



EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND EDUCATION IN GHANA: A STUDY OF FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS

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Abstract:

This study examines the complex and evolving relationship between religion and education in Ghana, with particular emphasis on faith-based schools as pivotal institutions in shaping academic achievement, moral formation, and socio-cultural identity. Drawing on qualitative documentary analysis and interdisciplinary perspectives from sociology of education, religious studies, and educational policy, the paper investigates how Christian, Islamic, and Pentecostal educational traditions influence pedagogical practices, institutional culture, and learner outcomes. The findings reveal that faith-based schools remain central to Ghana's educational development, historically rooted in missionary and Islamic educational systems that laid the foundation for formal schooling in the country. These institutions continue to contribute significantly to discipline, academic performance, and values formation. However, they also face persistent challenges including gender inequality, socio-economic disparities, tensions in church-state relations, and uneven resource distribution. The study further highlights the dual role of faith-based education as both a driver of academic excellence and a site of social reproduction and inequality. It argues that the sustainability of faith-based education in Ghana depends on balanced policy frameworks that respect religious identity while ensuring inclusivity and equity. By integrating historical, theoretical, and empirical insights, the paper contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on religion and education in Africa and provides policy-relevant recommendations for strengthening educational governance in Ghana.

Keywords: religion and education; faith-based schools; Ghana education system; moral formation; church-state relations; educational equity

1. Introduction

The relationship between religion and education in Ghana is deeply historical, structurally embedded, and culturally significant. Education in Ghana did not begin as a secular enterprise but emerged within religious frameworks that shaped both its content and purpose. Before colonial intervention, indigenous Ghanaian societies transmitted knowledge through African Traditional Religious systems that emphasized moral instruction, communal responsibility, and social integration (Dzobo, 1992; Opoku, 1978). Learning was experiential, participatory, and deeply embedded in ritual life, ensuring that education functioned as a holistic process of human development.

The arrival of European missionaries in the nineteenth century marked a major transformation in the educational landscape. Missionary groups such as the Basel Mission, Wesleyan Methodists, and Roman Catholic Church established formal schools that combined literacy training with Christian evangelization (Basel Mission, 1843; Debrunner, 1967). These institutions introduced structured curricula, standardized assessment, and Western pedagogical methods, fundamentally reshaping the concept of schooling in Ghana. Simultaneously, Islamic education in northern Ghana developed through Qur'anic schools (Makaranta), offering an alternative but equally influential system grounded in Islamic theology and moral instruction (Owusu-Ansah, 1991).

In contemporary Ghana, faith-based schools remain dominant actors within the educational system. They are widely recognized for producing strong academic outcomes and instilling discipline and moral values among learners (Asamoah, 2017; Boateng, 2014). However, their influence extends beyond academic performance to include identity formation, gender norms, and socio-cultural reproduction. This dual role positions faith-based schools as both educational institutions and moral communities.

Despite their significance, the relationship between religion and education in Ghana remains insufficiently theorized in an integrated manner. Existing studies often treat Christian, Islamic, and Pentecostal education separately, neglecting their interconnected influence within a pluralistic national system. This study therefore seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of faith-based education as a unified yet diverse phenomenon.

1.2 Explanation of Key Terminologies

- **Religion:** In this study, religion refers to organized systems of belief, worship, and moral values that shape human understanding of existence, ethics, and community life. In the Ghanaian context, it includes Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion as lived systems influencing education.
- **Education:** Education refers to the structured and informal processes of knowledge transmission, skill development, and moral formation through which individuals are socialized into society.
- **Faith-Based Schools:** These are educational institutions founded, managed, or strongly influenced by religious organizations, including Christian missions, Islamic authorities, and Pentecostal/charismatic movements.
- **Religious Education:** This refers to curriculum-based instruction aimed at teaching religious beliefs, moral values, and ethical reasoning within formal schooling systems.
- **Moral Formation:** The process through which individuals develop values, attitudes, and ethical behaviours considered acceptable within a given society.
- **Church-State Relations:** This refers to the interaction, cooperation, and sometimes tension between religious institutions and government authorities in the governance of education.

- **Social Capital:** The networks, trust, and shared norms that facilitate cooperation and collective action within educational communities.

