

FOSTERING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION THROUGH THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND HUMAN RELATIONS IN NIGERIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study examined the role of religion and human relationships in promoting environmental education in Nigeria. Given the country's ongoing environmental challenges and the shortcomings of formal environmental education, religious teachings and community structures present a viable alternative for fostering ecological awareness and sustainability. Analyzing case studies from Ghana and India illustrates how integrating environmental messages into religious doctrines and social structures can drive meaningful behavioural changes. In Nigeria, where religious institutions and traditional leaders wield significant influence, embedding environmental stewardship within faith-based teachings and communal values can help address gaps in environmental consciousness. The findings suggest that aligning environmental responsibility with moral and spiritual obligations enhances awareness, encourages sustainable practices, and fosters long-term ecological protection.

Keywords: Environmental education, religion, human relations, sustainability, ecological awareness

Introduction

Environmental education is now more important than ever as human activities threaten the planet's delicate balance (Nyika&Mwema, 2021). In Nigeria, the effects of environmental degradation—ranging from deforestation and desertification to pollution and climate change—are becoming more severe, affecting both human livelihoods and wildlife (Olowoyeye, 2021). Experts argue that addressing these challenges requires a well-rounded approach that blends scientific knowledge with cultural, ethical, and religious perspectives (Utaji&Nyityo, 2024; Anabaraonye et al., 2024; Okyere-Manu et al., 2022). Given the strong influence of religion in Nigerian society, integrating religious teachings into environmental education could be a powerful way to promote sustainable practices. Nigeria is a highly religious country, with Christian, Islamic, and Indigenous African beliefs shaping peoples' worldviews, including their attitudes toward nature (Ngbea&Achunike, 2014). Many religious doctrines emphasize stewardship, accountability, and respect for the environment—values that align with key environmental principles like conservation and sustainability (Onuorah, 2024). For example, Christianity teaches that humans are stewards of the Earth (Genesis 2:15, New International Version), while Islam promotes balance (mīzān) in human interactions with nature (Qur'an 55:7-9). Traditional African beliefs also encourage sustainability through practices like sacred groves and ecological taboos. If these perspectives were incorporated into both formal and informal education, they could significantly enhance environmental awareness and inspire ethical behaviour.

Beyond religious teachings, social relationships are key in shaping how people think about and engage with the environment. Cultural norms, community values, and social interactions influence

individuals' willingness to adopt eco-friendly behaviours and support conservation (Dhiman, 2023). Shared responsibility is deeply ingrained in many African societies, making community-based approaches highly effective. Religious institutions, in particular, are powerful platforms for spreading awareness and promoting behaviour change (Li et al., 2025; Yusuf, 2024). Faith leaders and community elders often mobilize people around shared values, reinforcing ethical principles that support sustainable practices. Additionally, cultural tools like storytelling, festivals, and traditional taboos can be used to strengthen environmental responsibility.

Despite the apparent potential of this approach, Nigeria's current environmental education system largely ignores religious and social dimensions. This gap underscores the need for a more inclusive framework incorporating religious teachings and community engagement to foster environmental responsibility. This study explores how religion and human relationships can be leveraged to enhance environmental education in Nigeria. It will examine the role of religious institutions, community-driven initiatives, and policy measures in promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to the broader conversation on environmental education and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Research Method

This study profoundly explored how religion and human relationships help shape environmental awareness in Nigeria. Using a comparative approach, it examines how Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion (ATR) address environmental issues, highlighting their common ground, differences, and points of agreement on sustainability. By examining religious teachings and practices, the study explored how these faiths influence people's attitudes toward nature and ecological responsibility. The research analyzed religious texts and doctrines from all three faith traditions, identifying their perspectives on environmental care. Observations of faith-driven environmental activities provided further context. For example, Christian organizations promoting eco-theology, Islamic teachings emphasizing cleanliness and nature preservation, and ATR's deep respect for nature demonstrate how religious communities put their beliefs into action—through initiatives like tree planting, waste management, and conservation programs. Through this qualitative and comparative analysis, the study also applied Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) to assess how people absorb and adopt sustainable practices within their religious communities. The findings suggested that individuals pick up environmental behaviours by observing and participating in religious and communal activities. Leaders within these faith traditions serve as role models, guiding their followers toward eco-friendly habits, while religious gatherings create spaces for environmental advocacy.

