







Exploring education leaders' perceptions of the effectiveness of socio-religious organisations in higher education funding in Cross River State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines education leaders' perceptions of the effectiveness of socio-religious organizations in higher education funding in Cross River State, Nigeria, focusing on the University of Calabar and Cross River State University.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A survey consisting of 34 items was developed, validated, and administered to 146 educational leaders from the two public universities in Cross River State. The survey aimed to gather their views on the effectiveness of socio-religious organizations in funding higher education.

Findings: The results indicate that while some socio-religious organizations are perceived to contribute to a vibrant and prosperous school community, they have not fully addressed the economic opportunities, skills, and knowledge needed for student workforce success. Gender and experience did not significantly relate to socio-religious organizations' funding in higher education.

Conclusion: This study explores education leaders' perspectives on the effectiveness of socio-religious organizations in funding higher education and suggests that addressing differences among education leaders can enhance learning experiences.

Research Limitations and Implications: The focus on education leaders' perspectives, the specific geographical context of Cross River State, Nigeria, and the reliance on self-reported survey data, which may be subject to response biases; therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings to other contexts.

Practical Implications: The effectiveness of higher education funding depends on various factors, including institutional context, funding nature, and the values of the funding organization.

Contributions to Literature: Socio-religious organizations can contribute to higher education funding through scholarships, grants, and donations to institutions, highlighting the diverse ways in which they can support educational advancement.

Keywords: Education leaders, Effectiveness, Exploration, Funding perceptions, Higher education funding, Cross River State, Nigeria, Perception, Socio-religious organizations.

1. INTRODUCTION

For decades, insufficient funding has had a significant detrimental impact on higher education in Nigeria. Nigerian universities have long grappled with inadequate funding, resulting in a decline in education quality, infrastructure, and research, among other issues (Abeysekera, 2016). One of the major repercussions of this funding shortage is the universities' struggle to attract and retain high-quality faculty members, leading to a shortage of qualified teachers and researchers and subsequently affecting the overall education and research standards in Nigerian universities (Adeyemi, 2019; Ahsan & Ali, 2020). Additionally, the lack of funding has resulted in inadequate infrastructure and facilities across universities, including insufficient classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and other essential resources for quality education and research (Altbach, 2017). According to Ashraf and Mahmood (2021), this deficiency has resulted in overcrowded classrooms and limited access to necessary tools and resources.

Moreover, the shortage of funding has hindered Nigerian universities from keeping up with the latest technological advancements and research innovations (Baker, 2019). The inadequate funding situation has hindered Nigerian universities' ability to compete with their international counterparts, resulting in a brain drain as talented academics seek better opportunities abroad (Dabiri & Adeleke, 2019; Dhillon, 2020; Eze, 2018). It is evident that urgent action is required to address this issue and enable Nigerian universities to achieve global competitiveness and produce high-quality graduates and research outcomes.

Higher education refers to post-secondary education provided by universities, colleges, and other institutions beyond secondary school. It encompasses undergraduate and graduate degree programs, as well as professional and vocational training (Gavriel & Kordoutis, 2019). However, funding at this level necessitates the prudent investment and utilization of financial resources allocated to higher education institutions, such as universities and colleges, to support their academic and research activities. Various sources contribute to higher education funding, including government appropriations, tuition fees, individual and organizational donations, and research grants (Giroux, 2016). Adequate funding plays a critical role in ensuring that institutions have the necessary resources to deliver quality education and conduct research that advances knowledge. It facilitates the attraction and retention of talented faculty, the provision of updated facilities and equipment, and support for research endeavors.

Hidayat (2021) discusses the socio-religious dimensions of educational funding, in which social and religious factors affect funding for education. These factors impact access to educational resources, the distribution of resources, and the prioritization of different types of education. Socio-religious organizations play a role in providing funding for higher education through scholarships, grants, and donations to institutions. The effectiveness of such funding can be assessed by its impact on increasing access to higher education, enhancing education quality, promoting equity and inclusion, and preparing students for future roles in society, including the workforce. However, socioeconomic status frequently determines educational opportunities in many nations. Wealthy families have more resources to provide their children with better educational options, such as private schools or additional tutoring, while low-income families face limitations in accessing these resources. Disparities in educational outcomes based on class can arise from unequal access to resources, as highlighted by Hussain (2019) and Iqbal and Qureshi (2020). This can result in inequitable educational opportunities for students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

The effectiveness of higher education funding, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which the funding allocated to higher education institutions or programs accomplishes its intended objectives and desired outcomes (Ahmed, 2018). These objectives commonly include expanding access to higher education, enhancing education quality, fostering research and innovation, and preparing students for the workforce. The effectiveness of higher education funding can be assessed through various indicators, such as graduation rates, student retention, employment outcomes, research productivity, and societal impact (Gavriel & Kordoutis, 2019). These indicators help gauge the impact and success of the funding in achieving the desired goals.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Funding plays a critical role in the effective management of higher education in Nigeria for several compelling reasons. Firstly, adequate funding is essential for establishing and maintaining the necessary infrastructure and facilities that support quality education. This encompasses buildings, classrooms, laboratories, libraries, computers, and other equipment indispensable for teaching and research purposes (Hidayat, 2021). Without sufficient funding, universities may be unable to provide the essential resources required for students to learn effectively and for faculty members to conduct their research endeavors. Secondly, funding is crucial for attracting and retaining high-quality faculty members. Competitive compensation and access to adequate resources are vital to supporting faculty members in conducting research and participating in professional development activities (Gavriel & Kordoutis, 2019). Inadequate funding may hinder universities' ability to attract and retain top talent, leading to a potential decline in the quality of education provided to students. Thirdly, funding is necessary to foster research and innovation within higher education institutions. Adequate financial support enables universities to invest in research initiatives, promote innovation, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge (Gavriel & Kordoutis, 2019). Insufficient funding can impede universities' capacity to carry out meaningful research activities and hinder their ability to contribute to scientific and societal progress. In conclusion, funding plays a pivotal role in ensuring the effective management of higher education in Nigeria. It enables the establishment and maintenance of necessary infrastructure, supports the attraction and retention of high-quality faculty, and

facilitates research and innovation within universities. Adequate funding is essential to upholding the quality of education and the advancement of knowledge in the higher education sector.