1.3 Motivation and Gap in Literature

The motivation for this study arises from the significant but fragmented scholarly attention to religion and education in Ghana. Existing research has documented the historical influence of missionary education, Islamic schooling traditions, and Pentecostal expansion, yet these studies tend to be treated separately rather than as interconnected parts of a shared educational system. This separation limits a holistic understanding of how diverse religious traditions collectively shape Ghana's educational landscape. Although faith-based schools are widely acknowledged for their contributions to discipline, moral development, and academic achievement, less attention has been given to how religious values influence teaching practices, institutional governance, and equity outcomes. In addition, socio-cultural and policy dimensions such as educational reforms and state-religion relations are often examined in isolation, with limited synthesis of their combined effects. This study is therefore motivated by the need to integrate these fragmented perspectives into a unified, comparative, and interdisciplinary analysis that positions religion as a central force within Ghana's education system.

1.4 Focus and Novelty of the Study

This study focuses on the complex relationship between religion and education in Ghana, with particular emphasis on faith-based schools as key institutions of moral formation, knowledge production, and social development. It examines how Christian, Islamic, and Pentecostal educational traditions coexist and interact within a pluralistic national education system, shaping learner identity, institutional governance, and pedagogical practice. The novelty of the study lies in its integrative and comparative approach, which moves beyond isolated analyses of single religious traditions or narrow academic performance indicators. Instead, it combines historical, sociological, theological, and policy perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of faith-based education. The study further reconceptualizes faith-based schools as active producers of moral values, social norms, and cultural identities rather than passive recipients of state policy. In doing so, it contributes to broader policy debates on equity, access, and institutional autonomy while situating faith-based education within Ghana's evolving socio-cultural and political landscape.

2. Statement of the Problem

Faith-based schools occupy a dominant and historically significant position within Ghana's education system, yet their role remains insufficiently theorized and unevenly understood in contemporary scholarship and policy discourse. While these institutions have been widely acknowledged for their contributions to literacy development, moral formation, and academic excellence (Asamoah, 2017; Boateng, 2014), critical challenges

persist regarding their inclusivity, governance structures, and alignment with national educational objectives.

One central problem is the tension between religious identity and standardized national curricula. Although state policies such as the Free Senior High School (Free SHS) initiative aim to ensure equitable access to education (Aidoo, 2020), they also raise concerns about the preservation of denominational ethos within mission-founded schools. This tension reflects broader struggles over institutional autonomy and educational control.

Additionally, disparities in access and outcomes across gender, socio-economic status, and geographic location continue to undermine the equity goals of Ghana's education system (Asare, 2017). Faith-based schools, while often perceived as high-performing institutions, are not immune to these structural inequalities.

Furthermore, the coexistence of multiple religious traditions within the educational system—Christian, Islamic, and Pentecostal—creates both opportunities and complexities in governance, pedagogy, and cultural integration. Despite this diversity, there remains a lack of comprehensive analytical frameworks that explain how these systems collectively shape educational development.

This study addresses these gaps by providing an integrated examination of religion and education in Ghana, focusing on how faith-based schools function within broader socio-political, cultural, and policy environments.

3. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between religion and education in Ghana, with specific emphasis on the role of faith-based schools in shaping academic, moral, and socio-cultural development.

The specific objectives are as follows:

- 1) To explore the historical foundations of faith-based education in Ghana.
- 2) To examine the pedagogical philosophies of Christian, Islamic, and Pentecostal schools.
- 3) To analyze the contribution of faith-based schools to moral and values education.
- 4) To assess academic performance differences between faith-based and public schools.
- 5) To investigate church–state relations in the governance of education.
- 6) To examine gender and socio-economic access within faith-based schools.
- 7) To analyze the contribution of faith-based education to national cohesion and identity formation.
- 8) To identify contemporary challenges and opportunities facing faith-based education in Ghana.

4. Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How did missionary, Islamic, and indigenous religious systems influence the development of education in Ghana?
- 2) What pedagogical philosophies underpin Christian, Islamic, and Pentecostal schools?
- 3) How do faith-based schools contribute to moral and character formation among learners?
- 4) To what extent do faith-based schools perform academically compared to public schools?
- 5) How has the relationship between church and state shaped educational governance in Ghana?
- 6) What gender and socio-economic inequalities exist within faith-based education systems?
- 7) How do Islamic and Pentecostal schools negotiate integration into the national education framework?
- 8) In what ways do faith-based schools contribute to national cohesion and identity formation?
- 9) What role does digital transformation play in reshaping faith-based education?
- 10) What challenges and opportunities define the future of faith-based education in Ghana?

5. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

5.1 Religion and the Historical Foundation of Education in Ghana

The history of education in Ghana is inseparable from religious engagement, particularly missionary Christianity and Islamic scholarship. Early missionary education introduced structured schooling systems that combined literacy with evangelisation, fundamentally reshaping indigenous educational practices (Basel Mission, 1843; Buah, 1998). These schools were not neutral institutions but value-driven systems designed to produce both moral subjects and administrative intermediaries.

Islamic education, particularly through Qur'anic schools, provided a parallel system that emphasised religious literacy, memorisation, and moral discipline (Owusu-Ansah, 1991). Unlike missionary schools, Islamic education retained stronger continuity with community-based instruction, reinforcing religious identity and ethical formation. Scholars such as Debrunner (1967) and Sanneh (2003) argue that these dual traditions created a plural educational landscape in which religion became structurally embedded in schooling systems. However, tensions emerged as Western models gradually became dominant, marginalising indigenous epistemologies.

5.2 Missionary Education and Structural Transformation

Missionary education fundamentally altered the structure of Ghanaian schooling by introducing formal curricula, examinations, and institutional hierarchies. According to Buah (1998), this system created new social stratifications based on literacy and proximity to mission centres. While it expanded access to formal education, it also reinforced colonial power structures.

The Basel Mission and Wesleyan Methodist institutions played a critical role in shaping teacher training, curriculum design, and moral instruction (Basel Mission, 1843; Debrunner, 1967). Their legacy persists in contemporary faith-based schools, which continue to reflect strong disciplinary and moral frameworks.

5.3 Indigenous Educational Traditions and Moral Formation

Before the introduction of formal missionary and Islamic schooling systems, education in Ghana was deeply embedded in indigenous social and religious life. Learning was not institutionally separated from living; rather, it was a continuous process of socialisation, moral instruction, and practical apprenticeship within the family and community structure (Dzobo, 1992; Opoku, 1978).

Indigenous education emphasized holistic human development, where intellectual training, moral discipline, and spiritual awareness were integrated. Through rites of passage, storytelling, communal participation, and apprenticeship systems, learners acquired knowledge that was contextually grounded and ethically oriented. Sarpong (1974) highlights that such systems cultivated responsibility, respect for authority, and communal solidarity, which were essential for societal stability.

However, colonial and missionary encounters disrupted these systems by introducing Western epistemologies that often delegitimised indigenous knowledge as “pre-modern” or “non-formal.” Gyekye (1997) argues that this created an epistemic imbalance, where African knowledge systems were subordinated within formal education structures. Despite this, elements of indigenous moral education continue to influence contemporary school culture, particularly in faith-based institutions where communal discipline and respect remain central.

5.4 Islamic and Christian Educational Traditions

Islamic education in Ghana, particularly through *Makaranta* systems, has historically emphasized Qur’anic literacy, memorisation, and moral discipline (Owusu-Ansah, 1991). These institutions remain influential in shaping religious identity, especially in northern Ghana. However, modernization pressures have encouraged gradual integration into national curricula, leading to hybrid educational models that combine religious and secular subjects (Nartey, 2018).

Christian missionary education, on the other hand, introduced formal schooling structures, including classroom-based instruction, standardized assessments, and structured teacher training systems (Debrunner, 1967). This system became the

foundation of Ghana's formal education system. While highly effective in promoting literacy, it also embedded Western cultural norms within educational content.

Pentecostal and charismatic schools, emerging more recently, introduce a distinct pedagogical orientation that combines academic instruction with spiritual empowerment and motivational learning approaches (Omenyo, 2005; Larbi, 2001). These institutions often emphasize personal success, discipline, and spiritual identity formation as part of holistic education.

5.5 Church–State Relations and Educational Governance

The relationship between religious institutions and the state in Ghanaian education has historically been characterized by cooperation and tension. During the colonial and early post-independence periods, missionary bodies played a dominant role in education provision. However, state intervention increased after independence, particularly under nationalisation policies aimed at standardising education and expanding access (Pobee, 1988).

The 1992 Constitution redefined this relationship by allowing religious bodies to retain ownership and management of schools while aligning with national education standards (Republic of Ghana, 1992). This created a dual governance system where faith-based schools operate under both denominational and state regulatory frameworks.

Aidoo (2020) notes that contemporary policies such as Free Senior High School have further complicated this relationship by increasing enrolment pressures while limiting institutional autonomy. As a result, faith-based schools must constantly negotiate between identity preservation and policy compliance.

