

Interfaith Education in Kenya: Building Curricula for Christian-Muslim Understanding

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Abstract

This article examines the critical role of interfaith education in fostering sustainable Christian-Muslim understanding in Kenya, where over 70% of the population is under the age of 30. Using a qualitative research design grounded in documentary analysis and thematic synthesis, the study evaluates the transition from colonial-era educational dualism toward integrated pedagogical frameworks. The research utilizes a "Triple-Pillar" conceptual model integrating the African communal philosophy of Ubuntu, the Islamic ethic of Ummah, and the Christian theological principle of Communion (Koinonia) to propose a relational ethics model for inclusive curricula. By analysing contemporary policy shifts, specifically the National Education Sector Strategic Plan 2023–2027, and institutional case studies from St. Paul's University, the study identifies how "pedagogies of encounter" and Scriptural Reasoning can mitigate historical religious silos. Despite these innovations, the findings highlight significant barriers, including conservative theological resistance, the "digital divide" in marginalized regions, and the political instrumentalization of religious identity. The article argues for a unified, historically honest curriculum that moves beyond abstract tolerance toward deep inter-religious engagement, offering actionable recommendations for standardized teacher training and multi-sectoral partnerships between state and religious bodies.

Keywords: *Interfaith Education, Kenya, Ubuntu, Christian-Muslim Relations, Curriculum Development, Values-Based Education.*

1.0 Introduction

Kenya's religious landscape is defined by its profound diversity, with Christianity and Islam standing as the two largest traditions alongside African traditional religions and smaller faith communities. While this plurality has historically enriched the nation's social fabric, religious differences have at times been exploited for political gain, leading to cycles of mistrust and social conflict. In a nation where the youth constitute over 70 per cent of the population, the classroom becomes a critical arena for fostering a culture of peaceful coexistence. Interfaith education, defined as structured learning that promotes understanding between different religious traditions, offers a transformative pathway to turn these diverse encounters into opportunities for mutual respect and dialogue.

1.1 Background of the Study

The urgency for structured interfaith curricula is underscored by Kenya's specific demographic and social realities. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2020), Christians make up approximately 85.5% of the population, while Muslims constitute 10.9%. These figures highlight a society where interfaith interaction is a daily necessity for national stability. Recent reports from civil society organizations, such as the Kenya Christian Professionals Forum (2023), emphasize that religious polarization, combined with high youth unemployment and family pressures, makes the implementation of interfaith curricula essential.

Current scholarship suggests that African communal philosophies, such as Ubuntu, and Islamic concepts of community, like Ummah, provide the “atmospheric spaces” necessary for meaningful dialogue. This study further integrates the Christian theological concept of Communion (*Koinonia*), which emphasizes a deep, participatory fellowship and shared life that transcends individual boundaries. By linking *Communion* with *Ubuntu* and *Ummah*, the study argues for a relational ethics framework where human flourishing is inseparable from communal well-being.

Despite these rich resources, Kenya’s educational history is marked by a dual system: colonial missionary schools and the madrasa system. This created parallel tracks of religious formation that often reinforced communal divisions. In response, the National Education Sector Strategic Plan 2023–2027 (Ministry of Education, 2024) has explicitly prioritized peace education and interfaith harmony as essential components of national curriculum reform.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

While the Ministry of Education (2024) has recognized the need for interfaith harmony, current pedagogical practices often keep Christian Religious Education (CRE) and Islamic Religious Education (IRE) strictly separated. This “siloes” approach limits the ability of students to learn about their neighbours’ traditions, often perpetuating stereotypes and leaving historical grievances regarding marginalization unaddressed. Without a curriculum that intentionally integrates interfaith perspectives and shared values like *Communion*, *Ubuntu*, and *Ummah*, the education system risks failing a generation that must navigate an increasingly pluralistic society.

1.3 Research Objectives

This article explores how curricula can be designed to promote Christian-Muslim understanding by focusing on the following objectives:

1. Analyse the theological and philosophical foundations of *Ubuntu*, *Ummah*, and *Communion* as complementary resources for interfaith pedagogy.
2. Examine the historical evolution of Christian-Muslim relations in Kenya to identify lessons for modern curriculum integration.
3. Evaluate current interfaith practices in universities, theological institutions, and grassroots communities to highlight existing models of success.
4. Identify systemic challenges including resource constraints, resistance from conservative groups, and political manipulation that hinder curriculum development.
5. Propose innovative recommendations for inclusive design, teacher training, and climate-resilient pedagogy.