Research is an indispensable element of higher education, requiring substantial resources such as funding for equipment, facilities, and personnel (Dabiri & Adeleke, 2019; Dhillon, 2020; Eze, 2018). Without adequate funding, universities may encounter difficulties in conducting research, leading to a lack of innovation and progress across various fields. Furthermore, funding plays a crucial role in providing financial aid and scholarships to students who may face financial constraints in pursuing higher education (Ashraf & Mahmood, 2021). This is vital for promoting equal access to education and ensuring that deserving students are not deprived of higher education opportunities. Therefore, funding assumes a critical role in the effective management of higher education in Nigeria by providing the essential resources to support quality education, attracting and retaining exceptional talent, fostering research and innovation, and facilitating equitable access to education.

2.1. Education Leaders

Education leaders encompass school planners, administrators, and supervisors (Hidayat, 2021). In Nigeria, there are several individuals recognized as education leaders, either for their contributions to educational development or their current leadership positions in the sector. Higher education institutions in Nigeria have various education leaders, including Vice-Chancellors, who serve as the Chief Executives of universities and are responsible for the overall management and administration of the institution (Dabiri & Adeleke, 2019). Additionally, there are provosts, who are the Chief Executives of colleges of education in Nigeria and oversee the institution's management and administration. Rectors hold leadership positions in polytechnics and are responsible for the overall management and administration of the institution (Hussain, 2019; Iqbal & Qureshi, 2020). Deans, on the other hand, are academic leaders who manage and administer faculties or departments within a university. Furthermore, the Heads of Departments serve as academic leaders responsible for managing and administering specific departments within a faculty. Registrars, on the other hand, are administrative leaders tasked with managing the administrative functions of universities, colleges of education, and polytechnics. Bursars hold financial leadership roles and are responsible for managing the financial resources of these institutions. Librarians, as academic leaders, are responsible for managing the library resources of universities, colleges of education, and polytechnics (Hussain, 2019; Iqbal & Qureshi, 2020). These education leaders play crucial roles in effectively managing higher education institutions in Nigeria and ensuring the delivery of quality education and research.

2.2. Socio-Religious Dimensions and Organisations

Socio-religious dimensions or organizations are groups that combine social and religious activities, missions, or goals. These organizations typically consist of individuals who share a common faith or religious belief and come together to address social or community issues. Their activities encompass charitable work, community service, education, advocacy, and spiritual development. Socio-religious organizations are often established to specifically address the needs and concerns of a particular community (Hussain, 2019; Iqbal & Qureshi, 2020). For instance, some organizations may focus on providing educational opportunities for disadvantaged children, while others may concentrate on offering food and shelter to the homeless. Some organizations may prioritize advocating for social justice or fostering interfaith dialogue and understanding. Examples of socio-religious organizations include Catholic Charities, Islamic Relief, Jewish Family and Children's Service, and the Salvation Army (Koseoglu, 2017). These organizations are typically non-profit and depend on donations and volunteer work to support their activities and fulfill their missions. They play a significant role in addressing social and community issues and promoting positive social change.

2.3. Higher Education Funding

Higher education funding refers to the financial resources allocated to support the operations and activities of higher education institutions, including universities, colleges, and vocational schools (Oyekanmi & Oyekanmi, 2020). This funding originates from various sources, such as governments, private donors, philanthropic organizations, and student tuition fees. Governments often play a significant role as a major source of higher education funding, providing support through different mechanisms like direct grants to institutions, research subsidies, and student financial aid programs. In addition to government support, private donors and charitable organizations play a significant role in financing various programs or projects through the provision of grants,

