IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ON MORAL CHANGE AMONG YOUTHS FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of religious education on moral change among youths in Nigeria and explores its implications for socioeconomic development. Given Nigeria's diverse religious landscape, religious education, encompassing both Islamic, African Traditional Religion and Christian Religious teachings, plays a critical role in shaping the moral values and ethical behaviours of the youths in Nigeria. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research includes quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with students, teachers and community leaders across some secondary and tertiary institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria. The instrument for data collection was a self-developed questionnaire (REMCY- Religious Education and Moral Change among Youths). The Sample consists of 100 students, 10 teachers and 10 community leaders. The survey assessed students' perceptions of how religious education influenced their moral values. Students rated their agreement with various statements on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). **85%** of students agreed that religious education significantly influenced their sense of honesty. **80%** of students agreed that religious education fostered their integrity. **85%** of students agreed that religious education promoted a sense of responsibility. The correlation between religious education and honesty was **0.72,** indicating a strong positive relationship. The correlation between religious education and integrity was **0.68**. The correlation between religious education and responsibility was **0.74.** The strong positive correlations suggest that religious education is strongly associated with the development of significant moral values. These attributes contribute to broader socioeconomic development by fostering trust, reducing corruption and enhancing community development. Qualitative interviews were conducted with a smaller focused group of teachers and community leaders. The teachers observed noticeable

behavioural changes in students who actively participated in religious education classes. Some community leaders highlighted the broader impact of religious education on community values. The study recommends the importance of integrating religious education into the educational system as a means to promoting moral integrity and drive socioeconomic progress in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Religious education, Moral change, Youths, Socioeconomic development*

INTRODUCTION

In acknowledgement of Nigeria's diverse religious landscape, comprising predominantly Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religious beliefs, religious education plays a pivotal role in shaping the ethical and moral values of its young population. It should be noted that the Nigerian population consists of over 60% youths. Islamic madrasas, Christian mission schools, and traditional religious teachings instill virtues such as honesty, integrity, compassion and social responsibility. These values influence youth behaviour, decision-making and community engagement, thereby contributing to the reduction in crime and corruption, enhanced work ethic and social cohesion (Akpan, 2020; Yusuf, 2019). However, challenges such as sectarianism, extremist indoctrination and disparities in educational quality necessitate balanced and inclusive approaches (Ojo, 2018). The nation's educational system should encourage interfaith dialogue and cooperation through educational programs, workshops and community initiatives. Interfaith activities can also highlight shared values, fostering a sense of national unity (Adeleke, 2021).

Religious education has long been a cornerstone of moral development, shaping the ethical values and behaviours of individuals from a young age. In Nigeria, a country marked by significant religious diversity and a complex socioeconomic landscape, religious education plays a critical role in influencing the moral framework of youths. This study examines the impact of religious education on moral change among Nigerian youths and its implications for socioeconomic development. In the Nigerian context, religious education encompasses both Islamic, Christian Religion and African Traditional Religious teachings. However, only the Islamic and Christian Religious teachings are notably integrated into the national curriculum across various educational institutions. This educational approach aims to instill virtues such as honesty, empathy and integrity, which are crucial for personal and societal well-being (Ogunleye, 2023). The objective is not only to nurture morally upright individuals but also to enhance their capacity to contribute positively to economic and social development. Recent research underscores the transformative effects of religious education on moral development. For example, Adamu and Olatunde (2023) highlight that religious education fosters a strong sense of moral responsibility among youths, leading to improved ethical behaviour in both personal and public domain. Their study suggests that this moral grounding is vital for addressing socioeconomic issues such as corruption and economic inequality. Similarly, Johnson and Eze (2024) explore how religious teachings influence youths' attitudes towards community service and economic participation, arguing that a morally educated youth is better equipped to engage in productive economic activities and contribute to

societal progress. Furthermore, the relationship between moral education and socioeconomic development is increasingly recognized. According to Akinloye and Olaniyan (2024), youths who receive religious education often display higher levels of integrity and accountability, which are essential for fostering a stable and prosperous economy. Their research demonstrates that ethical behaviour promoted through religious teachings can enhance trust in economic transactions and improve overall socioeconomic outcomes.

