



The interface between Religious Plurality and Student Academic Performance: The case of St. Ambrose College of Education, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Religious plurality is a defining feature of contemporary Ghanaian society and increasingly shapes life in educational institutions. This study examined how religious plurality influences academic performance at St. Ambrose College of Education in the Bono Region of Ghana. Using Pluralistic Theory, a qualitative case study design employed interviews, focus groups, and non-participant observation. Thirty-two participants, including students, student leaders, and lecturers, were purposively selected. The findings show that religious plurality is marked by peaceful coexistence, respect, and collaboration among students of different faiths. These interactions foster academic support, collaboration, integration, and psychological well-being, improving academic performance and student experience. Challenges such as stereotypes and occasional disruptions were noted but remained limited and did not affect campus harmony. The study concludes that, when well managed, religious plurality becomes an educational asset rather than a source of conflict. It contributes to scholarship by linking religious plurality to academic outcomes in Ghanaian teacher education and expanding the understanding of pluralism and student success within diverse and inclusive higher education learning environments in the Ghanaian context.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Higher Education, Interfaith Relations, Religious Diversity, Religious Plurality

INTRODUCTION

Ghana is widely recognized as a religiously pluralistic society where Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion coexist alongside smaller faith traditions in everyday social life. Religion in this context is not merely a private belief system but a central component of identity formation, moral reasoning, and communal interaction. Across the country, individuals of different religious backgrounds routinely interact

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in schools, markets, workplaces, and public ceremonies, often in ways that reflect tolerance and mutual accommodation rather than conflict.¹

The historical development of this religious diversity can be traced to pre-colonial African Indigenous Religion, followed by the introduction of Islam in the eighteenth century and Christianity through European missionary activity during the colonial period. These encounters produced a layered religious landscape that has continued to evolve into a stable system of coexistence.² In contemporary Ghana, religious plurality is therefore not an exception but a defining feature of social organization and national identity.

This pluralistic reality is strongly reflected in Ghana's educational institutions, particularly Colleges of Education, where students from diverse religious backgrounds are admitted based on academic merit rather than faith affiliation. Institutions such as St. Ambrose College of Education (SACE) in the Bono Region of Ghana serve as microcosms of this national diversity. Within such settings, students from Christian, Muslim, and African Traditional religious backgrounds are required to live, learn, and interact closely in shared academic and residential environments.

In these contexts, academic work often functions as a unifying force that transcends religious difference. Students collaborate in study groups, participate in classroom discussions, and share learning resources regardless of their faith identities. These interactions provide opportunities for mutual understanding, respect, and social cohesion. Government educational reforms have further reinforced this pluralistic environment through the introduction of Religious and Moral Education (RME) and other religious studies programmes aimed at promoting tolerance and intercultural understanding.³

Despite these positive developments, the increasing visibility of religious plurality in educational institutions raises important questions about its implications for academic performance. While interfaith interaction can foster cooperation and social support, it may also introduce subtle challenges. Differences in religious practices, such as prayer times, fasting periods, and participation in religious activities may occasionally affect students' academic schedules and concentration. In addition, stereotypes and misconceptions about other religious groups may influence interpersonal relations and group dynamics.

At St. Ambrose College of Education, these dynamics are particularly evident due to the coexistence of students from multiple religious traditions. Although the institution promotes academic excellence and social harmony, there is limited empirical understanding of how interfaith relations influence students' academic performance. Although Ghana is generally considered a religiously tolerant society, the extent to which everyday religious interactions in tertiary institutions shape learning outcomes remains underexplored.⁴

The problem, therefore, is not the existence of religious plurality, but the lack of sufficient empirical evidence on how such plurality affects academic performance in Colleges of Education. Although previous studies highlight the positive role of religious tolerance in promoting social cohesion, fewer studies have focused specifically on its academic implications within teacher education institutions.⁵ This gap is significant because educational environments are not only spaces for intellectual development but also for socialization and identity formation.

Within these pluralistic settings, students continuously influence one another through interaction, collaboration, and shared academic experiences. These interactions may enhance academic performance through peer support and collaborative learning, or they may introduce distractions and tensions that affect academic focus. Without clear empirical evidence, it remains difficult for educational stakeholders to fully understand how religious plurality shapes student outcomes.

¹ Iddrisu Nathan Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006).

² Iddrisu Nathan Samwini, "The Need for and Importance of Dialogue of Life in Community Building: The Case of Selected West African Nations," *Journal of Interreligious Dialogue* 6 (2011).

³ Adam Konadu, Michael M. Makafui, and Stephen Kyei, "Interfaith Relations and Coexistence in Ghana," *Jumuga Journal of Education, Oral Studies and Human Sciences* 9, no. 2 (2026): 1–11.

⁴ Adam Konadu, *Religious Pluralism and Its Effects on Ghanaian Society*. (Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2018).

⁵ Azumah M. O., *The Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000).

Against this background, this study investigates the influence of religious plurality on the academic performance of students at St. Ambrose College of Education. It examines how interfaith relations, tolerance, and cooperation contribute to or hinder students' academic engagement and performance within a pluralistic educational environment.