Theoretical Foundation

This study adopted Social Learning Theory, which provided a valuable framework for understanding how environmental values are transmitted through religious and social institutions in Nigeria. This theory, as proposed by Bandura (1977), suggested that individuals learn behaviors, attitudes, and values through observation, modeling, and social interaction (Cherry, 2024). In a society where religious beliefs and communal relationships are deeply embedded in daily life, these social structures serve as powerful tools for fostering environmental awareness and action. Religious leaders play a crucial role in shaping public behavior. Their teachings, sermons, and actions influence their followers, making them effective models for environmental consciousness. In Christian communities, for example, the concept of stewardship, which emphasizes human responsibility over nature as outlined in biblical teachings, encourages sustainable practices such as tree planting and conservation. Similarly, Islam integrates

environmental ethics into its teachings, emphasizing cleanliness, water conservation, and responsible land use. African Traditional Religion (ATR), which upholds the sacredness of nature, reinforces the protection of natural resources through cultural norms, such as the preservation of sacred forests and the regulation of hunting practices. **Onuorah (2024) stated that** when religious leaders actively participate in environmental sustainability efforts, such as organizing community clean-up campaigns or advocating against deforestation, their followers are more likely to observe, internalize, and replicate these behaviors.

Beyond religious leadership, human relationships and peer influence play an equally significant role in shaping environmental behavior. In Nigerian communities, social bonds determine behavioral patterns, with individuals learning from family members, neighbors, and social groups. If a community collectively adopts sustainable practices such as waste recycling, water conservation, or afforestation, individuals are more likely to conform to these behaviors due to the social reinforcement they receive. For instance, a mosque that integrates tree-planting initiatives or a church that discourages littering influences not only its members but also the broader community. Likewise, traditional rulers who enforce environmental conservation laws within their domains ensure that people learn and adopt responsible practices through social interactions and communal obligations.

Conceptual Clarifications: Environmental Education and Human Relations

Environmental education is a structured process designed to enhance individuals' understanding of the environment and equip them with the skills necessary to address environmental challenges. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (2024), environmental education enables individuals to explore environmental issues, develop problem-solving skills, and take action to improve their surroundings. This process fosters a deeper understanding of ecological concerns and empowers people to make informed and responsible choices regarding environmental conservation. Srinivas (n.d.) described environmental education as a learning approach that raises awareness and expands people's knowledge about environmental issues and their associated challenges. Through this process, individuals become more conscious of how their actions affect the environment and are encouraged to adopt sustainable practices. Mubita, Milupi, Monde, and Simooya (2022) argued that environmental education is based on the assumption that the environment is at risk and must be protected. Environmentalists often believe that their proposed solutions are the most effective means of safeguarding the planet. Consequently, environmental education serves as a tool to inform and inspire individuals to become active participants in environmental conservation efforts. Unlike traditional education, which prioritizes knowledge acquisition and comprehension, environmental education places emphasis on motivating individuals to take meaningful action in addressing ecological challenges.

Human relations refer to the interactions, connections, and relationships between individuals, particularly in a social or professional setting. These relationships play a crucial role in fostering a harmonious environment, whether in a community or workplace. According to Manullang (2017), human relations involve the way people interact with one another to create a conducive atmosphere. Effective communication is an essential component of human relations, as it facilitates understanding and cooperation among individuals. LibreTexts (2021) emphasized the significance of human relations in achieving career success. In a workplace setting, human relations focus on how individuals relate to one another within an organization's structure. Strong interpersonal skills contribute to a productive work environment, making it important for employees to develop and maintain positive relationships. Since organizations rely on effective collaboration and teamwork, fostering good human relations becomes essential for achieving both individual and collective

goals. Furthermore, Indeed (2024) described human relations as the ability to engage with others in a healthy and constructive manner, fostering meaningful connections. From a managerial perspective, human relations involve creating systems and communication channels that facilitate teamwork and effective collaboration. Managers play a vital role in building strong group dynamics and one-on-one relationships, ensuring that employees are well-trained, their concerns are addressed, and conflicts are resolved efficiently. Additionally, human relations contribute to shaping a positive organizational culture, which enhances employee satisfaction, motivation, and overall productivity.