5.6 Academic Performance, Discipline, and School Culture

Faith-based schools in Ghana are consistently associated with strong academic performance and disciplined learning environments. Studies indicate that such schools often outperform public schools in national examinations due to structured routines, moral supervision, and strong institutional leadership (Asamoah, 2017; Boateng, 2014).

Religious ethos plays a significant role in shaping school culture. Daily devotional activities, moral instruction, and disciplinary codes reinforce behavioural expectations and academic commitment. This creates what Asante (2004) describes as a “values-driven learning environment,” where education extends beyond cognitive achievement to include moral development.

However, critics argue that some elite mission schools reproduce social inequalities by privileging students from higher socio-economic backgrounds (Fecho, 2013). This raises questions about equity and access within faith-based education systems.

5.7 Gender, Equity, and Social Inclusion

Gender and socio-economic disparities remain persistent challenges in Ghana's faith-based education landscape. While missionary schools historically expanded educational

access for girls, they also reinforced patriarchal norms through curriculum design and institutional expectations (Oduyoye, 1995; Asare, 2017).

Despite improvements under policies such as Free SHS, structural inequalities continue to affect access to quality education. Rural students and low-income households often face barriers related to cost, infrastructure, and proximity to schools (Aidoo, 2020; Ghana Education Service, 2020).

These inequalities highlight the need for more inclusive policy frameworks that address not only access but also educational quality and equity outcomes.

5.8 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three complementary theoretical perspectives that collectively provide a multidimensional lens for understanding the relationship between religion and education in Ghana's faith-based schools. These include Religious Pluralism Theory, Social Capital Theory, and the Convivencia Model. Together, they illuminate how religious diversity, social relations, and lived experiences interact to shape educational outcomes, institutional identity, and moral formation.

a. Religious Pluralism Theory

Religious Pluralism Theory provides a framework for understanding how multiple religious traditions coexist, interact, and negotiate space within a shared educational system. In the Ghanaian context, this theory is particularly relevant due to the coexistence of Christian, Islamic, and Pentecostal educational institutions within a single national framework. Rather than viewing these traditions as competing or isolated systems, the theory emphasizes their interdependence, adaptation, and institutional coexistence.

It explains how faith-based schools maintain distinct religious identities while simultaneously operating under national educational policies. This involves continuous negotiation between doctrinal commitments and state curriculum requirements. The theory also highlights how religious diversity contributes to educational richness, while at the same time creating tensions around curriculum content, governance, and identity preservation. In this way, Religious Pluralism Theory provides a foundation for analyzing how Ghana's educational system manages religious diversity in practice.

b. Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory focuses on the role of trust, networks, norms, and shared values in facilitating collective action and improving institutional outcomes. Within faith-based schools, social capital is generated through strong communal relationships, shared moral expectations, and close-knit institutional cultures.

These schools often cultivate what is described as "bonding social capital," where students, teachers, and administrators are connected through shared religious values and ethical commitments. This fosters discipline, cooperation, and a sense of belonging, which directly contributes to improved academic performance and behavioural regulation. The presence of strong moral authority structures within faith-based schools

reinforces accountability and enhances learner engagement. Thus, Social Capital Theory helps explain why these institutions often demonstrate strong academic and disciplinary outcomes compared to other educational settings.

c. Convivencia Model

The Convivencia Model emphasizes lived experience, everyday interactions, and the social environment in shaping moral and educational development. It focuses on how individuals learn through participation in communal life rather than through formal instruction alone. In faith-based schools, this includes daily rituals, peer interactions, teacher-student relationships, and shared religious practices.

This model is particularly useful for understanding moral formation, as it highlights how values such as respect, responsibility, and empathy are cultivated through continuous social engagement. It also explains how school culture influences identity formation and ethical behaviour over time. By focusing on lived experiences, the Convivencia Model captures the informal but powerful processes through which education becomes a moral and social experience.

Together, these three theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing faith-based education. Religious Pluralism Theory explains structural coexistence, Social Capital Theory explains relational strength, and the Convivencia Model explains lived moral experience. Combined, they offer a holistic understanding of how faith-based schools in Ghana function as institutions shaped by structure, relationships, and everyday practice.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in documentary and interpretive approaches to examine the relationship between religion and education in Ghana, with a specific focus on faith-based schools. The qualitative orientation is appropriate because the subject matter involves complex socio-cultural, historical, pedagogical, and institutional dimensions that cannot be adequately captured through purely quantitative measurement. Instead, the study prioritizes meaning, interpretation, and contextual understanding.