scholarships, and targeted gifts. Indeed, tuition fees paid by students constitute another vital source of higher education funding. Students are often required to pay tuition fees to enroll in higher education institutions, and the amount can vary based on factors such as the institution type, program of study, and geographical location. Higher education funding is crucial for sustaining the quality of education and research at institutions, attracting and retaining talented faculty members, providing resources and facilities for students, and fostering innovation and advancements across various fields. However, many institutions face challenges due to funding shortages, which can have adverse effects on the quality of education and research offered to students (Jiao & Chen, 2020). Indeed, studies have indicated that religious factors can have an impact on educational funding. In certain countries, government funding may be allocated to religious schools, which can influence educational priorities and outcomes (Jiao & Chen, 2020). Some countries may provide more funding to religious schools compared to secular schools, leading to disparities in educational outcomes based on religion. Moreover, religious beliefs can also shape the utilization of educational funding. Certain religious groups may prioritize funding for schools that align with their specific beliefs or values, while others may focus on supporting more secular education (Khan & Wahab, 2021). The socio-religious dimensions of educational funding can significantly influence access to educational resources and the prioritization of specific types of education. It is crucial for this study to recognize and address these factors to ensure equitable access to high-quality education for all students (Koseoglu, 2017). It is indeed true that socio-religious dimensions have not proven to be a consistently reliable source of funding for university education, leading to funding challenges faced by many universities in Nigeria and other countries. While some religious organizations and individuals have made significant contributions to higher education, such as establishing and endowing universities or funding scholarships, these contributions are often inconsistent and dependent on the priorities and interests of the donors. As a result, universities cannot solely rely on these sources of funding to sustain their operations and invest in long-term initiatives. Furthermore, socio-religious dimensions and ideologies tend to prioritize specific educational programs or approaches that align with their beliefs and values. This may restrict the diversity of educational offerings and research topics at universities, limiting their ability to provide a comprehensive education and produce graduates equipped to address the complex challenges of the modern world (Oyekanmi & Oyekanmi, 2020). While socio-religious ideologies can play a supportive role in higher education, they cannot be solely relied upon as the primary or exclusive source of funding for universities. Sustainable funding for universities requires a diverse range of sources, including government appropriations, tuition fees, research grants, and philanthropic donations from various individuals and organizations. By diversifying funding streams, universities can better navigate financial challenges, maintain academic freedom, and ensure the quality and relevance of their educational and research endeavors. According to Singh (2020), a crucial aspect of the socio-religious dimensions of educational funding is the influence of government policies and funding on access to education. Government funding and policies can have a big impact on the availability and quality of education in many nations. For instance, some governments prioritize funding for public education, while others prioritize funding for private or religious schools (Umoren & Okon, 2018). These policies can greatly affect who can access education and the range of educational options available. In certain cases, religious organizations or institutions may also contribute to providing education and funding for it. This is particularly notable in countries where religion plays a significant societal role. For example, religious organizations may operate schools or offer financial support for education, thereby influencing the available types of education and the values imparted through them. Another crucial aspect of the socio-religious dimensions of educational funding is the influence of cultural and social norms on access to education (Jiao & Chen, 2020). For instance, in certain societies, girls may face lower chances of receiving an education compared to boys due to cultural beliefs that prioritize male education over female education. Similarly, certain social or ethnic groups may encounter disadvantages in accessing education due to discrimination or social exclusion. Moreover, economic factors also shape the socio-religious dimensions of educational funding. In many countries, access to education is closely linked to socio-economic status, with wealthier individuals and families having greater access to educational resources and opportunities. This creates significant disparities in educational outcomes based on income and social class (Mahbubani & Zaman, 2017). Therefore, it is clear that a variety of social, cultural, economic, and political factors have an impact on socio-religious dimensions of educational funding, which are complex and multifaceted. It is crucial to address these

factors to ensure that all students have equal access to high-quality education, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Ahmed (2018) conducted a study that revealed religious students are more likely to engage in extracurricular activities, achieve higher grade point averages, and graduate from college. Additionally, they tend to actively participate in their communities and volunteer. However, Frimpong and Osei-Tutu (2020) discovered that religious involvement does not have a positive association with educational attainment, even after considering other factors such as socioeconomic status and race. Nevertheless, the authors found that religious involvement can offer students social and emotional support, as well as motivation to succeed. Ismail (2017) also found that religious involvement does not have a direct positive association with educational attainment, but rather that this relationship is influenced by socioeconomic status. The authors further determined that religious involvement alone cannot provide students with the necessary resources for academic success, such as financial support and access to social networks. Similarly, Mahbubani and Zaman (2017) found that religious involvement is not significantly associated with student success indicators, including academic achievement, retention, and graduation. Contrarily, Kizito and Kariuki (2019) uncovered that religious involvement is one of the most crucial factors in determining student success in college. They also noted that religious involvement falls short in providing students with a sense of community, as well as support and encouragement.

According to a study by Ahmed (2018), socio-religious organizations have made a significant contribution to funding tertiary institutions in Nigeria, particularly in the areas of infrastructure development, scholarships, and research grants. The study highlighted the notable contributions of organizations such as the Islamic Development Bank and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation to the advancement of tertiary education in Nigeria. However, the study also acknowledged the challenges associated with the sustainability of these funding mechanisms, as they are susceptible to the volatility of global oil prices and political instability. Al-Samarrai and Zaman (2016) examined the involvement of faith-based organizations in funding higher education in Nigeria. Their study revealed that organizations like the Church of Christ in Nigeria and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs have established universities and colleges that offer quality education to students. The study also emphasized that these organizations have been able to sustain their funding through donations, grants, and endowments. However, it highlighted concerns regarding the lack of transparency and accountability in fund management, which can lead to mismanagement and corruption.

Frimpong and Osei-Tutu (2020) investigated the impact of faith-based organizations on student retention in Ghanaian universities. Their study unveiled the effectiveness of organizations such as the Christian Council of Ghana and the Muslim Students Association in providing financial support to students, resulting in improved retention rates. The study also revealed that these organizations offer mentorship and spiritual support to students, contributing to their academic success. However, the study noted the lack of government support for these organizations, which can impede their overall effectiveness.

Ismail (2017) conducted an analysis of the role of waqf in funding higher education within Muslim communities in Nigeria. The study discovered that waqf has proven to be an effective mechanism for funding Islamic schools and universities, as it offers a consistent source of income through endowments. Furthermore, the study revealed that waqf has allowed Muslim communities to preserve their religious and cultural identity while accessing quality education. However, the study acknowledged challenges associated with the management of waqf funds, as they are prone to mismanagement and corruption.

Kizito and Kariuki (2019) examined the impact of religious organizations on student academic performance at selected universities in Kenya. Their study revealed that organizations such as the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church have established universities that provide high-quality education to students. Additionally, these organizations have been successful in offering scholarships and financial support to students, resulting in improved academic performance. Nevertheless, the study noted a lack of government support for these organizations, which can hinder their effectiveness.

Similarly, Mahbubani and Zaman (2017) investigated the role of faith-based organizations in funding higher education within Muslim communities in Nigeria. Their study found that organizations such as the Islamic Development Bank and the Muslim World League have been effective in providing financial support to students, enhancing their access to education. The study also revealed that these organizations have been able to offer scholarships and research grants to students, positively impacting their academic success. However, the study

recognized challenges related to the sustainability of these funding mechanisms due to the volatility of global oil prices and political instability.

