

## **THE EFFECTS OF METHODOLOGIES OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN KIBOS AND KODIAGA MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Statement of the Problem:** Despite the incarceration of terror-related offenders in maximum-security prisons, there has been limited development of religious education methodologies specifically tailored to foster Christian-Muslim relations, unlike in society where such efforts are more extensive. This gap in interfaith-focused methodologies poses a potential risk to harmonious coexistence among inmates from different religious backgrounds.

**Purpose of the Study:** This study aimed to examine the effects of religious education methodologies on Christian-Muslim relations in Kibos and Kodiaga maximum-security prisons.

**Research Methodology:** A qualitative research design with a descriptive approach was employed. Data were collected through purposive sampling of chaplains and religious educators, utilizing closed-ended questionnaires and thematic analysis.

**Findings:** The study found that specific methodologies in religious education, such as teachings on forgiveness, reconciliation, and respect, positively influenced Christian-Muslim relations. However, interfaith dialogue was minimally addressed, limiting deeper interreligious understanding.

**Conclusion:** Religious education in Kibos and Kodiaga prisons positively impacted Christian-Muslim relations, though the lack of structured interfaith dialogues indicated room for improvement.

**Recommendations:** The study recommended incorporating structured interfaith dialogue sessions and providing additional training for chaplains to enhance Christian-Muslim relations and mitigate potential religion-based conflicts in these prison settings.

**Keywords:** *Religious Education, Christian-Muslim Relations, Interfaith Dialogue, Maximum Security Prisons, Rehabilitation Methodologies*

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Religious education in prisons has proven to be an effective tool for shaping inmate interactions, particularly in diverse settings such as maximum-security prisons, where tensions between religious groups can quickly escalate. Religious education has gained popularity in Kenya as a means of fostering positive Christian-Muslim relations in prisons. This role is especially important given the historical roots of religious education in correctional facilities, where religious instruction was one of the first rehabilitative programs available to inmates. According to Charles Atkins et al. (2019), early prison education in America and Europe prioritized religious instruction, with chaplains using the Bible as the primary curriculum to instill moral values and encourage peaceful behaviour among prisoners. This approach paved the way for modern prison programs, where religious education is still an important tool for promoting positive interpersonal relationships and reducing conflict among highly diverse inmate populations.

The importance of religious education as a rehabilitative and interfaith tool grows in light of evidence demonstrating its effectiveness in reducing recidivism. Lynne Rogers, Margaret Simonot, and Angela Nartey (2014) found that inmates who receive structured education, including religious teachings, are significantly less likely to reoffend than those who do not receive such education. Religious education is a well-established practice in Kenya's correctional system, with the goal of providing inmates with moral guidance and coping strategies that allow them to engage constructively with others, including those from different religious backgrounds. This rehabilitative goal includes fostering understanding between Christian and Muslim inmates, whose relationships have been strained by external religious tensions, making religious education an essential tool for promoting peace in the prison environment.

Kenyan prisons, particularly maximum-security facilities such as Kibos and Kodiaga, have become settings in which religious education has a significant and complex impact on interfaith relations. Tensions between Christian and Muslim inmates have risen in recent decades as a result of increased national and international terrorism incidents, many of which have been linked to religious extremism. According to Ismail, Maina, and Gecaga (2022), incidents such as the 1998 terrorist attacks on the US embassy in Kenya have fueled suspicion and prejudice between Christians and Muslims. These dynamics are mirrored in prison environments, where inmates convicted of extremism or associated with violent acts are frequently housed. The

challenge is to use religious education to bridge the divide, encouraging mutual respect and positive coexistence in these high-stakes settings (Sitienei & Kiprota, 2022).

The Kenyan prison system's emphasis on religious education to improve Christian-Muslim relations is part of a larger international trend, as countries around the world recognize the potential for religious instruction to serve as a countermeasure to extremism. In Europe, for example, countries such as Germany and the Netherlands have implemented interfaith programs within prisons as a strategy to promote religious inclusivity and foster peaceful coexistence among inmates of different beliefs. These programs emphasize the value of dialogue, pluralism, and the elimination of exclusivist ideologies, which are frequently at the root of interfaith conflicts. By incorporating these principles into religious education, prisons can foster reconciliation and understanding, significantly lowering the likelihood of internal conflict among inmates from various religious backgrounds (Faye, 2017).