1.4 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following core questions:

1. How can the values of *Ubuntu*, *Ummah*, and *Communion* be operationalized into a shared ethical framework for Kenyan classrooms?
2. What impact has the legacy of parallel missionary and madrasa education had on contemporary interfaith relations?
3. What are the primary barriers to implementing interfaith modules at the primary and secondary school levels?
4. In what ways can digital platforms and youth-led innovations serve as catalysts for interfaith understanding?

1.5 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in documentary analysis and thematic synthesis. The data gathering follows a three-tiered approach:

1. Policy Review: Analysis of the *National Education Sector Strategic Plan 2023–2027* and KICD guidelines.

2. Comparative Literature Synthesis: A cross-disciplinary validation of *Ubuntu*, *Ummah*, and *Koinonia*.
3. Institutional Case Studies: Purposive sampling of interfaith models at St. Paul's University. This ensures that the findings are anchored in the lived realities and institutional policies of the Kenyan educational landscape.

2.0 The Triologue of Communal Values: Ubuntu, Ummah, and Communion

African communal philosophies, Islamic concepts of community, and Christian theological foundations provide a multidimensional resource for interfaith education. Ubuntu, often summarized by the Mbiti (1999) axiom "I am because we are," emphasizes the ontological truth that human flourishing is inseparable from communal well-being. It centres on *umunthu* (personhood), mutual care, and the inherent dignity of every individual within the social fabric. Chidongo (2023) argues that Ubuntu creates "atmospheric spaces" for dialogue, enabling diverse communities to encounter one another with trust. Muthaphuli (2025) demonstrates how these values are operationalized in multi-faith pedagogy to promote radical inclusivity.

Complementing this is the Islamic concept of Ummah, which moves beyond mere social grouping to emphasize a divinely mandated solidarity and collective accountability. The Qur'an affirms this unity: "Indeed this, your Ummah, is one Ummah, and I am your Lord, so worship Me" (Qur'an 21:92). Effungani (2024) notes that the Ummah provides a theological foundation for interfaith missions in Africa by prioritizing social justice and mutual recognition.

To these two, this study integrates the Christian theological concept of Communion (*Koinonia*). *Koinonia* refers to a deep, participatory fellowship rooted in the life of the Trinity a shared existence that transcends individual boundaries. In the Kenyan context, Communion acts as a bridge between the spiritual and the social, echoing the relational ethics of Ubuntu and the solidarity of Ummah. Together, these three pillars affirm that Christian and Muslim communities share a profound commitment to a relational ethics where the "other" is not a stranger but a part of one's own communal identity.

2.1 Biblical and Qur'anic Imperatives for Dialogue

Both traditions contain scriptural mandates that transform interfaith dialogue from a social courtesy into a religious obligation. In the Christian tradition, the command to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Luke 10:27) establishes neighbourliness as the primary theological lens for interfaith relations. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) further illustrates that compassion and *Koinonia* must transcend ethnic and religious borders.

Similarly, the Qur’an presents human diversity as an intentional act of divine wisdom: “O mankind, We created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another” (*Lita’arafu*) (Qur’an 49:13). This verse suggests that difference is a catalyst for mutual discovery rather than a cause for division. Ochieng, Bwire, and Mombo (2024) argue that scriptural reasoning the practice of Christians and Muslims reading their sacred texts together is essential in volatile areas like Nairobi’s Eastleigh to move from "tolerance" to "deep understanding."

2.2 African Contextual Theology and Islamic Ethics of Coexistence

African contextual theology insists on rooting reflection in lived realities. Magesa (1997) posits that African moral traditions are fundamentally concerned with "abundant life." Therefore, poverty, conflict, and exclusion are not merely social ills but theological crises requiring communal responses. Ubuntu, as a theological resource, dictates that education must be a tool for restoration and solidarity.

Islamic ethics mirror this concern through the principles of *Adl* (justice) and *Ihsan* (excellence in doing good). In Kenya, these ethical imperatives provide a framework for a curriculum that does not shy away from historical grievances but seeks a just peace. Chidongo (2023) adds that inter-religious dialogue in Africa must be "decolonial," centering indigenous wisdom to create learning environments that reflect the actual social interactions of Kenyan citizens.

