to promote religious dialogue.
2. South-West Nigeria is known for its nature of multiple religions, religious education should be incorporated into all educational syllabi. Indicating peaceful coexistence and refraining from endorsing radical or intolerable religious principles.
3. Scholars of religious studies should make moral values and spiritual understanding a foundation in education. The educational system should continue to place importance on the involvement of God in life and education.

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