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INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN TEACHING ON ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE NORTH CENTRAL REGION OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of Christian teachings on the environmental stewardship of secondary school students in the North Central region of Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all students and teachers from fifty (50) mission-owned or Christian-oriented secondary schools across the region. Using a simple random sampling technique, a sample of 560 students and 40 teachers was selected from six secondary schools across Benue State, Plateau State and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Data was collected using a 10-item structured instrument titled "Christian Teachings and Environmental Stewardship Questionnaire" (CTESQ), which was validated by three experts and yielded a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.85. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics of Mean ($\bar{X}$) and Standard Deviation (SD). The findings of the study revealed that secondary school students in North Central Nigeria possess a high level of awareness regarding Christian teachings on environmental stewardship (Grand Mean = 2.98), particularly concerning the biblical mandates of creation care (Genesis 2:15) and divine ownership of the earth (Psalm 24:1). Furthermore, the study established that while Christian teachings exert a positive, moderate influence on students' ecological attitudes and moral perceptions (Grand Mean = 2.73) with many

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viewing environmental destruction as a sin—there exists a significant "awareness-to-action" gap. Students' faith did not strongly translate into active physical participation in conservation practices, such as tree planting ($\bar{X}$=2.41) or community advocacy ($\bar{X}$=2.38), due to a lack of structured environmental activities within the school curricula. Based on these findings, it was recommended among others that the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with Christian education boards, should systematically integrate practical environmental stewardship modules into the Christian Religious Studies (CRS) curriculum, and that faith-based schools should establish active "Creation Care" clubs to bridge the gap between theological theory and ecological action.

Introduction

Environmental stewardship involves the responsible use and protection of the natural environment through sustainable practices, conservation and ethical responsibility. In contemporary society, the degradation of the environment due to industrialization, deforestation, pollution and climate change has become a pressing global concern. Nations, organizations and individuals are increasingly recognizing the need to adopt sustainable practices to mitigate these challenges. In Nigeria, the situation is no different with the country experiencing significant environmental issues such as oil spillage in the Niger Delta, deforestation in the northern regions, urban waste mismanagement and erosion in the eastern areas (United Nations, 2022). These challenges necessitate a concerted effort toward environmental stewardship. Indeed, Christian teachings provide a framework that emphasizes the care and preservation of the earth as seen in the biblical mandate for stewardship (Agbiji, 2018). Genesis 1:26-28 emphasises humanity's dominion over creation, a dominion that is not exploitative but grounded in responsibility and care for God's creation. Psalms 24:1 further reinforces that "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it," affirming that humanity holds the earth in trust. These teachings offer a moral and ethical basis for environmental stewardship, resonating with the growing global emphasis on sustainable development, fostering sustainability and ethical environmental practices among secondary schools students especially in the North central region of Nigeria (Anozie, 2020).

Accordingly, secondary school as institutions where values and lifelong habits are formed, play a crucial role in promoting environmental awareness and stewardship (Anozie, 2020). Educating young individuals about the significance of environmental care aligns with the Christian ethos of love, justice, and stewardship (Eguabor, 2018). Through Christian teachings, students are encouraged to view environmental stewardship as a divine obligation rather than a mere societal expectation (Udo and Adekunle, 2019). Such

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teachings emphasize the interconnectedness of all creation, the intrinsic value of nature and the moral imperative to protect it for future generations (Ramose, 2021). In the Nigerian context, the influence of religious education is profound, given the significant of Christian population and the role of the religion in education (Adeyemo, 2017). Many secondary schools especially mission-owned or Christian-oriented institutions integrate biblical principles into their curricula and extracurricular activities (Okafor and Adebayo, 2020). As such, study by Uche and Obi, (2018) investigates how these teachings influence the environmental attitudes and practices of secondary school students in Nigeria. Also, Nwankwo, (2021) in his study explores whether Christian teachings on stewardship translate into tangible actions such as waste management, tree planting and advocacy for sustainable practices.