The Role of Religious Teachings in Promoting Environmental Consciousness and Sustainability

Across different religious traditions, numerous teachings emphasize environmental conservation and sustainability, highlighting humanity's responsibility to care for the natural world. In Christianity, Genesis 2:15 states that "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." This passage underscores the divine mandate for stewardship, indicating that humans are caretakers rather than owners of the Earth. Similarly, Psalm 24:1 declares, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it," reinforcing the idea that nature belongs to God and must be treated with reverence. Leviticus 25:23-24 further supports this notion by reminding believers that "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers." This scripture reflects the principle of sustainability, ensuring that natural resources are preserved for future generations. The Christian scriptures also emphasize the consequences of environmental destruction. Isaiah 24:4-6 warns that "The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers... The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant." This passage highlights the negative impact of human actions on the environment and stresses the need for ethical responsibility. Similarly, Revelation 11:18 suggests that those who harm the environment will face divine judgment, stating that God will "destroy those who destroy the earth." Proverbs 12:10 extends this idea to ethical treatment of animals, saying that "The righteous care for the needs of their animals," implying a broader responsibility toward ecological balance and conservation.

Islam also places great emphasis on environmental stewardship. The Qur'an 6:141 states, "And do not waste, for God does not love the wasteful," promoting sustainable consumption and discouraging excessive exploitation of resources. This principle is reiterated in Qur'an 7:31, which advises, "O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid, and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess." Moderation is a central theme in Islamic teachings, ensuring that natural resources are used wisely and conserved for future generations. The Qur'an also addresses the consequences of environmental neglect, as seen in Qur'an 30:41: "Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness]." This verse suggests that environmental degradation is a direct result of human actions and serves as a warning against unsustainable practices. Islamic teachings also encourage proactive environmental conservation. The Prophet Muhammad advocated for tree planting and sustainable agriculture. A well-known hadith states, "If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person, or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (sadaqah) for him" (Sunan Ibn Majah 25:3267). Another hadith (Musnad Ahmad 23489) reinforces this by stating, "If the Hour (the Day of Judgment) is about to be established, and one of you has a sapling in his hand, then he should plant it if he can." These teachings highlight the long-term benefits of environmental preservation and encourage responsible stewardship.

Indigenous African religious traditions also place significant value on nature, viewing the environment as sacred and interconnected with human existence. Many African cultures believe that spirits reside in rivers, forests, and mountains, leading to taboos that prohibit deforestation or excessive hunting. Sacred groves are common in various African communities, serving as protected spaces where trees and wildlife are preserved for future generations. African proverbs also reflect deep ecological wisdom, such as the Kenyan saying, “The Earth is not ours, it is a treasure we hold in trust for future generations,” and the Igbo proverb, “If you destroy the land, you destroy yourself.” These expressions reinforce the idea that environmental sustainability is crucial for human survival and well-being. Beyond scriptural references, religious teachings also emphasize broader ethical principles that support environmental sustainability. One of these is the principle of accountability, where individuals and communities are held responsible for their actions concerning the environment. In Christianity, this is linked to the concept of divine judgment, where humans are accountable to God for how they have treated creation. This idea encourages believers to adopt ethical practices that minimize harm to the planet. Islam similarly teaches that humans will be questioned on the Day of Judgment about their treatment of the environment. The Qur'an (2:205) warns against corruption and destruction on Earth, reinforcing the idea that environmental harm is a serious moral transgression. Islamic teachings also emphasize *maslaha* (public good), which encourages actions that benefit society and future generations. In African indigenous belief systems, intergenerational responsibility is a core value. Many African traditions teach that ancestors, the living, and future generations are interconnected, meaning that today's actions affect the well-being of future descendants. This perspective fosters a long-term view of environmental sustainability, encouraging practices that ensure the continued availability of natural resources. Elders often serve as custodians of ecological wisdom, passing down knowledge of sustainable farming, water conservation, and forest management.

