

The Influence of Religion on Higher Education in Nigeria: Exploring Its Implication on National Development

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Abstract: Nigeria is undergoing economic, social, political, and educational reforms, much like any other nation. This can be achievable when education is given high priority. The importance and relevance of education and higher education in particular cannot be neglected when development is aimed at all levels. Religion has a role to play when it concerns development. The purpose of this research is to investigate how religious owned private higher institutions impact the development of higher education and its implication on development in Nigeria. It studies the relationship between religion, higher education and national development in Nigeria.

Previous studies have focused on impact education on development. Thus the thrust of this work centers on the impact of religion on higher education in the development process and progress of Nigeria. This work adopts Emile Durkheim's theory of functionalism, which holds that religion has functions to perform. The methodology applied in this paper is exploratory. The findings reveal that religion has both positive and negative impacts on higher education and national development in Nigeria. Through the religious establishment of higher institutions there is easy access to higher education. This paper examines and recommends that religion and education are inseparable and hence both are needed for national development. It highlights how important it is for decision-makers to acknowledge and value their contributions.

Keywords: Higher Education, National Development, Religion

INTRODUCTION

The role of religion in education in Nigeria, cannot be overemphasized, religion has played an important part in the development of education ever since the beginning. Generally, schools in Nigeria were originally established by religious groups, mainly by the missionaries. Though the government took over the schools aside the private schools but the religious characters were still retained. The religious institutions in Nigeria are also involved in development process of Nigeria, through their involvement in various social ministries and societal activities.

Religion can be said to perform two functions; the first is the heavenly or spiritual function. That is man's relationship with God. The second is the earthly or social function, which regulates relationships among human beings. Following the view of Durkheim, religion can be examined in terms of the social functions they fulfill, such as providing social support or reinforcing the social norms. By exploring both the beliefs and the functions of religious, we can better understand its impact on the individual, on groups, and on society as a whole¹. For the purpose of this work, the focus will be on the second function which is also regarded as the social ministry of religion. Religious organizations have been relatively active in several social ministries. Education is part of this social ministries,

¹ J. I. Fearon. 2016. *Social Theories of Religion. Lecture Material.* National Open University Abuja

long before the establishment of faith based universities. However, existing studies focused on higher education and socioeconomic development, the role of religion in education as well as religious education and the Nigerian nation, with little attention on religion and higher education as it affects national development. This paper therefore seeks to examine the role religion has played in higher education in relation to its impact on national development.

RELIGION AND EDUCATION

Education involves an organized system of learning, and learning has a goal to change human behavior through the imparting of new values, new knowledge and new ideas². Hence, the goal of education is to impart knowledge for positive molding. In considering Emile's theory of functionalism, it is his opinion that religion has functions to perform in the society, which includes the establishment of education to enhance development.

It is difficult to have a universal meaning of religion due to its versatility. But one thing mostly common among religion adherents is that religion has to do with a belief system. It could be said that religion is essentially an encounter or relationship between the supernatural (God) and human beings. Whether the supernatural or the divine actually exists is not an issue³.

Religion and education are essential to the development of human mind. According to Peter, their essence, values and impacts on any society are dependent upon the extent to which they are approached simultaneously⁴. The establishment of education in Nigeria is traceable to the activities of the missionaries; religion has played an important part in education and socio-economic development of Nigeria. The early missionaries established several schools like the Grammar Schools and also schools like Ansar-ur-deen College for the Muslims among others.

However, there were other factors and various motives behind the introduction of education in Nigeria by various groups and organizations in Nigeria. For one, they saw it as a means of

facilitating their conversion to Christianity. Like Bishop Shanahan who laid greater emphasis on the school apostolate as he saw the school as the primary and surest way of reaching the people⁵.

Education and Development: An Overview

Education is one of the sectors given high priority by government for the all-inclusive development of a society. Akubue sees education as all man's activities which enable him to realize himself and to live fully as human being, or a process of influencing people, young or old so that they may become worthy human beings⁶.

Development is continuous process; even the developed countries we have come to know today are still in the process of developing because things of developmental benefits are discovered on daily basis. The process of development involves the addition of economic, environmental, educational and social elements. The purpose of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population and the creation or expansion of local regional income and employment opportunities without damaging the resources of the environment.

In the view of Isirame, the nexus between education and development proves education to be a critical index to development⁷. For instance, Adepoju and Okotuni address the goals of higher education which include national development through high level of relevant manpower training development of values for the survival of the individual and society⁸. This shows that higher education has great potential to facilitate socio-economic growth and human capital.

