

## **SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF PARENTS' RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD WESTERN EDUCATION IN SOKOTO STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined the influence of parental religious beliefs and attitudes toward Western education in selected communities in Dange-Shuni Local Government of Sokoto State, Nigeria. The study employed a mixed-method research design, which combined both quantitative and qualitative data collection modes. The population of the study comprised teachers and parents from selected communities of Dange-shuni Local Government with a sample of 118 teachers and 20 parents using purposive sampling technique. Data were gathered using questionnaires for teachers and in-depth interviews for parents. The instruments were pre-tested for validity through expert reviews and pilot testing for content validity, while Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to test reliability, yielding a coefficient of 0.67. The study utilized descriptive statistics (mean scores, percentages) for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for the qualitative data, to identify key themes and patterns. Findings revealed that parental attitudes toward Western education are largely shaped by religious concerns, with many parents perceiving it as incompatible with Islamic values. The study recommends that educational interventions in such communities should incorporate religious leaders and integrate Islamic teachings within the formal school system to enhance parental support and participation in education.*

**Keywords:** Parental Attitudes, Religious Beliefs, Western Education, Resistance

### **Introduction**

Globally, education is recognized as a vital tool for personal and societal development. It enhances socio-economic mobility, reduces poverty and promotes civic engagement (World Bank, 2018). However, the effectiveness of educational initiatives depends greatly on parental support and community buy-in. When education is perceived as foreign or culturally insensitive, families may either withdraw or adopt a passive stance toward school enrolment and retention (Okonjo, 2019; OECD, 2017).

Islamic education has historically played a central role in shaping the socio-religious identity of Northern Nigeria. The establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in the early 19th century entrenched

Qur'anic learning as the dominant form of knowledge dissemination in the region (Usman, 2015). However, the introduction of Western education by Christian Missionaries during colonial rule was met with deep resistance, particularly in Muslim-majority areas. This resistance stemmed from a perception that Western education was a vehicle for Christian proselytization and a threat to Islamic and cultural traditions (Yahaya & Liman, 2021; Salihu & Adeoye, 2018).

The Katsira community of Dange-Shuni Local Government Area of Sokoto State exemplifies this resistance. The very name "Katsira," derived from the Hausa phrase *ka tsira* which means "to escape," reflects the community's historical aversion to areas promoting Western education. While the Nigerian government has implemented initiatives such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme to expand access to education and international agencies like the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United State Agency for International Development (USAID) have conducted awareness campaigns to promote student enrolment in school, deep-rooted religious and cultural concerns persist in northern rural communities (UNICEF, 2020; USAID, 2015).

In spite of sustained interventions by government and other international aid agencies, educational outcomes in Sokoto State seem to remain poor. In addition, according to a USAID (2015), assessment, over 70% of Primary Three pupils in rural areas of Sokoto state could not read a simple sentence and more than 60% could not solve basic arithmetic problems. The study attributed this to limited parental engagement and resistance rooted in traditional and religious beliefs. More recently, Abubakar and Bello (2023) emphasized that parental attitudes in rural areas are shaped not only by religious considerations but also by mistrust of government institutions and perceived irrelevance of formal education to everyday life.

Several empirical studies across Nigeria affirm that parental religious beliefs significantly influence attitudes toward Western education. A study by Auwal and Abdu (2020) revealed that many Muslim parents in Kano State viewed Western education with suspicion, especially where curriculum content was perceived to contradict Islamic teachings. Similarly, Ibrahim and Yahaya (2021), in their study observed that low enrolment and school attendance among children in rural areas were often tied to parental concerns about moral decay and the exclusion of Islamic knowledge in public schools in Zamfara State.

In Sokoto State, a study carried out by Garba and Muhammed (2019) showed that despite growing awareness about the benefits of formal education, religious and cultural perceptions continue to discourage full participation in the schooling process. According to their findings, parents with strong religious orientations were less likely to send their daughters to school, citing concerns about exposure to Western norms. Moreover, Musa and Ahmed (2022) observed that in some rural areas, Western education is still considered a threat to Islamic values, leading parents to prioritize Qur'anic schools over formal ones.

