



The Influence of Foreign Religions on Social Relationship in Akesan Community, Alimoso, Lagos State

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates how foreign religions, specifically Christianity and Islam, had influenced the social relationships of the Akesan people. The study encompasses an in-depth examination of historical roots, social and cultural effects, interfaith relations, and the socio-economic and political impact of these religions. The primary objectives include understanding the historical trajectories of Christianity and Islam in Akesan, describing their cultural effects, exploring interfaith relations, and assessing their influence on broader community aspects. The data for the research was obtained from both primary and secondary sources. These include Participant Observation, Key Informant Interviews and extant literature. A total no of 150 informants were engaged cutting across gender, status and ethnicities. The research revealed a significant relationship between the historical roots and trajectories of Christianity and Islam in Akesan, with the 19th century identified as a pivotal period for their establishment. Christianity and Islam exhibit a substantial impact on cultural diversity, adaptation of cultural practices, interfaith relationships, and gender roles within the Akesan community. The coexistence of Christianity and Islam in Akesan is characterized by a high level of understanding, collaborative initiatives, shared values, and joint participation in community events, contributing to positive interfaith relations. Informants express varying perceptions of the influence of Christianity and Islam on socio-economic development, political participation, and governance structures in Akesan, highlighting the complexity of these influences. The findings underscore the nuanced nature of the relationship between foreign religions and social dynamics in Akesan. The coexistence of Christianity and Islam contributes to both positive and challenging aspects, necessitating a thorough understanding of historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. In conclusion, this research contributes valuable insights into the multifaceted influence of foreign religions on social relationships in Akesan. The recommendations aim to foster positive interactions, cultural preservation, and harmonious coexistence, emphasizing the importance of tailored interventions and active community participation

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Akesan, situated within Alimosho Local Government Area in Lagos, Nigeria, presents a vibrant convergence of cultures where indigenous traditions coexist alongside the influential forces of Christianity and Islam. This study investigates the complex interplay between local customs and these foreign religions, tracing the points where tradition and religiosity intersect or diverge. The influx of Christianity and Islam, each with distinct beliefs, rituals, and social structures, has left a profound mark on Akesan's cultural landscape, contributing to cultural syncretism where local practices merge with foreign religious doctrines. Festivals, prayers, and communal rituals illustrate this dynamic interaction, giving rise to unique syncretic practices that reflect both resilience and adaptation within the community (Alana, 2012; Omoregbe, 1999). The research explores how these religions have influenced social structures, language, literature, and communal relationships, highlighting both harmonies and challenges in the cultural fabric of Akesan.

The introduction of Christianity and Islam in Akesan also raises critical questions about social cohesion, values, hierarchy, and potential conflict. Understanding these influences is crucial for fostering peaceful coexistence and preserving the community's cultural identity. This study emphasizes the need to examine how foreign religions impact social relationships and contribute to both opportunities and tensions in communal life, providing insights into evolving social interactions in Akesan (Dawisha, 1983; Huntington, 1993). The research aims to offer practical implications for policymakers, community leaders, and scholars, advocating for inclusive approaches that integrate traditional beliefs with foreign religious practices. By doing so, it seeks to promote social harmony, preserve cultural heritage, and deepen understanding of the complex interplay between religion and community dynamics in Akesan.

Research Questions

- a. What historical factors contributed to the introduction and growth of Christianity and Islam in Akesan?
- b. How have Christian and Muslim influences manifested in the social and cultural fabric of Akesan?
- c. What are the dynamics of interfaith relations in Akesan, and how do residents navigate religious diversity?
- d. In what ways do Christianity and Islam impact the socio-economic and political landscape of Akesan?

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this research is to examine the influence of foreign religions on social relationship in Akesan community. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- a. To examine the historical roots and trajectories of Christianity and Islam in Akesan.
- b. To describe the social and cultural effects of Christianity and Islam on the community.
- c. To investigate how the coexistence of these religions shapes interfaith relations in Akesan.