The study is grounded in Pluralistic Theory, which emphasizes the coexistence and mutual recognition of diverse religious traditions as a basis for peaceful interaction and shared human development.⁶ By applying this framework, the study seeks to deepen understanding of how religious diversity functions not only as a social reality but also as an educational factor influencing academic outcomes.

Ultimately, this research contributes to scholarship on religious pluralism, interfaith relations, and education in Ghana by providing empirical evidence from a teacher education context. It extends existing discussions beyond social harmony to include academic performance, thereby offering insights for policymakers, educators, and institutional leaders who seek to promote inclusive and effective learning environments in religiously diverse settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Religious Plurality

Religious plurality has become one of the most significant features of contemporary societies, especially in nations characterized by cultural and religious diversity. The concept extends beyond the mere existence of multiple religions within a society and encompasses active interaction, mutual recognition, and peaceful coexistence among adherents of different faith traditions. Diana Eck argues that religious plurality is not simply diversity but an energetic engagement with diversity, that require dialogue, understanding, and respect among religious communities.⁷ Consequently, religious plurality creates opportunities for social interaction and cooperation while preserving religious distinctiveness.

Forman observes that religious diversity has existed throughout human history, although processes of globalization and modernization have made interreligious encounters more frequent and visible.⁸ Similarly, Konadu maintains that contemporary Ghanaian society has evolved into a religiously pluralistic environment in which Christians, Muslims, and adherents of African Traditional Religion interact regularly in educational institutions, workplaces, and communities.⁹ Religious plurality therefore functions not only as a demographic reality but also as a social condition that shapes interpersonal relationships and communal life.

In Ghana, religious plurality has become deeply embedded in the national social structure. Samwini notes that interactions among followers of different religions occur naturally in both private and public spheres, creating opportunities for mutual understanding and cooperation.¹⁰ As educational institutions increasingly reflect this broader societal diversity, the study of religious plurality has become particularly important within educational contexts.

Theoretical Perspectives on Religious Pluralism

The theological foundations of religious pluralism have been extensively developed by scholars who challenge exclusivist claims regarding religious truth. Among the most influential contributors is John Hick, who argues that no single religious tradition has exclusive access to salvation or ultimate truth.¹¹ According

⁶ John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995); Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *God Beyond Boundaries: A Christian and Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2017).

⁷ Diana L. Eck, "Religious Pluralism, on the Ground and in the Pulpit," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 56 (2003).

⁸ Charles W. Forman, "Religious Pluralism and the Mission of the Church," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 1 (1982): 2–7.

⁹ Konadu, *Religious Pluralism and Its Effects on Ghanaian Society*.

¹⁰ Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*.

¹¹ Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths*.

to Hick, the world's major religions represent different responses to the same transcendent reality and should therefore be regarded as equally valid pathways to spiritual transformation.¹²

Building on Hick's work, Paul Knitter contends that the historical existence of multiple religious traditions demonstrates the inadequacy of exclusivist theological positions.¹³ He argues that interreligious dialogue provides an avenue through which different faith communities can learn from one another while addressing shared human concerns. Likewise, Perry Schmidt-Leukel proposes that diverse religions offer complementary insights into ultimate reality and should therefore be viewed as partners rather than rivals.¹⁴

These theoretical perspectives are particularly relevant within educational settings where students from different religious backgrounds interact daily. Nevertheless, critics caution that pluralistic theology may weaken doctrinal distinctiveness and create ambiguities concerning religious truth claims.¹⁵ Despite these concerns, pluralistic theory remains a valuable framework for understanding how religious diversity influences social and educational experiences.

Religious Plurality and Interfaith Relations

A substantial body of scholarship associates religious plurality with positive interfaith relations and social cohesion. Mbiti argues that African societies have historically demonstrated remarkable capacities to accommodate diverse religious traditions within shared social spaces.¹⁶ In Ghana, religious coexistence is generally characterized by cooperation, tolerance, and peaceful interaction among different faith communities.¹⁷

Studies conducted by Abdul-Hamid, Ango, Ayandokun, and Forde consistently demonstrate that dialogue and interpersonal engagement contribute significantly to harmonious Christian-Muslim relations in West Africa.¹⁸ These scholars emphasize that sustained interaction reduces prejudice, promotes understanding, and strengthens social solidarity. Margaret and Sarbah reached similar conclusions. They found that regular contact among religious groups enhances communal harmony and minimizes tensions arising from religious differences.¹⁹

Recent studies further reinforce the importance of interfaith engagement. Konadu argues that religious tolerance in Ghana has been strengthened through the efforts of educational institutions, religious leaders, and civil society organizations.²⁰ Likewise, Konadu et al, found that frequent interaction among members of different faith traditions promotes trust, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence.²¹

Religious Plurality and Educational Development

The educational implications of religious plurality have increasingly attracted scholarly attention. Olagunju argues that globalization and increasing interreligious encounters require educational institutions to cultivate

¹² John Hick, "The Next Step Beyond Dialogue," in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books., 1995), 131-42.