2.3 Education as a Theological Mandate

Both faiths view the pursuit of knowledge as a sacred duty. In Christianity, the "Great Commission" (Matthew 28:19–20) involves teaching and discipleship aimed at the transformation of the mind. In Islam, the pursuit of knowledge (*Ilm*) is a foundational

religious obligation. The Prophet Muhammad stated, "Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim" (Ibn Majah, Hadith 224).

The National Education Sector Strategic Plan 2023–2027 (Ministry of Education, 2024) aligns with these mandates by emphasizing "peace education" as a national priority. By framing interfaith education as both a religious and a civic duty, educators can overcome traditional resistance, presenting the curriculum not as a compromise of faith, but as a fulfilment of it.

2.4 Pedagogy of Encounter: Translating Theory to Practice

The convergence of Ubuntu, Ummah, and Communion provides a robust foundation for a shared ethical framework in Kenya. This framework guides curriculum design by prioritizing four key areas: the recognition of pluralism as a divine will, where diversity is taught as an intentional gift ; a commitment to social justice that utilizes the concepts of *Adl* and *Koinonia* to address systemic inequality ; the practice of radical hospitality to ensure the participation of marginalized voices in the classroom ; and a shared ecological responsibility that recognizes the "community" includes the land, consistent with African traditional values and religious stewardship. By grounding the curriculum in these converged values, Kenya can move toward an interfaith education model that is theologically grounded, philosophically rich, and socially transformative.

The integration of Ubuntu, Ummah, and Communion informs a specific "pedagogy of encounter."

- i. Ubuntu Pedagogy: Utilizes storytelling, oral histories, and communal participation to humanize the "other."
- ii. Ummah Pedagogy: Emphasizes collective responsibility and moral formation (*Tarbiyah*).
- iii. Communion Pedagogy: Focuses on *Koinonia* through shared service and experiential learning.

Muthaphuli (2025) suggests that in multi-faith classrooms, these methods encourage students to participate in "service-learning projects," such as joint Christian-Muslim environmental initiatives. These projects embody the shared values of the three pillars, fostering relationships that transcend doctrinal disputes through common action.

2.5 Toward a Shared Ethical Framework

The convergence of Ubuntu, Ummah, and Communion provides a robust foundation for a shared ethical framework in Kenya. This framework guides curriculum design by prioritizing four key areas:

- i. Pluralism as Divine Will: Teaching diversity as an intentional gift from God.
- ii. Commitment to Social Justice: Using *Adl* and *Koinonia* to address systemic inequality.
- iii. Radical Hospitality: Ensuring the participation of marginalized voices in the classroom.
- iv. Ecological Responsibility: Recognizing that the "community" includes the land, consistent with African traditional values and religious stewardship.

By grounding the curriculum in these converged values, Kenya can move toward an interfaith education model that is theologically grounded, philosophically rich, and socially transformative.

3.0 Colonial Encounters and the Genesis of Educational Dualism

The contemporary state of Christian-Muslim relations in Kenya is deeply rooted in the colonial era and the specific manner in which missionary education was introduced. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Christian missions—sponsored largely by European societies established schools that became the backbone of the colonial administrative and educational infrastructure. These institutions prioritized Western cultural values and Christian proselytization, effectively marginalizing both Islamic pedagogical traditions and African indigenous knowledge systems (Gifford, 2009).

In response to this perceived cultural and religious hegemony, Muslim communities, particularly along the Swahili coast and in the Northern Frontier District, strengthened their own madrasa and ribat systems. This was a strategic move to preserve Islamic identity and resist colonial assimilation. Consequently, a dual system of education emerged: a Western-Christian track that produced the nation's political and economic elite, and an Islamic track that sustained communal cohesion and religious scholarship but remained largely outside the

state's formal power structures. This historical "parallelism" created structural divisions that continue to complicate curriculum integration today.