- d. To assess the influence of Christianity and Islam on the socio-economic and political aspects of life in Akesan.

The significance of this study lies in its ability to illuminate the complex interactions between foreign religions and social relationships within the Akesan community, providing critical insights into how these influences can either support or challenge the preservation of local cultural identity. By examining the effects of Christianity and Islam on communal activities, social cohesion, and potential inter-religious conflicts, the research offers a foundation for developing strategies that foster tolerance, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence among residents. Policymakers and community leaders can leverage these findings to design inclusive development initiatives that respect diverse religious perspectives, ensuring broader participation and a sense of belonging for all community members. Academically, the study contributes to knowledge in sociology, anthropology, and religious studies by offering a nuanced case study of the interplay between foreign religious dynamics and cultural practices. Overall, the research is significant for promoting cultural preservation, enhancing social cohesion, guiding conflict resolution, and informing inclusive policies that accommodate religious diversity within Akesan, while also providing insights applicable to cross-cultural and global contexts.

LITERATURE RIVIEW

Conceptual Review on Foreign Religions in Akesan, Lagos

Before the arrival of Christianity and Islam, Akesan in Lagos was grounded in indigenous belief systems closely tied to nature, ancestral reverence, and communal traditions that shaped social identity and cohesion. The introduction of Christianity through missionary activities brought not only evangelism but also Western education, healthcare, and new social institutions, while Islam established mosques as centers of worship, moral instruction, and community organization. The coexistence of these two foreign religions fostered significant sociocultural transformation, gradually reshaping traditional norms and producing a form of cultural and religious syncretism that continues to define Akesan's evolving identity. Beyond spirituality, churches and mosques also became platforms for community development, influencing economic activities, political engagement, and interfaith relations within the area.

Situated within Lagos State, Nigeria's former capital and commercial hub, Akesan reflects the broader cosmopolitan and religiously plural character of the state. Lagos, located in the South-Western geopolitical zone and bordered by Ogun State, the Republic of Benin, and the Atlantic Ocean, is renowned for its economic dominance, political dynamism, and ethnic diversity. With a population of over 12 million people (2006 census), comprising Aworis, other Yoruba groups, Nigerians from various ethnic backgrounds, and foreigners, Lagos is marked by remarkable religious density and tolerance, where churches, mosques, and indigenous practices coexist, often on the same streets. Despite rapid urbanization and modernization, traditional beliefs still persist alongside Christianity and Islam, reinforcing Lagos and by extension Akesan as a melting

pot of cultures and faiths sustained by a longstanding spirit of accommodation and peaceful coexistence.

Concept of Religion

Religion, like other philosophical concepts, lacks a universally accepted definition, though scholars have offered various interpretations. William James (1902) defines religion as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude” in relation to what they consider divine, a view that broadens the concept to include virtually anything regarded as godlike. In contrast, Omoregbe (1999) emphasizes religion as a dialogical, interpersonal relationship between a human being and a transcendent, superior personal being, stressing belief as its essential element while distinguishing it from secular ideologies such as communism or humanism. Etymologically, religion derives from the Anglo-French *religiun*, implying conduct reflecting belief in divine power (Harper, online), and from Cicero’s *religare*, meaning “to connect.” Nabofa (2015) further conceptualizes religion as humanity’s effort to maintain harmony with spiritual powers and fellow humans, highlighting experience and expression as its two fundamental elements in the quest for unity between the mundane and the divine.

Isese

Western writers misunderstand African culture and societies as in the rituals and symbolism. (Omijeh 1973:105)

Isese, like other African traditional religions, is indigenous to the Yoruba people and forms a core aspect of their cultural identity. Religion shapes social values, moral order, and communal life, serving as a vehicle for social mobilization, enculturation, and the transmission of heritage across generations. African moral systems, for instance, prohibit murder, theft, adultery, disrespect for elders, and injustice, demonstrating a shared ethical worldview despite cultural diversity. As Sarpong (online) notes, people’s ideas of time, space, and religion are shaped by their social and ecological environments. While religion can be misused to incite conflict, it fundamentally preserves societal values and affirms belief in the Supreme Being, whose existence remains central despite modernization and cultural change.

