
RELIGIOUS STUDIES AS INSTRUMENT FOR GOAL ACHIEVEMENT AND PRACTICE OF QUALITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA PRIMARY SCHOOLS

BY

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Abstract

This paper examines religious studies as instrument for goal achievement and the practice of quality education in primary schools in Nigeria. Religious studies play a vital role in primary education in Nigeria, a country with diverse religious traditions. Religious studies contribute to the achievement of broader educational goals, such as promoting social cohesion, encouraging moral autonomy, and nurturing emotional and spiritual well-being. It enriches the educational experience by offering opportunities for interdisciplinary connections, making learning more meaningful and relevant. The paper concludes that religious studies hold immense potential in shaping the future of education in Nigeria and beyond. By embracing religious studies as an instrument for goal achievement and the practice of quality education, primary schools can play a pivotal role in fostering a generation of individuals who embody moral integrity, interfaith understanding, and a commitment to creating a harmonious and just society. As the field of religious studies continues to evolve, it remains a valuable tool for building a brighter and more inclusive future for the young minds of today. Therefore, educational authorities in Nigeria should prioritize the seamless integration of religious studies into the curriculum of primary schools. This integration should be designed to promote a balanced and inclusive approach, fostering respect for diverse religious beliefs and traditions.

Keywords: Religious studies, Quality education, Goal achievement, Practice, Instrument

Introduction

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of any nation, and primary education serves as the foundation for a child's overall development. In Nigeria, primary schools serve as the starting point for academic and personal growth, laying the groundwork for future success. As a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, Nigeria faces the challenge of providing quality education while promoting religious tolerance and understanding among its diverse population. Religious studies, as an integral part of the curriculum in Nigerian primary schools, has the potential to address this challenge by not only fostering moral values and character development but also promoting religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence (Oludipe, 2019). Religion holds great importance in Nigerian society, with a rich tapestry of religious beliefs and practices, including Islam, Christianity, traditional African religions, and others. As a result, religious studies have been a subject of great importance in the Nigerian education system. It serves as a means to teach students about their own faith and culture while fostering an understanding and respect for the beliefs of others (Adesina&Oyeneye, 2020).

Understanding the current state of religious studies in Nigerian primary schools is crucial to identify existing strengths and weaknesses. Through a thorough examination of the curriculum, teaching methods, and teacher qualifications, we can assess how effectively religious studies is being integrated into the educational system. Religious studies not only impart knowledge about different religions but also nurtures valuable life skills such as critical thinking, empathy, and ethical decision-making (Abdullahi, 2018). Understanding various religious perspectives can empower students to be open-minded, compassionate individuals, contributing to a more harmonious society. Therefore, this paper aims to examine religious studies as instrument for Goal Achievement and practice of quality education in primary schools in Nigeria.

Concept of Religious Studies

Religious studies, also known as the study of religion or theology, are an academic discipline that examines and analyzes various aspects of religions. It involves the systematic and objective study of religious beliefs, practices, traditions, scriptures, rituals, and the roles of religion in shaping societies and cultures (Grimmitt, 2010). Religious studies is an interdisciplinary field that draws from various disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, literature, and art to gain a comprehensive understanding of religious phenomena. The primary focus of religious studies is to explore and understand the diversity of religious traditions around the world, without promoting or endorsing any particular belief system. Scholars in this field seek to analyze religions in an unbiased manner, considering their historical, cultural, social, and psychological contexts (Jackson, 2014; Cairns, 2011). Religious studies is pursued in various academic institutions, including universities and colleges, and it can be part of broader educational curricula or offered as a specialized degree program. Scholars and researchers in religious studies contribute to the field through research, publications, and academic discussions that add to the body of knowledge on religions and their influence on human life and societies.

Concept of Goal Achievement

Goal achievement refers to the successful realization of specific objectives or targets set by individuals, organizations, or communities. It involves the process of planning, striving, and attaining desired outcomes, often marked by measurable milestones or accomplishments (Locke & Latham, 2016). Goal achievement is a fundamental aspect of personal development, professional success, and organizational effectiveness. The process of goal achievement typically involves:

Goal Setting: Identifying specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) objectives that align with one's values, vision, and priorities.

