

RELIGION-IN-EDUCATION MANAGEMENT PRACTICE: A SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE

Dawo Jane Irene and Sika James

Department of Education Management and Foundations; Maseno University

<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2024.0790>

ABSTRACT

The world over, countries uphold both religion and education as basic human rights. Therefore education and religion are legally intersected and cannot be separated from the lives of learners, teachers, headteachers, board of managers, and parents among other stakeholders in a school. In this regard, experienced headteachers tend to leverage their own salient religious backing alongside active educational curriculum. The importance of religion can therefore not be gainsaid. Given that these educators have lived a religion that has espoused culture, values, morals, and practices, such propagation through religion-in-education to the learner may sometimes not be intentional. It is expressed involuntarily alongside curriculum implementation. However, owing to personal perceptions of their positional, cultural or religious authority and superiority, they may wittingly strategize to either diminish or enhance learner religious profession and practices. Educational institutions should cautiously avoid religious extremists. Such extremists may hinge towards converting learners to the choice religious beliefs and practices thus hindering learner religious freedom. The result would be a conflict with parents, teachers, and school managements of other, sometimes conflicting religious beliefs. The headteacher as a manager should lead by example to achieve learner educational objectives which sometimes is in conflict with their individual or groups religious rights. The challenge to school managers is the need to balance religious and educational rights in a religion-in-education multi-religious, multi-denominational and therefore multi-cultural context.

Keywords: Religion-in-education, Headteacher, Conflict.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

There have been many studies that focused on the relationship between religion and educational attainment. For instance, a research in 17 sub-Saharan African countries, found that religious identity shapes the odds of completing primary school at both national and local levels. This is because there is an association between Christian groups and the state, which potentially discouraged those of other religions from seeing state-sponsored schools as legitimate. Christian citizens therefore preferred to attend religious organization sponsored schools. Similarly, Muslims did not favor state-sponsored schooling for their children preferring instead to send them to Islamic religious schools. Muslim participation is even lower in countries that have mandatory teaching of religion in government primary schools, Manglos-Weber(2016). This sometimes spurs conflict between curriculum implementation and religiosity, some to the extent of investigating religious indoctrination. As reported by Hefner and Muhammad(2007), it has long been debated by scholars over the degree to which Islam has encouraged or discouraged secular education. Some experts note that the first word of the Quran as it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad is

“Iqra!” which means “Read!” or “Recite!”; they say Muslims are urged to pursue knowledge in order to better understand God’s revealed word; Islam having been the foundation of some of the world’s largest libraries. It is recorded that Muslims made innovative intellectual contributions in such fields as mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, medicine and poetry being proponents of some of the world’s long lasting theories such as those in management. They established schools, often at mosques, known as *katatib* and *madrasas*.

In the United States of America(USA) where there is no officially endorsed state religion. This means that everyone has the right to practice his or her own religion or no religion at all; and no law can be made by the USA congress that prohibits the exercise of religion(United States of America, 1789). Since 1962, school organized prayers are banned and students can only pray privately in school, or in groups after school hours. In addition to this, all children living in the USA have right to a free public education regardless of race, ethnic background, religion, sex, or whether rich or poor, citizen or non-citizen. This indicates that the practice of religion together with education is a pre-determined ‘ coincidence’ whereby the two move alongside each other in harmony voluntarily given an individual’s background. Similarly, in India, subject to public order, morality and health, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion(Republic of India, 1950). This is against the background of a predominantly Hindu religious state that provides free and compulsory education to all its citizens since 1-4-2010 monitored by state actors. In New Zealand Education Act 1877(29th November) established free, compulsory and secular education alongside societal and government respect for religious freedom. This has been upheld(Republic of New Zealand, 2014) and any conflicts that may arise are addressed based on a constitutional democracy. In Ireland Article 44 of the constitution guarantees freedom of religion and of conscience devoid of discrimination in an environment where education is compulsory for children aged 6-16 years whether at home, in public or non-recognized schools, parents being the responsibility bearers as guides to their children (Nelson & Yang, 2022).

In Africa, traditional education has been inter-twined with religion, case in point is education provided during initiation period which involved induction and training by religious leaders, oath-taking, and elders. Today, the informal education continues albeit with structures , guidelines, rules and regulations. In Nigeria, there is no section under chapter IV of the 1999 constitution which expressly provides for the right to education , though Nigeria has assented to several international instruments that enforce compulsory basic education (upto junior secondary) in a country with no state religion(Republic of Nigeria, 1999). In South Africa, Schools Act(Act 84 of 1996) Sec7 allows religious observance to be conducted at public school so long as guidelines are given to ensure equitable authority, and free and voluntary attendance is guaranteed(Republic of South Africa). This owing to the fact that public school managers become legal persons whose mandate include equipping learners with knowledge of religion, morality, values and diversity. This places school managers at a focal point in religion-in-education practice given that people in Africa practice varied religions. For instance, Buddhism is practiced in many parts of Africa, mainly East Africa and South Africa. Scholars of Buddhism note that Siddhartha Gautama, the religion’s founder, often is called “teacher” because of his emphasis on “the miracle of instruction” , instruction being key to formal education or and schooling.” He considered learning essential for attaining the Buddhist goal of enlightenment, the overall aim of school education(Meshram,2013).

According to Buddhism , education is important a human being can attain his or her own enlightenment (‘salvation’) without divine intervention, only with education.