This study aims to explore these dynamics by analyzing how religious education affects moral change among Nigerian youths and examining how these changes contribute to socioeconomic development. By integrating recent findings with the socioeconomic context of Nigeria, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of religious education in promoting both ethical behaviour and economic growth.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study primarily attempts to examine the impact of religious education on moral change among youths for socioeconomic development in Nigeria. Other objectives include, to undertake an overview of religious education in Nigeria, to articulate the challenges facing religious education and moral change among youths in Nigeria and to highlight the benefits of religious education and moral change among youths and socioeconomic development of Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Moral development refers to the process through which individuals learn to differentiate right from wrong, develop ethical values and establish a personal code of conduct. In the context of youth in Nigeria, this development is significantly influenced by religious teachings, which provide a model for understanding morality through religious texts, practices and community standards (Amadi, 2019).

Religious education encompasses the formal and informal teaching of religious beliefs, values, rituals and practices. In Nigeria, religious education is imparted through various institutions, including Islamic madrasas, Christian mission schools and African Traditional Religious teachings (this is mainly ingrained in the African culture). Each system aims to instill moral virtues and ethical behaviour in youth, shaping their character and worldview.

Ethical values are principles that guide behaviour and decision-making, such as honesty, integrity, compassion and respect. Religious education in Nigeria emphasizes these values, encouraging youth to act ethically in personal and public life. Ethical values derived from religious teachings contribute to societal norms and influence socioeconomic interactions.

Socioeconomic development involves the improvement of economic and social conditions in a society. It includes factors like economic growth, education, healthcare, social equity and community well-being. The moral development of youth through religious education can impact socioeconomic development by fostering a responsible, ethical and cohesive citizenry.

Islamic madrasas are educational institutions that provide religious and sometimes secular education based on Islamic principles. In Northern Nigeria, madrasas play a crucial role in teaching Quranic studies, Hadith and Islamic jurisprudence, instilling moral values such as justice, charity and community service (Ishaq, 2021, Abubakar, 2021)).

Christian mission schools, prevalent in Southern Nigeria, offer education based on Christian teachings. These schools often combine religious instruction with secular education, promoting values like love, forgiveness and social justice. They have historically contributed to moral and ethical development as well as academic excellence.

African Traditional Religious teachings, rooted in Nigeria's diverse ethnic traditions, emphasize respect for nature, elders and communal harmony. These teachings are less formalized but play a significant role in the moral development of youth within various communities, promoting values such as respect, responsibility and interconnectedness (Oladipo, 2020).

Social cohesion refers to the bonds that bring society together, fostering a sense of belonging and collective identity. Religious education, by promoting shared moral values and ethical behaviour, contributes to social cohesion in Nigeria. A cohesive society is crucial for peace, stability and socioeconomic development (Adegboye, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Religious Education and Moral Development in Nigeria

Nigeria is adjudged as a nation characterized by her rich complexities of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. This has caused her to stand at a crucial juncture where the moral development of the youth plays a pivotal role in shaping its future socioeconomic landscape. In this context, the role of religious education emerges as a fundamental factor in nurturing the ethical and moral scope of the young generation. Religious education in Nigeria, deeply embedded in the nation's historical, cultural and social fabric, influences the values, attitudes, and behaviours of the youths in profound ways (Nwankwo, 2018). With a population comprising a significant proportion of Muslims predominantly in the North, Christians mainly in the South, and adherents of indigenous beliefs scattered throughout, Nigeria presents a unique case for examining how religious education impacts moral development. Islamic madrasas, Christian mission schools and traditional religious teachings each contribute uniquely to the moral upbringing of Nigerian youth. These educational systems, rooted in their respective religious doctrines, often emphasize virtues such as honesty, integrity, compassion and social responsibility. These qualities are essential for personal development and societal progress.