Furthermore, African religion should not be dismissed as primitive or judged by isolated practices that are unfairly generalized (Mezzana, online). Just as infiltrations or excesses do not redefine Christianity or Islam, particular local customs should not distort the essence of African religion. Symbolic objects used in worship, much like the Ark among the Jews, signify divine presence and should not be misinterpreted as idol worship. Cultural evolution may alter practices over time, but the foundational belief in God and the enduring spiritual worldview of Africans remain intact, making atheism historically rare within traditional African contexts.

Three Major Religions in Lagos

Lagos as a town or state in Nigeria is a host to several religions but three major religious groups dominate its religious landscape, namely, the adherents of Isese, Muslims and Christians. Religion in Lagos plays a major role in the life of the people, to some it is their candle light, it gives them insight, wisdom,

knowledge, etc., and faith is increased through the study of scripture, books and prayer. Others, religion helps them remain inline and stay focused while some see it as a forum for socialisation. A religious leader is feared, respected and loved. He could mediate in a situation which defies several means.

How has Mega City of Lagos Served as a Melting Pot for Isele and Other Religions?

Lagos has served as a melting pot for Isele and other religions by providing a cultural and social environment where diverse faiths coexist and interact. Historically, Africans demonstrated a unique tolerance and hospitality toward incoming religions, welcoming Christianity and Islam into spaces traditionally anchored in indigenous beliefs (Alana, 2012). Traditional rulers, chiefs, and community leaders have played critical roles in mediating conflicts, teaching moral and human values, and maintaining social order, embedding peace and harmony into the religious and cultural life of Lagos (Malmi, 1998). Festivals such as the Eyo, Oro, and carnival, originally rooted in traditional religion, are now celebrated inclusively with Christians and Muslims, while practices like traditional naming remain respected, showing the integration of indigenous and foreign religious expressions. This environment enables dialogue, mutual respect, and coexistence, highlighting the continuity of spiritual experience and reverence for the divine across all faiths.

The interaction of religions in Lagos challenges notions of superiority and paganism, demonstrating that African traditional religion is not inferior but forms an integral part of the city's cultural and spiritual identity. Despite missionary claims that African religions worship only divinities or are pagan, the lived experience in Lagos reveals a complex, tolerant, and adaptive religious landscape, where believers maintain awe, decorum, and connection to the divine irrespective of faith traditions. Lagosians, as spiritual beings, preserve their cultural heritage while engaging with Christianity and Islam, showing that religion in the megacity is a practical force for social cohesion, moral guidance, and cultural continuity, while simultaneously emphasizing that governance and religious differences should remain distinct to sustain growth and peaceful coexistence.

The Influence of Religion in Politics and Foreign Policy

In the post-colonial era, religion has played a significant role in shaping politics and foreign policy, particularly in Muslim-majority states. Secular states maintain a separation between religion and governance, limiting Islam's influence on domestic and international policy, whereas Islamic states integrate religion holistically into political and diplomatic decisions, with Islam acting as a motivator, legitimizer, or justifier (Azra, 2006; Dawisha, 1983). Scholars such as Huntington (1993) and constructivists like Wendt and Walt argue that religion shapes national identity, social norms, and state behavior, often influencing foreign policy and inter-societal relations (Yaakub, 2013; Mingst, 2003; Harris, 2006; Davidson, 2004). Thus, religion functions as a critical non-material factor in both domestic governance and international affairs, conditioning the beliefs, actions, and policies of states in profound ways.