Religious education methodologies are now being tailored in Kibos and Kodiaga maximum-security prisons, where extremists are frequently housed, to directly address and improve Christian-Muslim relations. Muna (2017) emphasizes the importance of addressing inmate radicalization in Kenyan prisons, particularly in facilities housing individuals charged with terror-related offenses. In this context, religious education serves as both a moral guidance tool and a strategic approach to preventing the spread of extremist ideologies within prison walls. These programs seek to transform the prison environment into a space where peaceful interfaith relations can thrive, reducing the possibility of conflict and promoting long-term rehabilitation (Achuka, 2016). The study's focus on Kibos and Kodiaga prisons offers a unique perspective on how religious education methodologies can be tailored to promote positive Christian-Muslim relations in Kenya's most secure environments.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Religious education has become essential within Kenyan maximum-security prisons as a rehabilitative tool, particularly in addressing the challenges posed by inmates with histories of violence or extremist backgrounds. These individuals, whose numbers are reportedly on the rise, contribute to a volatile environment that threatens the peace and security of the entire prison community (Centre for Sustainable Conflict Resolution, 2022; Achuka, 2016). The existing framework of Christian-Muslim relations, both within and outside prison settings, emphasizes the importance of peaceful coexistence among adherents of different faiths. However, without targeted efforts to integrate Christian-Muslim relations within religious

education, these interactions may become strained, leading to further tension and conflict within prison facilities. This heightened risk necessitates an urgent examination of how existing religious education programs can be tailored to reinforce positive Christian-Muslim relations, thus mitigating the potential for religious and social conflicts among inmates.

The need for effective religious education that supports interfaith harmony is not unique to Kenya but is part of a global trend seen in countries like Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, where similar programs have been developed to address religious extremism and promote inclusivity within prison systems (Vellenga & De Groot, 2019; Faye, 2017). These international efforts highlight the importance of structured religious education programs that not only offer spiritual guidance but also foster inclusivism and mutual respect across faiths. Therefore, this study focuses specifically on assessing the methodologies of religious education in Kenyan maximum-security prisons, particularly Kibos and Kodiaga, with the goal of identifying practices that promote positive interactions between Christian and Muslim inmates. Through this targeted approach, the study aims to enhance interfaith relations, contributing to a safer, more cohesive prison environment that aligns with the broader objectives of rehabilitation and social reintegration.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

To examine the effects of methodologies of religious education on Christian-Muslim relations in Kibos and Kodiaga maximum security prisons.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

How do the methodologies of religious education impact Christian-Muslim relations in Kibos and Kodiaga maximum security prisons?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The section presents the theoretical framework, empirical review and the conceptual framework.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study applied the Social-Psychological Development Theory to examine how religious education methodologies impact Christian-Muslim relations in Kibos and Kodiaga maximum security prisons. According to Charles B. A. Ubah and Robert L. Robinson Jr. (2003:117), this theory proposes that cognitive processes significantly influence how individuals acquire and

retain new behavior patterns, especially when exposed to structured educational treatments, such as correctional education. In this context, the theory supports the hypothesis that religious education in prisons can foster positive Christian-Muslim relations by enhancing cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral skills among inmates.

By utilizing this theory, the study aimed to determine whether religious education in these prisons promotes moral and ethical behavior, offers pro-social, task-oriented interactions, and includes well-developed curricula that encourage constructive thinking. Additionally, the theory facilitated an exploration of whether religious education in these maximum-security prisons incorporates counter-discourse elements to prevent misuse of sacred texts and fosters a culture of religious dialogue and mutual understanding. The Social-Psychological Development Theory also provided insight into the potential psychological benefits of such educational interventions, as it posits that structured programs can help inmates build self-esteem, manage tension more maturely, and develop a favorable self-concept. While the theory does not assume that religious education alone can resolve all issues within prison systems, it suggests that these programs play a crucial role in promoting positive social psychology and enhancing interfaith relations among inmates, thus benefiting the broader prison environment and society at large.