Ahmed (2018) discovered that gender did not have a significant impact on education leaders' belief in the effectiveness of socio-religious organizations in funding education, particularly in rural areas where government funding is limited. Frimpong and Osei-Tutu (2020) found that education leaders' experiences were not significant predictors of the effectiveness of church funding in education, especially in rural areas where government funding is limited. Ismail (2017) found that experience did not determine education leaders' beliefs in the effectiveness of Zakat in funding education, particularly for low-income families. Mubarak (2019) conducted a study on the role of religious institutions in funding education in Nigeria. The study analyzed the funding and provision of education by religious institutions and found that many education leaders believe that religious institutions are effective in funding education. However, there was a lack of accountability and transparency in the funding process.

Similarly, Al-Samarrai and Zaman (2016) evaluated the beneficiaries of higher education subsidies in Pakistan. The study examined the impact of higher education subsidies on access to higher education and found that education leaders believe that subsidies from socio-religious organizations can effectively increase access to higher education for disadvantaged students. Kizito and Kariuki (2019) focused on the funding of higher education in Kenya by faith-based organizations. The study examined the role of faith-based organizations in funding higher education and found that education leaders believe that these organizations are effective in funding higher education, particularly for disadvantaged students who would otherwise be unable to afford it. Buttressing this fact, Mahbubani and Zaman (2017) explored the financing of higher education in Bangladesh. According to the findings of the survey, education authorities hold the belief that zakat has the potential to serve as a visible means of financing higher education, specifically catering to students hailing from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, educational funding in Nigeria encompasses various socio-religious dimensions. For instance, Covenant University, Redeemer's University, and Ajayi Crowther University are just a few of the private universities that receive funding from religious institutions, including the Living Faith Church the Redeemed Christian Church of God, and the Church of Nigeria. Moreover, numerous religious individuals and organizations in Nigeria have made notable contributions to support higher education through scholarships and research funding. For instance, the Bishop Oyedepo Foundation has granted scholarships to thousands of Nigerian students, enabling them to pursue their education in Nigeria and abroad.

Religious values and beliefs also play a significant role in shaping the educational priorities of universities and other institutions. For example, some universities in Nigeria have made theology or religious studies a core component of their curriculum, reflecting the influence of religious perspectives. Additionally, religious organizations in Nigeria have contributed to the infrastructure development of universities by constructing and equipping lecture halls, laboratories, and libraries. The Redeemed Christian Church of God, for instance, has provided infrastructure support to several universities in Nigeria. Furthermore, religious organizations in Nigeria have sponsored research projects that align with their values and areas of emphasis. For example, the Catholic Church in Nigeria supports research initiatives focused on social justice and poverty alleviation. These efforts exemplify the ways in which religious organizations actively participate in promoting education and advancing knowledge in Nigeria.

Private universities in Nigeria sponsored by religious organizations have experienced a surge in popularity in recent years (Jiao & Chen, 2020). These universities typically have a religious affiliation and often prioritize the study of theology or religious studies as a fundamental part of their curriculum. Notable examples of private universities in Nigeria sponsored by religious organizations include Bowen University (sponsored by the Nigerian Baptist Convention) and Madonna University (sponsored by the Catholic Church). Generous donations from religious individuals and organizations have played a significant role in supporting higher education in Nigeria. For instance, the Bishop Oyedepo Foundation has granted scholarships to thousands of Nigerian students, enabling them to pursue their studies in universities within Nigeria and abroad. Similarly, the Islamic Development Bank has provided funding to facilitate the development of Islamic studies programs in Nigerian universities. These contributions exemplify the commitment of religious entities to promoting and advancing education in Nigeria. Religious values and beliefs have a profound influence on shaping the educational priorities of universities and other institutions. For instance, certain universities in Nigeria may prioritize the study of ethics or morality as a foundational aspect of their curriculum. Moreover, these institutions may have specific regulations regarding dress codes and behavior that reflect the religious values upheld by the institution.

Religious organizations in Nigeria have also played a significant role in providing infrastructure support to universities. They have contributed to the construction and equipping of lecture halls, laboratories, and libraries. An example of this is the Redeemed Christian Church of God, which has provided infrastructure assistance to several universities in Nigeria, including the Redeemer's University (Jiao & Chen, 2020). Furthermore, religious organizations in Nigeria have actively sponsored research projects that align with their values and priorities. For instance, the Catholic Church in Nigeria supports research initiatives focused on issues related to social justice and poverty alleviation. Similarly, the Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC) has sponsored research projects exploring topics relevant to Islam and Muslim communities in Nigeria. These endeavors demonstrate how religious organizations in Nigeria actively contribute to knowledge generation and address issues pertinent to their respective religious contexts.

There are several noteworthy examples of successful initiatives that have addressed the socio-religious dimensions of educational funding. One such example is India's Right to Education Act, which was enacted in 2009. The Act's primary objective is to ensure free and compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 14. It includes provisions that reserve a percentage of seats in private schools for disadvantaged and marginalized communities, including low-income families and socially and economically disadvantaged groups. This has significantly improved access to education for these groups and helped to narrow educational disparities. Another notable example is Turkey's Imam Hatip schools. Originally established in the 1950s as religious vocational schools to train Islamic clerics, these schools have undergone transformations in recent years. The government has invested in these institutions and expanded their curriculum to include secular subjects such as mathematics and science. This expansion has made the schools more appealing to a wider range of students and enhanced access to education for individuals from religious backgrounds. Additionally, Malaysia's National Education Blueprint, launched in 2013, aims to enhance the quality of education and reduce disparities in educational outcomes. The blueprint incorporates various initiatives to improve access to education for marginalized and disadvantaged groups, including low-income families and indigenous communities. Furthermore, the United States' Title I program, established as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, provides funding to schools with a high proportion of low-income students. This funding aims to support the education of disadvantaged students and mitigate disparities in educational outcomes based on socio-economic status. These examples demonstrate successful efforts to address the socio-religious dimensions of educational funding. While each initiative may vary in approach and objectives, they all underscore the significance of recognizing and addressing the intricate social, cultural, and economic factors that influence access to education.