In Kenya, the constitution upholds freedom of religion and belief and freedom to manifest it through worship, practice, teaching and observance; and no one shall be compelled to act in a manner contrary to his belief; and shall not be denied access to institution on the basis of religion (Republic of Kenya 2010). All citizens have a right to basic education. This indicates that at school, the learners shall exercise both the right to education and right to religion concurrently. In exercising authority over the learners, Teachers service Commission(TSC) stipulates that as a teacher performs his duty, he shall not discriminate directly or indirectly against any person on grounds of race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or social origin, colour, age, disability, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language or birth in Kenya Subsidiary Legislation in 2015. This indicates that the TSC Code of Conduct envisages all possible presentations of religious bias that may stretch into favouritism, cronyism and other unethical practice(Republic of Kenya, 2015). However, even with all guidelines, constitution or otherwise, school managements still encounter experiences of conflict in religion-in-education management practice.

NB/ In this piece, religion and denomination mean the same when referring to Christian religion.

1.2 Conflict Experienced due to Religion-in-education Interaction in Institutions

- In a study in England seeking young people’s views about religion, its diversity and possibility for dialogue, students appreciated religious heterogeneity in their classrooms, indicating openness to peers from different religions but closeness in socialization to people of same religion. This was evidence of biased religio-academic interaction. Students expressed religious tolerance more abstractly than what they actually practiced in reality (Jackson, 2013).
- Drawing from the fact that Uganda has no state religion and therefore everyone is allowed to practice their religion(Republic of Uganda,1995), Makerere University being a secular university considers all days of the week to be working days whereby students and staff are to conduct and attend lectures and examinations as scheduled(Makerere University Regulations,2012). In 2003, three(3) Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) students sued the university management seeking to be allowed Saturday as a worship day to guarantee their right to worship. The court dismissed this petition on the basis that the university had students from diverse backgrounds (worshiping on diverse days) and hence if granted, there would be no days left for studies(Kimoga,2014).
- In as much as 10% of population in Egypt is Christian, Egyptian textbooks indicate that there is only one true religion(Islam) which God revealed to Adam, and all the prophets including Moses and Jesus. This teaching gives rise to a dogmatic conflict for the Christian students. Muslim students in public schools learn about Christianity through the lenses of Quran and Hadith whereas Christian students do not learn about Islam in Christian religion(Faour, 2012). Since religion is lived, one can only guess the religion-in-education management practices of a Christian headteacher in a Christian-Islamic environment and that of an Islamic one in a similar position.
- Should pupils have a right over religious matters in schools? A headteacher argued that in accepting to have girls have religious head-gear(including scarfs) such would make the

girls to look different, conspicuous, and special, favoured and would attract unprecedented and undesirable disruptive attention from school community(Daily Nation, 3/7/2020). In Kenya, this accommodativeness debate is yet to be concluded given reported cases involving school managements versus Muslims over female headgear(hijab), and Akorinos over headgear(scarfs), Rastafari over their dread-lock hair-do, and SDAs over being given work on Saturday, their day of worship, among other issues that are religiously sensitive to school individuals and groupings. Some school managements have rejected headteachers due to their not belonging to the religion of the sponsor.

2. CONCLUSION

School managers have an obligation to be religious neutral and to ensure a fairly neutral teaching-learning environment if their clients have varied backgrounds. This is based on the fact that in many nations there is freedom of choice of religious institutions to which parents can seek education for their children. Its noteworthy that school managers have skewed beliefs having lived religion either as an active or passive lifestyle from their childhood. Religion having been entrenched in their values, norms, culture, and practices, cannot be isolated from the person of the school manager. Therefore, they cannot avoid expressing it as they carry out their leadership and supervisory roles and responsibilities, however, moderation is expected as guided and controlled by constitutions. Their operational environment entails upholding both the right to religion and right to education as guaranteed and expected by their employers.

REFERENCES

- Bagir, Z.(2013). Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Education.”In Religious Pluralism and Religious Freedom: Religion, Society and the State in Dialogue. Ed. Hammer, S & Hussein, F. Yogyakarta: Huma printing and Design.
- Daily Nation(3/7/2020). Religious War over School Dress Codes. <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/religious-war-over-school-dress-codes-799480>
- Faour, M.(2012). Religious Education in Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia. The Carnegie papers. Carnegie middle East Center.
- Hefner, R. W. and Muhammad, Q. eds.(2007). Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education.
- Jackson,R.(2013). Religious education in England: The Story to 2013. *Pedagogiek: Wetenschappelijk Forum voor Opvoeding, Onderwijs en Vorming*, vol.33(2). <http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/58637>
- Kimoga,J.(2014). The Conflict between the Right to Religion and University Policies: Analysing a Policy Impact. *American Journal of Education and Research*. Vol2(4)
- Manglos-Weber, N.(2016). “Identity, Inequality and Legitimacy: Religious Differences in Primary School Completion in sub-Saharan Africa.” Forthcoming in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.
- Meshram, M. (2013). “Role of Buddhist Education in Ancient India,” *International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature*. See also “[Buddhist Attitude to Education](#).”
- Nelson, J. & Yang, Y.(2022). The role of teachers’ religious beliefs in their classroom practice – a personal or public concern? <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2022.2125672>

Nthontho, M.A.(2018). School Management and Leadership Education for Multi-religious Schools. Changing Societies and Personalities.Vol2(3)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.15826/csp.2018.2.3.048>

[Republic of India.\(1950\). The Constitution of India.](#)

[Republic of Kenya.\(2010a\). Constitution of Kenya.](#)

[Republic of Kenya.\(2015\). Teachers Service Commission Code of Conduct.](#)

[Republic of Nigeria.\(1999\). Constitution of Nigeria.](#)

[Republic of New Zealand.\(2014\). Constitution of New Zealand.](#)

Republic of Uganda(1995). The Constitution of Uganda. Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs.

Republic of South Africa.(1996). South Africa Schools Act(Act 84) Section 7.

United States of America.(1789). First Amendment to the Constitution.