Planning and Strategy: Developing a well-defined plan and strategic approach to reach the set goals, including outlining the necessary steps, resources, and actions required.

Implementation and Effort: Taking consistent and focused actions to work towards the set objectives, overcoming obstacles and challenges along the way.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Regularly assessing progress towards the goals, making adjustments as needed, and celebrating achievements.

Completion and Success: Successfully attaining the desired outcomes, accomplishing the set targets, and experiencing a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment.

Goal achievement is not always a linear process, and setbacks and adjustments are common. However, a resilient and determined approach, along with adaptability, can contribute to successful goal attainment.

Historical Perspective of Religious Studies in Nigerian Primary Schools

Religious studies in Nigerian primary schools have a long and evolving history that reflects the country's diverse religious landscape and the interplay between education and religious beliefs. The inclusion of religious studies in the curriculum has been influenced by historical, cultural, and political factors, shaping the way religion is taught in primary schools (Ebie, 2012). During the colonial era, Christian missionary activities played a significant role in shaping education in Nigeria. Christian missionaries established schools and began integrating religious instruction into the curriculum. This led to the early introduction of Christian religious studies in many schools, particularly in regions where missionaries were active. The British colonial government also played a role in shaping education policies, further influencing the inclusion of religious studies in the curriculum (Abdullahi, 2013). While Christian religious studies gained prominence during colonial rule, Islamic education also had a strong historical presence in Nigeria. Islamic schools (madrasas) have been a part of the educational landscape for centuries, providing religious instruction alongside secular subjects. With the spread of Islam, Islamic studies became an integral part of the curriculum in regions where Islam was the dominant religion.

After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the government took more control over the education system. Educational policies sought to strike a balance between secular education and religious instruction. To accommodate the religious diversity of the country, the government introduced the teaching of Islamic religious studies for Muslim

students and Christian religious studies for Christian students in public schools. In 1988, the Nigerian government passed the Education Reform Act, which emphasized the importance of religious studies in primary education (Eke, & Igboin, 2018). The act recognized religious studies as a core subject and mandated its inclusion in the curriculum for both public and private primary schools. This move aimed to promote religious understanding and tolerance among students of different faiths (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2008).

Today, religious studies continue to be an essential component of the primary education curriculum in Nigeria. Students are taught about their own religious traditions, as well as the beliefs and practices of other major religions in the country (Adediran, 2017). Efforts have been made to promote a balanced and inclusive approach to religious studies, focusing on understanding and respect for diverse religious perspectives.

The Role of Religious Studies in Promoting Moral Values and Character Development

Religious studies play a vital role in promoting moral values and character development among students. This subject goes beyond merely imparting knowledge about religious beliefs and practices; it seeks to instill ethical principles, virtues, and a sense of responsibility in students. The influence of religious studies on moral values and character development can be seen through several key aspects:

Teaching Ethical Frameworks: Religious studies introduce students to various ethical frameworks and moral teachings present in different religions. These frameworks provide guidelines on how to lead an ethical and virtuous life, emphasizing qualities such as honesty, compassion, forgiveness, humility, and respect for others (Jackson, 2007). By studying and reflecting on these teachings, students gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be morally upright.

Cultivating Empathy and Compassion: Religious studies often include narratives and teachings that emphasize empathy and compassion for others, especially for the less fortunate or marginalized (Wright, 2017). Students are encouraged to put themselves in others' shoes, fostering a sense of empathy and a desire to help those in need. This cultivation of compassion contributes to building a more caring and empathetic society.

Encouraging Moral Reflection: Religious studies encourage students to engage in moral reflection and critical thinking. Students are prompted to ponder ethical dilemmas and consider the consequences of their actions on themselves and others (Wright, 2017). This process of introspection helps students develop a moral compass and make better-informed decisions based on ethical considerations.