## **EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

The preceding studies presented and discussed the foundation upon which all methodologies for religious education in prison were to be built. According to their understanding, the starting point for all prison religious education methodologies was to shift inmates' mindsets to new realities (Chiki et al., 2017). They affirmed that religious education, as a practice of freedom that was both academic and spiritual, had to be a type of education that facilitated learning in order to acclimate prisoners to their new reality. Abraham K. Akih and Yolanda Dreyer (2017:6), in their study of African prisons, called for a shift from religious education that did not empower prisoners to confront new realities to a more focused one that preoccupied prisoners' minds with new realities. Akih and Yolanda (2017:11) supported this concept by demonstrating that pastoral interventions that focused on fear, made an emotional appeal, or shamed inmates were ineffective. They went on to say that while non-directive, unstructured self-help programs may be effective in other areas, they are ineffective for changing inmates' thinking patterns and skills. They thus emphasised the importance of pastoral caregivers in

prison focusing on programs that addressed specific issues and teaching specific skills and techniques for dealing with challenging situations.

This discussion revealed the need for methodologies of religious education in prison that are geared toward directing inmates' minds to new realities. Instead of being a tool of subjugation, it should liberate and facilitate learning, empowering prisoners to adapt to a new reality. As a result, the purpose of this study is to determine how religious education in Kenyan prisons used methodologies that empowered inmates to confront new realities, as no previous study in Kenyan prisons attempted to do so.

According to Ilechukwu<sup>1</sup> and Ugwuozor (2017:6), Nigerian religious education in prison failed to incorporate this concept. They argued that this mark was missed because prison education was generally designed to be retributive in nature, implying that punishment was the best response to and deterrent to crime, and thus inmates were taught to obey orders and conform. They concluded that the overarching pedagogy was one of behavioral submission and correction, which instilled obedience to authority and supported a domination-based hierarchy. They understood, however, that the goal of religious education was not to reinforce oppressive systems, but rather to empower inmates' moral and ethical behaviour. They believed that this could be accomplished by addressing the destructive effects of shame and shaming, and that religious education should establish and affirm inmates' personhood by encouraging all participants in the class to listen to one another on equal terms. This study found that Nigerian religious education in prison lacked methodologies that guided inmates toward a new reality. This study, however, sought to determine whether religious education in Kenyan prisons failed this test.

Given that religious education in prison had to guide inmates to a new reality, its theory needed to focus on that goal. Charlene Tan (2006:30-32) explains how Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler's perennial theory of education, which emphasizes cultivating students' reason and developing their intellectual powers, was useful in guiding inmates to a new reality. However, Kimberly J. Karhoff (2003:3) argued that its overemphasis on intellectualism made it too detailed for inmates. Tan (2006:32-33) proposed William C. Bagley's essentialism theory, which emphasized the importance of teaching essential and enduring knowledge accumulated over time, as well as discipline as a key item that students were expected to learn in order to function effectively as members of civilized society. Glenda Moss and Cheu-jeey Lee (2010: 38) hypothesized that it required the teacher to set high academic standards for his or her

students and administer appropriate standardized tests to assess the students' competence, while ignoring the spirituality aspect of religious education in prison.

The progressivism theory of Charles S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, as elaborated by Tan (2006:34-36) and described by Robert Newton (1981:2-5), held that God was within an individual, calling him or her to a personal relationship, and thus the purpose of the educator was not to impose something from without, but to help the person understand the divine as it emerged in his or her thoughts and feelings and in prayer. Karhoff (2003:12) discredited its use for religious purposes, claiming that every truth was relative and dynamic, contradicting the religious belief that God or Allah had given people truths to guide their thoughts, words, actions, and educational beliefs.