The moral development instilled through religious education extends beyond individual character formation. It influences broader social and economic dimensions. A youth population grounded in strong ethical principles is less likely to engage in crime and corruption, which are behaviours that have historically hampered Nigeria's economic growth and social stability (Okeke, 2020). Furthermore, religious teachings often advocate for community service, empathy

and social justice, fostering a sense of collective responsibility that is crucial for national cohesion and development. However, the landscape of religious education in Nigeria is not without its challenges. Issues such as sectarianism, the potential for extremist indoctrination, disparities in educational quality and the need to balance religious teachings with secular education pose significant hurdles. Addressing these challenges is imperative to ensure that religious education contributes positively to the moral and ethical development of youth, thereby enhancing the country's socioeconomic trajectory. This exploration into the impact of religious education on the moral development of Nigerian youth aims to delve into these multifaceted dimensions. By understanding the historical context, the specific contributions of different religious educational systems and their influence on youth behaviour and decision-making, we can better appreciate the broader implications for Nigeria's socioeconomic development. Moreover, by identifying the challenges and proposing informed policy recommendations, the nation can chart a path forward that harnesses the potential of religious education to foster a morally grounded, socially cohesive and economically vibrant Nigeria

The impact of religious education on moral development in youth is a multifaceted issue that intertwines deeply with the socioeconomic development of a nation (Yusuf, 2019). In Nigeria, a country marked by diverse religious beliefs and practices, understanding this impact requires an exploration of the various dimensions through which religious education influences the moral compass of its young population and, subsequently, the broader societal and economic fabric. Nigeria's history is rich with religious diversity, predominantly characterized by Islam in the North, Christianity in the South, and indigenous beliefs interspersed throughout. This diversity shapes the religious education that youth receive, often beginning at home and continuing in schools and religious institutions. The historical role of missionaries and Islamic scholars in education highlights the longstanding influence of religion on the moral and ethical development of Nigerian youth. Religious education in Nigeria typically encompasses teachings from the Quran, the Bible and African Traditional Religious beliefs. These teachings often emphasize virtues such as honesty, respect, charity and community service. The moral frameworks provided by these religions aim to guide youth towards ethical behaviour and responsible citizenship. Islamic Education, predominantly in the North, emphasizes principles such as justice, compassion and the importance of community (*Ummah*). Madrasas (Islamic schools) play a crucial role in inculcating these values (Yusuf, 2018). In the South, Christian education through churches and mission schools focuses on teachings from the Bible, promoting love, forgiveness and social justice (Okeke, 2019). African Traditional Religious education, though less formalized, instills respect for nature, elders and communal harmony. Ironically, it is commonly argued that the religious persuasion of the African cannot easily be extricated from his culture. His religion and culture are deeply intertwined (Nwankwo, 2018).

Religious education significantly shapes the moral compass of Nigerian youth. It provides a framework for distinguishing right from wrong and influences their behaviour, decision-making and interactions with others. Youth with strong religious education are often seen to exhibit

higher levels of empathy, altruism and social responsibility (Umeh, 2019). Religious teachings discourage vices such as lying, theft and corruption, promoting honesty and integrity. Many religious doctrines emphasize helping the less fortunate, encouraging youth to engage in charitable activities. Religious education often includes teachings on peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution, which are crucial in a country with ethnic and religious tensions. The moral development of youth through religious education has direct and indirect implications for Nigeria's socioeconomic development. A morally upright youth population is less likely to engage in criminal activities and corruption, which are significant impediments to economic growth and social stability (Okoro, 2021). Ethical behaviour and a strong sense of responsibility fostered by religious education contribute to a diligent and productive workforce. Religious teachings on love, forgiveness and community help in building a cohesive society, reducing conflicts and promoting peace, which are essential for economic development. Religious organizations often run schools, hospitals and social welfare programmes, directly contributing to social and economic development by filling gaps in government services (Onyekwere, 2022).

While religious education has many benefits, it also faces challenges and controversies in Nigeria. In some cases, religious education can lead to sectarianism or even extremism, aggravating social divisions and violence. There is a disparity in the quality of religious education, with some regions in Nigeria having better access and resources than others, leading to unequal moral and educational development. The Nigerian education system must balance religious education with secular subjects to ensure comprehensive development (Tijani, 2021). To harness the positive impact of religious education on moral development and socioeconomic progress, some policy recommendations are crucial. They include the development of an integrated curriculum that balances religious and secular education, ensuring holistic development. Provide training and resources for religious educators to ensure they impart balanced and inclusive teachings. Encourage interfaith programmes and dialogue to foster mutual understanding and reduce sectarian tensions. Establish regulatory frameworks to monitor religious schools and prevent the spread of extremist ideologies. Religious education plays a pivotal role in shaping the moral development of Nigerian youth, which in turn has profound implications for the country's socioeconomic development. By promoting ethical behaviour, social responsibility and community service, religious education can contribute significantly to building a stable, peaceful and prosperous Nigeria (Adeola, 2019). However, it is essential to address the challenges and ensure that religious education promotes unity and inclusivity to fully realize its potential benefits.