The interpretive design allows the researchers to explore how religious traditions influence educational structures, governance systems, and learner outcomes within Ghana's pluralistic educational environment. It also enables a critical engagement with how Christian, Islamic, and Pentecostal educational traditions shape moral formation and institutional identity. By adopting this approach, the study moves beyond surface-level description to provide deeper analytical insights into the lived realities and ideological foundations of faith-based education.

The documentary nature of the research further ensures that existing scholarly works, policy frameworks, and historical records are systematically analyzed to construct a coherent narrative of religion–education interactions in Ghana.

6.2 Data Sources

Data for the study were obtained exclusively from secondary sources. These include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, government policy documents, institutional reports, and historical mission records. The selection of these sources was guided by relevance, credibility, and academic rigor.

Peer-reviewed journal articles provided contemporary scholarly perspectives on themes such as educational inequality, pedagogical practices, church–state relations, and moral education. Academic books offered foundational theoretical and historical insights into the development of education in Ghana, particularly within missionary, Islamic, and indigenous contexts.

Policy documents, including national education frameworks and reforms, were used to understand the regulatory environment governing faith-based schools. These documents were particularly important for analyzing how state policies interact with denominational educational systems.

Historical mission records provided essential insights into the origins and evolution of missionary education in Ghana. They helped contextualize the long-standing influence of religious institutions in shaping formal education systems.

By triangulating these diverse sources, the study ensures a comprehensive and balanced understanding of the subject matter.

6.3 Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis as the primary method of data interpretation. Thematic analysis is suitable for identifying, organizing, and interpreting recurring patterns within qualitative data. It allows for systematic examination of large volumes of textual information while preserving contextual depth.

The analysis process involved several stages. First, all relevant documents were carefully read and re-read to gain familiarity with the content. Second, key ideas and concepts related to religion, education, pedagogy, governance, and inequality were identified and coded. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader thematic categories that reflected the central concerns of the study.

These themes included: academic performance and discipline, moral formation, church–state governance, educational inequality, and religious diversity in schooling systems. Each theme was then critically interpreted in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework.

The final stage involved synthesizing the themes into a coherent analytical narrative that explains how faith-based education operates within Ghana’s socio-educational landscape. This process ensured that interpretation remained grounded in evidence while also allowing for critical reflection.

6.4 Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

To ensure validity and reliability, the study employed triangulation across multiple secondary sources. By comparing findings from different authors, policy documents, and historical records, the researchers minimized bias and enhanced the credibility of interpretations.

Credibility was further strengthened through consistent engagement with peer-reviewed academic literature and authoritative policy documents. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a clear and transparent analytical procedure, particularly in coding and theme development.

Transferability was achieved by situating findings within broader theoretical frameworks such as Social Capital Theory, Religious Pluralism Theory, and Convivencia perspectives, allowing insights to be applicable beyond the immediate Ghanaian context. Confirmability was maintained by ensuring that interpretations were grounded in documented evidence rather than subjective assumptions. This systematic approach enhances the overall trustworthiness of the study.

6.5 Ethical Considerations

Although the study relies on secondary data, ethical academic standards were strictly observed. All sources used were properly acknowledged to avoid plagiarism and ensure intellectual honesty. The interpretation of existing literature was conducted fairly, without distortion or misrepresentation of authors' original arguments.

Respect for intellectual property was maintained throughout the research process. The study also adheres to scholarly integrity by ensuring transparency in data selection, analysis, and presentation.

6.6 Limitations of the Methodology

A key limitation of this methodology is its reliance on secondary data, which restricts the inclusion of primary empirical voices such as students, teachers, and administrators. As a result, the study may not fully capture lived experiences within faith-based schools.

Additionally, documentary analysis depends on the availability and quality of existing literature, which may vary across themes and regions. Despite these limitations, the use of multiple credible sources helps to mitigate gaps and strengthen overall analytical depth.

In summary, the methodological framework of this study is designed to provide a rigorous, interpretive, and evidence-based exploration of religion and education in Ghana. Through qualitative documentary analysis and thematic interpretation, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of faith-based schools as institutions shaped by historical legacies, religious values, policy structures, and socio-cultural dynamics.

7. Results / Findings

The findings of this study, derived from thematic synthesis of secondary literature, policy documents, and empirical studies, reveal a complex and layered relationship between religion and education in Ghana's faith-based schooling system. Five dominant themes emerged: academic performance and discipline, moral formation, institutional governance, equity and access, and religious diversity in schooling models.