Instilling Virtues: Religious studies emphasize the importance of developing virtues such as patience, integrity, self-discipline, and humility. These virtues are considered essential for personal growth and character development, and religious teachings often provide stories and role models to exemplify these virtues in action (Jackson, 2007).

Fostering a Sense of Purpose and Meaning: Religious studies provide students with a sense of purpose and meaning in life. Learning about religious beliefs and their significance helps students understand their role in the world and fosters a sense of responsibility towards their fellow human beings and the environment.

Shaping Moral Identity: Engaging with religious studies can contribute to the formation of a student's moral identity. By understanding the values and principles of their own religious tradition or exploring different religious perspectives, students develop a sense of identity based on their moral beliefs (Wright, 2017).

Promoting Moral Autonomy: Religious studies encourage students to think independently about moral issues and make moral decisions based on their own understanding and convictions. This empowerment of moral autonomy prepares students to navigate complex ethical challenges they may encounter in their lives.

Overall, religious studies offer a unique platform for nurturing moral values and character development, creating a positive impact not only on individual students but also on their communities and society as a whole.

The Integration of Religious Studies into the Curriculum

The integration of religious studies into the curriculum is a critical aspect of providing a well-rounded education that addresses the spiritual and moral development of students. This subject goes beyond imparting knowledge about different religious traditions; it aims to foster religious literacy, interfaith understanding, and respect for diverse

beliefs (Grimmitt, 2010). Effectively integrating religious studies into the curriculum according to Adediran (2017) requires careful planning and consideration of various factors to ensure a balanced and inclusive approach.

Promoting Religious Literacy: Integrating religious studies into the curriculum helps students become religiously literate, meaning they possess a basic understanding of the major world religions, their beliefs, practices, and cultural significance (Cairns, 2011). This knowledge enables students to engage in informed discussions about religion, breaking down stereotypes and promoting mutual respect.

Emphasizing Interfaith Understanding: Religious studies provide an opportunity to emphasize interfaith understanding, encouraging students to learn about and appreciate different religious traditions. This approach fosters respect for religious diversity and promotes a sense of unity and coexistence among students from various religious backgrounds.

Incorporating Ethical Teachings: Religious studies often include ethical teachings and moral principles that can be integrated into the broader curriculum (Cairns, 2011). By incorporating ethical discussions, students learn about values such as compassion, honesty, and empathy, which are applicable in various aspects of life.

Interdisciplinary Connections: Integrating religious studies into other subjects, such as history, literature, and social studies, allows for a more comprehensive understanding of religious influences on societies, cultures, and historical events. This interdisciplinary approach helps students see the interconnectedness of various subjects and their relevance in the real world.

Encouraging Critical Thinking: Religious studies provide an excellent platform for encouraging critical thinking and open dialogue. Students can explore philosophical questions related to religion, such as the existence of God, the nature of faith, and the problem of evil (Grimmitt, 2010). Engaging in these discussions nurtures analytical and logical thinking skills.

Sensitivity to Cultural Context: When integrating religious studies into the curriculum, it is essential to be sensitive to the cultural context and religious backgrounds of the students. Teachers should create an inclusive and respectful environment that allows students to express their beliefs and experiences openly.

Teacher Training and Professional Development: To ensure effective integration of religious studies, teachers need proper training and professional development. This includes learning about different religious traditions, teaching methods, and strategies for addressing sensitive topics in the classroom.

Community Involvement: Incorporating community involvement and engagement with religious institutions can enrich the religious studies curriculum (Grimmitt, 2010). Guest speakers from various religious backgrounds can provide firsthand insights and experiences, enhancing students' understanding of religious practices and beliefs.

By thoughtfully integrating religious studies into the curriculum, educational institutions can play a vital role in promoting religious tolerance, fostering interfaith dialogue, and nurturing a generation of globally aware and culturally sensitive individuals.