¹³ Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

¹⁴ Schmidt-Leukel, *God Beyond Boundaries: A Christian and Pluralistic Theology of Religions*.

¹⁵ Michael Vlach, "What Are Pluralism, Inclusivism and Exclusivism," 2025, <http://www.theologicalstudies.org/pluralism.html>.

¹⁶ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books., 1989).

¹⁷ Iddrisu Nathan. Samwini, "Religious Toleration as a Key Factor for Social Stability in Plural Ghana," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 14 (2014): 12.

¹⁸ M. Abdul-Hamid, "Theatres of Love and the Nexus between Christianity and Islam: The Case of Ghana," *WAATI Papers on Christian-Muslim Relations in West Africa* 7 (2011); P. S. Ango, "The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus: A Hope for Christian-Muslim Relations," *WAATI Papers on Christian-Muslim Relations in West Africa* 7. (2012); E. O. Ayandokun, "Building a Tension-Free Society for Mutual Relationship: Our Religious Differences Notwithstanding," *WAATI Papers on Christian-Muslim Relations in West Africa* 7 (2012); G. Forde, *A Resource for Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (Ireland: Coise Tine, 2013).

¹⁹ S. Margaret, "The Relationship between Christianity and Islam Using the Approach of Dialogue: Case Study of Kumasi." Undergraduate Long Essay, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2009; C. J. E. Sarbah, "A Critical Study of Christian-Muslim Relations in the Central Region of Ghana with Special Reference to Traditional Akan Values" (University of Birmingham., 2010)..

²⁰ Adam Konadu, "Fostering Religious Tolerance and Harmonization in Ghana: A Discussion on Efforts Made by Various Stakeholders," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 3, no. 5 (2022).

²¹ Konadu, Makafui, and Kyei, "Interfaith Relations and Coexistence in Ghana."

tolerance, intercultural competence, and mutual respect among learners.²² Educational environments therefore serve as important spaces where students develop attitudes toward religious diversity.

In Ghana, Religious and Moral Education (RME) has been identified as an important vehicle to promote understanding and peaceful coexistence among students of diverse religious backgrounds. Boafo et al. argue that effective religious education encourages respect for diversity while fostering moral development and social responsibility.²³ Furthermore, recent scholarship suggests that inclusive educational environments enable students to appreciate differences and participate more effectively in academic and social activities.²⁴

Religious Plurality and Academic Performance

Although scholars have extensively examined the social dimensions of religious diversity, relatively limited attention has been devoted to its influence on academic performance. Existing educational research suggests that supportive social environments significantly enhance learning outcomes. Positive peer relationships, collaborative learning, and strong social networks contribute to improved motivation, engagement, and academic achievement.²⁵

Within religiously pluralistic educational settings, students often gain access to broader support systems and diverse learning experiences. Konadu et al. argue that inclusive educational cultures foster a sense of belonging and participation, which positively influence academic success.²⁶ Similarly, Samwini maintains that peaceful coexistence and mutual respect create conditions that support personal and intellectual development.²⁷

Nevertheless, some scholars acknowledge potential challenges associated with religious diversity. Nora identifies stereotypes, misconceptions, and occasional tensions as factors that may undermine deeper interfaith understanding.²⁸ Konadu similarly notes that unmanaged religious differences can sometimes affect institutional harmony.²⁹ Despite these concerns, existing evidence generally suggests that the benefits of religious plurality outweigh its challenges when institutions deliberately promote inclusion, dialogue, and mutual respect.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that religious plurality contributes significantly to social cohesion, interfaith dialogue, and inclusive educational environments. However, most existing studies focus on theological, sociological, and peacebuilding dimensions of religious diversity rather than its educational consequences. Empirical research examining the specific relationship between religious plurality and academic performance within Ghanaian Colleges of Education remains limited. Consequently, there is insufficient understanding of how interfaith interactions, religious tolerance, and religious diversity influence students' academic experiences and outcomes in teacher education institutions. This study addresses this gap by investigating the impact of religious plurality on the academic performance of students at St. Ambrose College of Education in the Bono Region of Ghana.

²² O. Olagunju, "Globalization and Inter-Religious Dialogue in African Cultural Context," *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2013): 1.

²³ Charles Boafo, Adam Konadu, and Kofi Charles Twene, "Factors Affecting Teaching and Learning of Religious and Moral Education (RME) in Ghanaian Junior High Schools: A Case Study of C. B. Mensah SDA Junior High School," *Journal of Education and Learning Technology* 5, no. 1 (2024): 1–8.

²⁴ Adam Konadu et al., "Religious Pluralism and Inclusive Education in Ghana," *Jumuga Journal of Education, Oral Studies and Human Sciences* 9, no. 1 (2026).

²⁵ D. Amedorme et al., "An Assessment of the Challenges of Student Nursing Mothers of St. Ambrose College of Education in Ghana.," *American Journal of Interdisciplinary Research and Innovation* 4, no. 1 (2025): 32–42.

²⁶ Konadu et al., "Religious Pluralism and Inclusive Education in Ghana."

