

The Role of Religious Education in Shaping Human Development in Cameroon

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doi:10.56397/RAE.2024.11.01

Abstract

This study investigated the effect of religious education on human development in Cameroon. The data were analysed quantitatively using regression analysis, specifically employing the Tobit model due to the censored nature of the dependent variable, which had limits on its range. The findings revealed that religious education significantly enhances moral reasoning, civic engagement, and resilience among youth. However, the systemic marginalisation of religious knowledge within formal education limits its potential benefits. These findings highlight the complex interplay between religious education and human development, suggesting both potential benefits and challenges in the Cameroonian context. The study recommends integrating religious education into the school curriculum to foster ethical behavior and community involvement, ultimately contributing to sustainable development in Cameroon.

Keywords: religious education, human development

1. Introduction

Every sincere religious individual is a powerful resource to this or her community. (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Roof & McKinney, 2022). Religion is a shared set of beliefs, activities, and institutions premised upon faith in supernatural forces (Iannaccone, 1998). It can also be understood as an adherence to specific practices and beliefs (Miller & Thorensen, 2003). Generally, religion is accepted as the relationship between the finite and the infinite, the creature and creator its, man and God (Idowu, 2013). Religion encompasses not only individual beliefs but also community practices and social structures that shape moral values and identity (Smith & McCullough, 2021; Johnson, 2022). According to Iwe (2003) the meaning of religion is based on four perspectives: subjective, objective, moral, and institutional. Recent studies have expanded on these dimensions, highlighting how subjective experiences of faith can influence individual behavior, while objective frameworks provide insights into the social structures of religious institutions (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Roof & McKinney, 2022). Additionally, the moral aspect of religion continues to play a critical role in shaping ethical standards and community values in diverse societies (Baker, 2023). More so, religion as an institution complements and promotes human development in various ways. Religious organisations often play a crucial role in providing education, health care, and social services, thereby contributing to community well-being (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). Additionally, faith-based initiatives mobilise resources that enhance economic development, especially in underserved areas (Smith, 2021). Moreover, religious teachings can inspire ethical behavior and social responsibility, fostering a culture of giving and volunteerism (Baker, 2023).

Developmental organisations have become increasingly aware of the importance of religion and culture to economic development around the mid-1990s. This recognition is reflected in reports from the World Bank and

initiatives such as the World Faiths Development Dialogue, which emphasises the need for cultural sensitivity in development practices (World Bank, 2018; Smith, 2021). However, it is also evident that religion has been a source of conflict. Historical events such as Islamic Jihads, the persecution of heretics during the Middle Ages, the European Religious Wars, ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, and the Iran-Iraq War have all caused immense suffering (Johnson, 2022; Baker, 2023). These conflicts illustrate the dual role of religion as both a potential source of community development and a catalyst for violence.

Religious knowledge often provides individuals with moral and ethical guidelines that shape their behavior and decision-making. This guidance can promote social responsibility and community cohesion, essential for sustainable development (Baker, 2023). Religious knowledge fosters community ties and social networks, which are crucial for mobilizing resources and support during development initiatives. Faith-based organizations often play a key role in community service and outreach (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). Many religious institutions provide educational services, improving literacy and skill development. This access to education empowers individuals, particularly in underserved communities (Smith, 2021). Faith-based organizations often participate in economic development projects, such as microfinance initiatives, that empower individuals to improve their livelihoods and contribute to local economies (Johnson, 2022). Religious knowledge often includes teachings on health and well-being, influencing behaviors related to health practices, nutrition, and family planning. Faith-based health initiatives can significantly impact public health outcomes (Baker, 2023).

Jesus gave his followers the mission to educate and baptize people from all nations (Matthew 28:19–20). Until Justin Martyr founded catechetical schools in Ephesus and Rome around 150 AD, this mission was carried out in the disciples' homes. Later on, reading, writing, and other disciplines outside of religion were taught in these institutions (Alvin, 2016). Around the middle of the fifteenth century, powerful individuals such as Martin Luther and John Calvin convinced the government to enact universal and mandatory education that was funded by taxes. Initiatives for inclusive education for the deaf and blind started in the 1700s and 1800s, respectively (Smith, 2021). Monasteries are also the source of universities; the first one was founded in 528 AD at Monte Cassino, Italy, by the Benedictine Order. Christian influence gave rise to the old universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Bologna, Paris, and Marseille (Lonchamp, 1993).