Moreover, several factors could interact with religious beliefs and attitudes towards western education. One of such factors, socioeconomic factor may intersect with religious beliefs in shaping attitudes toward education. Earlier, Eze (2016) established that in low-income households, where parents had limited or no formal education, support for Western schooling was minimal, particularly for female children. In the same vein, Olayemi (2022) found that household occupation, income level and parents' educational attainment were strong predictors of willingness to enroll children in Western-style schools.

In light of the preceding discussion, this study seeks to explore how parents' religious beliefs and cultural values influence their attitudes toward Western education in Katsira and similar rural communities in Dange-Shuni Local Government Area of Sokoto State. It is crucial to analyze these attitudes through a sociological lens, as doing so would provide a deeper understanding of the social structures and belief systems that influence educational participation in the conservative Northern Nigerian context.

This study is hinged on the Sociological Theories of Social Reproduction and Cultural Capital (Bourdieu, 1986). These theories posit that social structures and cultural norms are maintained over time through the intergenerational transmission of values and beliefs. In the context of this study, parents' attitudes toward Western education are shaped by their religious-based cultural capital; that is, the knowledge, practices, and values they have acquired through Qur'anic education and Islamic traditions. This form of cultural capital prioritizes religious knowledge over secular or Western schooling, thus influencing educational decisions and reinforcing existing social structures. Viewed through this theoretical lens, the preference for Qur'anic education reflects not ignorance or resistance, **but a** culturally embedded value system. Hence, this study suggests that parents' religious beliefs and educational attitudes are rooted in broader cultural and historical contexts, which continue to shape perceptions of formal schooling.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In spite of multiple policy interventions and awareness campaigns, Western education has not been fully embraced in many parts of Northern Nigeria. Many communities in Dange-Shuni LGA seem to represent a microcosm of this larger sociocultural dynamic. Deeply rooted Islamic values and a historical aversion to Western models of education continue to shape parental decisions concerning their children's schooling. Although schools now exist within the community and enrolment figures have improved modestly due to Government's and NGO's efforts, resistance to Western education persists in more subtle forms. Some parents enroll their children but do not actively support their learning or follow up on academic progress. Others opt to keep their children at home to assist with farming, trading, or domestic chores. This resistance is often rooted in the belief that Western education conflicts with Islamic values or is associated with Christianity.

While previous studies have examined parental attitudes toward Western education in Islamic communities, few have explored how teachers perceive these attitudes, particularly through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. Moreover, limited research has applied this framework in African religious contexts where Qur'anic education competes with formal schooling. Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by examining teachers' perceptions of how religious beliefs shape parental engagement with education, offering context-specific insights and theoretical advancement in selected communities of Dange-shuni Local Government area of Sokoto state, with the goal of informing contextual strategies for improving educational uptake and achievement in similar rural, religiously conservative communities.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the prevailing parental attitudes toward Western education in the communities of Dange-Shuni Local Government Area?
2. How do parents' religious beliefs influence their attitudes toward Western education in the communities of Dange-Shuni Local Government Area?

## Methodology

*Research Design:* The study adopted the mixed methods research design using quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

*Participants:* The target population for this study comprises 167 primary school teachers and 2,550 parents from communities with very low school enrolment in Dange-Shuni Local Government Area of Sokoto State. One hundred and eighteen teachers made up the sample for the study. They were purposively selected, based on their experience in engaging with parents, as recommended by Research Advisors (2006). In the same vein, 20 parents were also purposively sampled, based on teachers' reports identifying them as having particularly negative attitudes toward Western education. The use of a limited number of respondents is justified in the context of qualitative research, where depth of insight is prioritized over breadth. As Mark (2010) argued, large sample sizes in qualitative studies may lead to data redundancy. Similarly, Merriam (2002) emphasized that qualitative research does not aim for generalization, but rather seeks to understand complex social phenomena within a specific context. Therefore, a smaller, information-rich sample is sufficient to achieve the study's objectives.