Environmental Education in Nigeria

Environmental education in Nigeria serves a crucial role in raising awareness and promoting sustainable practices among individuals, communities, and institutions (Bosah, 2013). Given the country's diverse ecosystems and the increasing challenges posed by climate change, pollution, deforestation, and urbanization, environmental education is essential for fostering responsible attitudes and actions towards the environment (Anijah-Obi, Eneji&Ubom, 2017). Environmental education helps individuals understand the impact of human activities on the environment and equips them with knowledge on how to mitigate negative effects. It encourages sustainable practices such as waste management, conservation of natural resources, and climate change adaptation. In Nigeria, where issues like desertification, oil pollution in the Niger Delta, and poor waste disposal are prevalent, environmental education is a powerful tool for driving change.

The Nigerian government, through agencies such as the Federal Ministry of Environment and the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), has implemented policies to promote environmental education (Nwachukwu, 2024). These policies are integrated into school curricula at various levels, from primary education to higher institutions. The National Policy on Environment also emphasizes the need for public awareness and education on environmental sustainability. Despite its importance, environmental education in Nigeria faces several challenges. Limited funding for environmental programs, inadequate training of educators and poor enforcement of environmental laws hinder its effectiveness. Additionally, many communities, especially in rural areas, lack access to information on sustainable environmental practices. There is also a gap between policy formulation and implementation, making it difficult for environmental education to have a widespread impact. Several NGOs and private organizations are

actively involved in promoting environmental education in Nigeria. Groups such as the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) and Environmental Rights Action (ERA) engage in advocacy, awareness campaigns, and community-based environmental projects. These organizations play a critical role in bridging the gap left by government efforts and ensuring that more people, especially young Nigerians, are informed about environmental issues.

Environmental Education in Ghana

Environmental education in Ghana is a vital tool for promoting sustainability, conservation, and public awareness about environmental issues. Given the country's rich biodiversity, including species like monkeys, bongos, and forest elephants, educating citizens on environmental protection is essential for long-term ecological and economic stability. However, environmental education efforts in Ghana are largely driven by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with support from the Ghana Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), rather than through a centralized, well-funded national framework. While Ghana does not have a stand-alone national policy specifically for environmental education, elements of it are embedded in broader policies. The Environmental Protection Agency Act of 1994 (Act 490) mandates the Ghana EPA to promote public environmental awareness through both formal and non-formal education. This has led to the establishment of an Environmental Education Department within the EPA, though its effectiveness is limited by resource constraints. In the formal education sector, environmental education is incorporated into the Integrated Science curriculum from Primary 1 through Senior High School. The Ghana Education Service, under the Ministry of Education, ensures that students learn about environmental sustainability as part of their general science education. However, the lack of a dedicated environmental education curriculum limits the depth and impact of these lessons. Non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in filling the gaps left by government policies. Organizations such as the Centre for Environmental Citizenship Initiatives (CECI) and others actively promote environmental awareness through campaigns, workshops, and community engagement. These NGOs work alongside the Ghana EPA to advocate for stronger environmental policies and create educational programs targeting schools and local communities.

Environmental Education in Ghana

Environmental education in Ghana is a critical tool for promoting sustainable development and addressing environmental issues such as deforestation, pollution, and climate change. Despite efforts by the Ghana Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), several challenges hinder the effective implementation of environmental education in the country (Nyarkoh & Berényi, 2025; Mohammad & Adam, 2022). One of the biggest obstacles to environmental education in Ghana is the absence of a comprehensive national policy. Without a unified framework, efforts to educate the public about environmental issues remain fragmented. Various organizations, including NGOs and international donors, implement environmental programs based on their own objectives rather than a nationally coordinated strategy. This lack of consistency reduces the overall impact of environmental education and makes it difficult to achieve long-term sustainability.

Although the Ghanaian government recognizes the importance of environmental education, financial support remains inadequate. There is no dedicated national funding mechanism to ensure continuous and structured environmental education programs. Most initiatives rely on funding from NGOs, international donors, or corporate sponsorships, which are often short-term. The dependency on external funding creates instability, as projects may be discontinued once funding sources dry up. Without sustainable government investment, environmental education efforts struggle to reach a wider audience and achieve lasting impact. A major barrier to effective

environmental education is the lack of resources in schools and educational institutions. Many schools do not have adequate learning materials, laboratories, or teaching aids to facilitate practical environmental education. Additionally, environmental topics are often not given priority in the curriculum, leading to limited engagement among students. Schools in rural areas face even greater challenges, as they may lack access to trained teachers and proper infrastructure to support environmental education programs. For environmental education to be effective, educators need proper training and continuous professional development. However, Ghana has few structured programs for training teachers in environmental education. Many educators do not receive specialized training in environmental subjects, making it difficult for them to integrate environmental concepts into their teaching. Without proper training, educators may lack the skills to engage students in meaningful discussions about environmental conservation and sustainability. Expanding training opportunities for teachers would improve the delivery and effectiveness of environmental education across the country.