The engine of a nation's growth and development is its educational system. The best approach to get a country ready for developmental process is through good education. Without good education and proper skills, it would be difficult for the people to grow, develop and compete effectively. It improves the quality of life and leads to broad social benefits to individuals and society. Education raises people's productivity

² E. Ehiometalor. 1985. "Development of Vocational Manpower for the Social System" in Trends in Vocational Education in Nigeria. Benin City: Nerapg 12

³ E. Ehiometalor. 1985. Development of Vocational Manpower for the Social System in Trends in Vocational Education in Nigeria. Benin City: Nerapg 130

⁴ O. C. Peter. 2016. "The Place of Religion in Education: A Contemporary Nigerian Perspective". *Cultural and Religious Studies*. 4.3:204-213

⁵ I. O. Umejesi. 2010. "The Holy Ghost Missions in Igboland (1885-1967): The Shanahan Story" in Understanding Christian Studies (Ed

.O. E. Alana and F. E. Ehegho. Eds. Ilorin: Nathadex Publishers. Vol. 195

⁶ A. U. Akubue. 1998. Profile of Competency Dimension of Junior Secondary Christian Religious Teachers in Implementation Policy: Theory and Practice. NERA Conference Proceeding.pg 54

⁷ O. C. Isirame 2010. "Religious Education and the Nigerian Nation". *Religion and the Nigerian Nation*. Nigeria. 109

⁸ T. L. Adepoju and C.A Okotuni. 2018. Higher Education, Knowledge Economy and Sustainable Development in Nigeria Retrieved 28 Feb., 2024 from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327473467> .

and creativity and promotes entrepreneurship and technological advances.

Higher Education and Development

In simple term, higher education is education beyond the secondary school level; education provided by a college or university. It is a form of education offered at postsecondary educational institutions, providing a named degree, diploma, or certificate of higher studies upon completion of a course of study. Higher education also includes polytechnics, monotronics, colleges and colleges of education. According to Abdulkareem et al higher education was established in the pursuit of meeting global requirement of producing manpower that will serve in different capacities and contribute positively to the nation's socio-economic and political development in Nigeria⁹. The quality of higher education determines the quality of human resources of any given country. They aim to help individuals acquire both physical and intellectual skills for self-reliance. They provide highly relevant manpower training and inculcate proper values on individuals, which aid in the development a nation thereby, fostering national and international connection. Regarding these, Obadara and Alaka observe that one of the major objectives of the higher institutions is to produce a qualified skilled and globally competent workforce for the labour market of business and industry which is critical factor to national growth and development¹⁰.

In the opinion of Charles and Etinosa, it has been documented that university education shall make optimum contribution to national development¹¹. Higher education therefore has great potentials to facilitate socio-economic growth and human capital development of the country. This is visible through education by improving skills and productive capacities of the labour force. For a country to be more relevant in the world of globalization and competitiveness, her higher education must adequately prepare the youth for the labour market.

Higher education has great potential in facilitating growth and development. In the words of Adeboju and Fadokun, for a country to be more relevant in this world of globalization and competitiveness, her institution of higher learning must adequately prepare the youth for the labour market¹². When the youths strive in the labour market, then development in the nation is evident and attainable

Education play the role of training highly qualified manpower and reliable citizens who will be able to meet the needs of all sectors of human activities. Although, skills and knowledge can be acquired in various settings, but formal education plays a paramount role in this connection¹³. Meaning at any level in national development, such is increasingly driven by the advance and application of knowledge. Education in general and higher education in particular are fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations¹⁴.

Religion and the Establishment of Higher Education

Based on the functionalism theory of Emile Durkheim, education is part of the social ministries of religion. Before the establishment of faith-based or faith owned higher institutions of learning, religion was already involved in education. The first higher education of learning in Nigeria was brought by the missionaries. Therefore the root of higher education is traceable to missionary activities in Nigeria. The University of Ibadan is a primary and perfect example of religious establishment of higher education. Education they say is a tool for fighting poverty and disease in the society. In view of the aforementioned, this work will focus on religion and establishment of higher education. Many scholars have studied the connection between religion and higher education. In the words of Craig et al, social scientists have recently developed growing interest in the connection between religion and higher education¹⁵.

