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CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AS A TOOL TO MITIGATE TEENAGE IMMORALITY IN SELECTED SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AJEROMI IFELODUN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, LAGOS-STATE

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Abstract

This study examines religious education as a tool for mitigating teenage immorality in selected senior secondary schools in Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area. Teenage immorality has become an increasing social and educational concern in many urban communities in Nigeria, particularly within Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos State. Immoral behaviors among adolescents manifest through actions such as dishonesty, examination malpractice, truancy, substance abuse, bullying, and teenage sexual misconduct. These behaviors threaten both the moral stability of society and the future development of young people. The study is anchored on Social Learning Theory, propounded by Albert Bandura, which emphasizes that behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and modeling of significant role models such as teachers, parents, and religious leaders. The study adopted a quantitative research approach using a descriptive survey design. A sample of 100 respondents, comprising students, teachers, parents, and religious leaders, was selected from 10 senior secondary schools using simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages. The findings reveal that religious education significantly contributes to adolescents' moral awareness, self-discipline, and responsible behavior. The study concludes that religious education remains an effective instrument for addressing teenage immorality when supported by schools, families, and religious institutions. Based on the study, the researcher recommends that schools strengthen religious education programs; that parents actively participate in the moral upbringing of their children; and that religious institutions collaborate with schools to organize youth mentorship programs, seminars, and faith-based activities.

Keywords: Christian Religious Education, Teenage Immorality, Senior Secondary School, Ajeromi Ifelodun Local Government, Lagos State

Introduction

Adolescence immorality has become a growing social concern in many urban communities in Nigeria, especially in Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos state. Immorality is behaviour that goes against accepted values, norms, or principles of what is considered right and

good in a society. Immorality among adolescents is often expressed through behaviours such as substance abuse, theft and dishonesty, bullying and aggressive behaviour, examination malpractices, truancy, disobedience, and sexual misconduct, vandalism and destruction of property, and disrespect for societal norms (Nwagu 2011, 123-130). These behaviours pose serious threats not only to the moral fabric of society but also to the holistic development and prospects of young people.

Scholars have argued that adolescence is a critical developmental stage during which values, attitudes, and moral orientations are formed, making targeted moral interventions essential at this period (Bornstein & Putnick 2022, 233-255). In this regard, education, particularly Christian religious education has been identified as a powerful instrument for shaping character and guiding behaviour. Christian religious education goes beyond the transmission of doctrinal knowledge; it seeks to nurture moral consciousness, ethical reasoning, and spiritual discipline among learners. Durkheim viewed religion as a vital social institution that promotes moral regulation and social cohesion, emphasising its role in instilling shared values that restrain deviant behaviour (Dahl & Martinez 2023, 243-275).

Similarly, Kohlberg's theory of moral development underscores the importance of structured moral instruction in helping individuals progress from externally controlled behaviour to principled moral reasoning. Christian Religious education, when effectively harnessed, provides such structure by presenting moral absolutes, ethical narratives, and role models that guide adolescents toward responsible conduct (Yusup 2025, 67-78). Bandura's social learning theory further supports the relevance of religious education by highlighting the influence of observed behaviours, role models, and reinforcement in shaping individual actions (Adeyemi, 2018, 45-54) In Christian religious education contexts, adolescents are exposed to positive role models through sacred texts, teachers, and faith leaders, which can significantly influence their moral choices.

In addition, Smith argues that human behaviour is shaped more by what individuals love and habitually practice than by what they merely know. Christian religious education, through repeated moral practices, rituals, and community engagement, helps cultivate virtues that counteract immoral tendencies. Though it has its own deficiencies as well, such as religious fanatics' example of what is happening currently, most especially in the northern part of the country. Where Christians are being killed by Muslims for religious sake claiming Allah instructed them to kill anyone not worshipping Allah (Smith 2016, 1-19). In the context of Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government, where rapid urbanisation, media exposure, and weakening family structures have intensified moral challenges among teenagers, religious education offers a culturally resonant and community-based response.

By reinforcing values such as self-discipline, respect for self and others, accountability, and fear of God, Christian religious education can contribute meaningfully to moral renewal among adolescents. The study was motivated by growing concerns over increasing immoral behaviours among adolescents, including truancy, examination malpractice, substance abuse, sexual misconduct, and general indiscipline. These behaviours pose serious threats to the moral fabric of society, students' academic development, and their overall well-being. Example of this act Reports from Nigerian newspapers and media outlets provide empirical support for the occurrence of immoral and indisciplined behaviours among secondary school students in urban areas of Lagos State, including environments comparable to Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government Area.