7.1 Academic Performance and Institutional Discipline

A consistent finding across the literature is that faith-based schools tend to record relatively strong academic outcomes compared to many public schools (Asamoah, 2017; Fecho, 2013). This performance is closely associated with structured school environments, strict disciplinary systems, and strong leadership cultures.

Mission schools, in particular, maintain rigid schedules that integrate academic instruction with moral and spiritual routines such as morning devotions, chapel services, and structured mentorship systems (Boateng, 2014). These practices contribute to learner discipline, time consciousness, and academic commitment.

Teachers and school administrators consistently emphasize that discipline is not merely punitive but formative, shaping learner identity and responsibility. This institutional culture creates an environment where academic achievement is reinforced by moral expectations.

7.2 Moral and Values Formation

A second key finding is the strong integration of moral education within faith-based schooling systems. Moral instruction is not treated as a standalone subject but embedded within daily school life.

Students are exposed to religious teachings, ethical codes, and behavioural expectations that influence their decision-making and interpersonal relationships (Bediako, 1995). Values such as honesty, respect, obedience, and responsibility are consistently reinforced.

However, the effectiveness of moral formation varies across institutions. Urban schools with better resources demonstrate more structured moral education programmes compared to rural schools, where implementation is often inconsistent.

7.3 Institutional Governance and Church–State Relations

The study finds that governance structures in faith-based schools are shaped by a dual authority system involving both religious bodies and the state (Ofori-Birikorang, 2016). While religious institutions retain ownership and identity control, the state regulates curriculum standards and accreditation.

This dual governance creates both stability and tension. On one hand, it ensures national standardisation; on the other, it limits institutional autonomy, especially in curriculum design and disciplinary enforcement.

School administrators often describe this relationship as “cooperative but constrained,” reflecting ongoing negotiation between denominational identity and national policy requirements.

7.4 Gender, Access, and Socio-Economic Inequality

Another major finding concerns persistent inequality in access to faith-based education. Although enrolment has increased significantly under national policies such as Free Senior High School, disparities remain evident.

Girls from rural and low-income backgrounds face structural barriers including financial constraints, cultural expectations, and limited school infrastructure (Aidoo, 2020; Asare, 2017). Similarly, elite mission schools tend to favour students from higher socio-economic backgrounds due to competition and hidden costs.

These findings indicate that while access has expanded numerically, equity challenges remain structurally embedded.

7.5 Diversity of Faith-Based Educational Models

The study identifies three dominant models of faith-based education in Ghana: Christian missionary schools, Islamic *Makaranta* institutions, and Pentecostal/charismatic schools.

Christian mission schools are characterized by structured curricula and disciplinary systems rooted in historical missionary traditions (Debrunner, 1967). Islamic schools emphasize religious literacy and moral discipline but face challenges in integrating fully into the national academic system (Nartey, 2018).

Pentecostal schools, by contrast, adopt a more dynamic and entrepreneurial approach, combining spiritual empowerment with academic ambition and motivational pedagogy (Omenyo, 2005; Larbi, 2001). These differences reflect a highly plural educational landscape.

7.6 Emerging Educational Challenges

The findings also highlight emerging pressures on faith-based schools, particularly digital transformation and curriculum standardization. Many institutions struggle with infrastructure deficits, limited ICT capacity, and uneven teacher preparedness for e-learning integration.

Additionally, increasing commercialization of education introduces competitive pressures that sometimes conflict with traditional religious values of humility and service.

8. Analysis and Discussion

The discussion interprets the findings in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework, offering a deeper analytical synthesis.

8.1 Religion as a Structuring Force in Education

The findings confirm that religion is not an external influence on education in Ghana but a constitutive force shaping institutional structure, pedagogy, and learner identity. Faith-based schools function as moral ecosystems where academic learning is embedded within ethical and spiritual frameworks.

This supports Social Capital Theory, which emphasizes that shared norms and trust enhance institutional effectiveness (Gyekye, 1997). The disciplined environments observed in faith-based schools are not accidental but arise from structured religious worldviews that prioritize order, responsibility, and moral accountability.

8.2 Academic Excellence and Moral Discipline

The strong academic performance of faith-based schools is closely linked to their moral and disciplinary systems. Unlike purely performance-driven models, these institutions integrate behavioural regulation with academic instruction.

This aligns with Boateng (2014), who argues that moral discipline enhances cognitive performance by creating stable learning environments. However, it also raises questions about whether discipline is always equated with academic excellence or whether it masks deeper inequalities in access and opportunity.