Challenges facing Religious Education and Moral Change among Youths in Nigeria

One of the significant challenges facing religious education in Nigeria is the risk of sectarianism and religious intolerance. The country's religious diversity can sometimes lead to divisions and

conflicts among different religious groups. This sectarianism can be exacerbated if religious education emphasizes exclusivity or superiority of one faith over others, fostering intolerance and even violence (Ojo, 2020). Religious education, if not properly regulated, can be a breeding ground for extremism and radicalization. In some cases, religious schools or teachers may propagate extreme views that encourage radical behaviour, leading to social unrest and violence. This is particularly concerning regions affected by insurgent groups like Boko Haram, which exploit religious narratives to justify their actions. There is a significant disparity in the quality and accessibility of religious education across Nigeria. In rural and economically disadvantaged areas, access to quality religious education can be limited. Poor infrastructure, lack of trained teachers and inadequate resources hinder the effectiveness of religious education, affecting the moral development of youth in these regions.

Balancing religious education with secular subjects is a challenge. An overemphasis on religious teachings at the expense of secular education can limit the overall development of youth, reducing their employability and ability to contribute to the modern economy. Conversely, neglecting religious education can lead to a loss of moral and ethical grounding (Kalu, 2018). The lack of a standardized curriculum for religious education presents a challenge. Different religious schools and institutions may have varying curricula, which can lead to inconsistencies in the moral teachings and values imparted to students. A standardized curriculum that incorporates universal ethical principles while respecting religious diversity is needed. The competency and training of religious educators are crucial for effective moral development. Many religious teachers may lack formal training in pedagogy or may not be well-versed in the broader ethical implications of their teachings. This can result in ineffective or even harmful instruction that fails to instill appropriate moral values.

Nigeria's cultural diversity means that religious education must be sensitive to various cultural contexts. A one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective and could alienate certain groups. Tailoring religious education to respect and incorporate cultural nuances while promoting universal moral values is a complex but necessary task. Traditional religious education may not adequately address contemporary ethical issues such as gender equality, human rights, and environmental stewardship (Udo, 2019). Updating religious curricula to include these modern concerns is essential for the holistic moral development of youth and for preparing them to navigate the complexities of modern society. Religious education in Nigeria can be subject to political influence and manipulation. Politicians and leaders may exploit religious sentiments for personal or political gain, which can undermine the integrity of religious education and its role in moral development. Ensuring that religious education remains apolitical and focused on genuine moral development is a significant challenge.

Effective monitoring and evaluation of religious education programs are often lacking in most parts of Nigeria. Without proper oversight, it is difficult to assess the impact of religious education on moral development and to identify areas for improvement (Gbadegesin, 2021). Implementing robust evaluation mechanisms is necessary to ensure that religious education is achieving its

intended goals. In areas where multiple religious groups coexist, interfaith tensions can complicate the implementation of religious education. Ensuring that religious education promotes interfaith understanding and cooperation, rather than exacerbating divisions, is crucial for social cohesion and national unity (Udo, 2019). Economic constraints can limit the resources available for both religious and secular education. In financially strained environments, prioritizing comprehensive religious education that also supports socioeconomic development becomes challenging. Finding sustainable funding models for religious education is essential. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving policymakers, religious leaders, educators and the broader community. Developing a balanced and inclusive religious education system that promotes ethical values, respects religious and cultural diversity and aligns with contemporary societal needs is essential for the moral development of Nigerian youth and the overall socioeconomic development of the country.

Benefits of Religious Education and Moral Change among Youths in Nigeria

Religious education plays a crucial role in the moral and ethical upbringing of youth in Nigeria, significantly influencing the nation's socioeconomic development. Religious education instills core moral values such as honesty, integrity and trustworthiness. These values are critical in combating corruption and unethical behaviour, which are major impediments to Nigeria's economic growth. A morally upright youth population is less likely to engage in fraudulent activities, promoting a more transparent and trustworthy business environment. Religious teachings often emphasize love, tolerance, and forgiveness, fostering social cohesion and peaceful coexistence among diverse ethnic and religious groups. A harmonious society is essential for economic stability and growth, as it reduces conflicts and promotes collaborative efforts towards national development. Religious education encourages youth to be responsible citizens who contribute positively to their communities. Values such as civic duty, respect for laws and active participation in community service are emphasized, leading to a more engaged and proactive citizenry that supports democratic governance and community development initiatives. Moral teachings in religious education promote a strong work ethic, diligence and discipline. These attributes are vital for enhancing productivity and efficiency in the workforce. Youth who internalize these values are likely to excel in their professional endeavours, contributing to economic growth and development.

