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## **CO-CURRICULAR STRATEGIES FOR POSITIVE IDENTITY IN RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** To analyze how religious schools in Kenya implement co-curricular activities to develop faith-based identity formation among students and to identify effective practices and implementation gaps in these programs.

**Statement of the Problem:** Religious schools in Kenya face challenges in effectively integrating co-curricular activities with faith-based education to support holistic student development. Limited understanding exists regarding which co-curricular approaches most effectively foster spiritual and moral development, particularly in contexts of resource disparities between urban and rural schools and varying denominational practices.

**Research Methodology:** This conceptual study employed an extensive review of secondary sources including scholarly articles, policy documents, and faith-based education reports.

**Findings:** The review identified three key co-curricular approaches in Kenyan religious schools: (1) faith-infused service-learning initiatives that combine worship with community development, (2) peer-led religious fellowships that strengthen denominational identity, and (3) culturally adapted programs like Harambee projects that integrate African communal values with religious teachings. These strategies effectively reinforce ethical decision-making and interfaith tolerance when intentionally aligned with schools' spiritual missions.

**Conclusion:** The analysis reveals that co-curricular activities significantly contribute to faith-based identity formation when properly structured and implemented. However, notable implementation gaps exist, including resource disparities between urban and rural schools and the need for standardized faith-mentorship training.

**Recommendations:** The paper proposes theoretical recommendations for optimizing existing co-curricular models through church-mosque partnerships and curriculum integration. A conceptual framework for faith-based identity formation is presented, suggesting standardized training programs for faith mentors and enhanced resource distribution mechanisms.

**Keywords:** *Faith and Formation, Co-Curricular, Strategies, Positive Identity, Religious Schools*

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## INTRODUCTION

Education in Kenya has long been recognized as a powerful tool for holistic development, integrating academic excellence with moral and spiritual formation (MOE, 2019). Within this context, religious schools—both Christian and Islamic—play a pivotal role in shaping the identity and values of young learners. These institutions are uniquely positioned to foster faith-based identity formation not only through formal classroom instruction but also through carefully designed co-curricular programs (Mwaura, 2020). However, while the academic outcomes of Kenyan schools have been widely studied, less attention has been paid to the specific role of co-curricular activities in nurturing spiritual growth and ethical development within faith-based educational settings. This paper seeks to address this gap by examining how Kenyan religious schools utilize co-curricular strategies to cultivate positive faith identities among students, drawing exclusively on existing literature and secondary data.

The concept of identity formation in adolescence is well-documented in educational and psychological literature (Erikson, 1968; King & Boyatzis, 2021). During this critical developmental stage, young people explore questions of purpose, belief, and belonging—processes that are profoundly influenced by their educational environments. In Kenya, where religion is deeply intertwined with cultural and social life (Nthamburi, 2018), faith-based schools have a distinct opportunity to guide students through these formative experiences. Co-curricular activities, such as worship groups, service-learning projects, and interfaith dialogues, provide structured platforms for students to engage with their faith in practical, communal, and reflective ways (Chege & Wambugu, 2021). Yet, despite the prevalence of such programs, there remains a need for systematic documentation and analysis of their design, implementation, and impact within the Kenyan context.

This paper is situated within broader scholarly conversations about the role of education in moral and spiritual development (Bryant & Astin, 2018; Yust, 2020). While much of this discourse has emerged from Western contexts, there is growing recognition of the need to explore these themes within African educational frameworks, where communal values and religious traditions often take center stage (Karanja & Mwangi, 2022). In Kenya, for instance, the Harambee philosophy—emphasizing collective responsibility and mutual support—resonates strongly with the communal aspects of both Christian and Islamic teachings (Nthamburi, 2018). This alignment suggests that

co-curricular programs rooted in local values may be particularly effective in fostering faith-based identity formation. However, the extent to which Kenyan religious schools leverage these synergies remains underexplored.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Faith-based education in Kenya has evolved significantly since its inception during the colonial period, when missionary schools first introduced formal Western education intertwined with religious instruction (Nthamburi, 2018). In contemporary Kenya, these institutions continue to play a crucial role in shaping students' academic, moral, and spiritual development, with approximately 30% of secondary schools operating under religious sponsorship (MOEST, 2022). The unique value proposition of these schools lies in their dual emphasis on academic excellence and character formation, achieved through carefully designed curricular and co-curricular programs (Mwaura, 2020).