For instance, 2025 news reported increasing trends of students engaging in inappropriate social media displays and risky behaviours, while 2024 news highlighted growing concerns among experts about youth involvement in substance abuse and moral decline linked to weak value systems and peer pressure. Similarly, 2025 news from another paper documented an incident where students were found engaging in smoking and alcohol consumption within school premises, prompting government intervention, and another news 2025 reported cases of sexual misconduct involving secondary school students outside school supervision. Furthermore, an investigative report by another 2025 exposed a “sex-for-marks” scandal in a Lagos public secondary school, illustrating systemic moral challenges within the educational environment.

Collectively, these reports underscore the influence of peer pressure, inadequate supervision, and socio-environmental factors in shaping negative behaviours among adolescents, thereby reinforcing the need for strengthened parental involvement, moral instruction, and institutional discipline. Therefore, this paper will examine the role of religious education as a tool in mitigating teenage immorality in Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area. Specifically, the study seeks to: determine the extent to which Christian religious education contributes to the reduction of immoral behaviours among adolescents; identify the challenges limiting the effectiveness of religious education in mitigating teenage immorality.

The research questions are: to what extent does Christian religious education contribute to the reduction of immoral behaviour among adolescent in Ajeromi/Ifelodun local government area? What factors hinder the effectiveness of Christian religious education in addressing teenage immorality in Ajeromi/Ifelodun local government area? and how does Christian religious education influence the moral development of teenagers in Ajeromi/Ifelodun local government area? Findings are intended to inform educational policy, parental practices, and religious instruction aimed at strengthening moral behaviour. Therefore, this paper examines the effectiveness of Christian religious education as a tool to mitigating teenage immorality in selected senior secondary school in Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area, of Lagos state with the aim of strengthening moral development and promoting socially acceptable behaviour among teenagers.

METHOD

The study adopted a quantitative research approach using a descriptive survey design to investigate religious education as a tool for mitigating teenage immorality in selected senior secondary schools in Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos State. The descriptive survey design was considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to gather information about respondents’ attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours regarding religious education and moral conduct (Abiri 2017, 34-52). The population of the study consisted of senior secondary school students, teachers, parents, and religious leaders in selected public secondary schools within the study area.

A sample sized 100 respondents was selected using simple random sampling techniques from ten senior secondary schools. The sample comprised sixty students, twenty teachers, ten parents, and ten religious leaders. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire divided into two sections: Section A contained demographic information while Section B focused on items relating to religious education and teenage immorality. Responses were measured using a Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The data collected was analysed using

descriptive statistical methods, specifically frequency counts and percentages, to identify patterns in respondents' opinion and experiences.

Review of Literature

The Concepts

Religious education is a structured academic and moral discipline concerned with the teaching of religious beliefs, values, ethics, and practices aimed at developing learners spiritually, morally, and socially. According to A-Z Research (2024, 54-98), religious education is not merely doctrinal instruction but a holistic process that nurtures moral reasoning, spiritual awareness, and ethical responsibility. In this sense, religious education functions as a formative tool that shapes attitudes, values, and behaviour. In the African and Nigerian context, religious education has historically been central to character formation. Adeyemi (2018, 45-58) notes that religious education in Nigerian schools emphasises virtues such as honesty, obedience, self-discipline, respect for authority, and communal responsibility.

These virtues are considered essential for social order and moral stability. Religious education also provides moral narratives and role models through sacred texts, which guide learners in distinguishing right from wrong (Timiel 2025, 72-79). Furthermore, religious education operates both formally and informally. Formal religious education occurs within school curricula, while informal religious education takes place in families, churches, mosques, and faith-based organisations. According to Smith (2009, 24-45), adolescents who experience consistent religious instruction across these contexts are more likely to internalise moral values and demonstrate pro-social behaviour.

Teenage immorality refers to behaviours exhibited by adolescents that violate established moral, ethical, and societal norms. These behaviours include sexual promiscuity, substance abuse, examination malpractice, truancy, cultism, disrespect for authority, theft, and violent conduct. Steinberg (2014, 112-119) explains that adolescence is characterized by heightened emotional reactivity and risk-taking tendencies, which increase susceptibility to immoral behaviour. In urban communities such as Ikotun, teenage immorality is often intensified by exposure to negative peer influence, social media, and weakening traditional moral controls. Olofin (2020, 88-102) observes that the breakdown of communal values and reduced parental supervision have contributed significantly to moral decline among urban adolescents in Nigeria.