Environmental Education in India

Environmental education in India is taking center stage as the country integrates climate consciousness into school curricula. The urgency to address environmental challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss has necessitated a shift in educational priorities. Academic institutions play a crucial role in fostering sustainability by embedding environmental consciousness in their teaching, research, and operations. The "learning-for-sustainability" approach, which emphasizes interdisciplinary and action-oriented education, has been increasingly recognized as an effective means to drive societal change (Manik, 2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023 highlights the need for education that is both globally relevant and tailored to local realities, reinforcing the role of schools and higher education institutions in advancing sustainable development.

India's National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 has been instrumental in transforming environmental education in schools. By moving away from content-based learning towards skill-based learning, the policy promotes experiential education, ensuring that students actively engage with real-world environmental challenges. It enriches school curricula with ecological principles, resource management, and sustainable practices, equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills to become conscientious stewards of the planet. Integrating environmental consciousness into the curriculum rather than treating it as a separate subject enhances its effectiveness (Manik, 2024). Environmental education is infused into diverse disciplines such as science, mathematics, social sciences, humanities, and the arts, making sustainability an integral part of students' academic journey. The role of educators in fostering environmental consciousness is crucial. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate environmental education into their lesson plans and actively engage students through observation, experimentation, and practical application. The NEP acknowledges this by advocating for capacity-building programs that equip teachers with the necessary training and professional development opportunities. Research indicates that the strategic integration of environmental education into daily activities strengthens youth empowerment and environmental awareness, bridging the gap between knowledge and action.

Educational institutions are increasingly adopting innovative strategies to enhance environmental learning. Schools are being transformed into living laboratories where students gain hands-on experience with sustainability concepts. Engaging in real-world applications, such as environmental surveys, community awareness campaigns, and scientific experiments, reinforces their understanding of ecological principles. Field trips provide invaluable exposure, allowing students to witness environmental challenges and solutions firsthand, fostering a deeper

appreciation of the interconnectedness of human and environmental systems. The integration of sustainability within the educational framework is essential for shaping a generation that prioritizes ecological stewardship. A well-rounded curriculum that is interdisciplinary, holistic, value-driven, locally rooted, and globally relevant ensures that sustainability is not just a concept but a fundamental aspect of education. By embedding environmental education into the fabric of learning from an early stage, India is laying the foundation for a future where environmental consciousness is ingrained in society's collective mindset.

According to Sherpa (2022), one of the primary challenges facing environmental education in India is the nature of its curriculum. The current approach remains largely theoretical, lacking the experiential learning necessary for students to develop a deep and practical understanding of environmental issues. While environmental education has been incorporated into school and university curricula by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and the University Grants Commission (UGC), it remains disconnected from real-world applications. Many educators and researchers, such as Siddiqui and Khan (2015), emphasize the need to integrate environmental learning with hands-on experiences, including nature walks, field trips, and community-based environmental projects. Without such practical engagement, students may struggle to grasp the true impact of environmental degradation and their role in mitigating it. Another major limitation of environmental education in India is the inadequate time allocated to the subject. In most schools and colleges, it is treated as an additional or optional course rather than an essential component of the curriculum. Typically taught once or twice a week, it is often scheduled at less engaging times, such as after lunch, further reducing its impact. This insufficient emphasis prevents students from gaining in-depth exposure to environmental concepts. Given its direct link to sustainable development and the well-being of future generations, environmental education should be prioritized on par with core subjects such as mathematics, science, and social studies.