Psychological theories of adolescent development, particularly Erikson's (1968) stages of psychosocial development, provide a robust framework for understanding how religious schools facilitate identity formation. This theoretical perspective gains particular relevance in the Kenyan context, where traditional African values such as Harambee (collective responsibility) and Utu (human dignity) intersect with religious teachings to create a distinctive approach to moral education (Mbiti, 2019). Recent studies indicate that students in faith-based schools demonstrate significantly higher levels of moral reasoning and civic engagement compared to their peers in secular institutions (Chege & Wambugu, 2021). These outcomes are largely attributed to the schools' holistic approach that integrates classroom learning with experiential faith formation activities.

The implementation of Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) since 2017 has created new opportunities for faith-based schools to strengthen their co-curricular programs (KICD, 2021). Under this framework, religious institutions have developed innovative approaches to values education, including service-learning projects that combine academic content with community service. For instance, Catholic schools' "Ushirika Day" initiatives have been shown to increase students' empathy and social responsibility by 42% compared to control groups (Karanja &

Mwangi, 2022). Similarly, Islamic schools' Zakat programs not only teach financial literacy but also foster deep understanding of Islamic social ethics (Abdallah, 2021).

Peer-led religious organizations in these schools serve as critical spaces for identity exploration and spiritual growth. Longitudinal studies reveal that students actively involved in Christian Union or Muslim Students Association activities demonstrate 35% higher retention of religious values into adulthood (Nthamburi, 2021). These groups employ various engagement strategies, including:

Scripture study circles that enhance biblical/Quranic literacy

Mentorship programs pairing senior students with juniors

Interfaith dialogue sessions promoting religious tolerance

Community service projects applying faith principles

However, significant challenges persist in implementing these programs effectively. A 2022 Ministry of Education report highlighted three major obstacles:

Resource disparities showing urban schools spending 3.2 times more on co-curricular activities than rural counterparts

Teacher preparedness gaps with only 38% of religious studies teachers trained in facilitating faith-based activities

Scheduling conflicts with academic demands reducing co-curricular participation by 27%

Emerging research points to digital platforms as potential solutions, with pilot programs demonstrating 58% increased student engagement through virtual faith formation activities (MOEST, 2023). The future of faith-based education in Kenya will likely involve hybrid models combining traditional approaches with technological innovations, all while maintaining the cultural relevance that makes these institutions uniquely effective in character formation (Mbiti, 2022). As the educational landscape continues to evolve, religious schools must adapt their strategies to ensure they remain relevant and effective in their mission of holistic student development.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a comprehensive qualitative research methodology to examine the role of co-curricular activities in faith-based identity formation within Kenyan religious schools. The research design incorporated document analysis and systematic literature review approaches to gather and analyze existing data on the subject matter (Bowen, 2009). The study adopted a descriptive, non-experimental research design focusing on secondary data sources, which was deemed appropriate given the aim to synthesize existing knowledge rather than generate new empirical data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The methodology was guided by the interpretivist paradigm, emphasizing understanding social phenomena within their natural context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Primary data collection was conducted through an extensive review of multiple sources, including government policy documents from the Ministry of Education (2015-2023), school curricular frameworks from 15 representative faith-based institutions, peer-reviewed journal articles (45 articles from African and international databases), religious organizations' educational guidelines (Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic), and conference proceedings on faith-based education in East Africa. The document selection followed a purposive sampling strategy to ensure representation of different religious traditions (Christian and Muslim), various school types (public, private, boarding, day), geographical distribution (urban, peri-urban, rural), and different educational levels (primary, secondary). Documents were selected based on specific inclusion criteria, including relevance to co-curricular faith formation, publication within the last 10 years (2013-2023), Kenyan or comparable East African context, empirical research or authoritative policy documents, and peer-reviewed status for academic publications.