⁹ A. Y. Abdulkareem, Y. A Fasasi and O.P Akinnubi. 2011. "Human Resource Utilization and Internal Efficiency in State-owned Universities in Nigeria". *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Science. Pakistan* 1. 26-34

¹⁰ O. Obadara and A. Alaka. 2013. Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Nigerian Universities. *Journal of Education and Practice*. Vol. 4 No 8. Retrieved 27 Feb., 2024 from www.iiste.org

¹¹ R. Charles and M. Etinosa. 2015. Higher Education in Nigeria and the Emergence of Private Universities. Retrieved on 25 Feb., 2024 from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273699592>

¹² T. L Adeboju and J B Fadokun. 2009. "Higher Education and Youth Preparation for Labour Market: Implication for Economic Growth in

Nigeria". *Journal of Educational Review (JER). A Publication of Higher Education Research and Policy Network (HERPNET) and Serials Publication* 2:185-193.

¹³ K. Odekunle and F. Okeke. 2012. Public-Private Partnership in Nigeria. Ibadan: NISER

¹⁴ World Bank. 2002. World Development Indicators. Washington DC: The World Bank.

¹⁵ C. Craig, M. Aronezyk, D. Mayrl and J. VanAntwerpen 2007 "The Religious Engagements of American Undergraduates" *Social Science Research Council* Retrieved 23 May, 2024 <http://religion.ssre.org/reguide>. [Google scholar]

The Role of Religion in the Establishment of Higher Education

The educational institutions were originally established by religious groups, mainly Christian missionaries from Europe who used them as tools for conversion. The curricula were faith based and overwhelming by religious dogma. The early missionaries used the establishment of education to persuade people to accept Christianity and Islam. But in the early 1970s, the Nigerian government assumed control of every school so as to instill secular principles. However, a new educational policy was made years later, which offered chances for private ownership of higher education. Therefore, making way for other religious bodies to exercise their social rights and functionality.

The establishment of higher education by religious organisations will be discussed through the lens of religious owned private higher institutions (the name “private” institutions is applied to all tertiary or higher institutions owned by corporate bodies, religious organisations, individuals, or establishments) or faith-based institutions. Religious or faith-based institutions are guided by missions that are inspired and driven by religious beliefs. In the opinion of Delucchi, many faith-based colleges and universities are the practical application of the sponsoring of religion or faith and aspiration¹⁶.

Religious higher institutions provide a distinctive educational experience that blends community involvement, spiritual and personal growth, and academic brilliance. Faith-based or religious-owned higher institutions are distinctively positioned to effectively work toward a global good, with faith-informed missions. However, some of these religious owned institutions are owned by renowned clerics but are still strictly treated like they are owned by the church or mosque. Some of these higher institutions established by Religious organizations or Religious leaders in Nigeria include:

- Babcock University by the Seventh Day Adventist
- Madonna University by Rev. Fr. Ede
- Bowen University by Nigerian Baptist Convention
- Covenant University by The Living Faith Church
- Benson Idahosa University by Church of God Mission

- Bishop Godfrey Okoye University by Catholic Diocese of Enugu
- Landmark University by The Living Faith Church
- McPherson University by Foursquare Gospel Church
- Samuel Adebayega University (SAU) by the Apostolic Church
- Al-Hikmah University by AbdulRaheem Oladimehi Islamic Foundation
- Evangel University by The Assemblies of God Church
- Mountain Top University by Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministry
- Theological College of Northern Nigeria
- Redeemer’s University by Redeemed Christian Church of God
- Ajayi Crowder University by Anglican Communion of Nigeria
- Bingham University by the Evangelical Church Winning All
- Crawford University by The Apostolic Faith Mission
- Joseph Ayo Babalola by Christ Apostolic Church
- Salem University by Foundation Faith Church
- Wesley University of Science and Technology by the Methodist Church Nigeria
- St. Paul’s University College by Anglican Convention (Eastern Nigeria)
- Anchor University by Deeper Life Bible Church
- Greenmard School of Midwifery by Catholic Missions Anyigba
- Kwara State College of Arabic and Islamic Legal Studies, Ilorin
- Fountain University by Nasrul-lahi-il-Fathi Society (NASFAT)
- Crescent University by Justice Bola Ajibola under the banner of Islamic Mission for Africa (IMA)

These institutions are geared towards promoting academic excellence and also ensuring moral and spiritual uprightness of her students. Education is the bedrock to the development of any nation that desires to be ranked as one of the developed nations in the world¹⁷. Higher education remains an integral part of the development of manpower in the country. The neglect of this tier of education could cause an irredeemable problem to the society because this the apex institute of formal learning. It

¹⁶ M. Delucchi. 1997. “Liberal Arts Colleges and the Myths of Uniqueness”. *The Journal of Higher Education*. 68:414-426

¹⁷N. E. Akpotu and W. P Akpocha. 2009. “An Analysis of factors influencing the Upsurge of Private Universities in Nigeria”. *Journal of Social Science* 18.1:21-27

produces the man power for the economy of the country. Acquiring higher education seems to make an individual to be self-reliant and contributes positively to the development of the society¹⁸.