Therefore, the relevance of this study cannot be overstated. As Nigeria grapples with environmental challenges, fostering a sense of stewardship among the youth is critical for the country's sustainable future. By examining the intersection of faith and environmental action in secondary schools, this research aims to provide insights that could inform policy-making, curriculum design and community engagement strategies. In framing this study, various scholarly perspectives on environmental stewardship and Christian teachings will be further reviewed. Works by theologians such as Sleeth, (2020) who advocates for a biblical view of environmentalism and Pope Francis (2015) whose encyclical *Laudato Si'* addresses ecological concerns that provide a theological foundation. Also, African thinkers like Gyekye (2019) and Christian ethicists in Nigeria contribute to contextualizing environmental ethics within African and Christian paradigms. This integration of biblical, theological and ethical perspectives underpins the research, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the topic. Ultimately, the study seeks to inspire a generation of young Nigerians who view environmental stewardship not just as a civic duty but as an expression of their faith and commitment to God's creation.

Problem Statement

Environmental degradation has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges of the 21st century and Nigeria at large is no exception. From deforestation, oil spillage and flooding to the improper disposal of waste, the country's natural resources are under significant threat. These environmental crises are exacerbated by a lack of awareness, poor policy implementation and limited community participation in environmental preservation. In the face of these challenges, the younger generation often exhibits apathy or a lack of understanding regarding their role in environmental stewardship. Amid these challenges, secondary schools where students are in a critical stage of value formation present a unique opportunity to foster a culture of environmental responsibility. Yet, it remains unclear how effectively Christian teachings on

environmental stewardship have been integrated into the education system and whether these teachings significantly influence students' attitudes and practices regarding environmental care. The Bible emphasizes humanity's responsibility to care for the earth as seen in passages like Genesis 2:15 where Adam is tasked to "work and take care of" the Garden of Eden. Similarly, Christian teachings advocate for justice and love which extend to the treatment of the environment and the well-being of future generations. However, there is a lack of empirical data on the extent to which these teachings shape the environmental consciousness of students in Nigerian secondary schools, particularly in a context where environmental education is not always prioritized in the curriculum. This gap in understanding presents a significant problem. If Christian teachings which are deeply embedded in the ethos of many Nigerian secondary schools are not effectively instilling environmental stewardship, an opportunity to address the nation's environmental challenges through education is being missed. This study therefore seeks to address these problems by examining the influence of Christian teaching on environmental stewardship among secondary school in the North Central region of Nigeria.

Literature Review

The study of the influence of Christian teachings on environmental stewardship has gained significant attention in academic and theological discourse especially in the context of education. This review explores the perspectives of various scholars, theologians and researchers, highlighting the relationship between Christian teachings, environmental ethics and the education of secondary school students in Nigeria. Christian theology provides a robust foundation for environmental stewardship that emphasizes on humanity's responsibility to care for creation. Bauckham (2018) in *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* discusses how biblical texts particularly Genesis 1:26-28 and Psalm 24:1, underscore the role of humans as stewards of God's creation. Bauckham argues that dominion over the earth as described in Genesis is not a license for exploitation but a call for responsible management and care. This interpretation has direct implications for education, as it encourages the integration of environmental ethics into curricula grounded in Christian principles. Similarly, Sleeth (2020) in *Serve God, Save the Planet* highlights the role of Christian teachings in promoting sustainable living. Sleeth asserts that understanding God's love for creation inspires individuals, including students to adopt practices that protect and sustain the environment. His work is particularly relevant to secondary education where moral and ethical values are instilled in students.

Faith-based schools are uniquely positioned to influence students' attitudes towards environmental stewardship through the integration of religious principles into education.

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DeWitt (2021), in his essay "Creation Care and Christian Environmental Stewardship," emphasizes that faith-based institutions have a moral responsibility to model and teach sustainable practices. He suggests that environmental stewardship should be embedded in the ethos of Christian schools, shaping students' behaviours and attitudes toward nature. In the Nigerian context, Agbiji and Swart (2015) explore the role of faith-based organizations in promoting environmental sustainability. Their study published in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* highlights how Christian teachings in Nigerian schools can foster a sense of responsibility among students. They argue that the inclusion of biblical principles in environmental education not only instills a moral obligation but also creates a platform for advocacy and action. Despite the potential benefits, several challenges exist in integrating Christian teachings on environmental stewardship into secondary school education. Hitzhusen (2017) in his work on the role of religion in environmental education, identifies a lack of trained educators who can effectively merge theological concepts with environmental science. He also points out the tension between modern ecological concerns and traditional interpretations of scripture which may hinder the adoption of progressive environmental practices in some religious schools. In Nigeria, similar challenges are evident. Iwe (2022) in *Christian Ethics and the Nigerian Society* notes that the lack of environmental consciousness among Nigerian youth is partly due to a weak emphasis on ecological issues in Christian teachings. He suggests that a more proactive approach by churches and faith-based schools could bridge this gap.