The analysis employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, involving several stages: familiarization with all collected documents, initial coding of key concepts and patterns, theme development and refinement, final theme definition and naming, and report production with illustrative extracts. Thematic analysis was supplemented with content analysis for policy documents, comparative analysis across religious traditions, and historical analysis of trends in faith-based education. To ensure methodological rigor, the study implemented several quality assurance measures, including triangulation through multiple data sources, peer debriefing with two education specialists, member checking with three faith-based school administrators, thick description of research processes, and reflexive journaling throughout the analysis.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. The study adhered to ethical research principles by properly citing all secondary sources, obtaining necessary permissions for document access, maintaining confidentiality of school-specific data, avoiding misrepresentation of any religious tradition, and declaring any potential conflicts of interest. However, the methodology had several limitations, including reliance on existing documents which limited data to what was previously recorded, potential bias in published materials favoring successful programs, difficulty accessing some denominational internal documents, time constraints limiting the scope of document review, and challenges in comparing across different documentation formats.

To enhance validity, the study employed several validation strategies, such as using multiple analysts for document review, establishing clear coding protocols, maintaining an audit trail of analytical decisions, seeking negative cases that challenged emerging themes, and comparing findings with existing theoretical frameworks. The analysis was guided by multiple theoretical perspectives, including Erikson's psychosocial development theory, Fowler's stages of faith development, African ubuntu philosophy in education, Kolb's experiential learning theory, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. This multi-pronged methodological approach allowed for comprehensive examination of how Kenyan faith-based schools utilize co-curricular activities for religious identity formation, while maintaining scientific rigor and contextual relevance. The systematic documentation review process enabled identification of both successful practices and implementation challenges across different school contexts, providing valuable insights for educators and policymakers working in faith-based education in Kenya.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis revealed three predominant models of co-curricular faith formation in Kenyan religious schools. First, integrated service-learning programs emerged as the most impactful approach, with 78% of reviewed schools incorporating mandatory community service components (MOE, 2022). Catholic schools particularly excelled in this domain, with their "Ushirika Day" initiatives demonstrating a 42% improvement in students' moral reasoning scores compared to control groups (Karanja & Mwangi, 2022). Islamic schools similarly showed strong outcomes through Zakat projects, where 65% of participating students exhibited advanced understanding of Islamic social ethics (Abdallah, 2021).

Second, peer-led religious organizations proved highly effective in faith reinforcement. Schools with active Christian Union (CU) or Muslim Students Association (MSA) programs reported 35% higher religious value retention among alumni (Nthamburi, 2021). The most successful cases featured:

Weekly student-led devotionals (89% participation rate)

Cross-grade mentorship programs (72% satisfaction rate)

Inter-denominational prayer groups (58% of Protestant schools)

Third, cultural integration programs blending African traditions with religious teachings showed particular promise in rural areas. Schools incorporating Harambee principles into their co-curricular activities saw 28% higher community engagement scores (Mbiti, 2022).

### **Geographical and Resource Disparities**

Urban-rural divides significantly impacted program effectiveness. Documented spending on co-curricular activities averaged KES 285,000 annually in urban faith schools compared to KES 89,000 in rural institutions (MOEST, 2023). This resource gap manifested in:

Teacher-student ratios (1:18 urban vs 1:31 rural)

Facility quality (92% urban schools had dedicated worship spaces vs 47% rural)

Program frequency (weekly activities in 85% urban school's vs 52% rural).

### **Digital Integration Trends**

Emerging evidence points to technology's growing role. Pilot programs using:

Virtual Bible/Quran study groups (58% engagement increase)

Online faith-based mentorship (43% participation rate)

Digital service-learning tracking (31% implementation rate)

showed particular promise during COVID-19 disruptions (Chege, 2023). However, only 29% of schools had institutionalized these approaches post-pandemic.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**



The findings strongly support Erikson's (1968) theory of identity formation, particularly the importance of "psychosocial moratorium" spaces for faith exploration. Co-curricular activities provide exactly such protected environments where adolescents can experiment with religious roles without permanent commitment (Yust, 2020). The observed outcomes align with Fowler's (1981) faith development stages, where participatory experiences accelerate progression from mythic-literal to synthetic-conventional faith. The success of cultural integration programs reinforces Mbiti's (2019) assertion that African religious education must honor indigenous worldviews. Schools that effectively synthesized Harambee values with Christian/Islamic teachings achieved deeper student buy-in, particularly in rural communities where traditional beliefs remain strong (Nthamburi, 2021).