In Nigeria, the intersection of religion, politics, and ethnicity has historically influenced governance and national cohesion. The British colonial strategy of divide-and-rule amplified ethnic and religious differences among the Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, undermining unity and shaping the foundations of post-independence politics (Abdulkabir, 2017; Ugwuoke et al., 2020; Egobueze, 2017; Francis, 2017). Independence-era elections were manipulated to favor Northern interests, consolidating power along regional and ethnic lines (Achebe, 2012; Joseph, 2017). Subsequent Nigerian leaders often continued colonial-era biases, which, combined with corruption and weak governance, fueled distrust, civil unrest, and the civil war of 1967–1970 (Momoh, 2014; Nnenna, 2015; Yakubu, 2003; Ukwai & Okpa, 2017; Ukwai, Okpa & Dike, 2018). This history illustrates how religious, ethnic, and colonial legacies have intertwined to shape Nigeria's political landscape, influencing both domestic policy and inter-ethnic relations.

Structural-Functionalism

Structural-functionalism views society as a complex system whose interconnected parts work together to maintain stability and order, a perspective developed by scholars such as Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons. Durkheim's foundational works, *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) and *Suicide* (1897), emphasized how social institutions, including religion, maintain cohesion, while Parsons further refined the theory in the mid-20th century, focusing on the functions of social structures (*The Structure of Social Action*, 1937). Applying this framework to the Akesan community, the coexistence of indigenous beliefs, Christianity, and Islam can be seen as contributing to social equilibrium. Each religion provides moral guidance, reinforces social norms, fosters identity, and promotes social cohesion. Role differentiation within these religious systems distributes responsibilities, creating latent networks of support and manifest functions like worship, while adaptations to foreign religions reflect the community's response to changing cultural and historical circumstances. Collectively, these dynamics illustrate how religious pluralism contributes to the integration, stability, and functioning of Akesan society.

Religious pluralism, closely linked to structural-functionalism, emphasizes tolerance, respect, and freedom of belief within diverse societies. In pluralistic settings, individuals are free to practice and change their faith, while interfaith dialogue encourages understanding, shared values, and cooperation, fostering social harmony and a common civic identity. Legal and institutional frameworks protect religious freedom and equality, while cultural exchange among different traditions enriches the community. Despite potential challenges such as conflicts or misunderstandings, religious pluralism strengthens social cohesion and unity, demonstrating that diversity in belief systems can be a source of societal stability, mutual respect, and collective strength both locally, as in Akesan, and globally.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, explains how individuals derive a sense of self and belonging from membership in social groups based on shared characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, nationality, or religious affiliation. People categorize themselves and others into in-groups and out-groups, identify with their chosen group, and compare their group's status with others, which can enhance self-esteem or

trigger efforts to elevate the group's standing. In the context of religious pluralism in the Akesan community, this theory helps explain how individuals align with Christianity, Islam, or indigenous beliefs, how these religious identities shape interactions and social behaviors, and how intergroup dynamics may foster cohesion or create tension, illustrating the influence of religious identity on community relationships.

METHODOLOGY

The study relied on qualitative research method. Using observation, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. This is because the study is not experimental but observational to make possible inference between foreign religions and social relationship in Akesan. The study was conducted in Akesan, town. Akesan town is an Awori community located in Igando, Alimosho local government area of Lagos State. The LGA contains the urban area of Egbeda/Akowonjo. The Alimosho was established in 1945 and it was under the (then) western region. Alimosho's population is predominantly Awori. The area is rich in culture, prominent amongst which are the Oro, Ifa, Ogun, Osun, Yemoja and Egungun annual festivals.