*Instrument:* The research instruments used for the study are "Parental attitudes on Western Education Questionnaire for Teachers (PAWEQ)" and "In-depth Interview for Parents". The questionnaire was based on 4-point Likert format with items that deal with teachers views on parental attitudes towards western education the content validity of the instruments was ascertained by two Sociologists of Education from the Department of Education Foundations Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto who scrutinized the guide and ensure that it was in line with the research questions and objectives of the study. To ascertain the reliability of PAWEQ, Cronbach Alpha statistics was used and index of 0.67 was obtained for the questionnaire.

*Data Collection Procedure:* The researcher with the help of two research assistants administered the questionnaire. The researcher personally conducted the in-depth interview with the parents using the interview schedule. Informed consent was sought for from parents for the recording of the interview. Data were recorded with the use of note pad and voice recording devise.

*Data Analysis:* Descriptive statistics namely mean score set as 3.2 benchmark and thematic analysis were used to analyse the quantitative and qualitative data obtained respectively.

## Results

*Research Question One: What are the prevailing parental attitudes toward Western education in the communities of Dange-Shuni Local Government Area?*

**Table 1: Teachers' Perception of Parental Attitudes on Western Education**

| SN | Items  | Mean | Interpretation   |
|----|--|------|------------------|
| 1  | Many parents in this community show little interest in their children's Western education. | 3.6  | Strong agreement |
| 2  | Parents rarely attend school meetings such as PTA gatherings or open days.                 | 3.5  | Strong agreement |

| SN                        | Items   | Mean            | Interpretation   |
|---------------------------|---|-----------------|------------------|
| 3                         | I have observed that parents prioritize Qur'anic education over Western schooling.        | 3.7             | Strong agreement |
| 4                         | Parents support boys more than girls in formal education.                                 | 3.4             | Agreement        |
| 5                         | Some parents discourage their children from attending school regularly.                   | 3.3             | Agreement        |
| 6                         | Parents question the value or benefit of Western education.                               | 3.2             | Agreement        |
| 7                         | I face challenges convincing parents to allow their children to complete basic education. | 3.5             | Strong agreement |
| 8                         | Community attitudes toward female education are generally negative.                       | 3.6             | Strong agreement |
| 9                         | Many parents see schooling as unnecessary beyond primary level.                           | 3.4             | Agreement        |
| 10                        | Parents withdraw their children due to religious or cultural concerns.                    | 3.3             | Agreement        |
| Source: Field survey 2024 |   | mean score: 3.2 |                  |

Based on the data from Table 1, teachers overwhelmingly agree that parental disinterest (Mean = 3.6) and low involvement in school activities (Mean = 3.5) are major issues. There is also strong confirmation that Qur'anic education is often prioritized over Western education (Mean = 3.7), reflecting deep-rooted religious and cultural preferences. Further, teachers observe a clear gender bias in educational support, with parents showing more support for boys than girls (Mean = 3.4) and community attitudes toward female education remaining largely negative (Mean = 3.6).

*Research Question Two: How do parents' religious beliefs influence their attitudes toward Western education in the communities of Dange-Shuni Local Government Area?*