Many religious traditions stress the importance of charity and helping the less privileged. This encourages youth to engage in philanthropic activities and social welfare programs, addressing societal issues such as poverty, education and healthcare. Such initiatives complement government efforts and contribute to overall social and economic development. A well-grounded moral education helps in reducing crime rates and social vices such as drug abuse, violence and sexual immorality. By fostering a sense of moral responsibility, religious education can deter youth from engaging in criminal activities, leading to safer communities and a more stable society. Religious education often highlights leadership qualities such as humility, service to

others and ethical decision-making. Developing these qualities in youth prepares them for future leadership roles in various sectors, ensuring that Nigeria has a pool of morally sound leaders who can drive sustainable development. Religious education reinforces the importance of family values and social structures. Strong family units and cohesive social structures are fundamental for nurturing well-rounded individuals who can contribute effectively to society. Stable families also reduce social problems, allowing for more focus on economic activities. Religious institutions often provide not only moral education but also vocational training and educational opportunities. These initiatives empower youth with practical skills and knowledge, enhancing their employability and capacity to contribute to economic development. Moral and religious education can provide a sense of purpose, hope and resilience. This emotional and mental well-being is crucial for personal development and economic productivity, as individuals who are mentally healthy are more likely to be productive and innovative.

Youth who receive religious education are likely to carry their moral values into their professional lives, promoting ethical business practices. This can lead to the development of fair and just business environments, attracting investment and fostering economic growth. The benefits of religious education and moral development in youth are profound and multifaceted, significantly contributing to Nigeria's socioeconomic development. By fostering ethical behaviour, social cohesion, responsible citizenship and a strong work ethic, religious education helps build a foundation for sustainable economic growth and social stability. Addressing the challenges and enhancing the positive impacts of religious education will ensure that Nigeria's youth are well-equipped to lead the nation towards a prosperous future.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research includes quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with students, educators and community leaders across various educational institutions. The research aimed to explore the role of religious education in shaping moral values such as honesty, integrity and responsibility among youths. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study combined quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of religious education across various educational institutions.

The survey data were collected from a diverse sample of students across educational institutions in Lagos state, including secondary schools (50 Students) and tertiary institutions (50 Students). The survey targeted students who had received formal religious education as part of their curriculum. The demographics of respondents reveals: Age Range (10 to 24 years). Gender (52% female, 48% male). Religious Background (Christianity: 65%, Islam: 25%, Other Religions: 10%). Frequency of Religious Education (Daily Lessons: 30% of students received daily religious education, Weekly Lessons: 50% of students attended weekly religious education classes, Occasional Lessons: 20% of students reported irregular religious education). The survey assessed students' perceptions of how religious education influenced their moral values. Students rated their agreement with various statements on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree).

Honesty (Strongly Agree: 45%, Agree: 40%m Disagree: 4%, Strongly Disagree: 1%). **85%** of students agreed that religious education significantly influenced their sense of honesty. Integrity (Strongly Agree: 42%, Agree: 38%, Disagree: 6%, Strongly Disagree: 2%). **80%** of students agreed that religious education fostered their integrity. Responsibility (Strongly Agree: 50%, Agree: 35%, Disagree: 4%, Strongly Disagree: 1%). **85%** of students agreed that religious education promoted a sense of responsibility.

Statistical Analysis shows: The correlation between religious education and honesty was **0.72**, indicating a strong positive relationship. The correlation between religious education and integrity was **0.68**. The correlation between religious education and responsibility was **0.74.** The strong positive correlations suggest that religious education is strongly associated with the development of key moral values.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with a smaller, focused group of participants, including students, teachers and community leaders. The interviews provided deeper insights into the personal and social impacts of religious education. Students reported that religious education helped them internalize moral values, often citing specific lessons that taught them the importance of truthfulness, ethical behaviour and accountability. A student admitted his religious studies teacher always emphasizes that being honest is not only about been truthful, but about living truthfully in all facets of life. This has made him more intentional about his actions both at school and at home. Other students noted that religious teachings provided them with tools for resolving conflicts peacefully, reinforcing the importance of maintaining integrity in difficult situations.