2.4. Research Statement and Questions

Universities are legally established with the purpose of providing services to students, staff, and the general public. However, a critical examination conducted by researchers in public universities in Cross River State has revealed a significant issue of poor funding for educational programs. Insufficient provisions exist for generating internal revenue, obtaining grants, receiving donations, collecting school charges and tuition fees, establishing an endowment fund, engaging the Alumni Association, and accessing the Education Tax Fund (ETF), among other sources. Consequently, this leads to a lack of adequate resources for higher education institutions, including outdated textbooks, limited technological infrastructure, and restricted opportunities for co-curricular activities. Furthermore, this financial shortfall results in low salaries for lecturers, making it challenging to attract and retain high-quality academic staff. It also contributes to larger class sizes, which hampers individual attention for students. Insufficient facilities, including outdated equipment, poorly maintained buildings, and a lack of resources for repairs and upgrades, further exacerbate the problem. As a consequence, an unsafe and unhealthy learning environment is created for both staff and students.

To address the issue of funding higher education in Cross River State, the government has implemented measures aimed at providing financial resources and support to educational institutions with both social and religious dimensions. These institutions include faith-based schools, which offer education grounded in religious values and beliefs while also meeting secular education standards. The support takes various forms, such as government grants, subsidies, tax exemptions, and private donations from religious organizations or individuals. Despite these efforts, researchers have observed that approximately 80 percent of these funds are not utilized to support the operational costs of educational institutions, including staff salaries, infrastructure development, and curriculum enhancement. It is evident that these funds are being misused instead of being directed towards moral education,

service learning, or community outreach initiatives. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to explore the perceptions of educational leaders regarding the effectiveness of socio-religious dimensions in funding higher education in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study seeks to address the following research questions:

- 1) What are the perceptions of educational leaders on the effectiveness of socio-religious organisation in higher education funding in Cross River State, Nigeria?
- 2) Are there significant differences $\alpha=0.05$ in education leaders' perceptions of the administrative issues and challenges of socio-religious dimensions of higher education funding based on gender and experience?

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

A total of 146 respondents in positions of leadership attended to the copies of the instrument administered physically by the researchers at the two public Universities in the study area. These respondents consisted of all the Heads of Department (39%), Deans (25%), Provosts (10%), and Directors (26%) drawn from different faculties. They were both males and females, who were drawn through the census approach for the study because they were manageable. They were asked about their perceptions and the issues surrounding the socio-religious dimension of higher education funding. Figure 1 presents the characteristics of the respondents in the study according to their leadership positions.

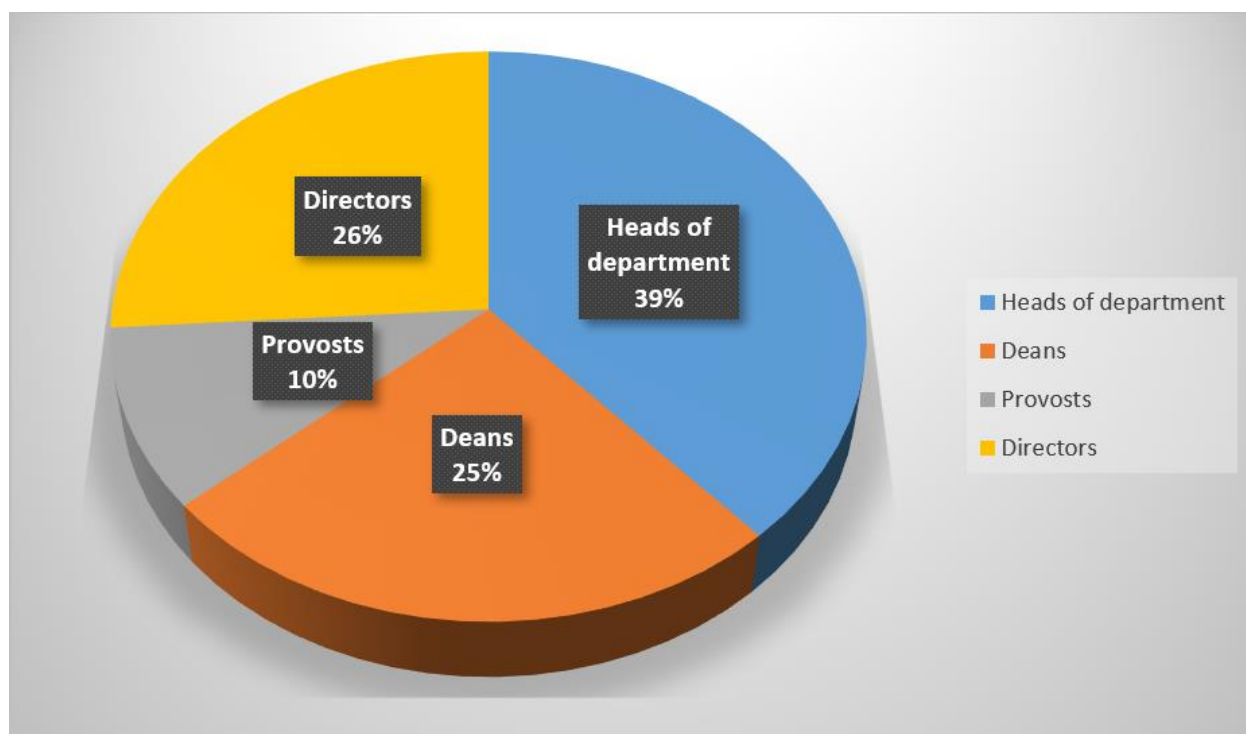


Figure 1. The percentage representation of respondents in the two public Universities.