The Critical Theory of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, as elaborated by Matthias Finger (1991:138) and posited by Tan (2006:36-38), aimed at analysing social and educational conditions in schools and society in order to expose exploitative power relationships and implement reforms that would produce equality, fairness, and justice, was appropriate for this study due to its desire for a just society. However, Stephen D. Brookfield (2005: 26) argues that it was firmly grounded in a specific political analysis, and Frank Abrahams (2004:5) argues that in schools, it focused on the social shaping and reshaping of the learning experience, with schools playing a more prominent role in both the creation and transmission of social reality, making it unsuitable for this research.

Charles B. A. Ubah and Robert L. Robinson JR (2003:117) developed the Social-Psychological Development Theory with the goal of assisting inmates in achieving a new reality. This theory strongly held that cognitive processes played an important role in the acquisition and retention of new behavioral patterns, and it was based on the general assumption that new behavioral patterns could be elicited in an individual through exposure to certain modes of treatment, such as correctional education programs. According to Simonot and Nartey (2014:9), it emphasized cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral skills as a means of empowering inmates to adapt to their new reality. Akih and Dreyer (2017:6) praised such theory for having cognitive behavioral approaches that were effective in a prison environment because they focused on the present, were task oriented, taught pro-social behaviours and techniques, and provided inmates with opportunities to practice these in a safe setting. The United Office on Drugs and Crime (2018: 28) agreed that cognitive-behavioral therapy was clearly one of the more promising rehabilitative treatments for criminal offenders. It was noted that, when compared to other

treatment approaches, cognitive-behavioral therapy was generally ranked at the top in terms of its positive effects on recidivism because it had a well-developed theoretical basis that explicitly targeted criminal thinking as a contributing factor to deviant behavior and could be adapted to a variety of offenders. According to these studies, religious education in prison should focus on cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral skills in order to empower inmates to adapt to a new reality. The current study investigated whether religious education programs in Kenyan prisons emphasized cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral skills.

The religious teacher in prison also had to ensure that the religious education provided to inmates shifted their perspective to new realities. Following the Social-Psychological Development theory, Simonot and Nartey (2014:9) believed that religious teachers in prison needed to develop learners' resilience to issues that negatively impacted their lives, such as violent extremism, through a pedagogy that included cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral skills in order to foster respect for diversity and responsible engagement. According to Stijn Sieckelinck (2016: 9-10), on the mental level, they had to dismantle everything that contributed to inmates' uncertainty; on the relational level, they had to take alienation, disenfranchisement, and victimization seriously through deflection; and on the behavioral level, they had to recognize the need for risk taking so that religious education did not escalate into recklessness through a displacement strategy. According to him, they needed to develop awareness programs that would be accompanied by exercises and activities that would teach students how to protest peacefully. Previous research established the need for teachers to focus on directing inmates' minds toward a new reality. This study determined whether religious teachers in the Kibos and Kodiaga prisons directed inmates' minds to a new reality. Scholars such as Francesco Ragazzi (2014: 22) argued that the curriculum for religious education in prison should focus on providing inmates with alternative perspectives on their future.

Helen Tiffin (1995:95) argued that one way to accomplish this was to ensure that inmates' curriculum included a canonical counter discourse that provided them with alternative perspectives on their future. She explained that this canonical counter discourse occurred when a teacher chose a character or characters, or the fundamental assumptions of a British canonical text, and exposed those assumptions. In other words, she made it clear that it entailed mapping the dominant discourse, reading and exposing its underlying assumptions, and deconstructing these assumptions from the cross-cultural perspective of the imperially targeted local. She