²⁷ Iddrisu Nathan Samwini, "I Am Because We Are: A Precondition to Peace in a Religious and Political Pluralistic West African Country," *Journal of Interreligious Dialogue*, 2014, 3–1.

²⁸ Nora Kofognoterah Nonterah, "The Challenges of Interfaith Relations in Ghana: A Case Study of Its Implications for Peace-Building in Ghana," in *Pathways for Interreligious Dialogue in the Twenty-First Century*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 197–211.

²⁹ Konadu, "Fostering Religious Tolerance and Harmonization in Ghana: A Discussion on Efforts Made by Various Stakeholders."

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Pluralistic Theory, which emphasizes the coexistence, interaction, and interdependence of diverse religious traditions and how these relationships shape human experiences, including education. The theory provides a framework for understanding how religious diversity influences social behavior, values, and academic life. This section explores key issues, including the meaning of religious plurality, its theoretical foundations, and its implications for academic performance.

Plurality refers to the coexistence of diverse groups distinguished by ethnicity, culture, politics, or religion within a shared society. Religious plurality, in particular, describes a condition in which multiple religious traditions co-exist with mutual respect and cooperation.³⁰ According to Celene, religious plurality recognizes that morally upright individuals exist across different faiths and that people should be evaluated based on their actions rather than their religious affiliation.³¹ It represents a structured coexistence in which various religious groups interact peacefully and constructively.

Forman argues that religious plurality has always existed globally but has become more visible in contemporary times.³² Similarly, Konadu notes that modern society has undergone a transformation where coexistence among people of different religious backgrounds is no longer optional but inevitable.³³ Tayviah further emphasizes that such interactions have become a natural and everyday aspect of human life.³⁴

In Ghana, religious plurality is particularly evident. The country recognizes three major religions—Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion—each with multiple denominations. Samwini highlights that interactions among adherents of these religions occur naturally in both private and public settings, often without restrictions based on religious identity.³⁵

The Religious Plurality Theory in Scope

The concept of religious plurality has gained significant attention in both academic and public discourse. Among its most influential proponents is John Hick, widely regarded as a leading figure in pluralist theology. Hick argues that no single religion holds absolute truth or exclusive access to salvation.³⁶

Initially a committed Christian theologian, Hick's views evolved through his interactions with people of other faith traditions. He came to recognize the validity of multiple religious paths, suggesting that all religions contribute to moral and spiritual transformation.³⁷ According to Hick, salvation is not confined to a single religious tradition but is accessible through various faiths.

Paul Knitter, a prominent follower of Hick, reinforces this view by asserting that multiple religions have existed throughout human history, each offering unique perspectives on the meaning of life.³⁸ This diversity challenges the notion that any one religion can claim exclusive truth. Another key scholar, Perry Schmidt-Leukel, argues that while religions differ in expression, they all point toward an ultimate transcendent reality in equally valid ways.³⁹ He maintains that no single religion can claim superiority, as each provides a distinct but legitimate path to understanding the divine.

Together, these perspectives highlight that religious plurality is not merely about coexistence but about mutual recognition, interaction, and the shared pursuit of meaning. In educational contexts, this theory

³⁰ Eck, "Religious Pluralism, on the Ground and in the Pulpit," 67.

³¹ A. L. Celene, "Interreligious Exchange in Elementary Education: Expanding Horizons at the Islamic Academy of New England," *Journal of Interreligious Dialogue* 3, no. 1 (2014), 15.

³² Forman, "Religious Pluralism and the Mission of the Church," 10.

³³ Konadu, "Fostering Religious Tolerance and Harmonization in Ghana: A Discussion on Efforts Made by Various Stakeholders," 34.

³⁴ Michael M. Tayviah, *The Colonial Impact in Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana and Togo: A Comparative Assessment* (Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag, 2019), 102.

³⁵ Samwini, "The Need for and Importance of Dialogue of Life in Community Building: The Case of Selected West African Nations," 34.

³⁶ Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths*, 18.

³⁷ Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths*, 25.

³⁸ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 12.

³⁹ Schmidt-Leukel, *God Beyond Boundaries: A Christian and Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, 78.

provides a useful lens for examining how interfaith interactions influence students' academic and social development.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine the influence of religious plurality on the academic performance of students at St. Ambrose College of Education (SACE) in the Bono Region of Ghana. A case study approach was deemed appropriate because it facilitates an intensive investigation of a contemporary social phenomenon within its natural setting and allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interactions.⁴⁰ Given the study's focus on interfaith relations within a specific educational institution, the design provided a suitable framework for exploring how religious diversity shapes students' academic lives.

The target population comprised all regular students enrolled at St. Ambrose College of Education during the 2025 academic year. A total of thirty-two (32) participants were selected for the study. The sample consisted of twenty-four (24) students, four (4) student leaders, and four (4) lecturers who possessed relevant knowledge regarding religious diversity and student interactions on campus. Among the student participants, eighteen identified as Christians, five as Muslims, and one as an adherent of African Traditional Religion. Participants ranged between nineteen and thirty-one years of age and included both male and female students from different levels of study. The inclusion of participants from varied religious and academic backgrounds enhanced the breadth and depth of perspectives gathered during the research process.