Empirical studies further validate the influence of Christian teachings on environmental stewardship among students. Omojuwa and Ajayi (2019) conducted research on secondary schools in southwestern Nigeria, examining how biblical principles influenced students' attitudes toward environmental issues. Their findings published in the *Journal of Christian Education* reveal that schools that incorporated environmental themes into Bible studies and chapel services reported higher levels of environmental awareness among students. Also, Anozie (2020) in Environmental Sustainability in Nigeria: The Role of Faith-Based Organizations highlights case studies of Nigerian schools that have adopted tree-planting campaigns and waste management programmes as part of their Christian ethos. These schools demonstrated significant improvement in students' practical engagement with environmental issues, reinforcing the role of Christian teachings in fostering sustainable practices. Globally, Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) has been influential in advocating for ecological consciousness within Christian communities. The encyclical emphasizes the interconnectedness of all creation and the moral imperative for Christians to address environmental degradation. This global perspective resonates with efforts in Nigerian schools, where the integration of Christian teachings on stewardship can be contextualized within local environmental challenges. Similarly, Conradie (2016) in Christian Theology and Environmental Responsibility explores

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the theological underpinnings of environmental action providing a framework that can be adapted to educational contexts. His work offers practical insights for incorporating creation care into school programmes by emphasizing the role of religious education in shaping environmental attitudes.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigates the influence of Christian teaching on environmental stewardship of secondary school in the North Central region of Nigeria. The researcher specifically intends to:

1. examine the level of awareness of Christian teachings on environmental stewardship of secondary school students in the North Central region of Nigeria.
2. assess the extent to which Christian teachings influence students' attitudes towards environmental conservation and care.

Research Questions

This study would provide answers to the following research questions.

1. What is the level of awareness of Christian teachings on environmental stewardship of secondary school students in the North Central region of Nigeria?
2. To what extent do Christian teachings shape students' attitudes and perceptions regarding environmental conservation in the North Central region of Nigeria?

Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate the influence of Christian teachings on environmental stewardship of secondary school students in the North Central region of Nigeria. This design was suitable as it enabled the researchers to gather relevant data on existing attitudes, practices, and perceptions related to the subject of study. The population for this study comprised all students and teachers from 50 mission-owned or Christian-oriented secondary schools located in the North Central region of Nigeria. Simple random sampling techniques were used to select 560 students and 40 teachers from two secondary schools each, making up a total of 6 secondary schools across three states (namely Benue, Plateau, and the Federal Capital Territory). A trial test was conducted with 50 students from 2 secondary schools in Nasarawa State that were not part of the main study. The purpose of the trial test was to ensure the clarity, reliability, and validity of the proposed research instrument. The primary data collection tool was a ten (10) item structured questionnaire titled: "Christian Teachings and Environmental Stewardship Questionnaire" (CTESQ), designed on a four-point Likert scale of; Strongly Agree (4); Agree (3); Disagree (2); and Strongly Disagree (1).

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The validity of the instrument was reviewed by three experts: two professors from the Department of Christian Religious Studies, University of Abuja, one lecturer from the Department of Environmental Education, University of Jos and an associate professor from the Faculty of Education, University of Abuja, all in Nigeria. Their expertise ensured the questionnaire's content validity, relevance and alignment with the study objectives. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested during the trial test using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.85, demonstrating a high level of internal consistency. Upon obtaining the necessary approvals, the researchers distributed the questionnaires during a two-week field visit to the selected schools. Permission was sought from school authorities, and the process was supervised to ensure high response rates and accurate completion of the questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed by the researcher accompanied by three (3) research assistants. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically Mean scores and standard deviation.