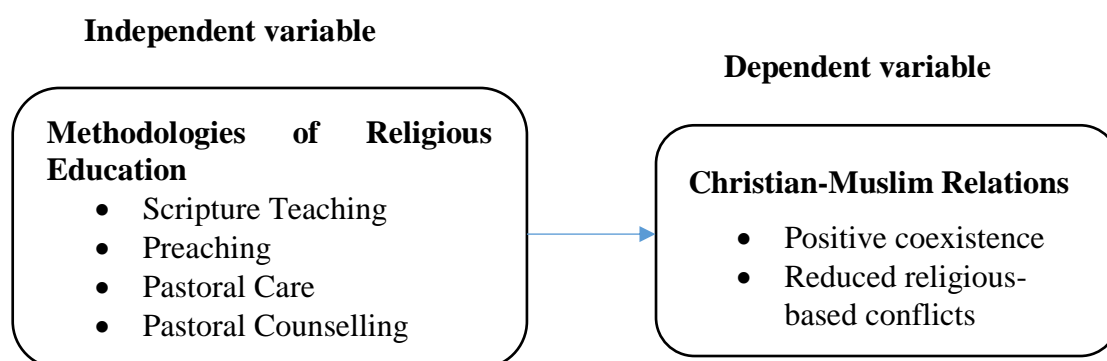


praised the operation of counter-discourse for not attempting to subvert the dominant in order to take its place, but rather evolving textual strategies that continuously consumed their own biases while exposing and eroding those of the dominant discourse. According to Davidson (2017:75), violent religious texts must be addressed because they originated in historical periods when war and violence were appropriate means of diplomacy and communication. They must therefore be given an honest explanation of the roles of this text in their original context as well as in their afterlives. If religious education in prison took this approach, the accusation that its subjugated inmates was dropped. Furthermore, it provided an avenue for inmates to be empowered with their own reliable way of studying religion, allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of their religion. These studies emphasized the need for a religious counter discourse curriculum for inmates. The current study investigated the prevalence of counter-discourse curriculum in Kenyan prisons.

Previous research had called for a shift from religious education that did not empower prisoners to face new realities to a more focused approach that preoccupied prisoners' minds with new realities. They also stated that one way to accomplish this was to ensure that the curriculum for inmates was a canonical counter discourse, which included mapping the dominant discourse, reading and exposing its underlying assumptions, and dismantling these assumptions from the cross-cultural perspective of the imperially targeted local. As a result, religious education theory, as well as the teacher, had to take this into consideration. However, no study had critically evaluated this perspective on religious education in Kenyan prisons. This study thus evaluated whether religious education in Kenyan prisons had methodologies geared toward empowering inmates' minds to new realities.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework below illustrates the relationship between methodologies of religious education and their impact on Christian-Muslim relations within maximum-security prisons.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study used a qualitative research design, targeting Christian and Muslim chaplains in Kibos and Kodiaga maximum-security prisons as they are directly involved in religious education and interfaith relations. Using purposive sampling, all 16 chaplains were selected as participants, though only eight participated in the study. Data collection was conducted through closed-ended questionnaires, distributed in person with the assistance of prison chaplains, allowing respondents to complete them on their own schedules. Qualitative data analysis was done thematically to identify key themes and insights, while descriptive statistics were used to organize and present data effectively.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the findings on how religious education methodologies impact Christian-Muslim relations in Kibos and Kodiaga maximum security prisons. The study aimed to assess the specific elements of religious education, such as forgiveness, reconciliation, respect, and interfaith dialogue, and their roles in fostering a peaceful and collaborative environment for inmates of different faiths.

### **Positive Impact of Religious Education on Christian-Muslim Relations**

The study found that a significant majority of chaplains and inmates observed a positive impact of religious education on interfaith relations within the prison environment. Religious education programs incorporating forgiveness, reconciliation, and respect were seen as pivotal in reducing tension and promoting mutual understanding between Christian and Muslim inmates.

**Table 1: Impact of Religious Education on Christian-Muslim Relations**

<b>Impact of Religious Education</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strong Positive Impact	3	37.50%
Moderate Positive Impact	4	50%
No Significant Impact	1	12.50%
Total	8	100%

From the table above, 87.5% of respondents indicated that religious education had a positive impact on Christian-Muslim relations in the studied prisons, with 37.5% noting a strong positive impact and 50% observing a moderate positive effect. Only 12.5% reported no significant impact. This indicates that religious education is generally effective in fostering a peaceful atmosphere and promoting cooperative relationships among inmates of different religious backgrounds. The strong emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation, which align closely with both Christian and Muslim teachings, helps inmates reflect on personal reform and encourages empathy toward others, regardless of religious affiliation.