The teachers observed noticeable behavioural changes in students who actively participated in religious education classes. These changes included improved honesty in academic work, greater responsibility in class assignments and more respectful interactions with peers and teachers. Students who take religious education seriously often show better behaviour in and out of the classroom. They are more likely to admit their mistakes and take responsibility for their actions, asserts some teachers. They emphasized the importance of being role models, noting that their own behaviour significantly influenced how students embraced the values taught in religious education.

In the environment where the students reside, some community leaders highlighted the broader impact of religious education on community values. They observed that youths who received religious education were more likely to participate in community service and take on leadership roles within their communities. Some agreed that young people who have gone through religious education programmes tend to be more involved in community development projects. They bring a sense of integrity and responsibility that inspires others. Some leaders also pointed out the need to ensure that religious education remains culturally relevant and inclusive, addressing the diverse religious backgrounds within the community.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data provides a holistic understanding of the impact of religious education on moral development among youths. The survey results and

interview insights consistently demonstrate that religious education significantly contributes to the development of moral values such as honesty, integrity and responsibility. The quantitative data provided strong statistical evidence of these relationships, while the qualitative data offered rich, personal narratives that illustrated the real-life impact of these values. While the overall impact of religious education was positive, the findings also revealed that the extent of its influence varied based on factors such as the frequency of religious education, the engagement of educators and the cultural context within which the education was delivered.

The findings of this study are consistent with those of other researchers who have explored the role of religious education in moral development. Various scholars have emphasized the importance of religious education in shaping ethical behaviour, providing a moral framework, and fostering personal and social responsibility. Berkowitz and Bier (2005) discuss how character education, which often includes religious education, is pivotal in promoting moral development. They argue that such education provides students with the necessary moral knowledge, reasoning skills and motivation to act ethically, which aligns with the current study's findings on the impact of religious education on honesty, integrity, and responsibility. According to a study by Lickona (1996), religious education is instrumental in helping students understand and commit to moral principles. Lickona highlights that religious teachings often provide students with clear ethical guidelines, which contribute to their moral development. This supports the current research findings that religious education fosters moral values like honesty and integrity. In the context of Nigeria, Adeyemo and Adeleye (2008) examine how religious education within schools serves as a moral compass for students, particularly in multi-religious societies. They argue that religious education helps students navigate complex moral landscapes and reinforces communal values such as responsibility and social justice. This finding parallels the current study's emphasis on the role of religious education in promoting responsibility among Nigerian youths. Hay and Nye (2006) conducted a longitudinal study that observed how religious education impacts students' moral reasoning over time. They found that students who received consistent religious education displayed a higher level of moral reasoning and ethical decision-making in adulthood. This finding supports the current research's conclusion that religious education instills enduring moral values in students.

The findings of this study align with the broader literature on the impact of religious education on moral development. The significant contribution of religious education to fostering honesty, integrity and responsibility among youths is well-supported by both the current research and existing studies. Other researchers have similarly recognized the vital role that religious education plays in shaping ethical behaviour and providing a moral foundation for students. These consistent findings underscore the importance of religious education in moral and character development, suggesting that it should remain a crucial component of educational curricula to support the holistic development of students.

CONCLUSION

The impact of religious education on the moral development of youth in Nigeria holds profound implications for the nation's socioeconomic trajectory (Ogunleye, 2023). Nigeria's diverse religious landscape, comprising Islam, Christianity and indigenous beliefs, underscores the pivotal role of religious education in shaping ethical values, behaviours, and attitudes among its young population. Throughout this discussion, it has become evident that religious education instills fundamental moral virtues such as honesty, integrity, compassion and social responsibility. These values are not merely theoretical but are actively practiced and reinforced through religious teachings, ceremonies and community engagements. Such moral grounding is essential for fostering a sense of personal accountability and civic duty among Nigerian youth, qualities that are indispensable for effective participation in the socioeconomic development of the nation. Moreover, religious education promotes social cohesion and peaceful coexistence by emphasizing principles of tolerance, respect for diversity and mutual understanding among different religious and ethnic groups (Adamu and Olatunde, 2023). In a country as ethnically and religiously diverse as Nigeria, these teachings are crucial for mitigating intergroup tensions and fostering a unified national identity that transcends communal divides.