The study employed purposive sampling as the primary sampling technique, supplemented by convenience sampling. Purposive sampling allowed researchers to select participants who had direct experience with religious plurality within the college environment and could provide rich information relevant to the research objectives. Convenience sampling was used only to facilitate access to participants who were available and willing to participate during the period of data collection. This approach was considered appropriate because the study sought in-depth insights rather than statistical generalization. Efforts were nevertheless made to ensure diversity in terms of religious affiliation, gender, and academic level to capture a broad range of experiences and viewpoints.⁴¹

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and non-participant observation. These instruments were directly related to the objectives of the study. Semi-structured interviews explored students' experiences of religious diversity, patterns of interfaith interaction, and perceptions regarding the effects of such interactions on academic performance. Interviews with lecturers and student leaders provided additional institutional perspectives on religious coexistence and student welfare. Furthermore, two focus group discussions involving eight participants each were organized to generate collective reflections on interfaith relations and academic experiences. Non-participant observation enabled the researchers to observe naturally occurring interactions among students in lecture halls, residence facilities, and other communal spaces within the college.

All interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in English and audio-recorded with the consent of participants. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim to facilitate detailed analysis. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a process that involved repeated reading of transcripts, coding of significant statements, categorization of related ideas, and the identification of recurring themes. The themes that emerged were interpreted in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework that underlies the study. This analytical process enabled the researchers to uncover patterns, similarities, and differences in participants' experiences and perceptions.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, methodological triangulation was employed using multiple data collection methods. Member checking was also conducted to verify the accuracy of participants' responses, while peer review of coded data enhanced analytical consistency and credibility.⁴²

⁴⁰ Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications*, vol. 6 (Sage Thousand Oaks, CA, 2018); Sarah Crowe et al., "The Case Study Approach," *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 11, no. 1 (December 27, 2011): 100, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-11-100>.

⁴¹ Nicholas Walliman, *Research Methods: The Basics* (Routledge, 2021).

⁴² Michael Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research* (London: Sage, 1998).

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of St. Ambrose College of Education before the commencement of fieldwork (Approval No. SACE-REC/2025/014). Participants were fully informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and voluntarily signed informed consent forms before participating. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by removing identifying information from interview transcripts and research reports. In addition, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without adverse consequences. These measures ensured that the study complied with the accepted ethical standards that govern social science research.⁴³

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored how religious plurality influences the academic performance of students at SACE in the Bono Region of Ghana. Data generated from interviews, focus group discussions, and observations revealed that religious diversity is deeply embedded in the everyday life of the institution. Four major themes emerged from the analysis: religious diversity and campus life, interfaith relations among students, the influence of religious plurality on academic performance, and perceptions regarding the future of interfaith coexistence. Although the participants acknowledged some challenges associated with religious diversity, the findings overwhelmingly suggest that religious plurality contributes positively to students' academic experiences and social development.

Religious Diversity and Everyday Student Life

Participants consistently described SACE as a religiously diverse environment in which students of different faith traditions interact freely. Although the college was founded as a Catholic institution, students reported that religious identity does not significantly determine friendship patterns, classroom participation, or academic collaboration.

A Muslim student reflected on his initial experience upon entering the college: "Because the school is a Christian institution, I was worried that I would struggle to fit in. But after arriving, I realized that most students were interested in knowing me as a person, not judging me because I am Muslim." Similarly, a Christian participant remarked: "In this school, religion is important, but it is not what determines who you sit with in class or who becomes your friend. We are students first."

These perspectives were repeatedly echoed during the focus group discussions. Participants emphasized that daily interaction in lecture halls, hostels, dining areas, and study groups has normalized religious diversity to the extent that it is viewed as an ordinary aspect of campus life rather than a source of division.⁴⁴

Observational data confirmed these accounts. Students of different religious backgrounds were frequently seen working together on assignments, sharing lecture notes, and participating jointly in extracurricular activities. Such interactions suggest that religious diversity has become integrated into the institutional culture of SACE.

The findings support broader observations regarding Ghanaian society, where religious plurality increasingly manifests through everyday encounters and cooperation among people of different faiths.⁴⁵ Recent studies on religious pluralism and inclusive education in Ghana similarly argue that educational institutions serve as important spaces where students learn to appreciate diversity while maintaining their distinct religious identities.⁴⁶

⁴³ Keith G. Smith, *Writing and Research: A Guide for Theological Students* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2016).

⁴⁴ Focus Group Discussion with Students Offering Religious and Moral Education as a Major Course. Conducted by authors. St. Ambrose College of Education, September 15, 2025.

⁴⁵ Konadu, *Religious Pluralism and Its Effects on Ghanaian Society*; Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*.

⁴⁶ Konadu et al., "Religious Pluralism and Inclusive Education in Ghana."

Nature of Interfaith Relations among Students:

One of the strongest themes emerging from the data was the generally cordial nature of interfaith relations within the college. The participants repeatedly stressed that the pursuit of academic success serves as a unifying factor that transcends religious differences.