When teenagers lack strong moral foundations, they are more likely to adopt behaviours that conflict with societal expectations (Ayotunde & Solomon 2024, 54-79). Teenage immorality has far-reaching consequences. It negatively affects academic achievement, increases school dropout rates, contributes to health risks such as teenage pregnancy and drug addiction, and undermines societal cohesion. Consequently, addressing teenage immorality has become a priority for educators, parents, religious institutions, and policymakers (Ogundele 2019, 22-34). Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by identity formation, moral questioning, and behavioural experimentation. Erikson (1968, 119-190) describes adolescence as a period of "identity versus role confusion," during which individuals seek to define their values and beliefs.

Moral development during this stage is particularly sensitive to social influences, including education, family, peers, and religion. Kohlberg (1984, 118-210) argues that moral reasoning evolves through stages, and that adolescence marks a transition from conventional morality, based

on obedience and social approval, to post-conventional morality, which emphasises ethical principles. Religious education plays a significant role in facilitating this transition by exposing adolescents to moral principles, ethical reasoning, and value-based decision-making. Without structured moral guidance, adolescents may struggle to develop internal moral controls, leading to increased engagement in immoral behaviour (Joyan 2025, 51-54). This underscores the importance of intentional moral and religious education during adolescence.

Numerous scholars have emphasised the role of religious education in shaping moral behaviour. Durkheim (1912, 156-178) conceptualizes religion as a moral force that reinforces collective values and regulates individual conduct. According to him, religious instruction promotes discipline, self-restraint, and respect for societal norms, all of which are essential to social order. Other empirical evidence supports this view in the sense that studies have shown that adolescents who actively participate in religious education and faith-based activities exhibit lower levels of deviant behaviour and higher levels of moral commitment (Smith 2009, 87-98). Religious education provides clear moral boundaries and reinforces accountability to a higher moral authority, which discourages immoral actions.

In Nigeria, religious education has traditionally served as a moral compass for young people. Ogodo (2025, 90-118) reports that students exposed to consistent religious instruction demonstrate greater respect for authority and adherence to moral standards than those with minimal exposure. However, the effectiveness of religious education often depends on teaching methods, relevance to contemporary issues, and the credibility of instructors. Studies have shown that peer groups play a significant role in shaping adolescent behaviour. For instance, Steinberg (2014, 118-238) argues that adolescents are more likely to conform to peer norms because of their desire for acceptance and belonging. When peer groups endorse immoral behaviour, teenagers may engage in such behaviour despite moral instruction.

Religious education can counteract negative peer influence by providing alternative value systems and moral communities that reinforce positive behaviour. Faith-based peer groups and youth fellowships offer supportive environments that encourage moral accountability. The proliferation of social media and digital content has exposed teenagers to explicit and morally questionable material. Olofin (2020, 88-102) notes that unrestricted media consumption contributes significantly to moral decline among adolescents. Religious education can also help teenagers critically evaluate media content and develop moral discernment. Parents are regarded as the primary agents of moral socialisation in different societies around the world. According to Hill and Tyson (2009, 740-763), parental involvement reinforces moral values taught in schools.

When parents actively support religious education, its impact on moral behaviour is significantly enhanced. Conversely, inconsistent parental guidance weakens moral instruction. Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between religious education and adolescent behaviour. Hill and Tyson (2009, 34-129) found that value-oriented education significantly reduces behavioural problems among adolescents. Smith (2009, 190-199) reported that teenagers engaged in religious education were less likely to engage in substance abuse and sexual misconduct. In Nigeria, Adeyemi (2018, 180-234) and Olofin (2020, 32-57) found that religious education positively influences discipline and moral conduct among secondary school students. However, many studies

focus on general moral education rather than localised contexts, underscoring the need for research on specific communities, such as the Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that religious education plays a crucial role in moral development and in mitigating teenage immorality. Scholars agree that adolescence is a sensitive period for moral formation and that structured moral instruction is essential. Despite the positive effects of religious education, there are negative effects on adolescence, such as fanaticism, fundamentalism, and conflicts between religious teaching and social reality to mention but few. However, most existing studies are either theoretical or conducted at broader national or regional levels. There is a noticeable gap in localized empirical studies examining how religious education can be harnessed to address teenage immorality within specific urban communities such as Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by providing context-specific empirical analysis with recommendations to mitigate teenage immorality in study.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory (Bandura)

Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that behaviour is acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement (Bandura 1977, 118-202). Teenagers learn moral or immoral behaviours by observing models within their environment. Religious education provides positive role models through teachers, religious leaders, and scriptural narratives, thereby encouraging the imitation of morally acceptable behaviour. Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated a relationship between religious education and moral behaviour (Tyson 2009, 321-378).