### **Key Elements in Religious Education Methodologies**

In addition to assessing the general impact of religious education, the study also examined the specific content and methodologies used in these programs to understand what aspects contributed most effectively to Christian-Muslim relations. Elements such as forgiveness, reconciliation, respect, and interfaith dialogue were highlighted as foundational to these educational initiatives.

**Table 2: Key Religious Education Topics Promoting Christian-Muslim Relations**

<b>Religious Education Topics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Forgiveness and Reconciliation	5	62.50%
Interfaith Dialogue and Group Discussions	2	25%
Respect and Tolerance Teachings	1	12.50%
Total	8	100%

Table 2 shows that forgiveness and reconciliation were the most emphasized topics in religious education programs, accounting for 62.5% of the responses. This focus on reconciliation

provides inmates with a path toward healing and mending relationships, which is particularly valuable in a prison environment where tensions can easily arise. Reconciliation efforts have been shown to help inmates reflect on their actions and seek constructive ways to rebuild relationships, especially with those of different faiths. This is in alignment with restorative justice principles, which aim to rehabilitate and reform rather than solely punish.

In addition, interfaith dialogues and group discussions accounted for 25% of the focus within religious education. Although this is a lesser emphasis compared to forgiveness and reconciliation, interfaith dialogues are critical for directly addressing misunderstandings and misconceptions between Christian and Muslim inmates. These discussions allow inmates to share their perspectives and find common ground, which helps reduce biases and fosters a spirit of cooperation. However, the limited emphasis on interfaith dialogue suggests that there is room for improvement in how religious education programs incorporate structured conversations between Christian and Muslim inmates. Expanding this component could provide a more robust foundation for long-term peace and understanding. Respect and tolerance teachings, at 12.5%, also contribute to fostering an atmosphere of mutual appreciation.

### **The Role of Interfaith Dialogue and Challenges**

While the study highlights the positive impact of religious education on Christian-Muslim relations, it also uncovers challenges in effectively implementing interfaith dialogue within these programs. The current interfaith dialogue component is minimal, with only 25% of respondents noting its presence. The limited inclusion of structured interfaith discussions restricts opportunities for inmates to engage deeply with one another's beliefs, potentially leaving certain misunderstandings and biases unaddressed. Interviews with chaplains revealed that some inmates face barriers in participating in interfaith dialogues, including a lack of prior exposure to such interactions and insufficient guidance on how to approach these conversations. Chaplains also noted that some inmates, especially those with limited formal education, may find it challenging to engage in structured dialogues, which can sometimes require a certain level of literacy and familiarity with theological concepts. To address these challenges, chaplains suggested more training and preparation for both educators and inmates to enhance their readiness for interfaith engagement.

## CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that religious education methodologies have a significant and positive impact on Christian-Muslim relations within Kibos and Kodiaga maximum security prisons, primarily through teachings on forgiveness, reconciliation, and respect. These elements contribute to a peaceful and cooperative environment among inmates, encouraging them to find common values and develop mutual understanding. However, the limited use of interfaith dialogue highlights an area for potential growth. Expanding structured interfaith dialogues within religious education programs would likely provide additional benefits, strengthening Christian-Muslim relations and helping to prevent religious-based conflicts within the prison environment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance Christian-Muslim relations in Kibos and Kodiaga maximum security prisons, it is recommended that religious education programs incorporate more structured interfaith dialogue sessions, providing inmates with opportunities to engage directly and learn about each other's beliefs. Also, religious education curricula should focus more on practical teachings of respect and tolerance alongside forgiveness and reconciliation. Chaplains should receive further training to facilitate these dialogues effectively, and programs should be adapted to accommodate inmates with varying educational backgrounds to ensure inclusivity and deeper understanding across religious divides.

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