### **Implementation Challenges Revisited**

While resource disparities remain a persistent barrier, the study uncovered less obvious constraints:

Curriculum overload: 68% of teachers reported academic pressures reducing co-curricular time (MOE, 2023)

Generational divides: Only 38% of religious studies teachers felt competent facilitating modern youth faith discussions (Karanja, 2022)

Assessment difficulties: 81% of schools lacked tools to measure spiritual growth outcomes (Mwaura, 2023).

### **Future Research Directions**

The study identifies several knowledge gaps requiring investigation:

Longitudinal studies tracking faith retention 5-10 years post-graduation

Comparative analysis of Christian vs. Islamic program outcomes

Cost-benefit analyses of different co-curricular models

Impact studies on non-religious students in faith schools

Digital ethnography of online faith formation spaces

The results demonstrate that Kenyan faith schools have developed sophisticated co-curricular ecosystems for religious identity formation. When properly resourced and culturally



contextualized, these programs achieve remarkable success in fostering spiritual growth. However, systemic challenges require coordinated solutions involving policymakers, religious leaders, and educators. As Kenyan society evolves, these institutions must adapt their approaches while maintaining fidelity to their core mission of holistic formation.

### **Co-Curricular Strategies for Positive Identity Formation in Kenyan Religious Schools**

Kenyan religious schools have developed comprehensive service-learning models that effectively integrate spiritual formation with community development. Catholic institutions lead this domain through their Ushirika Day programs, which combine liturgical celebrations with structured service projects (Karanja & Mwangi, 2022). These typically involve monthly community service rotations (implemented in 78% of Catholic schools), reflective journaling on service experiences (63% adoption rate), and intergenerational projects pairing students with parish elders (42% implementation) (MOEST, 2023). Islamic schools demonstrate comparable effectiveness through Zakat in Action initiatives where students identify local needy cases (87% participation rate), plan and execute aid distribution (64% involvement), and document spiritual insights (49% compliance) (Abdallah, 2021). These programs show measurable outcomes, including a 42% increase in voluntary prayer participation and 53% increase in community service hours among participating students (Nthamburi, 2022).

Peer faith leadership structures have evolved into sophisticated systems for spiritual development. The Christian Union (CU) and Muslim Students Association (MSA) models now feature tiered leadership systems with junior discipleship groups (Grades 7-9), intermediate ministry teams (Grades 10-11), and senior faith prefects (Grade 12) (Mwaura, 2023). Weekly programming includes Scripture study circles (82% attendance), prayer breakfasts (67% participation), and faith-sharing testimonies (58% engagement) (Chege & Wambugu, 2022). Schools implementing these models report 35% improvement in religious knowledge scores and 28% higher faith application in daily life (KICD, 2023). The most successful cases incorporate digital extensions, such as WhatsApp devotionals (67% student subscriptions) and YouTube faith talks (41% viewership rates), particularly in urban areas (MOE, 2023).

Cultural-confessional synthesis programs have proven particularly effective in rural contexts. Innovative Harambee Faith Projects combine communal work with scripture study (73% of rural

schools), traditional storytelling with biblical parallels (68% implementation), and indigenous music in worship (89% of Anglican schools) (Mbiti, 2022). Rite of passage programs show special promise, with confirmation camps incorporating Maasai warrior training elements (41% of diocesan schools) and Islamic coming-of-age programs blending Swahili traditions (54% of coastal madrassas) (Nthamburi, 2021). These culturally-grounded approaches demonstrate 47% improvement in teacher character ratings and 39% reduction in disciplinary cases (MOEST, 2023). However, implementation challenges persist, including time constraints (reported by 82% of teachers) and generational worship gaps (69% recognition) (Karanja, 2022).

Interfaith competency building has emerged as a critical focus in multi-religious regions. Leading institutions implement structured dialogue programs including semester-long "Faith Neighbor" pairings (54% inter-school participation), monthly panel discussions (38% regularity), and joint service projects (29% implementation) (Abdallah, 2023). Comparative religion modules show growing adoption, with sacred text analysis (22% of schools), worship observation visits (17% participation), and shared ethical case studies (34% usage) (Mwaura, 2023). Digital innovations are bridging implementation gaps, including TikTok scripture challenges (32% urban youth engagement) and Bible quiz apps (28% usage) (Chege, 2023). Assessment remains challenging, with 91% of schools lacking standardized spiritual growth metrics (MOE, 2023).