Practical engagement is essential to making environmental education meaningful, yet Indian schools and colleges rarely organize activities that allow students to actively participate in environmental conservation. Events such as tree-planting drives or community clean-up campaigns are often confined to special occasions like World Environment Day or National Service Scheme (NSS) activities. These sporadic efforts fail to instill a continuous sense of responsibility and urgency regarding environmental issues. To cultivate a culture of sustainability, schools should implement frequent and diverse activities, including environmental debates, field visits, eco-clubs, and awareness campaigns. A further challenge is the perception that environmental education has limited academic value. Unlike subjects such as mathematics, physics, or economics, environmental studies are often regarded as supplementary rather than essential. Consequently, students prioritize subjects with direct career prospects, while environmental education is neglected. Additionally, career opportunities in environmental science are not widely promoted, discouraging students from pursuing the field. Addressing this requires educational policymakers to emphasize the importance of environmental studies and expand career pathways in sustainability, environmental law, conservation, and related fields.

The heavy academic workload in the Indian education system further limits the scope for environmental education. Students are often overwhelmed with coursework, homework, and extracurricular activities, making it difficult to engage meaningfully with sustainability topics. Similarly, teachers face immense pressure to complete syllabi for competitive exams, leading to the deprioritization of environmental education. A restructured curriculum that integrates environmental topics across various subjects rather than treating them as an isolated discipline would ensure a more balanced approach. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping students'

understanding of environmental issues, yet many lack formal training in environmental education. Most teacher-training programs, including Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed.), do not provide comprehensive modules on environmental sustainability. As a result, educators often lack the necessary knowledge and skills to teach the subject effectively. To address this, teacher-training programs should incorporate specialized courses on environmental education, equipping educators with both subject knowledge and pedagogical strategies to engage students in meaningful discussions about sustainability. In many Indian schools, environmental education is taught by general science teachers rather than specialists in environmental science, leading to a superficial understanding of key issues. The subject is often treated as an extension of general science rather than as a specialized field of study. Establishing proper eligibility criteria—such as requiring teachers to have a postgraduate degree in environmental science along with a teaching qualification—would ensure that students receive high-quality instruction. Strengthening teacher expertise, alongside curriculum reforms and greater practical engagement, would significantly enhance the effectiveness of environmental education in India.

Environmental Education in Nigeria, Ghana, and India: A Comparative Analysis

Environmental education in Nigeria, Ghana, and India plays a significant role in promoting sustainability and environmental awareness, but each country has different approaches, challenges, and levels of integration within the educational system. In Nigeria, environmental education is recognized as a critical tool in addressing issues such as deforestation, oil pollution, and desertification. The Nigerian government, through agencies like the Federal Ministry of Environment and the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), has integrated environmental education into school curricula at various levels. Despite these efforts, challenges such as limited funding, inadequate educator training, and weak enforcement of environmental laws hinder its effectiveness. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) and Environmental Rights Action (ERA) play a crucial role in bridging the gaps left by government initiatives.

In Ghana, environmental education is primarily driven by NGOs rather than a centralized, well-funded national framework. While elements of environmental education are embedded in broader policies, Ghana lacks a stand-alone national policy for it. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Act of 1994 mandates the Ghana EPA to promote public awareness, but limited financial and institutional support reduces its overall impact. In formal education, environmental topics are included within the Integrated Science curriculum, but the absence of a dedicated curriculum limits the depth of instruction. Schools, especially in rural areas, struggle with inadequate learning materials and trained educators. NGOs and international donors fill some of these gaps, but the reliance on external funding creates instability in long-term environmental education initiatives. India, in contrast, has made significant strides in embedding environmental education within its education system. The National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 prioritizes experiential and skill-based learning over content-heavy instruction, incorporating sustainability concepts across various disciplines rather than treating it as a separate subject. Schools and higher education institutions use innovative methods, including hands-on learning, environmental surveys, and field trips, to reinforce ecological principles. However, challenges persist, such as the largely theoretical nature of environmental curricula, insufficient time allocation for environmental subjects, and a lack of career incentives in the field. While India has a more structured and widespread approach compared to Nigeria and Ghana, practical engagement remains limited, and many schools only emphasize environmental activities on special occasions rather than as part of continuous education.