3.1 Post-Independence Nation Building and Interfaith Initiatives

Following independence in 1963, the Kenyan government under Jomo Kenyatta sought to forge a unified national identity under the motto of *Harambee* (all pull together). While the state attempted to integrate diverse religious groups, the legacy of colonial favoritism persisted. The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) emerged as a powerful voice in shaping national discourse on governance and education. Conversely, the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) was established in 1973 to provide a centralized body to represent Muslim interests and address the community's developmental and educational marginalization (NCCCK, 2018).

Despite these tensions, the post-independence era also saw the birth of significant interfaith collaborations. Joint efforts between the NCCCK and SUPKEM in the 1990s and early 2000s focused on constitutional reform and election monitoring demonstrated that religious institutions could serve as a united moral front. These high-level partnerships laid the essential groundwork for moving interfaith engagement from political advocacy into the realm of structured classroom pedagogy.

3.2 The Role of Ecumenical and Interfaith Bodies in Dialogue

Ecumenical and interfaith bodies have been instrumental in transitioning Kenya from a state of "co-existence" to "active dialogue." Organizations such as the All-Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK) have provided platforms for theological exchange and shared social action. Katongole (2017) notes that these bodies have successfully reframed interfaith relations around shared "laments" over poverty, corruption, and governance.

Recent academic work by Ochieng, Bwire, and Mombo (2024) highlights that these institutional efforts are increasingly being felt at the grassroots level. Their study of Nairobi's Eastleigh neighborhood shows that while historical grievances regarding state neglect and profiling remain, local "peace committees" composed of pastors and imams are actively creating spaces for interfaith learning. Furthermore, Olweny (2025) reports that the

Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) has begun a systematic review of education and policy frameworks to ensure interfaith harmony is not just a sentiment, but a measurable educational outcome.

3.3 Persistent Challenges: Radicalization and Political Manipulation

The historical trajectory has not been without significant setbacks. The political manipulation of religious identities, particularly during contested elections, has often strained Christian-Muslim relations. Furthermore, the rise of extremist movements such as Al-Shabaab has exploited historical grievances such as the perceived socio-economic marginalization of the Coast and North Eastern regions to recruit vulnerable youth (World Bank, 2023).

These security challenges have often led to increased surveillance and mistrust, particularly in urban centers. Ochieng et al. (2024) emphasize that these tensions are frequently mirrored in the classroom, where curricula may inadvertently privilege one faith tradition over another or rely on out-dated stereotypes. The historical challenge for interfaith education is thus twofold: it must address the "theology of fear" generated by extremism while simultaneously correcting the historical imbalances of the colonial educational legacy.

3.4 Opportunities: History as a Pedagogical Corrective

Kenya's history, while marked by friction, also offers a unique blueprint for interfaith curricula. The resilience displayed by both communities in preserving their faiths provides a starting point for teaching "mutual respect through identity." The long-standing collaboration between the NCKC and SUPKEM serves as a practical model for how Christian and Muslim educators can co-author curriculum materials.

As Olweny (2025) observes, the shift in policy discussions within AMECEA suggests that the lessons of the past are finally being translated into actionable strategies for the future. By treating history as a "pedagogical corrective," interfaith education in Kenya can move beyond the colonial dualism toward a unified framework that honors the Christian concept of *Communion*, the Islamic *Ummah*, and the African *Ubuntu*.

4.0 Interfaith Education in Kenyan Universities

for national cohesion. As Polinder (2024) notes, academic institutions in East Africa increasingly act as "neutral grounds" for navigating religious diversity in the face of national polarization. Leading institutions, including St. Paul's University, Daystar University, and the University of Nairobi, have transitioned from traditional, isolationist theology toward integrated religious studies. These programs emphasize comparative religion and peacebuilding, providing students with the intellectual tools to navigate a pluralistic society.

St. Paul's University (SPU), in particular, stands as a continental leader through its Institute for Christian-Muslim Relations (ICMR). Established in partnership with the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), the Institute pioneered the unique Master of Arts in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations. This program is designed to move beyond theoretical knowledge to confront "inherited or manufactured" stereotypes, replacing them with a framework of "responsible Christian witness" that honors good neighborliness.