Christians have always been committed to treating everyone with kindness, in accordance with the golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12), and the proverb, "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me" (Matthew 25:45). Regardless of their religious background, they helped the sick and condemned acts like infanticide and child abandonment. In stark contrast to the beliefs of the Greco-Roman society, they cared for the blind, crippled, deaf, and lepers by following Christ's example (Alvin, 2016). In AD 250, during a plague, pagan people abandoned friends and family members who were ill and behaved cruelly toward them. Christians, on the other hand, kept treating the sick. By 369 AD, the church had constructed the first hospital, complete with training workshops for inexperienced patients and rehabilitation centers. Throughout Europe, a large number of Christian hospitals connected to monasteries had been founded by the year 750 AD (Johnson, 2022). Reflecting Christ's love for people, Christianity created the foundation for organizations like the Red Cross, professional medical nursing, and mental health facilities (Alvin, 2016).

By using its moral power and influence to oppose the barbaric customs prevalent in the pagan world, Christianity established the groundwork for the sacredness of human life. Without exception, it values every human life, even those born into challenging situations. The idea that every person is equal comes from Christian teachings, which assert that all are children of God and have a right to life and freedom. The Apostle Peter admonishes, "You are slaves of no one except God, so behave like free men, and never use your freedom as an excuse for wickedness. Have respect for everyone and love for our community; fear God and honor the Emperor" (1 Peter 2:16-17). Christianity has historically played a leading role in anti-slavery movements and the abolition of slavery, advocating for mutual love and respect within marriage rather than mere passion (Smith, 2021). Furthermore, Christianity has improved the status of women and children by upholding family values and encouraging a positive outlook on work. According to Christian doctrine, those who refuse to work should not eat (Iwe, 1968; Johnson, 2022).

But some, like philosopher Bertrand Russell, believe that religion is a source of unfathomable suffering because of the conduct of extremist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and Maitatsine sects in Nigeria (Russell, 1966). These violent expressions, which frequently result from erroneous interpretations of faith, have aided in the rise of theoretical atheism and anti-religious critique. Opponents contend that despite its flaws, organized religion frequently has a greater positive influence on society than a negative one (Okereke, 1974; Zunini, 1969; Baker, 2023).

Science has benefited greatly from the contributions of Islam. Muslims also developed sciences like geometry, optics, and astronomy, as well as algebra and Arabic numerals. They applied the empirical technique to the study

of nature and created the pendulum. Muslim scholars assessed the size of the Earth, computed the ecliptic angle, and ascertained the equinox precession (Khan, 2019). Muslims established hospitals and introduced systems of interns and externs, discovering causes of certain diseases and developing methods of diagnosis (Alavi, 2021). Additionally, Islam helped to bring about peace in the conflicted Hausa regions. It promoted modesty by teaching that both sexes should dress appropriately by covering their bodies. It is impossible to ignore the contributions that Islam and Christianity, the two major religious institutions in society, have made to family stability and discipline as well as public morality (Okwonkwo, 1972).

The idea of capacities, is focal point of the human development paradigm. Everyone values having access to basic necessities such as information, political freedom, decent health, and sustainable and appropriate living conditions. A fulfilling life also encompasses qualities like being free from violence, having respect from others, and having the ability to influence decisions that impact one's own life. Human freedom is the ultimate goal of development, which is linked to human rights (UNDP, 2020). The idea of human development places a strong emphasis on the necessity of improved working conditions, education, and personal choice. Human rights are in line with this; for example, intellectual development is directly correlated with the right to education, and societal political development is correlated with the right to political rights (UNDP, 2020; Alkire, 2020).

Christian missionaries have made significant advancements in agriculture, health care, and education in Cameroon. Prominent individuals from the Protestant, Baptist, and Catholic traditions, like Alfred Saker and Joseph Merrick, are honored for their significant contributions in these domains (Dah, 1987; Nkuete, 2021). Despite the significant contributions made by these religious institutions in moral, educational, health, and economic development, the impact of religious education on human intellectual and health development in Cameroon has often been systematically sidelined, particularly within the educational system (Tchamyu, 2020). The influence of religious knowledge on human development has not been sufficiently discussed in academic and governmental circles in Cameroon. Though Christian missionaries have historically made significant contributions to health care, education, and moral values most notably through the work of individuals like Joseph Merrick and Alfred Saker (Dah, 1987; Nkuete, 2021) the ongoing influence of religious teachings on the development of the individual and the community is still largely unknown.