Religious Studies as panacea for Goal Achievement and the Practice of Quality Education

Religious studies can significantly contribute to goal achievement and the practice of quality education in primary schools. According to Alviar-Martin and Hughes (2016), through imparting moral values, promoting holistic development, and fostering critical thinking, religious studies enrich the educational experience of students, empowering them to become responsible and compassionate individuals. Alviar-Martin and Hughes(2016) identified the role of religious studies in achieving educational goals and quality education as:

Moral and Character Development: Religious studies provide a platform for teaching moral and ethical values, which are essential for character development. As students learn about the moral teachings and principles of different religions, they are encouraged to apply these values in their daily lives, promoting integrity, empathy, and social responsibility.

Promoting Tolerance and Social Cohesion: Through religious studies, students gain a deeper understanding of diverse religious traditions and beliefs. This fosters interfaith understanding and tolerance, breaking down barriers and promoting social cohesion within the school community and beyond.

Enhancing Critical Thinking Skills: Religious studies often involve discussions about complex philosophical and ethical questions. Engaging with such topics encourages critical thinking and analytical skills, enabling students to analyze different perspectives and form well-reasoned opinions.

Encouraging Respect for Diversity: By learning about different religious beliefs and practices, students develop respect for cultural and religious diversity. This respect is vital in cultivating a positive learning environment and nurturing global citizenship.

Nurturing Emotional and Spiritual Well-being: Religious studies provide an opportunity for students to explore questions related to spirituality and the purpose of life. This exploration can contribute to their emotional well-being and provide a sense of meaning and purpose.

Fostering a Sense of Purpose: Religious studies can help students develop a sense of purpose beyond academic achievement. By understanding the principles of compassion, service, and social justice, students are encouraged to contribute positively to their communities and society.

Strengthening Values Education: Religious studies complement values education, reinforcing the importance of honesty, kindness, and empathy. These values are crucial for building strong moral character and responsible citizenship.

Cultivating Cultural Awareness: Religious studies expose students to cultural practices and traditions associated with different religions. This exposure cultivates cultural awareness and sensitivity, preparing students to thrive in diverse and multicultural settings.

Through a well-structured and inclusive religious studies curriculum, primary schools can lay the foundation for fostering moral and ethical values, promoting social cohesion, and nurturing well-rounded individuals who can positively contribute to society.

Conclusion

Religious studies play a crucial role in the educational landscape of primary schools in Nigeria and beyond. Religious studies go beyond merely imparting knowledge about different religions; it serves as a powerful instrument for promoting moral values and character development. Religious studies also contribute to the achievement of broader educational goals, such as promoting social cohesion, encouraging moral autonomy, and nurturing emotional and spiritual well-being. It enriches the educational experience by offering opportunities for interdisciplinary connections, making learning more meaningful and relevant. Conclusively, religious studies hold immense potential in shaping the future of education in Nigeria and beyond. By embracing religious studies as an instrument for goal achievement and the practice of quality education, primary schools can play a pivotal role in fostering a generation of individuals who embody moral integrity, interfaith understanding, and a commitment to creating a harmonious and just society. As the field of religious studies continues to evolve, it remains a valuable tool for building a brighter and more inclusive future for the young minds of today.

Recommendations

- i. Educational authorities in Nigeria should prioritize the seamless integration of religious studies into the curriculum of primary schools. This integration should be designed to promote a balanced and inclusive approach, fostering respect for diverse religious beliefs and traditions.
- ii. Government should provide comprehensive training and ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers who deliver religious studies. This training should equip educators with the knowledge, skills, and sensitivity necessary to handle religious topics in a respectful and unbiased manner.
- iii. Schools should encourage to organize interfaith dialogue sessions and activities that facilitate understanding and cooperation among students from various religious backgrounds. These initiatives can contribute to a more harmonious and inclusive school environment
- iv. There should be collaboration between religious communities and institutions to enrich the religious studies curriculum. Guest speakers and community involvement can provide valuable insights and firsthand experiences, enhancing students' understanding of religious practices and beliefs.

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