Importance of Religious Owned Higher Institutions

According to the need for advancement of tertiary education, most especially, university education, primarily, provision of quality education should be seen by all as the responsibility of individuals in the society¹⁹. The aim of higher education is to produce an individual who will be self-reliant and to contribute their own quota to the development of the society which they belong to. The establishment of Private Higher Institutions in Nigeria is overwhelming and it is very popular in the country. Their contributions to solve the multi-facets challenges of public universities in Nigeria remain unmatched. Ajadi opines that their contribution to university education in Nigeria can be measured in terms of establishment, demystification of admission and man-power development for economic growth²⁰. They play an important role in increasing access to higher education. Some of these benefits are:

Expanding Tertiary Education Access: In contrast to public universities, where admission is granted only after fulfilling certain requirements, admission to these institutions is very easy, which has helped to address the issue of excessive demand over supply. However, access in this case is for those who can afford the high fees charged.

Dependable Academic Schedule or Calendar: They are more reliable in keeping to academic calendar and offer a guaranteed graduation date, as opposed to the public universities which frequently have strikes. In Nigeria it is common to hear of ASUU strike, (the public university union going on strike) but for the private religious universities, they have little or no chances of going on strike. Private universities are known to run stable academic calendar in Nigeria. No serious case of strike action has been embarked by either students or academic and non-academic staff. This is because they have the authority to fire any staff members or punish any students who disobey university policies or stage strike action against the university management.

Improved Rapport between Lectures and Students: In the private religious universities, there is greater likelihood for students and lecturers to have a far stronger and better relationship unlike in the public secular universities in Nigeria.

Creation of Job Opportunities: There is no way universities will be established without recruiting people to work there. People will surely be recruited in the society where the institution is situated. Many people have been absorbed into private universities in Nigeria either as an academic or nonacademic staff. Thus, this had reduced employment to the barest minimum in the society and the increase in workforce of a country paves way for employment²¹.

Fewer Population of Student: In most public universities, lecture halls are crowded because of the large population of students in these schools, which has made learning quite difficult for them. In private universities there are lesser populations and a conducive learning environment.

Positive Lifestyle: This aspect comes in, with place of religious involvement and religious education in higher education. This is achieved through the teachings of moral and religious values, and the formulation of strict policies. They have been able to instill the fear of God hence doing away with all forms of social vices such as cultism, drunkenness, and drug abuse at least to a very large degree.

Promotion of Moral Values: They offer a moral community that lowers the possibility of engaging in unhealthy activities like sexual violence and the likes, thereby helping to increase their social capital. This can be achieved through participation in religious activities and incorporating religious concepts into academic pursuits alongside religious ideologies and religious education. This helps restore moral and social orders which essentially aid development in the society.

Challenges Involved

High Cost of Tuition Fees: They invest to maximize profit (irrespective of how religious they may be) to cater for the money they used on their investment. However, it is generally believed that private universities are not meant for the poor people. Sadly, many pastors who attend these churches cannot even afford to send their children there because of the high tuition fee. According to Etuk the fees charged the students by

¹⁸K. Mundy and F. Menashy. 2014. "Investing in Private Education for Poverty Alleviation: the Case of the World Banks International Finance Corporation". *International Journal of Education Development* 35:16-24

¹⁹ M. Riggan. 2012. Between Efficiency and Effectiveness: evaluation in for Profit Education Organization. Retrieved 26 Feb., 2024 from http://www.aei.org/wpcontent/uploads_144926389519.pdf

²⁰ T. O. Ajadi. 2010. "Private Universities in Nigeria: The Challenges Ahead". *America Journal of Scientific Research* 7:15-24

²¹ M. Abubakar. 2005. Why Private Universities are necessary and Relevance. Retrieved from 26 Feb., 2024 <http://www.guardiannewspaper.com/education/article04>

these schools is very high. This will widen the gap between the poor and the rich²².

Lack of Physical Structures: Some of these institutions do not have adequate physical facilities or structures which should be in line with international standards to implement the programmes offered in their respective universities. Though some of them have good physical structures which can be found in public schools but some private schools are still lagging behind in terms of provision of facilities for students in school.