A hallmark of the ICMR's approach is the practice of Scriptural Reasoning, where students study the Bible and the Qur'an side-by-side. According to Ochieng, Bwire, and Mombo (2024), this method is essential for moving from mere "tolerance" to "deep understanding," particularly in volatile urban contexts like Nairobi's Eastleigh. Additionally, the University hosts the Centre for Islamic Studies in Africa (CISSA) in conjunction with the Centre for Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at Eastleigh (CCMRE). These centers serve as practical laboratories where students engage in "pedagogies of encounter," ensuring that academic training is grounded in lived realities. Such initiatives operationalize the "Triple-Pillar" framework: they embody Ubuntu's principle of relationality, the Islamic ethic of *Ta'aruf* (mutual recognition), and the Christian practice of *Koinonia* (Communion) through shared intellectual vulnerability.

4.1 Theological Institutions and Clergy Training

Theological colleges and seminaries act as the gatekeepers of communal attitudes, shaping the leaders who influence millions of congregants. Polinder (2024) argues that in contexts where religious identity is a primary marker of belonging, these institutions must move beyond doctrinal isolation to address national polarization. In Kenya, ecumenical institutions like the All-Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) have begun integrating interfaith

competencies into formal clergy training. This ensures that future leaders view interfaith engagement not as a compromise of faith, but as a fulfilment of their pastoral mandate (AACC, 2024).

Practical collaborations between the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) and the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) have further operationalized this through "diapraxis" dialogue through action. These workshops equip leaders with skills in conflict resolution and community mobilization. By training leaders to work across religious lines, these institutions provide a frontline defence against what Gifford (2009) describes as the "politicization of faith," preventing sectarian radicalization at the grassroots level.

4.2 Primary and Secondary School Curricula

At the primary and secondary levels, religious education remains a mandatory core subject. However, the traditional dualism where CRE and IRE are taught as parallel tracks has historically reinforced social silos. While this separation preserves doctrinal integrity, it creates what the World Bank (2023) identifies as a "siloeffect" that limits opportunities for students to build empathy during their most formative years.

There is a burgeoning movement toward reform led by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD). The National Education Sector Strategic Plan 2023–2027 (Ministry of Education, 2024) signals a shift toward "Values-Based Education." However, Ochieng et al. (2024) suggest that without explicit modules for shared ethical inquiry, these policies risk staying in the realm of "abstract tolerance" rather than achieving deep understanding. The challenge lies in intentional curriculum design that fosters encounter without eroding religious identity.

4.3 Community-Based and Informal Interfaith Education

Beyond formal classrooms, community-based initiatives serve as "living laboratories" for interfaith learning. These initiatives often center on shared human vulnerabilities such as food insecurity and healthcare access. According to the World Bank (2023), climate change in particular acts as a "common threat" that necessitates inter-religious cooperation.

In urban centers like Nairobi and Mombasa, youth-led forums have organized joint service projects to tackle environmental degradation. These projects embody the convergence of

Ubuntu's communal responsibility, the Islamic ethic of Zakat (social almsgiving), and the Christian call to Stewardship. These practical encounters foster a "pedagogy of the streets" that complements formal academic learning, proving that interfaith collaboration is as much a social necessity as a theological one.

Civil society organizations play an essential role in documenting the realities that necessitate interfaith education. The Kenya Christian Professionals Forum (2023) report on the *State of Life, Family & Faith in Kenya* highlights that rising youth unemployment and religious polarization are inextricably linked. Their findings suggest that interfaith education must address socio-economic grievances to be effective. Additionally, various NGOs have developed "Interfaith Toolkits" and training manuals that are now being used to facilitate dialogues in volatile regions, shifting the public discourse from suspicion to resilience.

4.4 Challenges: Resistance, Resources, and Politics

Despite the momentum, significant systemic barriers remain:

- i. **Theological Resistance:** Conservative elements within both faiths often view interfaith education with suspicion, fearing it may lead to religious syncretism or the dilution of doctrinal purity.
- ii. **The Resource Gap:** Implementing new curricula requires specialized textbooks and digital resources, which are often unavailable in rural and marginalized areas.
- iii. **The Pedagogical Gap:** There is a critical shortage of educators trained in interfaith pedagogy. Most teachers at the primary and secondary levels lack the specific skills required to facilitate sensitive, high-stakes dialogues.
- iv. **Political Instrumentation:** The recurring "instrumentalisation" of religion during election cycles can rapidly erode the trust built within educational spaces, making long-term interfaith projects difficult to sustain.