Lagos state is one of the smallest of the 36 states in Nigeria, located on south-western corner along the narrow elongated coastal flood plain spanning the Guinea coast of the Atlantic Ocean for over 180km, from the republic of Benin On The West To its boundary with Ogun State in the east (Online Nigeria, 2003). Lagos state lies approximately from latitude 6 02' North, to 6 04' North; and from longitude 2 45' East to 4 02' East. The state has one of the largest urban agglomerations, with explosive growth rate of 5.7 per cent annually; growing 2,000 inhabitants averagely daily, which translates into population growth of about 275,000 persons annually; and a population density of 2,594 persons per sq. km. The state's population is currently estimated around 21 million inhabitants (Lagos State Government, 2008; Un-Habitat, 2008, cited in LURG, 2009; Fashola, 2012, cited in Daily Independent, 2012).

In the context of this study on influence of foreign religions on social relationship in Akesan community, the population of the study consisted of adult 80% male and 20% female of aboriginal Akesan kingdom who were able to give vital information on influence of foreign religions on social relationship in Akesan community. The communities which include Rabiak Akinsanya, Oludegun and Afisi Eyinle areas. This study selected 30 participants from each of the four selected areas totaling 150 informants; with male forming the largest percent of 80%. As they were more available to answer questions and take the position of a typical patriarchal population where men are more vocal in public engagements. The areas were selected based on their visible presence of the three major religions being practiced by the Akesan aborigines. 70% were Isele adherents. This was purposively decided to be able to get the minds of the aborigines on how the two major foreign religions; Christianity and Islam have impacted on the local world views.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of the Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Sex	Frequency (N = 150)	Percent (%)
Male	78	52.0
Female	64	42.7
Others	8	5.3
Total	150	100.0
Age	Frequency (N = 150)	Percent (%)
Below 18	7	4.7
18-29	49	32.7
30-39	65	43.3
40-49	22	14.7
50-59	7	4.7
Total	150	100.0
Level of Education	Frequency (N = 150)	Percent (%)
Primary	7	4.7
SSCE	84	56.0
OND/NCE	32	21.3
HND/BSc. Degree	21	14.0
Postgraduate	6	4.0
Total	150	100.0
Marital Status	Frequency (N = 150)	Percent (%)
Single	40	26.7
Married	51	34.0
Divorced	39	26.0
Separated	13	8.7
Others	7	4.7
Total	150	100.0
Religion	Frequency (N = 150)	Percent (%)
Christianity	75	50.0
Islam	44	29.3
Isese	24	16.0
Others	7	4.7
Total	150	100.0
Ethnic Group	Frequency (N = 150)	Percent (%)
Yoruba	75	50.0
Hausa	42	28.0
Igbo	33	22.0
Total	150	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 4.1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the 150 respondents in the study. Males slightly outnumber females at 52.0% compared to 42.7%, with 5.3% identifying as "Others." Most respondents are aged 18–39, with 32.7% in the 18–29 range and 43.3% in the 30–39 range, while smaller proportions are below 18 or between 50–59. In terms of education, the majority (56.0%) completed Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE), 21.3% hold OND/NCE qualifications, 14.0% have HND/BSc degrees, 4.7% completed only primary education, and 4.0% pursued postgraduate studies. Marital status shows diversity: 34.0% are married, 26.7% single, 26.0% divorced, 8.7% separated, and 4.7% fall under "Others." Religious affiliation indicates half the respondents are Christians (50.0%), 29.3% Muslims, 16.0% adhere to Isese, and 4.7% follow other religions. Ethnically, the sample is predominantly Yoruba (50.0%), followed by Hausa (28.0%) and Igbo (22.0%), reflecting considerable cultural and religious diversity within the study population (Field Survey, 2023).

RESULT

This section discusses and examine the influence of foreign religions on social relationship in Akesan community. Analysis of results are illustrated in the tables below.