3.2. Research Instruments and Analysis

A 34-item instrument, titled the Perception of Socio-Religious Funding Effectiveness in Higher Education Questionnaire (PSRFEHQ), was used for data collection. The instrument demonstrated good reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.84, indicating its suitability for data collection. The validation process involved the expertise of six experts from the Department of Test and Measurement at the University of Calabar. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A and Section B. Section A focused on gathering demographic information from the respondents, while Section B explored the effectiveness and issues related to the socio-religious dimensions of higher education funding. Each sub-independent variable in the study was measured using twenty items. To assess agreement or disagreement with the items, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement using response options: High Level (HL), Moderate Level (ML), and Low Level (LL). The mean of the

response options was scored accordingly, with HL ranging from 2.1 to 4.0, ML ranging from 1.1 to 2.0, and LL ranging from 0.1 to 1.0. To address the research questions, means, standard deviations, and t-test analyses were employed to analyze the collected data.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of education leaders on the effectiveness of socio-religious dimensions to higher education funding in Cross River State, Nigeria?

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation on the effectiveness of socio-religious dimensions to higher education funding.

Socio-religious organisations in higher education funding:	Mean	S.D	Level
Help to create a more equitable society by providing all students with the opportunity to reach their full potential	0.18	0.11	Low
Help to break down the barriers that exist between different groups of people	0.36	0.23	Low
Help to create a more inclusive and welcoming society for everyone	0.54	0.57	Low
Help to strengthen communities by providing students with the skills and knowledge they need to be productive members of society	0.72	0.73	Low
Help to create a more vibrant and prosperous school community for everyone	1.91	0.93	Moderate
Help to increase economic opportunity by providing students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the workforce	0.07	0.12	Low
Help to provide funding for career and technical education programmes	0.25	0.24	Low
supporting programs that help students to find jobs after they graduate	0.43	0.06	Low
Help to increase civic engagement by providing students with the knowledge and skills they need to be active citizens	0.62	0.58	Low
Help in providing funds for civic education programme	0.84	0.61	Low
Overall mean score	0.59	0.42	Low

Table 1 illustrates the perception of education leaders in the public universities of Cross River State regarding the effectiveness of socio-religious dimensions in higher education funding. The overall mean score indicates a low view of effectiveness, with a mean of 0.59 (SD = 0.42). Among the items, the statement "Socio-religious dimensions of higher education funding help to create a more vibrant and prosperous community for everyone" received the highest mean score of 1.91 (SD = 0.93). The second-highest mean score was for the item stating that socio-religious dimensions of higher education funding contribute to funding civics education programs, with a mean of 0.84 (SD = 0.61).

Conversely, the two items with the lowest scores were about the socio-religious dimension of higher education funding's impact on increasing economic opportunity and creating a more equitable society. The item stating that it helps increase economic opportunity by providing students with the skills and knowledge needed for workforce success received a mean score of 0.07 (SD = 0.12). The second item, which stated that it helps create a more equitable society by providing all students with the opportunity to reach their full potential, obtained a mean score of 0.18 (SD = 0.11). The results, as presented in the table, indicate that except for item 5, all other items fall within the range of 0.1 to 1.0 (Low Level). This suggests that respondents genuinely perceive that the effectiveness of socio-religious dimensions in higher education funding is yet to be realized in the sampled public universities in Cross River State.

4.2. Research Question 2

Are there significant differences at the level ($\alpha = 0.05$) in education leaders' perception on the issues of socio-religious dimensions to higher education funding based on gender and experience? To answer this research question, means, standard deviations, independent t- test were presented next.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations on the issues of socio-religious dimensions to higher education funding.

Socio-religious dimensions of higher education funding is:	Mean	S.D	Level
Exacerbating existing inequalities by favouring certain groups of students, such as students from low-income families or students of color	3.30	2.13	High
Creating disparities in educational outcomes with some groups of students receiving more resources than others	2.59	2.35	High
Leading to waste and inefficiency because there is often a lack of accountability for how educational funding is spent	3.78	2.57	High
Encouraging lack of transparency about how educational funding is decided and allocated	4.91	2.79	High
Making funding difficult for the public to hold decision-makers accountable	2.22	2.91	High
Very complex and bureaucratic, which makes it difficult to get funding to the schools and students who need it most	5.96	0.77	High
Too tedious because educational funding decisions are often influenced by political considerations	2.44	2.21	High
Leading to funding being diverted to pet projects or projects that do not have the best interests of students in mind	3.55	1.42	High
Very often inflexible, which makes it difficult to respond to changing needs	4.66	1.64	High
Currently unsustainable, as it is based on a growing reliance on debt	5.96	1.31	High
Filled with a great deal of uncertainty about the future of educational funding, as it is subject to political and economic changes	2.18	1.08	High
Devoid of consensus on the best way to fund education, which makes it difficult to make progress on reforms	3.22	1.19	High
Replete with socio-religious groups such that those with more resources often have more access to quality education, while those with fewer resources are at a disadvantage.	4.34	1.32	High
Supporting students from certain socio-religious groups who may face discrimination in their access to education even in the classroom	5.45	1.53	High
Enhancing some educational programme that serve specific socio-religious groups not to receive adequate funding for providing quality education	2.57	3.74	High
Making it difficult for students from different socio-religious backgrounds to feel represented and respected since the teaching force in many schools is not diverse	2.62	1.95	High
Making teachers and administrators to become insensitive to the needs of students from different socio-religious backgrounds, which makes it more difficult for these students to succeed in school	3.78	2.22	High
Blocking students from different socio-religious backgrounds from receiving the support they need to succeed in school, such as tutoring, counseling, or financial assistance	4.84	2.43	High
Forcing students from different socio-religious backgrounds to face negative stereotypes from their peers and teachers, which makes it difficult for them to succeed in school	2.90	2.62	High
Making students from different socio-religious backgrounds to face violence and harassment from their peers and teachers, which makes it difficult for them to succeed in school	2.42	2.83	High
Making students from different socio-religious backgrounds to have limited opportunities to pursue higher education or other post-secondary options thus limiting their future success	2.51	2.02	High
Making students from different socio-religious backgrounds to have different educational outcomes, with students from more privileged groups having more opportunities for success	2.32	2.25	High
Overall mean score	3.53	2.14	High