In Nigeria, Adeyemi (2018, 100-116) reported that students who received consistent religious instruction displayed higher levels of discipline and moral responsibility than their counterparts. Similarly, Olofin (2020, 234-254) observed that active participation in religious activities correlated with reduced involvement in immoral behaviours among secondary school students in Lagos State. Olofin's study implies that religious education, when effectively implemented, can serve as a preventive and corrective mechanism against teenage immorality. It also emphasises the need for synergy between schools, families, and religious institutions in moral development efforts.

Relationship Between the Study Topic and Bandura's Social Learning Theory

The study titled "Religious education as a tool to Mitigate Teenage Immorality in selected senior secondary schools in Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area" is theoretically grounded in Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which posits that human behaviour is largely learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within social contexts (Bandura 1977, 242-268). This theory provides a strong explanatory framework for understanding how religious education influences the moral behaviour of teenagers. According to Bandura, individuals, particularly adolescents, learn acceptable and unacceptable behaviours by observing significant models in their environment, such as teachers, parents, peers, and community leaders.

Religious education creates structured environments in which teenagers are exposed to moral role models through religious education teachers, religious leaders, and moral exemplars presented in sacred texts. In the context of Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area, religious education serves as a social platform where values such as honesty, self-discipline, obedience, respect for authority,

and sexual restraint are demonstrated and reinforced. Through repeated observation of these values in action, teenagers are likely to internalise and reproduce such behaviours in their daily lives.

Bandura's theory further emphasises the role of reinforcement in sustaining learned behaviour. In religious education settings, morally acceptable behaviours are often reinforced through praise, encouragement, moral approval, and spiritual affirmation, while immoral behaviours are discouraged through correction and moral consequences. This process aligns with the study's assumption that consistent reinforcement of moral values within religious education can reduce the prevalence of immoral behaviours such as truancy, examination malpractice, substance abuse, and sexual misconduct among teenagers. Additionally, Social Learning Theory highlights the importance of reciprocal determinism, which explains that behaviour, personal factors, and the environment interact to influence one another.

This concept is particularly relevant to the study, as teenage behaviour in Ikotun is shaped not only by individual choices but also by environmental influences such as school climate, family background, peer groups, and religious institutions. Religious education contributes to shaping a morally supportive environment that interacts with teenagers' beliefs and behaviours, thereby reducing tendencies toward immorality. Bandura's Social Learning Theory provides a clear and relevant theoretical foundation for this study by explaining how religious education functions as a mechanism for moral learning through modelling, imitation, and reinforcement. The theory supports the study's central argument that when religious education consistently presents credible moral models and reinforces ethical behaviour, it can significantly mitigate teenage immorality in Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area. This study examined the role of religious education in mitigating teenage immorality in Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos State, with particular emphasis on Bandura's Social Learning Theory as its theoretical foundation.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data collected from respondents were analysed using frequency counts and percentages. The results are presented according to the research objectives of the study which examined the influence of religious education on the moral behaviour of teenagers, the extent to which religious education reduces teenage immorality, and the challenges limiting the effectiveness of religious education in mitigating teenage immorality among students in selected senior secondary schools in Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos State.

Research Question 1

To what extent does Religious Education influence the moral behaviour of teenagers in senior secondary schools?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	50	50%
Agree	34	34%
Disagree	10	10%
Strongly Disagree	6	6%
Total	100	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Interpretation

The results in Table 4.1 show that 50% of the respondents strongly agreed while 34% agreed that Religious Education influences the moral behaviour of teenagers. However, 10% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed with the statement. This implies that a large majority (84%) of the respondents believe that Religious Education plays an important role in shaping the attitudes and moral conduct of adolescents.

Table 4.2

Research Question 2

To what extent does Religious Education reduce immoral behaviours among teenagers in senior secondary schools?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	46	46%
Agree	32	32%
Disagree	14	14%
Strongly Disagree	8	8%
Total	100	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Interpretation

The findings presented in Table 4.2 reveal that 46% of the respondents strongly agreed while 32% agreed that Religious Education helps to reduce immoral behaviours among teenagers. On the contrary, 14% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed. The results indicate that 78% of the respondents believe that Religious Education contributes significantly to reducing immoral behaviours such as examination malpractice, dishonesty, truancy, and disrespect for authority among adolescents.