4.5 Opportunities: Digital Innovation and National Identity

The path forward is illuminated by the growing recognition of "Unity in Diversity" as a core tenet of modern Kenyan identity. Digital transformation offers a unique opportunity to bypass traditional barriers; online platforms, webinars, and social media campaigns can reach youth across geographical and religious divides. Furthermore, the 2023–2027 policy window

provided by the Ministry of Education offers a rare institutional opening to formalize these practices. By leveraging these opportunities, Kenya can develop a robust interfaith curriculum that serves as a model for the rest of Africa, fostering a generation that is theologically grounded, culturally agile, and committed to national cohesion.

5.0 Theological Resistance and the Fear of Syncretism

One of the most formidable hurdles in developing interfaith curricula in Kenya is the resistance stemming from conservative religious circles. Both Christian and Muslim leaders often express concern that interfaith education might dilute doctrinal purity or lead to religious syncretism the merging of distinct beliefs into a homogenized faith. In contexts where religious identity is inextricably linked to cultural and political survival, any move toward comparative study is frequently viewed as a threat to "religious authenticity." Overcoming this requires framing the curriculum through the "Triple-Pillar" lens of **Ubuntu**, **Ummah**, and **Communion**, emphasizing that the goal is not theological compromise but the fulfilment of a religious mandate for neighbourliness and mutual respect.

5.1 Resource Disparities and Infrastructural Constraints

The implementation of a national interfaith curriculum faces severe resource limitations. While elite urban institutions and universities may have the infrastructure for such programs, many schools in rural and marginalized regions lack even basic materials. Current textbooks remain predominantly mono-religious, focusing exclusively on either Christian Religious Education (CRE) or Islamic Religious Education (IRE) with little to no comparative content. Scaling these initiatives to the primary and secondary levels requires a significant capital investment in new pedagogical materials and digital infrastructure, a challenge highlighted by the World Bank (2023) regarding general educational inequality in Kenya.

5.2 The Pedagogical Gap: Lack of Trained Educators

The efficacy of interfaith education rests on the competence of the teacher. Currently, a significant gap exists between policy intent and classroom reality due to a lack of trained educators. Most teachers at the primary and secondary levels have been trained within the same siloed systems they are now expected to bridge. Facilitating high-stakes dialogue between Christian and Muslim students requires specialized skills in conflict resolution and

scriptural reasoning competencies that are currently not standardized in teacher training colleges. Without this professional development, there is a risk that interfaith modules will be taught superficially, inadvertently reinforcing the very stereotypes they seek to dismantle.

5.3 Political Instrumentalization of Religion

The efficacy of interfaith education is often hindered by the legacy of colonial "parallelism." Gifford (2009) argues that the historical favouritism of certain religious tracks has made the education system a frequent site of political contestation, where faith is "weaponized" during election cycles to erode social trust. Furthermore, the World Bank (2023) highlights that general educational inequality and the "digital divide" in Kenya significantly hamper the uniform implementation of national reforms, particularly in rural and marginalized regions. For interfaith education to remain credible, it must be protected by independent institutional frameworks that prioritize long-term peacebuilding.

5.4 Historical Grievances and Socio-Economic Marginalization

Curriculum development cannot occur in a vacuum, ignoring the historical grievances of marginalized communities. Muslim populations, particularly in the Coastal and North Eastern regions, have historically faced perceptions of exclusion from the national economic and political core. Ochieng, Bwire, and Mombo (2024) note that these grievances remain deeply embedded in contemporary urban contexts like Eastleigh, where economic inequality fuels mistrust. An interfaith curriculum that fails to acknowledge these systemic injustices risks being dismissed as a tool of the status quo. To be successful, the curriculum must affirm the dignity and historical contributions of all communities, ensuring that "interfaith harmony" is linked to "social justice."

5.5 The Complexity of Balanced Curriculum Design

Designing a curriculum that balances theological integrity with open dialogue is an inherently complex task. There is a delicate tension between focusing on commonalities which risks glossing over real and important doctrinal differences and focusing on differences which may inadvertently reinforce division. Striking this balance requires a sophisticated pedagogical approach that encourages critical thinking and empathy. It necessitates a collaborative design process involving theologians from the ICMR at St. Paul's University, representatives from

SUPKEM and NCKK, and secular educational experts to ensure the content is both theologically robust and educationally sound.