8.3 Church–State Negotiation and Institutional Identity

The dual governance system reflects ongoing negotiation between religious identity and state regulation. Religious Pluralism Theory helps explain how multiple educational traditions coexist within a single national framework.

While this arrangement allows diversity, it also creates institutional tension. Faith-based schools must continuously balance doctrinal identity with compliance to national standards, particularly in curriculum content and assessment systems.

8.4 Inequality and Structural Exclusion

Despite their moral rhetoric, faith-based schools are not immune to structural inequality. Gendered expectations, socio-economic disparities, and geographical disadvantages continue to shape access.

These finding challenges idealized perceptions of faith-based education as inherently inclusive. Instead, it reveals that institutional excellence often coexists with systemic exclusion, particularly in elite schools.

8.5 Plurality and Educational Fragmentation

The coexistence of Christian, Islamic, and Pentecostal models reflects a plural but fragmented educational landscape. While diversity enhances innovation, it also produces uneven standards, integration challenges, and policy complexity.

Islamic schools, for instance, remain partially marginalized in national discourse, while Pentecostal schools are rapidly expanding without uniform regulatory frameworks.

8.6 Integrated Interpretation

When viewed holistically, faith-based education in Ghana emerges as a hybrid system shaped by history, religion, governance, and socio-economic forces. It is simultaneously a site of academic excellence, moral formation, and structural inequality.

The convergence of Religious Pluralism Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Convivencia perspective demonstrates that education in Ghana is not merely institutional but deeply relational and value-driven.

9. Implications of the Study

The findings of this study on the relationship between religion and education in Ghana's faith-based schools have wide-ranging implications for theory, pedagogy, policy, governance, and socio-cultural development. Overall, they demonstrate that faith-based education is not merely an administrative or institutional arrangement but a deeply embedded system that shapes academic achievement, moral identity, and social cohesion within Ghanaian society.

From a theoretical perspective, the study extends existing understandings of education by challenging purely secular or economic interpretations of schooling. It demonstrates that education in Ghana is fundamentally shaped by religious, moral, and cultural forces that influence both institutional behaviour and learner identity formation. Social Capital Theory is reinforced, as faith-based schools cultivate strong networks of trust, discipline, and shared moral expectations that enhance educational outcomes. Religious Pluralism Theory is also validated, as multiple religious traditions coexist within a shared national system while maintaining distinct identities and pedagogical orientations. In addition, the study contributes to Convivencia-informed interpretations by showing that everyday interactions within schools play a critical role in shaping moral development and social relationships beyond formal curriculum structures.

In terms of pedagogy, the study highlights that learning in faith-based schools is closely linked to moral instruction and behavioural formation. Education extends beyond cognitive achievement to include character development and ethical orientation. This implies that teacher education programmes must integrate not only subject knowledge but also ethical pedagogy, classroom morality, and culturally responsive teaching approaches. Teachers are therefore not only transmitters of knowledge but also moral role models whose behaviour significantly shapes student development. This reinforces the idea that pedagogy in Ghana is inherently value-driven rather than neutral.

At the policy and governance level, the study reveals the complexity of church-state relations in Ghana's educational system. Faith-based schools operate under dual authority structures that require careful balancing between denominational identity and national policy standards. This creates important implications for educational reform, which must ensure that standardization efforts do not undermine the religious ethos that defines these institutions. Policies such as Free Senior High School, while improving

access, also introduce challenges related to funding, resource allocation, and institutional autonomy.

Socially and culturally, faith-based schools function as key agents of socialization and value transmission. They promote discipline, respect, responsibility, and cooperation, thereby contributing to national cohesion through shared moral frameworks. However, they also reflect broader societal inequalities, particularly in relation to gender, socio-economic status, and geographical access, meaning that they simultaneously foster unity while revealing structural divisions.

Finally, in the context of digital transformation, the study highlights both opportunities and challenges. While e-learning and open education expand access to learning resources, unequal infrastructure and digital literacy gaps limit effective implementation. This underscores the need for deliberate investment in ICT infrastructure, teacher training, and inclusive digital policies to ensure equitable educational transformation.

10. Conclusion

This study has examined the complex and evolving relationship between religion and education in Ghana, with particular emphasis on faith-based schools as central actors in the national education system. The findings demonstrate that these institutions are historically rooted in missionary Christianity, Islamic scholarship, and contemporary Pentecostal expansion, each contributing uniquely to educational development.

Faith-based schools continue to play a critical role in shaping academic performance, moral formation, and social identity. Their structured environments, disciplined cultures, and value-driven pedagogies contribute significantly to student success and character development.