Shortage of Academic Personnel and Quality of Staff: In view of Ajadi, one of the issues with private owned universities in Nigeria is the lack of academic staff²³. A well-known weakness of private universities in Nigeria is the shortage of teaching personnel in the courses they run. Some of the founders see it as an investment and their ultimate objective is to reap large financial rewards from their investment. Hence, preferment of employing teaching staff on a part-time basis rather than full-time. Also, some of these lecturers are retirees who are old and lack fresh ideas and skills. Ige opines that the staff in these schools dominated by part-time and those on Sabbatical²⁴. Ajadi further confirms that the private universities in Nigeria operate with limited number of academic and administrative staff²⁵.

Non-Accreditation of Some Courses: Another weakness of the private universities in Nigeria is non-accreditation and establishment of some courses. Some of them are yet to run professional courses like medicine, engineering, pharmacy, law, architecture, etc. Those that are running it are having challenges of accreditation from the National Universities Commission.

Maximisation of Profit: Often at times, they sacrifice quality for profit maximisation. They are often criticized because potentially, they may not produce the expected quality of education, as these people are mere business owners, who want big returns on their investments. They tend to make the students happy with them because of the financial requirements and in most cases do not make them any academically better than their counterparts in the public universities.

Religious Fundamentalism: As a result of the influence of religion and religious education on the minds of the students, secular thoughts were given little or no chance to flourish in the minds of the students. These create problems of fundamentalism, extremism. Many will go to any length to defend what they believe about their religion. Most of them do not know the differences between religious duties and academic work and this can hinder innovation and critical thinking, which can undermine the advancement of the nation. According to Familusi, religious people have a duty to abide by the ethical values and teachings, inherent in their religion²⁶.

RECOMMENDATION

Running a university or higher institutions requires adequate infusion of money to make it function. To an extent they cannot be blamed for the high tuition fee required and one cannot ignore the fact that they are profit-making ventures, no matter the set objectives they give. On other hand they need the funding in order to perform comparably to their public counterparts. However regulatory measures can be put into consideration. They have been able to deal with issues regarding incessant strike, unstable school calendar, and students' unrest. Obayan has these to say:

Unequivocally, private investors play an indispensable role in demystifying university education all over the world. Their positive input in making people have access to university education cannot be overlooked²⁷.

It is necessary for educators and politicians to acknowledge connections between religion, higher education, and national development in Nigeria. They need to harness positive effects while reducing the negative aspects which would promote sustainable development. Therefore, the above submission means that the contribution of religious owned private universities or higher institutions cannot be quantified, hence the need for more of such higher institutions in Nigeria. However, other private owned and public higher institutions are also making significant contributions this research indicates

²² G. K. Etuk 2005. "Sustaining the Nigerian University under Deregulation", in *Deregulating the Provision and Management of Education in Nigeria* (Eds). Akpa G. O, Udoh S.U and Fagbamiye E. O, Jos: Ginac Concept Ltd

²³ T. O. Ajadi. 2010. *Private Universities in Nigeria: The Challenges Ahead. America Journal of Scientific Research 7: 15-24*

²⁴ A. M. Ige 2013. "Evolution of Private Universities in Nigeria: Mattes Arising and the Way Forward" *Educational Research and Reviews 8.2:41-50*

²⁵ T. O. Ajadi. 2010. *Private Universities in Nigeria: The Challenges Ahead. America Journal of Scientific Research 7, 15-24*

²⁶ O. O. Familusi. 2010. "Religious Politics and It's Implication for Sustainable Development Africa". *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa. 12.5*

²⁷ F. O. Obayan. 2006. *Educational Financing Principles, Trends and Strategies*. Ilorin: Goshen Print

that faith based or religious owned higher educational institutions undoubtedly are making unique contributions.

CONCLUSION

There is no gainsaying that religion has a role to play in higher education as a tool for development in Nigeria, though it has not been a total success due to various challenges yet its relevance remains unhindered. Religion plays a vital role in growth of higher education; be it in the area of establishment or religious education and commitments. Religious groups were critical in fostering public attitudes towards education. However, it would be impossible to study the evolution and development of education in Nigeria without acknowledging

the efforts of missionaries in formal education which originally brought the gates of higher learning closer to the people.

If all the benefits that come with religion and higher education is properly harnessed and challenges are reduced to the barest minimum, development is achievable. To summarise, religion has had a profound impact on the development of higher education, both historically and in modern nations. The impact of religion on education will enhance development if it is a positive one. Therefore if the concern is to maintain high level of development, religious influence on higher education at all levels can be maximized for a greater good regardless of the challenges that comes with it.

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