Table 4.3

Research Question 3

What are the challenges limiting the effectiveness of Religious Education in mitigating teenage immorality?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	42	42%
Agree	28	28%
Disagree	18	18%
Strongly Disagree	12	12%
Total	100	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Interpretation

The results in Table 4.3 show that 42% of respondents strongly agreed and 28% agreed that certain factors limit the effectiveness of Religious Education in addressing teenage immorality. However, 18% disagreed while 12% strongly disagreed. This means that a majority of the respondents (70%) believe that external factors such as peer pressure, social media influence, weak parental supervision, and societal values reduce the impact of Religious Education on adolescents' moral behaviour.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study reveal that Religious Education plays a significant role in shaping the moral behaviour of teenagers in the selected senior secondary schools in Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos State. The majority of respondents agreed that religious teachings provide moral guidance that helps students develop positive attitudes and responsible behaviour. Religious Education exposes students to ethical principles such as honesty, respect, obedience, and self-discipline, which are essential for character formation during adolescence. Through the study of moral and religious teachings, students become more aware of the consequences of immoral behaviour and are encouraged to adopt values that promote social harmony and responsible citizenship.

Furthermore, the findings show that Religious Education contributes significantly to reducing immoral behaviours among teenagers. The responses from the respondents indicate that students who actively participate in Religious Education classes are more likely to demonstrate good behaviour and avoid practices such as examination malpractice, truancy, dishonesty, and disrespect for authority. Religious teachings often emphasise accountability, moral responsibility, and the importance of living a disciplined life. As a result, students who are regularly exposed to these teachings may develop stronger moral convictions that guide their behaviour both within and outside the school environment.

Another important finding of the study is the influence of Religious Education teachers as moral role models in the lives of students. Teachers who teach Religious Education often serve not only as instructors but also as counselors and mentors who guide students in making responsible decisions. Through classroom discussions, practical examples, and moral instruction, teachers help students understand how religious values can be applied to everyday life situations. This reinforces the role of the teacher as a moral guide who helps adolescents navigate the challenges associated with peer pressure and social influences.

The study also highlights that Religious Education encourages students to develop positive interpersonal relationships. By teaching values such as compassion, kindness, forgiveness, and tolerance, Religious Education promotes pro-social behaviour among students. These values help students to interact peacefully with their peers, respect differences, and resolve conflicts in constructive ways. Consequently, Religious Education contributes not only to individual moral development but also to the creation of a more disciplined and harmonious school environment.

However, the findings also reveal that certain challenges limit the effectiveness of Religious Education in mitigating teenage immorality. Factors such as peer pressure, exposure to negative social media content, and weak parental supervision were identified as major obstacles to the successful implementation of Religious Education. Adolescents are often influenced by their social

environment, and when external influences contradict the moral teachings received in school, the impact of Religious Education may be weakened. This suggests that the moral development of adolescents cannot rely solely on school-based instruction but must also involve supportive family and community environments.

Finally, the study indicates that addressing teenage immorality requires a collaborative effort among schools, families, religious institutions, and the wider society. While Religious Education provides a strong foundation for moral development, its effectiveness can be strengthened through parental involvement, community support, and the promotion of positive social values in the media. When these different social institutions work together, they create a supportive environment that reinforces moral teachings and encourages adolescents to develop responsible and socially acceptable behaviour.

Conclusion

The study examined religious education as a tool for mitigating teenage immorality in selected senior secondary schools in Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos State. The findings show that religious education plays a vital role in promoting moral awareness, self-discipline, and responsible behaviour among adolescents. Students who are regularly exposed to religious teachings and participate in faith-based activities demonstrate a higher tendency toward ethical conduct and respect for societal norms. However, the study also reveals that factors such as peer pressure, social media influence, and lack of parental involvement can weaken the impact of religious education. Addressing teenage immorality therefore requires a collaborative effort between schools, parents, and religious institutions to reinforce moral values consistently in the lives of young people.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the researcher recommends the below suggestions:

1. Schools should strengthen religious education programmes by incorporating practical moral teaching and value-based activities that address contemporary moral challenges faced by teenagers.
2. Parents should actively participate in the moral upbringing of their children by reinforcing religious and ethical teachings at home and monitoring their social interactions.
3. Religious institutions should collaborate with schools to organise youth mentorship programmes, seminars, and faith-based activities that promote discipline and positive character development among adolescents.

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