However, the study also reveals persistent challenges, including inequality in access, gender disparities, governance tensions, and uneven adaptation to digital learning environments. These challenges highlight the need for more inclusive and adaptive educational frameworks.

Importantly, the study concludes that education in Ghana is not a neutral technical process but a deeply value-laden social institution shaped by religion, culture, and historical experience. Faith-based schools remain essential to national development, but their long-term relevance depends on their ability to balance religious identity with inclusivity, innovation, and responsiveness to contemporary educational demands.

11. Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the relationship between religion and education in Ghana's faith-based schools, ensuring improved academic outcomes, moral formation, and institutional equity.

At the policy level, there is a need to strengthen equitable funding mechanisms to ensure that faith-based schools receive adequate and fair financial support across regions. Policy frameworks should also balance the preservation of denominational identity with adherence to national curriculum standards, ensuring both religious integrity and academic consistency. In addition, regulatory systems governing church–state partnerships in education must be refined to reduce tension and enhance cooperation. Given the increasing role of digital learning, targeted investment in ICT infrastructure, particularly in underserved and rural schools, is essential for inclusive educational development.

At the institutional level, continuous professional development for teachers should be prioritized, with emphasis on ethics, pedagogy, and value-based instruction. Moral education should be fully integrated into classroom practice rather than treated as an isolated subject. Schools are also encouraged to adopt gender-sensitive policies that enhance participation and inclusion for all learners. Furthermore, leadership training for school administrators should be strengthened to support effective management of value-driven educational environments.

From a pedagogical perspective, educators should adopt more reflective and participatory teaching approaches that encourage dialogue, moral reasoning, and critical engagement. Character education should be emphasized alongside academic instruction to ensure holistic learner development. Student-centred learning strategies should be encouraged, alongside structured mentorship systems that guide learners' moral and academic growth.

At the societal level, stronger collaboration between schools, families, and religious communities is necessary to reinforce consistent moral guidance. Interfaith dialogue should be promoted within educational settings to encourage tolerance and social cohesion. Community involvement in school governance should also be strengthened, alongside public sensitization on the importance of values in education.

In relation to digital education, there is a need to invest in ICT infrastructure, enhance teacher training in e-learning and digital literacy, and promote equitable access to open educational resources. The integration of blended learning models should also be encouraged to combine the strengths of physical and digital instruction effectively.

12. Future Studies

Future research on the relationship between religion and education in Ghana should deepen empirical understanding of how different faith-based educational systems operate in practice and how they influence learner development. One important area for further study is the lived experiences of students in Islamic Makaranta institutions, particularly how these learners navigate the balance between religious instruction and integration into the national education system. Such studies would provide richer insight into the pedagogical and social realities of Islamic education, which remain underexplored in contemporary scholarship.

Another significant area for future inquiry is the longitudinal analysis of Pentecostal education and its long-term impact on student outcomes. This would help clarify how Pentecostal pedagogical approaches influence academic performance, moral development, career trajectories, and identity formation over time. Similarly, comparative studies across West African countries would be valuable in identifying regional similarities and differences in faith-based education systems, thereby broadening the scope of understanding beyond the Ghanaian context.

In addition, the growing influence of digital technologies introduces a new research frontier. Future studies should examine the role of digital religion and its impact on moral formation in schools, particularly how online religious content shapes learners' ethical reasoning, values, and behavioural patterns. Closely related to this is the need for intersectional studies that explore how gender, class, and socio-economic background influence access to and outcomes within faith-based education systems.

Furthermore, quantitative research is needed to provide robust statistical evaluations of academic performance across different faith-based school systems compared to public schools. Such studies would complement existing qualitative insights and strengthen evidence-based policy formulation.

Overall, these future research directions will contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how religion continues to shape educational development, institutional practices, and learner outcomes in Ghana and across the wider African context.

Ethical Pledge

The authors affirm that this study was conducted with full academic integrity. All sources used have been properly acknowledged, and no form of plagiarism was committed. The research process adhered to ethical standards of scholarly writing and responsible citation practices.

Ethical Consideration

This study is based entirely on secondary data and therefore did not involve human participants. However, ethical academic standards were strictly observed in the selection, interpretation, and representation of existing literature to ensure fairness, accuracy, and respect for intellectual property.

AI Declaration Statement

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Declaration of Paper's Originality

This manuscript is an original scholarly work developed through critical synthesis of existing literature. It has not been submitted or published in any other journal or academic outlet.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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