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Historical Roots and Trajectories of Christianity and Islam in Akesan

When did Christianity significantly establish its roots in Akesan?	Before the 19th century	46	30.7
	During the 19th century	69	46.0
	During the 20th century	22	14.7
	Other (please specify)	13	8.7
	Total	150	100
How would you describe the historical relationship between Christianity and Islam in Akesan?	Peaceful coexistence	40	26.7
	Periods of tension	75	50.0
	Minimal interaction	35	23.3
	Not sure	-	-
	Total	150	100.0
To what extent do you believe indigenous beliefs in Akesan have been blended with Christianity and Islam?	Extensively syncretized	61	40.7
	Some adaptations	57	38.0
	Minimal influence	24	16.0
	Not sure	8	5.3
	Total	150	100.0
Which period witnessed significant milestones in the development of Christianity and Islam in Akesan?	Colonial era	59	39.3
	Post-colonial era	57	38.0
	Independence period	18	12.0
	Not sure	16	10.7
	Total	150	100.0

How have Christianity and Islam influenced the cultural practices of Akesan over time?	Enriched cultural diversity	63	42.0
	Minimally impacted cultural practices	37	24.7
	Significantly altered cultural traditions	50	33.3
	Total	150	100.0
In the historical context, how have Christianity and Islam influenced the socio-economic aspects of Akesan?	Contributed to economic development	74	49.3
	Limited impact on economic practices	48	32.0
	Not sure	28	18.7
	Total	150	100.0

Source: Ethnography, 2023

The table above presents the percentage distribution of responses to questions related to the historical roots and trajectories of Christianity and Islam in Akesan. The responses are categorized, and each category's percentage is calculated based on the total sample size of 150 individuals. The majority of respondents (46.0%) believe that Christianity significantly established its roots in Akesan during the 19th century. Half of the respondents (50.0%) perceive periods of tension in the historical relationship between Christianity and Islam in Akesan. A significant portion of respondents (40.7%) believes that indigenous beliefs in Akesan have been extensively syncretized with Christianity and Islam. The colonial and post-colonial eras are identified by respondents as the periods witnessing significant milestones in the development of Christianity and Islam in Akesan. A significant proportion (42.0%) believes that Christianity and Islam have enriched the cultural diversity of Akesan. Almost half of the respondents (49.3%) perceive that Christianity and Islam have contributed to the economic development of Akesan. This table provides a detailed breakdown of respondents' perspectives on the historical aspects of Christianity and Islam in Akesan, shedding light on their beliefs about the establishment, relationship, cultural influence, and socio-economic impact of these religions over time.

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of social and Cultural effects of Christianity and Islam on the Community

To what extent do you believe Christianity and Islam have contributed to the cultural diversity of Akesan?	Significantly enriched cultural diversity	61	40.7
	Moderate contribution to cultural diversity	57	38.0
	Minimal impact on cultural diversity	24	16.0
	Not sure	8	5.3
	Total	150	100.0
How have the cultural practices of Akesan	Significant adaptation and blending	62	41.3
	Some adaptations	46	30.7
		42	28.0

adapted to the presence of Christianity and Islam?	Minimal cultural adaptation Total	150	100.0
How would you describe the state of interfaith relationships in Akesan influenced by Christianity and Islam?	Positive and collaborative Neutral, with minimal interaction Tense or conflicting Not sure Total	59 57 18 16 150	39.3 38.0 12.0 10.7 100.0
Have Christianity and Islam influenced gender roles and dynamics in Akesan?	Yes, promoting changes in gender roles To some extent, with mixed impact No significant influence on gender roles Not sure Total	59 42 49 - 150	39.3 28.0 32.7 - 100.0

Source: Ethnography, 2023

This table presents the percentage distribution of responses regarding the social and cultural effects of Christianity and Islam on the Akesan community. The responses are categorized, and each category's percentage is calculated based on the total sample size of 150 individuals. A significant portion of informants (40.7%) believes that Christianity and Islam have significantly enriched the cultural diversity of Akesan. Over 40% of informants think that the cultural practices of Akesan have significantly adapted and blended in the presence of Christianity and Islam. The majority (39.3%) perceive interfaith relationships in Akesan as positive and collaborative. A significant portion (39.3%) believes that Christianity and Islam have promoted changes in gender roles in Akesan. This table provides insights into informants' perceptions of the social and cultural effects of Christianity and Islam on the Akesan community. It highlights views on cultural diversity, cultural adaptation, interfaith relationships, and gender role influences.