The College Prefect explained: “Everybody comes here with the aim of becoming a teacher. Because we have that common objective, students rarely allow religious differences to create conflicts.”⁴⁷ Likewise, the President of the Ghana Muslim Students Association in the college observed: “When somebody has a problem, students support each other regardless of religion. During funerals, sicknesses, or financial difficulties, Christians and Muslims contribute together.”⁴⁸

Moreover, many participants described close friendships that crossed religious boundaries. A female Christian student stated: “My best friend in this college is a Muslim lady. We revise together, attend group discussions together, and support each other academically. Before coming here, I did not know much about Islam, but our friendship has changed many of my perceptions.” Another participant remarked: “Living together has helped us understand each other. Most of the misconceptions people have about other religions disappear when you interact with them every day.”

These testimonies reveal how sustained interaction facilitates mutual understanding and reduces prejudice. The findings align with pluralist perspectives that view dialogue and interpersonal engagement as important mechanisms to foster peaceful coexistence.⁴⁹ They also support recent studies by Konadu, Makafui, and Kyei, who found that frequent interaction between members of different faith communities promotes trust, social cohesion, and interreligious understanding in Ghana.⁵⁰

The evidence further suggests that students do not perceive religious differences as obstacles to cooperation. Rather, diversity appears to enrich social relationships by exposing students to alternative perspectives and experiences.

Influence of Religious Plurality on Academic Performance

The central objective of this study was to examine how religious plurality affects academic performance. Participants identified numerous ways through which interfaith interaction positively influences learning outcomes.

Collaborative Learning and Academic Support

The most frequently cited benefit of religious plurality was the promotion of collaborative learning. Participants consistently reported that study groups are formed on the basis of academic interests and competence rather than religious affiliation.

One Level 300 student explained: “When examinations are approaching, nobody asks whether you are Muslim or Christian. What matters is whether you can help the group understand the course.” Another participant added: “Some of the people who have helped me most academically belong to different religions. We exchange notes, explain difficult topics, and encourage one another.” A focus group participant similarly noted: “Sometimes when I do not understand a concept, I contact colleagues from different religious backgrounds because I know they will assist me.”⁵¹

These narratives indicate that religious diversity broadens students’ academic networks and creates opportunities for peer learning. The President of the Muslim Students Association emphasized this point:

⁴⁷ Interview with the College Prefect of St. Ambrose College of Education. Interview by authors. Dormaa-Akwamu, Bono Region, Ghana. September 14, 2025.

⁴⁸ Interview with the President of the Ghana Muslim Students Association, St. Ambrose College of Education. Interview by authors. Dormaa-Akwamu, Bono Region, Ghana. September 13, 2025.

⁴⁹ John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

⁵⁰ Konadu, Michael M. Makafui, and Stephen Kyei., “Interfaith Relations and Coexistence in Ghana,” 1-11.

⁵¹ Focus Group Discussion with Students Offering Religious and Moral Education as a Major Course. Conducted by authors. St. Ambrose College of Education, September 15, 2025.

“Academic success in this college depends largely on cooperation. Students help each other irrespective of religion, and that support improves performance.”⁵²

The findings suggest that the beliefs of religious plurality contributes to academic achievement by creating inclusive learning communities where knowledge and resources are freely shared. This observation supports recent research indicating that inclusive educational environments enhance student engagement, participation, and academic outcomes.⁵³

Tolerance, Respect, and Psychological Well-Being

The participants also highlighted the importance of religious tolerance in creating a conducive learning environment. Many respondents argued that mutual respect reduces tension and allows students to focus on their studies.

A Muslim participant explained: “I feel comfortable here because people respect my beliefs. When you feel accepted, it becomes easier to concentrate on your academic work.” A Christian student similarly remarked: “Nobody forces you to abandon your faith. You are respected for who you are, and that gives you peace of mind.”

Several respondents emphasized that students generally accommodate one another's religious commitments. Muslim students noted that their colleagues often understand when they excuse themselves for prayers, while Christian students reported receiving similar consideration regarding church activities. One participant stated: “We understand that religion is important to everybody. If someone has to attend prayers or church activities, we respect that.”

The significance of these findings extends beyond social harmony. Participants repeatedly linked feelings of acceptance and respect to increased concentration, confidence, and academic motivation. These observations resonate with Konadu's recent discussion of the *Imago Dei* principle, which argues that recognizing the inherent dignity of every person provides a strong foundation for peaceful interfaith relations and inclusive educational environments.⁵⁴

Unity, Belonging, and Academic Motivation

Another important finding was the relationship between interfaith harmony and students' sense of belonging. Participants indicated that acceptance and inclusion strengthen their attachment to the institution and motivate them to actively participate in academic activities.

One student explained: “You feel that you belong here regardless of your religion. That feeling encourages you to become involved in class activities and group discussions.” A lecturer similarly observed: “Students who feel accepted tend to be more confident academically. Inclusion affects participation, and participation affects learning.”⁵⁵ Another participant remarked: “The support system here motivates many students. You know that people are willing to help you succeed.”