Table 2 presents the perspectives of education leaders in public universities in Cross River State regarding the key issues related to socio-religious dimensions of higher education funding. The overall mean score indicates that they hold high views on these issues, with a mean of 3.53 (SD = 2.14). This is evident from their detailed responses to the individual survey items. The two items that received the highest mean scores were: "Socio-religious dimensions of higher education funding are currently unsustainable as it is based on a growing reliance on debts" and "Socio-religious dimensions of higher education funding is very complex and bureaucratic, which makes it difficult to get funding to the schools and students who need it most". Both items scored 'high', with means of 5.96 (SD = 1.31) for each item. Conversely, the two items that scored the lowest were: "Socio-religious dimensions of higher education funding is filled with a great deal of uncertainty about the future of educational funding, as they are subject to political and economic changes" and "Socio-religious dimensions of higher education funding are making funding difficult for the public to hold decision-makers accountable". These items had means of 2.22 (SD = 2.91) and 2.18 (SD = 1.08) respectively. However, it is important to note that all responses to the items were within the 'high' level, indicating the strong perspectives of the participants regarding the issues surrounding socio-religious dimensions of higher education funding in the study area.

Table 3. The means and standard deviations of male and female leaders' perceptions on the effectiveness and issues surrounding socio-religious dimensions of higher education funding on their personal and professional lives were calculated and presented.

Domains	Sex	N	Mean	S.D
Educational effectiveness	Male	72	3.85	0.75
	Female	74	3.62	0.89
Funding issues	Male	72	3.85	0.78
	Female	74	3.65	0.94

Table 3 demonstrates noticeable differences in the mean scores between female and male educational leaders' perceptions regarding the educational effectiveness and funding issues associated with socio-religious dimensions of higher education. Male educational leaders exhibited stronger views in both domains, with mean scores of 3.85 (SD=0.75) for effectiveness and 3.85 (SD=0.78) for funding issues. Conversely, female educational leaders had mean scores of 3.62 (SD=0.89) and 3.65 (SD=0.94) for the same domains. But to examine the significance of the differences between male and female educational leaders concerning the effectiveness and funding issues related to socio-religious dimensions of higher education, a t-test was conducted, and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. T-test comparison of gender differences on the effectiveness and funding issues surrounding the socio-religious dimensions of higher education.

Domains	F	Sig.	T	df
Effectiveness	3.339	0.070	1.451	144
Funding issues	2.715	0.102	1.710	144

Table 4 reveals that there were no statistically significant differences in perceptions between male and female education leaders in both domains. For the effectiveness domain, the t-value was 1.451 (p=0.70), and for the issues of socio-religious dimensions of higher education, the t-value was 1.710 (p=0.102). These results indicate that male and female education leaders held similar views on the effectiveness and issues of socio-religious dimensions of higher education in Cross River State. Based on their experiences, the perceptions of education leaders regarding the effectiveness and funding issues surrounding the socio-religious dimension of higher education funding were calculated and presented in Table 5.

Table 5 reveals significant differences in education leaders' perceptions based on their experiences regarding the effectiveness and issues surrounding socio-religious dimensions of higher education funding. In the effectiveness domain, the group with less than 2 years of experience had the lowest mean score of 2.66 (SD=0.66), while the group with 2 to less than 10 years of experience had the highest mean score of 3.85 (SD=0.85). Similarly, concerning the issues surrounding socio-religious dimensions of higher education funding, the group with less than 2 years of experience had the lowest mean score of 2.85 (SD=1.08), while the group with 2 to less than 10 years of experience had the highest mean score of 3.79 (SD=0.90).

Table 5. Means and standard deviations of education leaders' perceptions on the effectiveness and issues surrounding the socio -religious dimension of higher education funding.

Domains	Experience	N	Mean	S.D
		Less than 2 years	40	2.66
Effectiveness	2-less than 10 years	57	3.85	0.85
	10 years and more	49	3.76	0.70
	Total	146	3.78	0.80
	Less than 2 years	40	2.85	1.08
Funding issues	2-less than 10 years	57	3.79	0.90
	10 years and more	49	3.76	0.75
	Total	146	3.75	0.84

5. DISCUSSION

Education leaders in Cross River State perceive socio-religious organizations as ineffective in providing funding for public universities. This finding suggests that these organizations have not met expectations in terms of funding higher education in the study area. They have been unable to support career and technical education programs, assist students in finding employment opportunities after graduation, and enhance civic engagement by equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills to become active citizens. The reasons behind this finding could be attributed to the various challenges faced by socio-religious organizations in Nigeria when it comes to funding higher education. These challenges include limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, restricted access to funding sources, and limited institutional capacity. This finding aligns with the research conducted by [Darnell and Sherkat \(2017\)](#), who discovered that socio-religious involvement does not have a positive association with educational attainment, even after accounting for factors such as socioeconomic status and race. It is consistent with the findings of [Ecklund and Park \(2015\)](#) and [Mayhew and Lessard \(2019\)](#), who found that religious involvement in university education management does not positively impact student success, including academic achievement, retention, and graduation. Additionally, it aligns with the findings of [Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling \(2016\)](#), who determined that religious involvement fails to provide students with a sense of community, support, and encouragement. Thus, the perception of education leaders in Cross River State highlights the limited effectiveness of socio-religious organizations in funding higher education and supporting student success in various aspects.

