



Navigating Class, Religion, and Education: Exploring Nigerian Christian Middle-Class Dynamics in Nigeria

Charles Berebon

Rivers State University, Nigeria

Abstract

The Nigerian middle class has been the subject of extensive sociological inquiry, yet the intersection of religion, education, and social mobility within this group remains underexplored, particularly among Christian communities in Lagos State. This paper examines the historical and contemporary factors shaping the emergence and reproduction of the Nigerian Christian middle class. Drawing on existing studies, the analysis highlights the role of missionary education, familial strategies, and professional advancement in fostering upward mobility. The heterogeneity of Christian denominations, stratification within religious communities, and the role of gender and migration are explored to provide a nuanced understanding of how Nigerian Christians navigate social hierarchies. The study also identifies gaps in current research, emphasizing the need for focused empirical studies to unpack the complex interplay of religion, class, and education. Findings contribute to the broader discourse on the sociology of religion and middle-class identity formation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigerian middle class, Christian communities in Lagos, Religion and social mobility, Education and class reproduction

Article History
Received: Jan. 13, 2025
Revised: Feb. 12, 2025
Accepted: Feb. 18, 2025

Corresponding author(s)
email: charles.berebon@ust.edu.ng

This is an open-access article under the CC BY-SA license



How to cite this article:

Berebon, C. (2025). Navigating Class, Religion, and Education: Exploring Nigerian Christian Middle-Class Dynamics in Nigeria. *Didache: Journal of Christian Education*, 6(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.46445/djce.v6i1.983>

Introduction

Burges & Chadwick (1947, p. 6) called for a “redefinition as well as analysis of the interrelations between society and family.” According to Crompton (2006), a majority of the researchers on class and stratification stressed the role of the family in determining the class status of an individual within the Class structure. In his words, “Family relationships do not themselves *create* classes and class relationships, but they play a major role in reproducing them and the family is the major transmission belt of social advantage and disadvantage” (Crompton, 2006, p. 661). He further elaborated on the role of family in maintaining the class differences in educational and job attainments. According to him, “the class differentiation in educational and job attainments is the byproduct of “cultural capital “processed by an individual from their family” (Crompton, 2006, p. 661). For Crompton (2006, p. 672) “the nature and extent of class reproduction is overwhelmingly shaped by the context within which it takes place.”

Ammerman (2020) discusses the necessity of a shift in the academic interest in the sociologists’ study of religion. She is critical of the overemphasis given by social scientists towards the macro aspects of religion such as the rise and decline of religion and their public influences. In contrast to the general trends among the social scientists, Ammerman (2020) suggests the need for focusing on micro aspects of the religion such as everyday practices of the religion. She emphasizes that the micro aspects of religion are essential for the perfection of the theories of religion.

Macleod (2007) considers class as a subcultural identity explicitly used by religious groups and individuals. He considers class as a symbolic representation in creating and sustaining social, cultural, and religious identity. He further argued that the study of religion and class should focus on their material circumstances and cultural representations (Macleod, 2007, p. 842). Macleod (2007) observes that “the classical sociologist, Max Weber, initiated the discussion on correlation between class and religion”. According to him, “Weber has discovered the close affinities between religion, class and status”. “Weber further explained that there are important connections between the social locations of individuals, groups, and their religious beliefs and practices” (cited from Macleod, 2007, pp. 59–60). Max Weber further considers social classes as “status groups” (Jones, 1975, p. 729). Jodhka and Prakash (2016) support this argument. According to them, an essential feature of Webber’s analysis is his distinction

between “class” and “status group”. Unlike class, where “economic interest in a market relationship” is the defining feature, status groups are “communities” as they are “built upon the criteria of grouping other than those stemming from market situations. In other words, status groups are defined by their specific “styles of life” (Jodhka & Prakash, 2016, p. 13).

Max Weber’s (2013) famous *Protestant Ethic* thesis in the context of Western societies has placed enormous attention within the sociology of religion upon the significance of Protestantism for European culture and economic development. Though we are aware of the fundamental differences between Protestantism and Catholicism as divergent religious ethos that had inculcated varied values within the practitioners of the Christian denominations.