5.6 Institutional and Policy Gaps

While the National Education Sector Strategic Plan 2023–2027 (Ministry of Education, 2024) provides a broad policy window, the specific legal and institutional frameworks required to sustain interfaith harmony remain underdeveloped. Olweny (2025) identifies that without clear legislative support and dedicated departments within the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), interfaith initiatives may remain localized or temporary. For Kenya to truly become a model for Africa, these "pockets of excellence" must be translated into a permanent, well-funded, and legally protected national educational priority.

5.7 Harnessing Digital Platforms for "Atmospheric Spaces"

The digital revolution in Kenya offers unprecedented avenues to scale interfaith education beyond the physical constraints of traditional institutions. As Chidongo (2023) emphasizes, inter-religious dialogue must adapt to contemporary digital realities to remain relevant to a tech-savvy youth. Online forums, moderated webinars, and virtual exchange programs can provide the "atmospheric spaces" necessary for safe encounter. Universities can leverage these tools to develop national online modules on Christian-Muslim relations, while podcasts and social media campaigns rooted in the "Triple-Pillar" framework can promote the values of Communion, Ubuntu, and Ummah to a wider audience, countering extremist narratives in the digital sphere.

6.0 Youth-Led Innovation and Participatory Pedagogy

With over 70% of the population under 30, Kenya's youth are the primary stakeholders in interfaith peace building. Youth-led initiatives often bypass the rigid dogmatism that can hinder older generations, demonstrating a natural openness to relational dialogue. Effungani (2024) highlights that Christian mission and Islamic outreach is being reshaped by youth-led engagement, particularly in theological institutions. Interfaith clubs in schools can serve as "laboratories of participation," where students design joint service projects. These initiatives translate the theoretical concepts of Ubuntu's communal care and the Islamic ethic of Zakat (almsgiving) into lived reality.

6.1 Strategic Interfaith and Cross-Sector Partnerships

The success of a national interfaith curriculum depends on the strength of institutional partnerships. Collaborative frameworks between the Ministry of Education, the NCKK, and SUPKEM ensure that curricula reflect diverse theological perspectives while adhering to national educational standards. Olweny (2025) notes that the AMECEA Kenya Forum's current probing of policy frameworks provides a unique window for such collaboration. Partnerships between universities and NGOs can facilitate the "Pedagogical Bridge," creating specialized training programs that equip primary and secondary teachers with the skills needed for interfaith mediation.

6.2 Contextual Theology as a Policy Driver

Interfaith education in Kenya is most effective when it is "decolonial" and rooted in lived experience. By integrating the insights of African theologians like Mbiti (1999) and Magesa (1997) with Islamic ethics of Adl (justice) and Ihsan (compassion), educators ensure the curriculum resonates with the Kenyan soul. This contextual approach allows interfaith education to influence broader public policy; when the education system prioritizes mutual respect and Communion, it creates a societal baseline of resilience that protects the nation from political and religious manipulation.

6.3 Climate-Resilient Interfaith Education: A Shared Stewardship

The climate crisis presents a unique "common enemy" that necessitates interfaith cooperation. Both Christianity and Islam emphasize the theological mandate of stewardship Koinonia with creation in the Christian tradition and Khalifah (stewardship) in Islam. Muthaphuli (2025) demonstrates that Ubuntu-inspired pedagogy is naturally suited to ecological justice, as it views the environment as part of the extended community. Joint Christian-Muslim service-learning projects such as sustainable agriculture in drought-stricken regions or urban reforestation embody the shared ethics of both faiths, proving that "care for our common home" is a powerful catalyst for interfaith understanding.

7.0 Conclusion

This study has critically examined the role of interfaith education in fostering Christian-Muslim understanding in Kenya, with a specific focus on curriculum development across

schools, universities, and theological institutions. The analysis demonstrates that while Kenya's religious diversity has historically been a flashpoint for tension, it also serves as fertile ground for robust dialogue and social transformation. In a landscape where the youth comprise the vast majority of the population, education emerges as the most critical arena for shaping how future generations navigate difference. Consequently, the implementation of interfaith curricula is not merely an academic luxury but a fundamental necessity for national cohesion and sustainable peace.