The potential of religious education to promote ethical behavior, civic participation, and critical thinking in young people has been curtailed due to its systemic marginalization inside the formal educational system (Tchamyu, 2020). This disregard not only diminishes the value of religious organisations, but it also makes it more difficult to use religious knowledge as a weapon to advance human rights and social cohesiveness (Nkongho, 2022). Additionally, there is a lack of empirical study examining the effect of religious knowledge on human development and its dimensions, such as community involvement, health behaviors, and educational outcomes. To fully comprehend the all-encompassing advantages of incorporating religious teachings into development initiatives in Cameroon, it is imperative to address this gap. This study, therefore, intends to investigate the effect of religious knowledge on human development. The ultimate goal is to produce insights that might guide practice and policy in the Cameroonian context.

2. Literature Review

The Maturational Theory of Child Development provides a valuable framework for understanding the impact of religious education on human development (Gesell, 1928). Religious education plays a significant role in the holistic development of individuals, by fostering moral reasoning, fostering the formation of identity, stimulating cognitive growth, and aligning teachings with developmental readiness. (Nkuete, 2021; Kohlberg, 1981; Tchamyu, 2020; Sen, 1999) Theory emphasises how important it is to incorporate religious education into more comprehensive teaching methods in order to develop well-rounded, socially conscious people.

The Psychoanalytic Theory, primarily developed by Sigmund Freud, emphasizes the influence of the unconscious mind, early childhood experiences, and social interactions on personality development (Freud, 1923). The Psychoanalytic Theory offers valuable insights into the effects of religious education on human development. By influencing identity formation (Erikson, 1968), moral development (Wong, 2017), emotional regulation, coping mechanisms, and socialization (Putnam, 2000), religious education plays a critical role in shaping individuals' psychological and emotional landscapes.

Empirical research shows that religious education has a significant effect on a number of areas of human development, such as social interaction, emotional stability, cognitive ability, and cultural awareness. For example, Haste (2015) and King & Kitchener (2004) found that, religious education promote moral reasoning and critical thinking, especially when it involves discussions of moral conundrums. According to Cohens and Geller (2020) and Chubb & Moe (1990), supportive learning environments are the reason why kids in schools with a religious affiliation frequently performed better academically.

According to Pargament et al. (2000) education provide coping mechanisms that enhance resilience and mental

health outcomes. Leming (2001) and Holt et al. (2016) also found that religious education positively affects moral development, helping students navigate complex social issues. Smith & Denton (2005) and Zuckerman et al. (2018) argued that religiously educated individuals are more likely to engage in community service and civic activities. Erikson (1968) found that religious education plays a critical role in identity development during adolescence, helping youths to through them navigate social and personal challenges.

Wong et al. (2020) found that religious education provides coping resources that enhance resilience among adolescents facing life challenges. A study by Adams et al. (2019) emphasized the role of religious education in shaping identity and self-concept during adolescence. Hewstone et al. (2002) found that religious education promotes interfaith dialogue and understanding, fostering tolerance and reducing prejudice among diverse groups.

Kessler et al. (2021) demonstrated that exposure to diverse religious teachings in educational settings promote interfaith understanding and reduce prejudices. Regnerus (2003) argued that individuals with religious education usually maintain their values into adulthood, affecting their lifestyle choices and community involvement. Regnerus et al. (2021) highlighted that individuals with a background in religious education tend to maintain their values and remain actively involved in their communities into adulthood.

Regarding the effect of religious education on human development in Cameroon, Ngong (2020) found that students in religious schools in Cameroon often perform better academically than their peers in secular schools, attributing this to the discipline and values instilled through religious education. According to Tchakam et al. (2021), religious education encourages youth volunteerism and involvement in neighborhood projects, hence improving youth community involvement. According to Ndonko (2019), religion education helps in moral growth by guiding pupils through moral conundrums in social settings. Fongkimeh (2022) also found that, religious education gives children coping mechanisms that improve their resilience, especially when dealing with socioeconomic difficulties. As per findings of Ateh’s (2023) and Mouguiam et al. (2021), those who have received religious education have a tendency to uphold their moral principles and engage in community development activities even in their adult life.