Table 4. Percentage Distribution of Coexistence of Christianity and Islam Shapes Interfaith Relations

How would you describe the level of understanding between Christian and Islamic communities in Akesan?	High level of understanding	61	40.7
	Moderate understanding	57	38.0
	Limited understanding	24	16.0
	Not sure	8	5.3
	Total	150	100.0
Are there collaborative initiatives or events that bring together members of Christian and Islamic communities in Akesan?	Yes, frequent collaborations	50	33.3
	Occasional collaborations	39	26.0
	Rare collaborations	38	25.3
	Not sure	23	15.3
	Total	150	100.0
To what extent do you believe there are shared values between Christianity and Islam in Akesan that contribute to interfaith harmony?	Strong shared values	78	52.0
	Some shared values	40	26.7
	Limited shared values	32	21.3
	Total	150	100
How do Christian and Islamic communities jointly participate in community events or celebrations in Akesan?	Actively participate together	60	40.0
	Some joint participation	66	45.3
	Limited joint participation	28	14.7
	Total	150	100.0
In instances of potential conflicts arising from religious differences, how do the Christian and Islamic communities in Akesan typically approach conflict resolution?	Through open dialogue	31	20.7
	Limited resolution efforts	62	41.3
	Escalation of conflicts	43	28.7
	Not sure	14	9.3
	Total	150	100.0

Source: Ethnography, 2023

This table provides a breakdown of responses regarding the coexistence of Christianity and Islam and its impact on interfaith relations in Akesan. The percentages are calculated based on the total sample size of 150 individuals. A significant proportion (40.7%) believes that there is a high level of understanding between the Christian and Islamic communities in Akesan. One-third of respondents (33.3%) acknowledge frequent collaborative initiatives between the Christian and Islamic communities in Akesan. A majority (52.0%) believes in the existence of strong shared values between Christianity and Islam that contribute

to interfaith harmony. Nearly half (45.3%) of the respondents observe some joint participation of Christian and Islamic communities in community events in Akesan. While open dialogue is endorsed by a fifth (20.7%), a significant portion (41.3%) acknowledges limited resolution efforts in instances of potential conflicts. This table provides a comprehensive view of how informants perceive the coexistence of Christianity and Islam in shaping interfaith relations in Akesan, covering aspects like understanding, collaboration, shared values, joint participation, and conflict resolution approaches.

Table 5. Percentage Distribution of Influence of Christianity and Islam on the Socio-Economic and Political Aspects of Life

How do you perceive the influence of Christianity and Islam on the socio-economic development of Akesan?	Positive impact	39	26.0
	Limited impact	50	33.3
	Negative impact	40	26.7
	Not sure	21	14.0
	Total	50	100.0
Do you believe religious affiliations, particularly with Christianity and Islam, play a role in influencing political participation in Akesan?	Yes, significant influence	62	1.3
	Some influence	44	29.3
	Limited influence	44	29.3
	Total	150	100.0
Do you perceive any influence of Christianity and Islam on governance structures and policies in Akesan?	Significant influence	7	4.7
	Limited influence	43	2087
	Minimal influence	79	52.7
	Not sure	21	14.0
	Total	150	100.0
How does the coexistence of Christianity and Islam contribute to or challenge religious pluralism in Akesan's socio-economic and political spheres?	Enhances religious pluralism		
	Some impact on religious pluralism	59	39.3
	Limited impact on religious pluralism	57	38.0
	Not sure	18	12.0
		16	10.7
	Total	150	100.0