These findings suggest that religious plurality contributes indirectly to academic performance by promoting social integration and psychological security. Recent studies on religious pluralism and inclusive education in Ghana also conclude that students perform better when educational institutions promote acceptance, inclusion, and equal participation.⁵⁶

⁵² Interview with the President of the Ghana Muslim Students Association, St. Ambrose College of Education. Interview by authors. Dormaa-Akwamu, Bono Region, Ghana. September 13, 2025.

⁵³ Konadu et al., “Religious Pluralism and Inclusive Education in Ghana.”

⁵⁴ Adam Konadu, “Imago Dei and Interfaith Relations in Ghana,” *International Journal of Humanity and Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2026): 1–14.

⁵⁵ An interview Dr. Twene Kofi Charles, Lecturer of Religious and Moral Education, St. Ambrose College of Education. Interview by authors. Dormaa-Akwamu, Bono Region, Ghana. October 14, 2025.

⁵⁶ Konadu et al., “Religious Pluralism and Inclusive Education in Ghana.”

Challenges Associated with Religious Plurality

Although participants overwhelmingly emphasized positive experiences, they also identified several challenges.

Disruptions Related to Religious Activities:

Some participants reported that religious activities occasionally interfere with study schedules. A Muslim student commented: “Sometimes loud night prayers can make it difficult to study, especially during examination periods.” Similarly, a Christian participant noted: “There are occasions when group discussions are interrupted because members have religious commitments.”

Although most respondents described these incidents as infrequent, they nonetheless demonstrate the need for institutions to balance religious expression with academic responsibilities.

Stereotypes and Subtle Forms of Discrimination:

Another challenge identified by participants was the persistence of stereotypes. A Muslim respondent explained: “Most students are respectful, but occasionally you hear comments suggesting that Muslims are violent. Those statements can be uncomfortable.” A focus group participant added: “Some labels are used jokingly, but they can still make people feel excluded.”⁵⁷

Although participants stressed that overt discrimination was rare, these accounts reveal that misconceptions about religious groups continue to exist. Such findings support previous studies indicating that stereotypes remain obstacles to deeper interfaith understanding.⁵⁸ As Konadu et al observe, meaningful interaction and dialogue remain essential for challenging inherited prejudices and strengthening trust among religious communities.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, respondents generally agreed that these incidents were isolated and did not significantly undermine campus harmony.

Future of Interfaith Coexistence at SACE

Participants expressed strong optimism regarding the future of interfaith relations within the college. Most believed that continued interaction would further strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation. One student observed: “The more we interact, the more we realize that we share many common values.” Another participant remarked: “Future students will benefit from the peaceful relationships we are building now.” The College Prefect similarly stated: “I believe interfaith relations in this college will continue to improve because students have learned the importance of respecting one another.”⁶⁰

At the same time, participants cautioned against complacency. A lecturer noted: “Peaceful coexistence should not be taken for granted. Institutions must continue promoting dialogue so that misconceptions do not grow into conflicts.”⁶¹

The optimism expressed by participants reflects broader patterns within Ghanaian society, where interfaith relations are generally characterized by coexistence and cooperation.⁶² However, the findings also underscore the need for sustained efforts to promote dialogue, tolerance, and inclusion if these gains are to be preserved.

Overall, the evidence demonstrates that religious plurality at SACE functions primarily as a positive force. Through collaborative learning, mutual respect, social support, and inclusive participation, interfaith interaction contributes meaningfully to students’ academic performance and personal development.

⁵⁷ Focus Group Discussion with Students Offering Religious and Moral Education as a Major Course. Conducted by authors. St. Ambrose College of Education, September 15, 2025.

⁵⁸ Nonterah, “The Challenges of Interfaith Relations in Ghana: A Case Study of Its Implications for Peace-Building in Ghana.”

⁵⁹ Konadu, Makafui, and Kyei, “Interfaith Relations and Coexistence in Ghana.”

⁶⁰ Interview with the College Prefect of St. Ambrose College of Education. Interview by authors. Dormaa-Akwamu, Bono Region, Ghana. September 14, 2025.

⁶¹ An interview Dr. Twene Kofi Charles, Lecturer of Religious and Moral Education, St. Ambrose College of Education. Interview by authors. Dormaa-Akwamu, Bono Region, Ghana. October 14, 2025.

⁶² Konadu, “Imago Dei and Interfaith Relations in Ghana.”

Although challenges such as stereotypes and occasional disruptions remain, participants overwhelmingly viewed religious diversity as a resource that enriches both educational experiences and campus life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study demonstrate that religious plurality, when supported by inclusive institutional practices, can serve as a valuable resource for academic success, social integration, and character formation among students. Consequently, educational stakeholders should adopt deliberate measures that transform religious diversity into a catalyst for educational excellence and peaceful coexistence.

First, the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), and teacher education institutions should mainstream interfaith education within teacher preparation programmes. Rather than limiting discussions of religious diversity to Religious and Moral Education courses, colleges of education should integrate themes of interreligious understanding, dialogue, tolerance, and conflict transformation across relevant courses. Such an approach will prepare future teachers to manage religious diversity effectively within Ghana's increasingly pluralistic classrooms and communities.