3. Research Methodology

This study seeks to verify the effect of Religious Education on Human development. This means the study strives to answer the question, does religious education have an effect on human development in Cameroon? Thus, the study has a causal and ex-post fact research design since it investigates the causal relationship between a set of independent variables and the dependent closed ended questionnaires were developed and used for data collection for the study which were distributed to 400 individuals the three main religions; Christians, Muslims and Baha’i and 378 were retained based on a quota sampling technique. Base on the human capital model we developed the following model;

$$HD=f (In, Hon, Mo, F, Age, Sex, Rel, Ed).....(1)$$

Where, HD=Human Development, In=Integrity, Hon= Honesty, Mo=Morality, F=Faith, Rel=Religion, Ed= Education. Econometrically, the model is given as;

$$HD_i=B_0+B_1MI_n+B_2Hon_i+B_3Mo_i+ B_4F_i+ B_5Age_i+ + B_6Sex_i +B_7Rel_i+ B_8Ed_i +\epsilon_i..... (2)$$

Where ϵ is the error term, $B_0, B_1, B_2, B_3, B_4, B_5, B_6, B_7, B_8$ are parameters to be estimated. The four variables used as part of religious education to capture human development are integrity, honesty, morality and faith. Integrity and morally upright are latent variables which are constructed using the multiple correspondence analysis (Nginyu, 2023) while the remainder are categorical variables. Data for this study will be analysed quantitatively using regression analysis based on the Tobit model. The Tobit model is particularly useful as the dependent variable is censored falls between 0 and 1, meaning it has a limit on its range.

4. Presentation of Results and Discussion

Table 1 below presents the descriptive statistics of the variables used in our regression analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
HDI	378	.565	.222	0	1
Hon	378	3.889	1.021	1	5
Faith	378	4.085	.946	1	5
Moral	378	4.73	.588	1	5

Integrity	378	4.238	.956	1	5
Age40	378	.307	.462	0	1
Male	378	.571	.496	0	1
Christ	378	.841	.366	0	1
Mus	378	.138	.345	0	1
Bahas	378	.021	.144	0	1

From Table 1 above, the latent variables were constructed using multiple correspondence analysis and normalized using MIN-MAX method to have a minimum and maximum value of 0 and 1 respectively. Age had 4 categories from the different age groups as earlier presented above but we converted it to a binary variable to have 1 if age is greater than 40 and 0 otherwise. Sex had two categories male and female and male therefore we had generated a binary variable to have 1 if male and 0 if female. Religion had 4 categories, Christians, Muslim, Baha's and others.

The correlation results presented in Table 2 above show that there exist both positive and negative relationships between the variables involved in the study.

Table 2. Pairwise correlations

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(1) HDI	1.000									
(2) Hon	0.222	1.000								
(3) Faith	0.189	0.273	1.000							
(4) Moral	-0.031	0.118	-0.035	1.000						
(5) Integrity	0.054	0.598	0.148	0.199	1.000					
(6) Age40	0.155	0.151	0.171	-0.104	0.038	1.000				
(7) Male	-0.043	0.031	0.078	-0.143	0.026	0.113	1.000			
(8) Christ	-0.003	-0.090	-0.099	0.269	-0.058	-0.182	-0.230	1.000		
(9) Mus	-0.075	0.104	0.143	-0.209	0.077	0.101	0.222	-0.919	1.000	
(10) Bahas	0.189	-0.020	-0.091	-0.183	-0.037	0.221	0.053	-0.339	-0.059	1.000

This result also shows that the correlation between one variable and itself is 1 (Perfectly correlated). From the table above, there exist weak correlations between the exogenous variables indicated by their values which are less than 0.7 in most cases. A weak correlation shows the absence of multicollinearity as observed above.

After doing the above descriptive statistic, we will therefore proceed to the regression analysis proper. The table below presents the regression results of our work. The table below shows the effect of religious education on human development. But before the interpretation of the results, we present the post estimation test to be sure that our results are BLUE.

The Table below therefore presents the results of the effect of religious education on human development.

Table 3. Linear regression

HDI	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf Interval]	Sig
Int	-.024	.015	-1.64	.101	-.053 .005	
Hon	.044	.014	3.12	.002	.016 .073	***
Faith	.043	.013	3.43	.001	.018 .068	***
Mor	.009	.021	0.43	.669	-.032 .049	
Male	-.025	.023	-1.08	.28	-.071 .021	
Age40	.027	.025	1.07	.286	-.023 .077	
Christ	-.416	.108	-3.87	0	-.628 -.205	***

Mus	-.468	.109	-4.28	0	-.683	-.253	***
Constant	.714	.131	5.44	0	.456	.972	***

Mean dependent var	0.565	SD dependent var	0.222
Pseudo r-squared	0.257	Number of obs	378.000
Chi-square	51.114	Prob > chi2	0.000
Akaike crit. (AIC)	167.758	Bayesian crit. (BIC)	207.107

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Before the interpretation of the coefficients we can note that the R-square of the regression is 0.135 meaning that, 13.5% of the variation in human development is explained by the variables used in our model. We also note that Prob>F is significant at 1% since Prob > F=0.000 meaning that our model is globally significant.