**Table 2: Teachers' Perception of Religious Influence on Parental Attitudes**

| SN | Items   | Mean | Interpretation   |
|----|---|------|------------------|
| 1. | Religious beliefs strongly influence parents' attitudes toward Western education. | 3.8  | Strong agreement |
| 2. | Some parents believe Western education is contrary to Islamic teachings.          | 3.6  | Strong agreement |
| 3. | Parents express concern that Western education promotes un-Islamic values.        | 3.7  | Strong agreement |
| 4. | Religious leaders sometimes discourage formal schooling.                          | 3.5  | Strong agreement |
| 5. | Pupils have been withdrawn from school for religious reasons.                     | 3.3  | Agreement        |
| 6. | Parents are more open to formal education if it includes Islamic studies.         | 3.4  | Agreement        |
| 7. | Fear of moral corruption through Western education is common among parents.       | 3.5  | Strong agreement |
| 8. | Religious and cultural beliefs limit girls' access to higher education.           | 3.6  | Strong agreement |
| 9. | Parents seek religious leaders' approval before school enrolment.                 | 3.2  | Agreement        |

| SN  | Items  | Mean | Interpretation   |
|-----|--|------|------------------|
| 10. | Integrating Islamic and Western education would increase parental support. | 3.7  | Strong agreement |

Source: Field survey 2024

Table 2 reveals that teachers strongly agree that religious beliefs directly shape parental attitudes (Mean = 3.8), with many parents believing Western education contradicts Islamic teachings (Mean = 3.6) and promotes un-Islamic values (Mean = 3.7). Teachers also confirm that religious leaders sometimes discourage formal schooling (Mean = **3.5**), indicating the powerful role of local clerics in education-related decision-making. Interestingly, there is moderate agreement that parents would be more supportive if Islamic studies were integrated into the curriculum (Mean = 3.4) and that such integration could increase acceptance of Western education (Mean = 3.7).

### Thematic Analysis of In-depth Interview

Data obtained from in-depth interview was analyzed under the theme:

#### *Parental Attitudes Toward Western Education*

Islamic education is deeply ingrained in the culture and Makarantun Allo (elementary Islamic schools) are highly prioritized by parents. In many villages such as Katsira, Tudu, and Tutunbe, the scheduling of formal schooling is often adjusted around Islamic lessons. Primary schools frequently start after 11:00 am, running for only 3 to 4 hours daily due to the preference given to morning Qur'anic studies.

According to P1 (Male, Parent in Tudu, aged 57):

Staff of primary school in our area have been making efforts to improve attendance and discourage pupils late coming informing us that school should start at 8:00 am, but we still cannot combine house chores with schooling,

This response addresses lateness and irregular attendance associated with school in the Katsira community which is the reflection of parental attitudes to western education. Indeed, Many parents equate Western education with Christianity, leading to skepticism and reluctance to embrace formal schooling.

P2 (Male, aged 53, graduate of Makarantun Allo, Katsira) explained:

Western education is related to *Nasaranci* (Christianity), and we are concerned it was introduced to replace Islam. That's why we focus more on Islamic schools.

Another respondent (P8) (Female, aged 39, Tutunbe) stated that:

I don't see any reason to rush for Western school when the child has not mastered the Qur'an. That's the foundation. Without it, education is not complete.

This reflects the common belief held in this community by other respondents (P9, P12 and P14) that Western education is secondary and only valuable after Islamic education.

For other respondents however, their views demonstrate caution and ambivalence. In line with this, P13 (Female, aged 40, Katsira) stated that:

Sometimes we hear teachers tell children things that don't match our religion. That is why I don't send my daughter to school often.

Similar to the above view, P16 (female, aged 38, Shiyar Yan Koli) explained that:

Western education teaches English and science, but what about our religion? If it's not part of the school, how will our children learn it.

These views of P14 and P16 suggest fear of ideological conflict, particularly in gendered contexts, reinforcing protective parental control over female education. The same view was also shared by P5, P10 and P17. The above perceptions have led to low enrolment and limited participation in Western education in some villages. This sentiment was particularly pronounced in Katsira (Dange ward) and Tudu (Shuni ward).

In Shiyar Yan Koli, a conservative settlement in Tudu, resistance to Western education is especially strong. Several respondents from this area cited historical distrust stemming from colonial encounters and the belief that Western education was imposed forcibly.

P10 (male, aged 60, Shiyar Yan Koli, Tudu) recalled:

The Whiteman fought Sultan Attahiru to introduce Western education with Christianity. After defeating the Sultan, they succeeded. That's how it started and nothing has changed.