Furthermore, education leaders found no significant differences in the funding issues related to socio-religious organizations' contributions to higher education based on gender and experience. The findings revealed that these organizations may be exacerbating existing inequalities by favoring specific groups of students, such as those from low-income families or students of color, among other issues. This finding could be attributed to the fact that some socio-religious organizations are creating disparities in educational outcomes by allocating more resources to certain groups while neglecting others. As a result, there is a lack of transparency in how educational funding decisions are made and distributed ([Ahmed, 2018](#)). Additionally, students from different socio-religious backgrounds may face negative stereotypes from their peers and lecturers, hindering their academic success ([Frimpong & Osei-Tutu, 2020](#)). This situation creates an unfavorable school climate, leading to violence and harassment against students from diverse socio-religious backgrounds by their peers and lecturers ([Ismail, 2017](#)). The implication of this finding is that many socio-religious organizations may face limitations in scaling their scholarship programs to reach a larger number of students. They may lack the necessary resources, expertise, or systems to effectively manage a wide-scale scholarship program in public universities in Cross River State, thus contributing to these challenges. Therefore, addressing these issues will require collaborative efforts from socio-religious organizations, the government, and other stakeholders to ensure that scholarship programs are effective, transparent, and accessible to all students.

6. CONCLUSION

For numerous years, insufficient funding has had a significantly negative impact on higher education in Nigeria, thereby affecting the administrative responsibilities of education leaders. The list of Nigerian institutions that have suffered from a decline in research quality, facilities, and educational standards due to a lack of financial resources is extensive. However, one of the most significant consequences of inadequate funding is the universities' inability

to attract and retain highly qualified teachers. Therefore, it is crucial for education leaders to carefully assess the impact and implications of any external funding sources, including socio-religious organizations. It is essential that such funding align with the principles of quality education, inclusivity, and educational autonomy. Socio-religious organizations should prioritize providing scholarships to marginalized groups, such as girls, individuals with disabilities, and students from low-income backgrounds. This approach can contribute to reducing educational disparities and promoting inclusivity in higher education.

Socio-religious organizations should engage in collaborative efforts with other stakeholders, including the government, educational institutions, and private sector organizations, to leverage resources and expertise for the purpose of supporting higher education funding. These organizations should actively explore innovative funding models, such as crowd funding, social impact bonds, and other alternative finance methods, to contribute to higher education funding. Furthermore, it is imperative that individuals actively support and champion legislative reforms aimed at facilitating greater financial resources for institutions of higher education. Additionally, these reforms should also strive to provide incentives for expanded participation from the private sector within the education domain. By taking these proactive measures, socio-religious organizations can play an active and supportive role in addressing the funding challenges faced by higher education in Nigeria. This collaborative approach will help ensure that more students have access to the education and skills necessary for their success in life.

7. POLICY PROPOSALS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING AND THE IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Based on the findings of this study, it is crucial to propose policies that can facilitate and enhance collaborations between socio-religious organizations, the government, and institutional frameworks to provide financial support for higher education in Cross River State, Nigeria. These collaborations should be targeted and incentivized through measures such as tax breaks, subsidies, or other forms of support. Additionally, scholarship programs funded by socio-religious organizations should be established to offer financial assistance to students in Cross River State, Nigeria, pursuing higher education. Moreover, the proposed policy initiatives should be implemented through effective strategies that involve stakeholder engagement. This includes actively involving socio-religious organizations, educational institutions, and government officials in the implementation process to ensure their buy-in and support. Furthermore, the government should launch comprehensive public awareness campaigns to educate the public about the advantages of socio-religious organizations' involvement in funding higher education in Cross River State, Nigeria. By implementing these policy proposals and engaging various stakeholders, it is possible to bring about structural transformations and foster increased collaborations that support higher education funding in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Furthermore, it is crucial for the government to offer capacity-building programs to socio-religious organizations and educational institutions. These programs will enable them to effectively access and utilize funding opportunities. To ensure the success of the policy proposals, a monitoring and evaluation framework should be established. This framework will track the effectiveness of the proposals and allow for necessary adjustments. Flexibility and adaptability should be encouraged in the implementation process to accommodate changing circumstances and needs. Regular feedback should be sought from stakeholders, including socio-religious organizations, educational institutions, and government officials, to ensure that the policy proposals are meeting their needs and expectations.

Moreover, there is a need to scale up these policy proposals and implementation strategies to other states in Nigeria and potentially other countries. This expansion will increase access to higher education funding for underprivileged students. Therefore, the proposed policies and strategies aim to improve access to higher education funding for underprivileged students in Cross River State, Nigeria, by harnessing the resources and expertise of socio-religious organizations. By fostering collaboration, providing incentives, and raising awareness, these proposals have the potential to enhance access to higher education and promote social mobility in Nigeria.

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD STATEMENT

The Ethical Committee of the University of Calabar, Nigeria has granted approval for this study on 2 April 2023 (Ref. No. UC/VC/ADM/19⁸).

TRANSPARENCY

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, writing the original draft, methodology, data collection, formal analysis, approval, V.G.O.; editing, resources, software, data collection, project management, approval, C.A.B.; technical support, data collection, approval, O.E.O.; validation, visualization, approval, G.E.A.; supervision, data collection, approval, B.D.O. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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