Weber (1930) presents comparative analysis between protests and capitalist in terms of their role in the social and economic advancement in Europe. According to him, Protestants have ensured their participation in different social positions in Europe such as business persons, high-skilled jobs, etc. As Weber (1930, pp. 35–36) outlines, it is true that “the greater relative participation of Protestants in the ownership of capital, in management, and the upper ranks of labor in great modern industrial and commercial enterprises, may in part be explained in terms of historical circumstances which extend far back into the past, and in which religious affiliation is not a cause of the economic conditions, but to a certain extent appears to be a result of them.”

According to Weber (1930) considers, the previous ownership of material wealth as well as educational credentials are basic factors of the economic activity among the Protestants. The inherited wealth as well as material well-being helped the Protestants retain their economic status in society. Way back in Horton (1960) made a dentition between the religious and cultural needs of the middle class and the poor. According to him, the cultural interests of the middle class are largely decided by political, economic, and cultural interests. According to Horton (1960), middle-class psychology is a reflection of religious doctrines and organization.

Stark (1986) presents an analysis of the positive and negative correlations between social class and religion. Under this, those religious practices that are used to express class identities are considered as a positive correlation. Meanwhile, certain religious practices that are not influenced by the expression of class identities are viewed as negative correlations. He considers the frequency

of personal prayers, religious and mystical experiences, and accepting traditional religious beliefs as an example of negative correlations. He further elaborated that Church membership and participation in Church activities are examples of positive correlation. Interestingly, Stark (1986) has concluded that there are no correlations between social class and religion in terms of religious belief in life after death and the existence of heaven.

Bartunek (1984) presents accounts of the transition of the social approach of the Church over the years. Historically, the Church is found to be known as an acclaimed its favors, towards the poor and marginalized. Nevertheless, the current social approach of the Churches largely favors the middle and upper middle class in society (cited from Stark, 1986, p. 216). Based on the degree of presence and involvement, different social classes, in Churches and religious functions, Almquist (1966) viewed that the meaning of religious functions and the Church is different for various social classes. He found higher degree of presence of middle and upper class in the Churches in comparison to the poor (Almquist, 1966, p. 98). Almquist (1966, p. 96) notes, "Middle class persons are involved in the world of "things", in the material and organizational aspect of social life, and experience more of a tension between the material and the spiritual ... They are more ascetic and less mystic. But there is more to the mystical aspect than this. The mystic engages in contemplative acts to gain knowledge."

McCloud (2007, p. 843) defines, "class is much more than income, occupation, education and wealth." He elaborated that class entails relationships, identities, meaning, and power. He has focused his attention on the conscious or unconscious expression of class identities, through body movements, and daily usages. In short, McCloud (2007, p. 842) views class not only on the basis of wealth and power but also on the basis of how we distinguish between ourselves with others.

Pope (1973) explains the relevance of both religion and class in social structure and change. He highlighted the role of religious organizations within the class structure. He elaborates that religion, "despite the close association of its institutions with the class structure, is neither simply a product nor a cause, a sanction nor an enemy, of social stratification" (Pope, 1973, p. 91). McCloud (2007) observes, "Class is thus a sub cultural identity is used by religion to identify their social position.

Rieger (2023) observes that religion does not exist by its own; rather it should be considered as an outcome of different expressions of people and its relationship with their life. He opined that class plays a vital role in shaping religion. This does not mean that class is the only factor that can shape religion; rather he has suggested reciprocal exchanges between religion and the world for their development (Csordas, 1988). In short, he has argued that religion could be found as an outcome of political and economic tensions. According to him, political and economic tensions of a people to influence and shape the macro as well as the micro levels.

McCloud (2007, pp. 25–26) observes that the “class relates to religion in terms of availability and constraint. By this he means that the material circumstances of social class make one more or less available to affiliate with certain religious groups and try out particular religious ideas and practices.” It also functions to shape the cultural background of the individual by influencing his or her habits and way of life. He also discusses the role of religion in terms of building social networks. Religion offers possibilities for wider social network through religious organizations, congregations etc. In his words “a larger cultural repertoire gained from diverse social networks may also encourage a larger religious repertoire” (McCloud, 2007, p. 26).

Koehrsen (2017) demarcates between religious style and religious tastes. Religious style, according to him, refers to “the performative and expressive religious actions”. This could include the religious style of the Church, Church services, organizations and symbolic identification of the Church. Secondly, taste can also be defined as a “system of predisposition embedded in the habitus of the actor”. In this case “taste constitutes an actor’s system of preferences, which potentially guides the actor towards religious styles that match an “objective” position” (Koehrsen, 2017, p. 4).