This view was echoed by others, showing how historical narratives continue to shape parental attitudes.

P4 (Female, aged 42, Katsira) stated:

I send my children to Qur'anic school first; that is our tradition. If they are strong enough, they can later join the formal school.

P7 (Male, aged 50, Tutunbe) noted:

We don't reject Western education entirely, but we fear the moral impact. It's better to protect our children with Islamic teachings.

Despite growing awareness about the benefits of Western education, many parents still prioritize religious education. Some expressed concern that Western schooling promotes foreign values perceived to contradict Islamic principles.

P11 (Female, aged 35, Tudu) mentioned:

They teach things we do not fully understand. Sometimes the dressing, behavior, and language of children change.

Still, a few parents showed signs of openness, especially when Islamic and Western education was combined.

P15 (Male, aged 46, Katsira) shared:

If there is Islamic knowledge in the school, it is easier for us to accept. That is why schools that offer both are more trusted here.

Based on the views of all 17 parents (P1, P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18 and P20), the data clearly show that religious beliefs and historical mistrust of

Western education are central to the persistent low enrolment and irregular attendance in public primary schools across Dange-Shuni communities.

## **Discussion**

The study found that many respondents hold negative or indifferent attitudes toward Western education. Teachers noted frequent absenteeism, late school start times due to Makarantun Allo sessions, and a lack of parental involvement in their children's academic affairs. Parents echoed these sentiments, expressing skepticism about the intent and value of Western education. These findings strongly align with those of Salihu and Adeoye (2018) and Garba and Muhammed (2019), who observed that many Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria associate Western education with Christian proselytization and cultural intrusion.

Similarly, the claim that the name "Katsira" itself reflects the community's historical resistance to Western education mirrors the argument of Yahaya and Liman (2021), who noted that such resistance is not only educational but symbolic and historical, rooted in colonial encounters and religious preservation.

However, while some empirical studies such as those of USAID (2015) and UNICEF (2020) point to a gradual improvement in parental attitudes due to policy interventions, this study observed that these interventions have limited penetration in remote areas like Katsira and Tudu. Teachers still report that community members are largely unresponsive to sensitization campaigns, and the timing of Qur'anic schooling remains a major scheduling conflict.

The study also found that religious beliefs directly shape parental attitudes, especially where Western education is perceived as contradictory to Islamic values. Many parents interviewed described formal education as "Nasara" (Christian), introduced forcefully by colonial administrators. This aligns with Auwal and Abdu (2020) and Ibrahim and Yahaya (2021) findings that curriculum content, co-educational settings, and the lack of Islamic subjects in public schools contribute to parental distrust.

However, while Musa and Ahmed (2022) emphasized that the mere presence of Western schools is often resisted in some rural areas, this study found a slightly more different reality. Some parents, particularly younger or more educated ones, are willing to allow their children to attend Western schools if Islamic education remains a priority or if the schools integrate Arabic or religious instruction. This suggests a possible area of convergence, where hybrid educational models integrating religion into the curriculum may gradually soften resistance.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study concludes that in Katsira and other selected communities of Dange-Shuni, parental religious beliefs significantly shape negative attitudes toward Western education. Deep-rooted perceptions of Western education as a threat to Islamic values contribute to low school enrolment, late attendance, and limited parental involvement. However, some openness exists where Western education is combined with Islamic teachings, suggesting potential for improved acceptance through culturally sensitive educational approaches.

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government and educational stakeholders should collaborate with local religious and traditional leaders to conduct culturally sensitive awareness campaigns that emphasize the

compatibility of Western education with Islamic values. This can help reshape negative perceptions and improve school attendance and parental support.

2. Schools in conservative communities should integrate basic Islamic studies or offer parallel Qur'anic sessions within formal school schedules. This dual approach may increase parental trust and encourage enrollment by aligning educational practices with local religious expectations.

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