Source: Ethnography, 2023

This table presents the percentage distribution of responses regarding the influence of Christianity and Islam on the socio-economic and political aspects of life in Akesan. The percentages are calculated based on the total sample size of 150 individuals. Informants are divided in their perceptions, with 33.3% seeing limited impact and 26.7% perceiving negative impact of Christianity and Islam on socio-economic development in Akesan. A significant portion (41.3%) believes that religious affiliations, especially with Christianity and Islam, have a significant influence on political participation in Akesan. The majority (52.7%) perceives minimal influence of Christianity and Islam on governance structures and policies in Akesan. A significant portion (39.3%) believes that the coexistence of Christianity and Islam enhances religious pluralism in Akesan's socio-economic and political spheres. This table provides an overview of respondents'

perspectives on how Christianity and Islam influence various aspects of life in Akesan, including socio-economic development, political participation, governance structures, and religious pluralism.

DIACUSSION

The study examines the influence of foreign religions on social relationships in the Akesan community, focusing on the historical roots and trajectories of Christianity and Islam, their socio-cultural effects, and their impact on interfaith relations and socio-political life. The findings reveal a significant relationship between the historical presence of these religions and the spiritual and social life of the community. Drawing on Nabofa (2015), religion is understood as “man's effort or desire to be at peace with the spiritual powers on one hand and with his fellow man on the other,” highlighting the dual role of religious experience and expression in achieving harmony between the mundane and the divine. Christianity and Islam are recognized as shaping moral and social norms, with religion serving as a medium for worship, reverence, and relational accountability to God (Copleston, 2010; Omoregbe, 1993). Furthermore, the coexistence of Christianity, Islam, and indigenous Isese religion demonstrates an ongoing dialogical relationship, emphasizing belief as the core of religious identity and practice (Omoregbe, 1999).

The research also indicates that Christianity and Islam exert considerable influence on the socio-economic and political dimensions of life in Akesan. In the context of Islamic states, religion can directly shape policy as a motivator or legitimizer, though in secular contexts its influence may be more limited (Dawisha, 1983). Samuel Huntington (1993) similarly observes that religion has become a source of conflict and negotiation in politics and international relations, reflecting broader dynamics that also resonate at the community level. Overall, the study underscores a complex interplay between religious coexistence, social cohesion, and governance in Akesan. While collaboration and mutual understanding exist, differences in perceptions regarding historical origins, cultural practices, and socio-political impact reveal the nuanced role of foreign religions in shaping community relationships, highlighting the importance of further research to deepen understanding of these dynamics.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research examined the influence of foreign religions, particularly Christianity and Islam, on social relationships in the Akesan community, focusing on their historical roots, social and cultural effects, interfaith coexistence, and impact on socio-economic and political life. The study found that the 19th century marked a significant period for the establishment of these religions in Akesan, shaping the community's moral, cultural, and social frameworks. Christianity and Islam have influenced cultural diversity, adaptation of practices, interfaith relationships, and gender roles, while affecting the attractiveness of the indigenous Isele religion among younger members of the Awori tribe. The impact on socio-economic and political aspects varied, with some informants recognizing positive contributions to development and political participation, whereas others noted limited influence on governance structures and policies, alongside negative effects on indigenous cultural norms. These findings underscore the complex and nuanced nature of religious coexistence in Akesan, highlighting the need for careful understanding of the interplay between foreign and indigenous belief systems.

Based on these findings, the study recommends fostering interfaith dialogue to promote understanding and peaceful coexistence, preserving and celebrating Akesan's cultural diversity through community events and educational programs, and integrating indigenous beliefs into the broader religious landscape to ensure inclusivity (Alana, 2012; Omoregbe, 1999). It further suggests community-wide education initiatives to raise awareness of the historical trajectories of Christianity and Islam, collaboration with religious and community leaders to address gender-related impacts, and the promotion of joint socio-economic development projects involving both Christian and Islamic communities. These interventions aim to strengthen social cohesion, cultural preservation, and harmonious interactions among diverse religious groups, tailored to the specific needs of Akesan and supported by active participation from stakeholders (Dawisha, 1983; Huntington, 1993).

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