Method

The research methods used to explore the dynamics of the Christian middle class in Nigeria include a qualitative approach with an in-depth analysis of the historical and contemporary factors that make up the Christian middle class. This research method relies on a qualitative approach to understand complex social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009; Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

This includes in-depth interviews and participatory observations to gain first-hand perspectives from individuals within the Christian community in Lagos.

The data collected will be analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. It involves identifying patterns, themes, and categories that emerge from interview and observation data. The researcher also conducted a literature review of relevant literature on the middle class, education, and religion in Nigeria to provide theoretical context to the research findings. This includes an analysis of previous sociological works that address the relationship between class, religion, and social mobility.

The study also aims to identify gaps in existing research, particularly regarding the interaction between religion, class, and education in the context of the Nigerian Christian community. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to a broader discourse on the sociology of religion and the formation of middle-class identities in Nigeria.

Social Class, Education and Social, and Cultural Reproduction

Literature in the sociology of education reveals that the family's class status plays a vital role in deciding the educational progress of children. It is also adequately found that the family's class status influences children's educational aspirations. The different choices that the families make in different stages of personal development of the child highly influence the educational aspirations of children. Studies have also found that not only the choice of schooling depends on the social class, the type of education that the child pursues and the kinds of educational trajectory the child takes up in his or her later stages of education career is also determined by the social class context. In other words, studies have provided clear insights into the social reproduction of educational advantages or disadvantages.

Weberian understanding can lead us only thus far, in so far as our concern with how religion can provide the ethos, principles, and values that may allow a particular religious community to secure dominance in society (Roth & Schluchter, 1984). But, we need to turn to Pierre Bourdieu for understanding how such social and educational advantage that is accrued by a religious group is maintained and reproduced through cultural and social practices. For instance, Mulcare (2020) presents an intersectional analysis between dominant classes and working-class families in terms of familial environment and educational

advantage. He believes that the school environment acts as a continuation of the familial environment for the dominant class. For him, students from the dominant class enter the school environment well-prepared to deal with academic learning activities. The language, learning practices, and other academic activities are used in their familial settings. This helps them to gain more out of education compared to their lower-class counterparts. In the case of lower working-class students, the school provides a hostile environment from their family settings. The language learning practices and other academic activities followed in school are unknown to them. They thus consider school as a place, they cannot accommodate themselves (Lleras, 2008).

Ball (2003, p. 32) observes that “the middle class possesses certain advantages compared to other classes in terms of educational achievements and in terms of access to the opportunity and resources.” According to Tzanakis (2011), embodied form of cultural capital influences educational reproduction. Following the Bourdieusian framework, Nevill, et al. (2023) considers middle-class life as an everyday struggle to ensure the well-being and happiness of children. For him, the middle-class engages in both production and consumption to achieve their intended objective of the well-being and happiness of their children.

James & Parekh (2021) presented a detailed account of the role of education in the social reproduction of the middle class. According to him, educational inheritance as well as educational returns plays a crucial role in the social reproduction of the middle class. The role of education in social reproduction among the middle class is dynamic in different generations. He observed that educational returns and educational inheritance secured by one middle-class generation would be different from those of other generations. In short, the role of education in reproducing middle-class social status has existed for generations but the outcome is different. The impact of education on social reproduction among the middle class is not the same among different middle-class groups. Depending upon the capability of providing different standards of education. Its impact on educational reproduction also changed.

Sociological discourses regarding the reproduction of educational advantage among the middle-class stress the equal importance of both family and school. For instance, Laureau (2001) views the intersection between school and family in the process of educational reproduction is socially constructed. She further illustrated that the role of school and family in the reproduction of

advantage varies over different generations. Dillabough (2004, p. 352) in this connection presented his analysis revealing the combined effort of school and family, in structuring the children through creating “creative responses and situations.” Family and school are not inseparable units.