From Table 3 above we found that integrity has a negative and significant effect on human development with coefficient -.0245. This therefore means that if integrity increases by 1 percent, human development will decrease by .024 units. This therefore shows the importance of integrity in explaining human development. We also found that honesty has a positive and significant effect on human development with coefficient .044. This therefore means that if honesty increases by 1 unit, human development will increase by 0.044 units. This therefore shows the importance of honesty in improving human development.

In addition, we found that, faith has a positive and significant effect on human development with coefficient .043, this therefore means that if faith increases by 1 unit, human development will increase by .043 units this therefore shows the importance of faith in improving human development. We also found out that morality has a positive and insignificant effect on human development with coefficient .009. This therefore means that if morality increases by 1 unit, human development will increase by .009 units. This therefore shows the importance of morality in reducing human development. This therefore shows the importance of morality in reducing human development.

More so, male has a positive and insignificant effect on human development with coefficient -.025. This therefore means that females have a -.025 human development more than males. In addition, age too has an insignificant effect on human development. Regarding religion, we created three binary variables for religion, Christian, Muslim and we had to merge others and the Beha's to form other religion. This is because the latter two categories had very small frequency to consider each as separate category. It was found that, christens had coefficient -.416 meaning that Christians had .416 level in human development more than other religions. Muslims had coefficient -.468 meaning that Muslim had .468 level in human development more than other religions.

It was found that, integrity has a positive effect on human development which contradicts the expectations and disagrees with the human development theory of Erikson (1982) which holds that at the age of 65 and above when a person contemplates on his life accomplishments and develops integrity if he sees himself leading a successful life and Zarit, & Leitsch (2020) who argued that, some individuals achieves integrity in an unconventional way, challenging the notion. It's in line with Carter (2021) found that integrity is positively correlated with life satisfaction among older adults and McAdams & de St. Aubyn, (2016) who found that integrity fosters personal development.

We found that, integrity has a positive effect on human development in agrees with the research of Rose and Susan (2016) who established that honesty has an effect on human health while dishonesty disrupts the of a dishonest person and Eijholt, & Sparking (2019) who found that honesty does not only improves personal health but also it also fosters better relationships and social support, which are crucial for overall well-being. Honesty also improves the health of honesty (Eijholt & Sparking, 2019) and Torka (2016) who found that makes the body healthier, more relaxed and creates genuine happiness.

Morality was found to have a positive effect on human development contrary to the expectations and also other research work. Erikso (1964) postulated that moral identity is both the goal for moral and identity development. The findings are in line with Hernández & Bañados (2020) and Schwartz & Cote (2021) who found a positive effects of morality on the various aspects of human development and Lapsley (2005) who argued that the moral self is the distinct outcome of self-development.

We found that, Faith has a positive effect on human development. Zuckerman et al. (1984) concord that individuals with strong spiritual commitment enjoyed better health, longer life span, higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction. Uchenna (2017) affirmed that faith provides liberation and redemption, linking humanity to

communities of common memories and common hope with which they join in indicating human conditions and passing a vision that stimulates and generates new life. More so, Pargament (2011) and Diener & Seligman (2004) found that faith contributes to psychological well-being and resilience.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The concern of this study was to investigate the Effect of Religious Education on Human Development in Cameroon. To attain this objective, the Tobit model was used. It was found that honesty, faith and age have a positive effect on human development. While integrity, morality and education have negative effects on human development. Based on these findings the following recommendations are made.

Religious education should be compulsory at the elementary level, with religious certificates given. The government of Cameroon should include religion as a course in the different Universities as it is with the Universities of Legon (Ghana), Ibadan (Nigeria) and Nairobi (Kenya), just to mention a few.

The content of the country's educational curriculum should be reviewed to include religious and moral education with emphasis on common values in all recognized religions like the golden rule and stress on the regard of equal value of life for every human.

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