Second, college authorities should establish institutional mechanisms that promote sustained interfaith engagement among students. The study revealed that regular interaction among students of different religious backgrounds strengthens mutual respect, reduces stereotypes, and enhances collaborative learning. Educational institutions should therefore support interfaith forums, dialogue sessions, cultural exchange programmes, and student-led initiatives that encourage meaningful interaction beyond formal academic settings. These platforms can help students appreciate religious differences while building relationships that contribute positively to their academic and social development.

Third, administrators should develop clear policies that balance religious freedom with academic responsibilities. Although participants generally reported harmonious coexistence, some indicated that certain religious activities occasionally disrupted study schedules and academic concentration. Institutions should therefore create guidelines that accommodate legitimate religious observances while ensuring that teaching, learning, and assessment activities remain unaffected. Such policies should be formulated through consultation with religious groups on campus to promote fairness, inclusivity, and institutional harmony.

Fourth, guidance and counselling units should be strengthened to address issues related to religious diversity and student well-being. Counsellors should be equipped to assist students experiencing religious prejudice, misunderstanding, or identity-related challenges. Effective counselling services can contribute to students' psychological well-being, enhance their sense of belonging, and ultimately support improved academic performance.

Fifth, continuous professional development programmes should be organized for lecturers, tutors, and student leaders on religious diversity management and inclusive educational practices. As the study indicates, positive interfaith relations flourish when institutional actors actively promote respect, equality, and inclusion. Training programmes can equip educational personnel with the skills needed to prevent discrimination, address misconceptions, and foster a campus culture that values diversity.

Finally, further studies should be conducted in universities, technical universities, nursing training colleges, and other colleges of education across Ghana to determine whether similar patterns exist in different institutional contexts. Comparative and mixed-method studies would enrich scholarly understanding of the relationship between religious plurality and educational outcomes and contribute to the development of evidence-based educational policies.

Collectively, these recommendations underscore the need for intentional institutional support, inclusive educational practices, and sustained interfaith engagement to ensure that religious plurality continues to function as a source of academic enrichment, social cohesion, and national development. Moreover, this study contributes to scholarship by demonstrating that religious plurality in Ghanaian tertiary institutions is not merely a sociocultural reality but also an important educational variable capable of shaping students' academic experiences, collaborative learning practices, and overall educational success.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the impact of religious plurality on the academic performance of students at St. Ambrose College of Education (SACE) in the Bono Region of Ghana. Specifically, it sought to understand how interactions, relationships, and cooperation among students from different religious backgrounds influence their academic experiences and outcomes within a tertiary educational environment. Against the backdrop of Ghana's long-standing tradition of religious diversity, the study explored whether religious plurality serves as a barrier to academic success or functions as a resource that enhances learning, social integration, and student development.

The findings demonstrate that religious plurality at SACE is largely characterized by peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and constructive engagement among students. Although the college operates within a Catholic tradition, students from Christian, Muslim, and other religious backgrounds reported feeling accepted and included in the academic and social life of the institution. Daily interactions in classrooms, hostels, study groups, and extracurricular activities have created an environment in which religious identity rarely becomes a source of division. Instead, students are united by common educational aspirations and a shared commitment to academic achievement.

A significant finding of the study is that religious plurality contributes positively to academic performance through collaborative learning, peer support, and the expansion of academic networks. Students freely exchange ideas, share learning resources, and assist one another irrespective of religious affiliation. The study also revealed that an atmosphere of tolerance and respect enhances students' psychological well-being, confidence, and sense of belonging, all of which are important factors in academic success. In this regard, the findings support the assumptions of Pluralistic Theory by demonstrating that meaningful interaction among people of different faith traditions can generate positive educational and social outcomes.

At the same time, the study acknowledges that religious plurality is not completely free of challenges. Instances of stereotypes, misconceptions, and occasional disruptions associated with religious activities were identified by participants. However, these challenges were generally viewed as isolated events rather than systemic obstacles to academic progress. More importantly, the findings indicate that continuous dialogue, mutual understanding, and institutional support can effectively minimize such tensions and strengthen interfaith relations within educational settings.

The study contributes to scholarship by extending existing discussions on religious pluralism beyond questions of social harmony and interreligious coexistence to include educational outcomes. While previous studies have largely focused on the social and theological dimensions of religious diversity, this research provides empirical evidence that positive interfaith relations can also foster academic engagement, motivation, and performance among students. Therefore, it enriches the growing body of literature on religion and education in Ghana by demonstrating that religious diversity, when properly managed, can serve as an asset rather than a liability within educational institutions.

In conclusion, the study argues that religious plurality should not be viewed merely as a demographic reality but as a valuable social and educational resource. The experiences of students at SACE illustrate that diversity can promote cooperation, understanding, and academic excellence when supported by inclusive institutional cultures. The future of Ghana's educational system, and indeed its broader social cohesion, depends in part on its ability to nurture environments in which people of different faiths learn, live, and work together in mutual respect. Religious plurality, therefore, emerges not as a threat to academic achievement but as a foundation upon which meaningful learning, personal growth, and national unity can be strengthened.

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