Data Analysis and Results

Research Question 1: *What is the level of awareness of Christian teachings on environmental stewardship of secondary school students in the North Central region of Nigeria?*

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Level of Awareness of Christian Teachings on Environmental Stewardship (N=560)

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Dev (SD)	Dec.
1.	I am aware of the biblical mandate in Genesis 2:15 to "work and take care of" God's creation.	3.42	0.68	Agree
2.	I have been taught in school/chapel that the earth belongs to God (Psalm 24:1) and humanity is only a caretaker.	3.28	0.74	Agree
3.	I am aware that Christian teachings view environmental degradation (e.g., pollution, deforestation) as a failure of stewardship.	2.85	0.89	Agree
4.	I know that caring for the environment is an expression of Christian love towards my neighbors and future generations.	3.12	0.81	Agree
5.	Our Christian Religious Studies (CRS) curriculum frequently teaches lessons specifically focused on nature conservation.	2.24	0.95	Disagree
	Grand Mean / Average Standard Deviation	**2.98**	**0.81**	**High**

Table 1 shows the responses of secondary school students regarding their level of awareness of Christian teachings on environmental stewardship. The results reveal that students agreed with Item 1, indicating a high level of awareness of the biblical mandate

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in Genesis 2:15 (X^-=3.42, SD=0.68). Similarly, they agreed that they have been taught that the earth belongs to God (Item 2: X^-=3.28, SD=0.74) and that caring for the environment is an expression of Christian love (Item 4: X^-=3.12, SD=0.81). However, students disagreed with Item 5, showing that their Christian Religious Studies (CRS) curriculum rarely features lessons specifically focused on nature conservation (X^-=2.24, SD=0.95). Overall, the Grand Mean of 2.98 (which is well above the cut-off point of 2.50) indicates that secondary school students in the North Central region of Nigeria possess a high level of awareness regarding Christian teachings on environmental stewardship. This awareness is largely rooted in general biblical principles rather than a structured environmental curriculum.

Research Question 2: *To what extent do Christian teachings shape students' attitudes and perceptions regarding environmental conservation in the North Central region of Nigeria?*

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Influence of Christian Teachings on Students' Attitudes Toward Environmental Conservation (N=560)

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean (X^-)	Std. Dev (SD)	Dec.
6.	My belief in Christian stewardship makes me feel personally responsible for keeping my school environment clean.	3.18	0.79	Agree
7.	Because of my Christian faith, I actively participate in school environmental activities like tree planting and proper waste disposal.	2.41	1.02	Disagree
8.	I believe that destroying plants, wasting water, and littering are sins against God's creation.	2.94	0.86	Agree
9.	Christian teachings have changed my attitude toward how I handle household and school waste.	2.76	0.91	Agree
10.	I feel motivated by my faith to speak up or advocate against environmental pollution in my community.	2.38	0.98	Disagree
	Grand Mean / Average Standard Deviation	**2.73**	**0.91**	**Moderate**

Table 2 addresses the extent to which Christian teachings translate into student attitudes and actual behaviors. The data show that students agreed that their belief in stewardship makes them feel personally responsible for school cleanliness (Item 6: X^-=3.18, SD=0.79) and that they perceive environmental destruction as a sin against God's creation (Item 8: X^-=2.94, SD=0.86).

Conversely, students disagreed with Item 7, revealing that their faith does not strongly translate into active participation in practical school environmental activities like tree planting (X^-=2.41, SD=1.02). They also expressed a lack of motivation to advocate against

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community pollution (Item 10: $\bar{X}$=2.38, SD=0.98). The Grand Mean of 2.73 indicates that while Christian teachings have a positive moderate influence on shaping students' general attitudes and cognitive perceptions toward environmental care, this influence is currently passive. There is a noticeable gap when it comes to translating these faith-based attitudes into concrete, practical environmental actions (like waste management campaigns, planting trees, or advocacy).

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study have provided critical empirical insights into how Christian teachings interface with ecological responsibility among youth in North Central Nigeria. The discussion is structured around the two primary themes of the study: students' theological awareness of environmental stewardship, and the translation of that awareness into practical ecological attitudes and behaviors.