Theological and philosophical foundations specifically the "Triple-Pillar" framework of Ubuntu, Ummah, and Communion provide a cohesive and shared ethical basis for this educational shift. These traditions converge on the principles of relationality, human dignity, and collective responsibility, offering a language for curricula that promotes respect and justice without requiring theological compromise. While historical analysis reveals that colonial-era missionary and madrasa systems created deep-seated educational silos, post-independence initiatives by bodies such as the NCKK and SUPKEM have proven that institutional collaboration is both possible and effective.

Current practices in Kenyan universities, such as the work of the Institute for Christian-Muslim Relations at St. Paul's University, alongside grassroots community initiatives, offer promising blueprints for the future. However, significant challenges remain, including resistance from conservative factions, resource constraints, a lack of specialized teacher training, and the persistent threat of political manipulation. Despite these hurdles, the rise of digital platforms, youth-led innovation, and the urgent need for climate-resilient stewardship provide new and dynamic avenues for growth. By harnessing these opportunities, Kenya can develop educational frameworks that prepare its citizens to engage constructively with religious diversity, contributing significantly to both national unity and global interfaith dialogue.

7.1 Recommendations

7.1.1 Develop Inclusive and Integrated Curricula

Kenya's education system should move beyond siloed religious instruction toward intentionally designed curricula that integrate Christian and Muslim perspectives. This includes the introduction of comparative religion modules and Scriptural Reasoning exercises

that allow students to encounter the "other" in a controlled, respectful academic environment. Such design must balance theological integrity with radical openness, ensuring students grow in their own faith while developing a sophisticated understanding of their neighbour's traditions.

7.1.2 Standardize Teacher Training in Interfaith Pedagogy

The Ministry of Education, in partnership with universities, should establish professional development programs that equip educators with the specific skills required for interfaith pedagogy. Training should focus on conflict mediation, critical thinking, and empathy-building. Facilitating sensitive dialogues between students of different faiths is a high-stakes task that requires a specialized competency currently missing from many standard teacher-training colleges.

7.1.3 Strengthen Multi-Sector Institutional Partnerships

A "whole-of-society" approach is required. Sustained collaboration between the NCKK, SUPKEM, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), and civil society is essential to ensure that curricula are both theologically representative and pedagogically sound. These partnerships can pool resources, share expertise, and provide the institutional "shield" necessary to protect interfaith initiatives from political interference.

7.1.4 Prioritize Youth-Led Innovation

Youth should be viewed as co-creators of interfaith harmony rather than mere recipients. Schools and universities should provide funding and institutional support for interfaith clubs and "Living Laboratory" projects. By empowering students to design and implement their own service-learning initiatives, the curriculum remains dynamic and responsive to the actual social challenges faced by the younger generation.

7.1.5 Scale through Digital Transformation

To overcome geographical and resource barriers, Kenya must harness digital tools. This includes the creation of national online interfaith modules, podcasts, and virtual exchange programs. Digital platforms can connect students from Nairobi's urban hubs with those in

rural or marginalized regions, fostering a broader national consciousness and providing access to high-quality interfaith resources regardless of location.

7.1.6 Address Historical Grievances through Affirmative Education

Curricula must be "historically honest," acknowledging the marginalization of certain religious and regional communities. By affirming the contributions of the Muslim community to Kenya's national history and economic development, interfaith education can act as a tool for reconciliation. As Ochieng et al. (2024) suggest, addressing exclusion directly in the classroom is a prerequisite for building genuine trust at the grassroots level.

7.1.7 Implement Climate-Resilient "Green Pedagogy"

Environmental stewardship provides a unique, non-controversial entry point for interfaith collaboration. Curricula should include joint service-learning projects in sustainable agriculture and conservation. This "Green Pedagogy" embodies Ubuntu's communal ethics, the Islamic Khalifah (stewardship), and the Christian call to Stewardship, demonstrating that the survival of the "common home" is a shared religious duty.

7.1.8 Ensure Alignment with National Policy

For interfaith education to be sustainable, it must be fully embedded within the National Education Sector Strategic Plan 2023–2027. Policy alignment gives these initiatives the legal legitimacy and budgetary support needed to move from "pilot projects" to permanent national pillars. Recognition from continental bodies like AMECEA further provides a supportive regional environment for Kenya to emerge as a leader in African interfaith pedagogy.

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