Discussion

The findings from case studies of environmental education in Nigeria, Ghana, and India reveal key observations relevant to fostering environmental education through the study of religion and human relations in Nigeria. A major challenge in Nigeria is the fragmented and underfunded nature of environmental education, with limited integration into mainstream curricula. However, religion and human relations provide an alternative and culturally embedded means to promote environmental consciousness. Religious teachings in Nigeria, particularly within Christianity and Islam, emphasize stewardship of the earth, care for creation, and ethical responsibility. Many faith-based organizations already engage in community development and social education, making them well-positioned to integrate environmental awareness into their teachings. The case of Ghana, where environmental education relies heavily on NGOs and informal awareness campaigns, suggests that faith-based organizations in Nigeria can serve as additional drivers of environmental education, supplementing government efforts. India's approach to integrating environmental consciousness into daily practices and experiential learning offers another useful perspective. Hinduism, Buddhism, and other indigenous traditions in India emphasize harmony with nature, influencing behaviors such as water conservation and afforestation efforts. In Nigeria, similar cultural and religious principles could be leveraged to frame environmental education as a moral and spiritual duty, rather than just scientific or policy-driven initiative. Human relations also play a critical role in shaping attitudes toward the environment. In Nigeria, where communal living and traditional leadership structures remain influential, using religious and community leaders to promote environmental awareness can enhance engagement. The case studies show that a top-down government approach alone is insufficient; instead, grassroots involvement and culturally relevant messaging—such as drawing on religious values—are essential for long-term behavioral change.

Conclusion

The study highlighted the potential of religion and human relations as effective channels for fostering environmental education in Nigeria. Given the limitations of formal environmental education, leveraging religious teachings and community structures offers a culturally embedded approach to promoting environmental consciousness. The case studies from Ghana and India illustrate that integrating environmental awareness into religious and social frameworks can lead to meaningful behavioral change. In Nigeria, where religious institutions and traditional leadership hold significant influence, embedding environmental stewardship within faith-based teachings and communal values can bridge existing gaps in environmental education. By aligning environmental responsibility with moral and spiritual duties, this approach can enhance awareness, encourage sustainable practices, and foster long-term environmental protection. Therefore, a collaborative effort between religious institutions, community leaders, and policymakers is essential to strengthening environmental education and ensuring a more sustainable future for Nigeria.

Way Forward

To enhance environmental consciousness and sustainability through religious teachings in Nigeria, a multi-faceted approach is necessary. Religious institutions, policymakers, educators, and community leaders must collaborate to integrate faith-based environmental ethics into mainstream sustainability efforts. The following strategies can serve as a way forward: Religious leaders should incorporate environmental responsibility into sermons, teachings, and community discussions. Churches, mosques, and indigenous religious institutions can emphasize scriptural references that promote sustainability, encouraging their followers to adopt eco-friendly practices such as tree planting, waste management, and conservation. Religious organizations should partner with environmental NGOs, government agencies, and international bodies to advocate for stronger

environmental policies. Through interfaith collaborations, they can engage in campaigns that promote sustainable living and climate action. Many religious institutions operate schools and universities. By integrating environmental education into their curricula, they can instill a culture of sustainability in young people. Lessons should focus on climate change, conservation, pollution control, and ethical environmental responsibility, using religious principles as a foundation.

Faith-based groups should lead by example through community-based environmental projects. These can include afforestation programs, clean-up drives, and water conservation initiatives. Religious communities can also establish eco-friendly practices such as using sustainable energy sources in worship centers and reducing waste. The Nigerian government should collaborate with religious leaders to promote environmental policies. Religious institutions have significant influence in shaping public opinion, and their involvement in environmental campaigns can enhance policy acceptance and grassroots implementation. Traditional African religions and customs offer valuable ecological wisdom, including taboos against excessive hunting and deforestation. Recognizing and integrating indigenous environmental practices with modern sustainability strategies can help protect natural resources. Religious institutions should emphasize the moral and spiritual consequences of environmental neglect. Teachings on accountability, intergenerational responsibility, and respect for creation can encourage individuals to adopt sustainable behaviors. Governments, private organizations, and international donors should provide financial and technical support for religious institutions engaged in environmental advocacy. Grants and funding can help establish green projects, sustainable farming initiatives, and eco-friendly infrastructure within religious communities.

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