Furthermore, the benefits extend to economic spheres as well. A morally upright youth population is more likely to uphold ethical standards in business and governance, thereby reducing corruption, promoting transparency and enhancing investor confidence (Udo, 2019). This, in turn, facilitates a more conducive environment for economic growth, investment and entrepreneurship. However, despite these significant benefits, challenges such as sectarianism, extremism, disparities in educational quality and the need for balanced curriculum integration persist. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts among religious leaders, educators, policymakers and community stakeholders to ensure that religious education remains inclusive, respectful of diversity and aligned with national development goals. Suffice it to state that, while recognizing and navigating these challenges, Nigeria has an opportunity to harness the positive impact of religious education on moral development to foster a generation of responsible, ethical and empowered youth. By doing so, Nigeria can effectively cultivate a foundation for sustainable socioeconomic development, where moral integrity, social harmony and economic prosperity blend to propel the nation towards a brighter future. The study concludes that religious education plays a crucial role in fostering moral values among youths, with significant positive effects on honesty, integrity and responsibility. These values are essential not only for personal development but also for the broader socio-economic development of communities (Kalu, 2018). By promoting ethical behaviour and social responsibility, religious education contributes to the cultivation of future leaders who can positively impact society.

The impact of religious education on the moral development of youth in Nigeria holds profound implications for the nation's socioeconomic trajectory. Nigeria's diverse religious landscape, comprising Islam, Christianity, and indigenous beliefs, underscores the pivotal role of religious

education in shaping ethical values, behaviours and attitudes among its young population (Ibrahim, 2017). Throughout this discussion, it has become evident that religious education instills fundamental moral virtues such as honesty, integrity, compassion and social responsibility. These values are not merely theoretical but are actively practiced and reinforced through religious teachings, ceremonies and community engagements. Such moral grounding is essential for fostering a sense of personal accountability and civic duty among Nigerian youth, qualities that are indispensable for effective participation in the socioeconomic development of the country (Adebayo & Okafor, 2019). Moreover, religious education promotes social cohesion and peaceful coexistence by emphasizing principles of tolerance, respect for diversity and mutual understanding among different religious and ethnic groups. In a country as ethnically and religiously diverse as Nigeria, these teachings are crucial for building a united and harmonious society. A peaceful and stable social environment, in turn, provides a conducive atmosphere for economic growth, investment and sustainable development (Ojo, 2018).

The study also highlighted the challenges inherent in religious education, such as the risk of sectarianism, extremist indoctrination and the need to balance religious teachings with secular knowledge. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that involves government regulation, curriculum reform, educator training and community engagement (Yusuf, 2019). By implementing these policy recommendations, Nigeria can harness the positive impact of religious education on moral development to achieve its broader goals of national unity, social stability and socioeconomic prosperity (Adeleke, 2021). In the long run, a morally grounded and ethically responsible youth population will not only contribute to reducing crime, corruption and social vices but will also play a pivotal role in driving innovation, productivity and sustainable development. Thus, religious education, when properly guided and implemented, can serve as a powerful tool for transforming Nigeria's future and ensuring its continued progress on the path of socioeconomic development (Akpan, 2020).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The findings suggest a need for educational institutions to prioritize religious education within their curricula, ensuring that it is delivered consistently and effectively.
2. There is a need for ongoing training and support for educators to help them serve as effective role models and facilitators of moral development.
3. **The role of community leaders in reinforcing the values taught in religious education should be recognized and supported, with opportunities for collaboration between schools and communities.**
4. Develop a balanced curriculum that combines religious teachings with secular subjects. This integrated approach ensures that youth receive a holistic education.

5. Encourage interfaith dialogue and cooperation through educational programs, workshops, and community initiatives. Interfaith activities can also highlight shared values, fostering a sense of national unity.

6. Invest in the training and professional development of religious educators. Teachers should be equipped with pedagogical skills, cultural sensitivity and a deep understanding of their religious teachings.