The analysis of Research Question One (Table 1) revealed that secondary school students in the North Central region of Nigeria possess a remarkably high level of awareness regarding Christian teachings on environmental stewardship, as indicated by a Grand Mean of 2.98. Students strongly recognized the biblical mandate of creation care in Genesis 2:15 ($\bar{X}$=3.42) and acknowledged the sovereign ownership of the earth by God as expressed in Psalm 24:1 ($\bar{X}$=3.28). This finding strongly supports the assertions of Bauckham (2018), who argued that biblical texts do not grant humanity a license for tyrannical exploitation, but rather issue a clear call for responsible caretaking and preservation. The students' high cognitive awareness of these passages indicates that basic theological concepts of "humanity as a trustee of God's property" are well-understood. This also aligns with Sleeth (2020), who noted that when young people understand God's love for creation, it provides them with a profound moral foundation for environmental consciousness. However, a critical contradiction emerged: while students exhibited high spiritual and moral awareness, they disagreed with the assertion that their Christian Religious Studies (CRS) curriculum frequently features structured lessons specifically dedicated to environmental conservation ($\bar{X}$=2.24). This indicates that the high level of awareness is driven by general biblical literacy and pulpit sermons rather than systematic academic instruction.

The results from Research Question Two (Table 2) showed that Christian teachings exert a positive, moderate influence on students' attitudes toward environmental conservation (Grand Mean = 2.73). Notably, students' faith shaped their internal belief systems; they felt a personal responsibility to keep their school clean ($\bar{X}$=3.18) and strongly perceived environmental destruction, wasting water, and littering as sins against God's creation ($\bar{X}$=2.94). This internal cognitive shift validates the theological framework of Pope Francis (2015) in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which calls for an "ecological conversion" where the

effects of an individual's encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Viewing ecological carelessness as a spiritual failure (a "sin") suggests that Christian ethics are highly effective at forming an internal ecological conscience. However, the empirical data exposed a significant "awareness-to-action" gap. While students held positive attitudes, their faith did not strongly translate into active physical participation in school-level environmental conservation activities, such as tree planting ($\bar{X}$=2.41), nor did it motivate them to actively advocate against pollution in their wider communities ($\bar{X}$=2.38).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that while Christian teachings are a powerful tool for environmental conservation among youth in North Central Nigeria, they remain largely underutilized. Secondary school students possess a strong theological foundation in "creation care," viewing ecological degradation as a spiritual failure. However, a critical gap exists between this faith-based awareness and practical action (such as waste management and tree planting). This disconnect is structural: the Christian Religious Studies (CRS) curriculum lacks hands-on ecological training, and faith-based schools rarely offer platforms for environmental activism. To address Nigeria's growing ecological crises, educational and religious institutions must transition from passive theology to active ecological modeling equipping students to translate their faith into lifelong environmental stewardship.

Recommendations

To bridge the gap between theological awareness and practical environmental action among secondary school students in North Central Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), in collaboration with Christian education stakeholders, should review and enrich the Christian Religious Studies (CRS) curriculum to include dedicated, practical modules on ecological stewardship, Christian environmental ethics, and sustainable resource management.
2. Mission-owned and Christian-oriented secondary schools should establish active extracurricular green clubs (e.g., "Creation Care Clubs" or "Eco-Stewardship Societies"). These clubs should lead practical campus initiatives such as recycling drives, compound beautification, and tree-planting campaigns to give students a physical outlet for their faith.
3. Faith-based school administrators should actively model ecological stewardship by implementing school-wide environmental policies. This includes enforcing proper

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waste segregation, minimizing single-use plastics on school grounds, and maintaining green spaces, thereby creating an environment where "creation care" is lived rather than just preached.

4. School proprietors and the Ministry of Education should organize capacity-building workshops and seminars for CRS teachers and chapel coordinators. This will equip them with the pedagogical skills and cross-disciplinary knowledge required to effectively blend biblical theology with practical environmental science.
5. Secondary schools should partner with local churches, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community leaders to involve students in regional environmental advocacy and ecological restoration projects (e.g., erosion control or community cleaning days), fostering a broader sense of civic and religious responsibility.

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