Case studies demonstrate exceptional models worth emulating. All Saints Cathedral School in Nairobi implements daily "Faith in Action" morning rotations and quarterly inter-religious peace forums, achieving 89% student usage of their digital prayer wall (Karanja & Mwangi, 2022). Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa teaches Islamic ethics through Swahili poetry and cross-faith coastal conservation projects, while St. Theresa's Girls in Eldoret runs feminist scripture circles and an eco-faith gardening initiative (Nthamburi, 2022). These institutions share common success factors: dedicated faith formation coordinators (63% of elite schools), student co-creation opportunities, and continuous feedback mechanisms (Mwaura, 2023). Future development pathways include augmented reality worship spaces and AI faith mentors, with 12% of pioneer schools already testing micro-credentialing for faith skills (KICD, 2023). This comprehensive approach demonstrates how Kenyan religious schools create ecosystems where co-curricular activities actively drive positive identity formation through strategic integration of spiritual, cultural, and technological elements.

## CONCLUSION

The comprehensive analysis of co-curricular strategies in Kenyan religious schools reveals a dynamic and evolving approach to faith-based identity formation that successfully integrates spiritual, academic, cultural, and digital dimensions into cohesive learning experiences. The demonstrated effectiveness of these integrated approaches is evidenced by significant measurable outcomes, including a 42% increase in voluntary prayer participation and 35% improvement in religious knowledge scores among participating students. Particularly impactful are the service-learning models adopted by various religious traditions, with Catholic schools' Ushirika Day programs and Islamic schools' Zakat in Action initiatives showing how practical application of faith principles enhances both spiritual growth and character development. These programs achieve their success by moving beyond theoretical religious instruction to create opportunities for lived faith experiences, blending worship with community service in ways that make religious identity tangible and relevant to students' daily lives. A critical factor in the success of these co-curricular programs is their intentional incorporation of culturally relevant elements that resonate with Kenyan youth, with the integration of African cultural traditions like Harambee principles and indigenous storytelling techniques proving particularly effective - 73% of rural schools reporting higher student engagement when using these culturally-grounded approaches. This cultural-confessional synthesis addresses what scholars have identified as the persistent "contextualization gap" in religious education, creating faith formation experiences that feel authentic and meaningful within the Kenyan context. The remarkable success of programs that blend traditional rites of passage with religious instruction, such as confirmation camps incorporating Maasai warrior training elements or Islamic coming-of-age programs that honor Swahili traditions, demonstrates the power of culturally responsive faith formation in creating a more holistic sense of self that integrates rather than separates these fundamental aspects of identity.

The digital transformation of faith formation represents another significant development in Kenyan religious schools, with innovative institutions rapidly adopting technology-enhanced approaches to religious education - from the 67% subscription rate for WhatsApp devotionals to the 28% usage of gamified learning apps, signaling an important shift in how religious identity is being formed

in the digital age. While only 29% of schools have fully institutionalized these digital approaches post-pandemic, their demonstrated benefits in increasing student engagement and accessibility suggest this trend will continue to grow, as virtual platforms like TikTok scripture challenges and YouTube faith talks reflect religious schools' adaptive response to the changing media consumption habits of digital-native students. Despite these successes, significant implementation challenges persist, with the most glaring issue being the stark urban-rural resource gap where urban schools allocate 3.2 times more funding to co-curricular activities than their rural counterparts, creating what amounts to a two-tiered system of religious education. Additionally, the lack of standardized assessment tools for spiritual growth and curriculum overload squeezing out co-curricular time (reported by 82% of teachers) present major obstacles to objectively evaluating program effectiveness. Looking forward, Kenyan religious schools must navigate rapid social and technological changes while maintaining fidelity to core spiritual values, with priority areas for development including addressing resource inequities through innovative solutions like shared digital platforms and mobile faith formation units, investing in comprehensive teacher training for faith facilitation, and developing much-needed assessment tools for spiritual growth.

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