7. Implement robust monitoring and regulatory frameworks to oversee religious educational institutions.

8. Religious education should actively promote a culture of peace, non-violence and conflict resolution.

9. Engage parents in the moral and religious education of their children. Parents play a critical role in reinforcing the values taught in schools and religious institutions.

10. The government should establish partnerships with religious organizations to support and enhance religious education. Collaborations can also help address common challenges and promote a unified approach to moral development.

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Appendix 1
Quantitative Survey Questionnaire

Section A: Bio-data

1. Age:
☐ 10-14
☐ 15-19
☐ 20-24
☐ 25 and above

2. Gender:
☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Other

3. Educational Level:
☐ Primary School
☐ Secondary School
☐ University

4. Religious Affiliation:
☐ Christianity
☐ Islam
☐ Other (please specify): _____

5. Frequency of Religious Education Classes:
☐ Daily
☐ Weekly
☐ Monthly
☐ Occasionally
☐ Not at all

Section B: Perception of Moral Values

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements by ticking the appropriate box.

1. Religious education has made me more honest in my daily life.
☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

2. I have learned the importance of integrity through religious education.
☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

3. Religious education has taught me to be more responsible in my actions.
☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

4. Religious education has helped me resolve conflicts more peacefully.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

5. My academic performance has improved due to the moral teachings in religious education.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

6. I am more involved in community service because of the values taught in religious education.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

7. Religious education has taught me to respect others regardless of their beliefs.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Section C: Open-Ended Questions

8. What specific lessons in religious education have influenced your understanding of honesty?

9. Can you describe a situation where religious education helped you act with integrity?

10. In what ways has religious education encouraged you to take on responsibilities within your school or community?

11. Do you feel that the religious education you received is relevant to your everyday life? Please explain.

Appendix 2
Qualitative Interview

Interview for Students

1. Can you share your experiences with religious education in your school? What topics or lessons stand out to you?
2. How frequently do you attend religious education classes and do you find them engaging?
3. How has religious education influenced your understanding of honesty? Can you provide an example?
4. Do you believe religious education has taught you to act with integrity? How has it shaped your actions?
5. In what ways has religious education made you more responsible? Could you share a situation where you felt this?
6. How do the moral values taught in religious education apply to your daily life? For instance, how do you practice honesty or responsibility outside of school?
7. Can you describe a situation where the teachings from religious education helped you resolve a conflict?
8. Have you noticed any changes in your behaviour or the behaviour of your peers as a result of religious education?
9. How do you think religious education affects your involvement in the community or your interactions with others?
10. What aspects of religious education do you find most valuable? Are there any areas you think could be improved?
11. How would you like to see religious education evolve to better support moral development?

Interview for Teachers

1. How do you perceive the role of religious education in your institution? What goals do you aim to achieve through these lessons?
2. How do you approach the teaching of moral values such as honesty, integrity and responsibility in your classes?
3. Have you noticed any changes in students' behaviour that you would attribute to religious education? Can you provide specific examples?
4. How do you assess the effectiveness of religious education in fostering moral values among students?
5. What challenges do you face in delivering religious education that effectively instills moral values?
6. Are there any particular strategies or activities you find particularly successful in engaging students with these moral lessons?
7. How do you see the impact of religious education extending beyond the classroom, particularly in the broader community?
8. How do you ensure that religious education is inclusive and respectful of diverse religious backgrounds within your institution?
9. What improvements would you suggest for religious education programmes to enhance their impact on moral development?
10. How do you see the future of religious education in your institution and what role do you believe it will play in the overall development of students?

Interview for Community Leaders

1. How do you perceive the role of religious education in the community, particularly among youths?
2. In your view, how effectively does religious education promote values such as honesty, integrity and responsibility?
3. Have you observed any differences in the behaviour or attitudes of youths who have undergone religious education? Can you share any examples?
4. How do you think religious education contributes to the development of ethical leaders and responsible citizens in the community?
5. What role does religious education play in promoting social cohesion and community involvement among youths?
6. How do you ensure that the teachings in religious education are culturally relevant and inclusive?
7. How does the community support or engage with religious education programmes? Are there any community-led initiatives that complement these teachings?
8. What additional support or resources do you think are needed to enhance the impact of religious education?
9. How would you like to see religious education evolve to better serve the moral development of youths and the needs of the community?
10. What long-term benefits do you believe religious education can bring to the socioeconomic development of the community.