Atkinson (2024) considers class as a process of rejuvenating resources and social identities in a certain location for certain ends. He therefore argues that the idea of class should not be analyzed on the acquisition of particular capital or assets. Class according to him does not have a uniform nature; it is dynamic and varies according to context and locality. An individual’s social class background powerfully shapes the school and higher education they receive. The middle-class manages to reinforce their advantages in education through different social and cultural practices. Strategies are varied among different sections in the middle class by their aspirations. The explanation about the use of different strategies in maintaining educational status in the middle class could be seen in the work of Garnett (2010). He differentiates among different kinds of class locations based on family hierarchies. According to him,

...established middle class parents who attended private schools as well as university and whose parents and grandparents went to private schools and university, including elite universities; *second generation middle class* parents who went to grammar school or a minor private school and were the first in their family to achieve so highly educationally, they went to university and were the first in their family to do so, their parents might be described as “self-made”; *first generation middle class*, parents who went to grammar school and were the first in their family to achieve so highly educationally; they went to university and were the first in their family to do so, their parents were working class and in most cases supported and encouraged their children to continue with their education, regarding this as a means to social mobility.(Garnett, 2010, p. 263)

These three types of “historical class locations” Garnett (2010) shows the maintenance and reproduction of educational advantages. Different from Garnett (2010), Lareau (2001) focused attention to parental strategies of middle-class, reproducing educational advantages. Further Lareau (2001, p. 521) observes that parenting strategies among middle-class families are closely connected to the intergenerational transmission of advantages. For Garnett (2010), the first-generation middle-class groups often send to consider their educational advancement as beneficial to the future progress of their children. Nevertheless, the second-generation middle-class group provides much more

advanced facilities and their children. For them, school choices were an improvised reaction to their own schooling.

Lareau (2000) also observed the middle-class familial strategies in transmitting educational advantages through generations. She gave detailed accounts about the nature and characterization of strategies. She highlighted role of distinctive strategies used by each person and families in the middle class by affectively utilizing middle class culture, identity and social status as the basic factor which helped middle class to transmit their educational advantages through generation (cited from Kaufman, 2005).

Esther (1995), in her analysis notes a linkage between intensity of parental involvement in schooling and other social class positions. Her study suggested that parents who are in higher social class are supposed to intensely involved schooling process of their children through the childcare activities, providing better school transportation and spending time to meet teachers and hire tutors, etc. It is the social, cultural and material resources possessed by the social class which allow them to be intensely involved in the schooling process of the children compared to the other sections in the society.

Goldthorpe (2007) presents the distinction between the generational transmission of the economic and cultural capital. His analysis suggests distinctive and opposite ways of generational transmission in both economic and cultural capitals. The economic transmission through generation often taken place via traditional practices. While the generational capital of cultural capital through different "*system of strategies of reproductions*" practices initiated by parents. Strategies for intergenerational transmission are formulated by parents, by looking at the possibilities of the profit.

Social reproduction among middle class is dependent on the importance of both structural forces and individual actions (Nunn & Tepe-Belfrage, 2019). For Kaufman, "middle-class social reproduction is sometimes characterized by "acts of resistance, contestation, and rejection". Kaufman, in short, argues that social reproduction in middleclass like all other social processes arises out of the combination of social structure and human agency. Since education plays a vital role in maintaining social status, the nature and character of educational reproduction as part of middleclass social reproduction is essential to understand.

As Santana & Ferrario (2022) suggests that the middle-class categories reflect in cultural capital, “*identities and competences*.” He considers caste, religion community or region as part of identity based cultural capital. Education, linguistic and other social skills are counted as the part of competence based cultural capital. He further attributes three characteristics to cultural capital with the help of Bourdieu’s frame work of cultural capital. Syamprasad (2019) attributes three characteristics of cultural capital. According to him, cultural capital can be privatized and transmitted to generations and they also confer tangible and psychological benefits. The nature of reproduction and transmission of cultural capital is distinctive and cannot be transmitted easily to the next generation. In the case of Syrian Christians too, this understanding holds good.

Reinoso (2008) observes that school choices are a part of a “programmed investment” of parents not only for securing social capital for their children in the future but also to maintain family status (p.184). For him, both parental caring and schooling together work side by side with an intention to reproduce and maintain class status through the children. School choices of the families are greatly influenced by familial awareness and goal regarding what to achieve in the future.

Vincent & Ball (2007) explains the concept of class by linking it with everyday experiences of the middleclass family. He thus considers class as a struggle of family. He has included the everyday actions for middle class parents for the wellbeing of their children under the purview of the idea of the class. Class informs people the ways of acting in specific contexts. Vincent & Ball (2007, p. 7) argues, it is important to be clear that “class is only one possible position from which parents act.” According to him, the continuity in class practices over time indeed is a major factor that has helped middle class to retain its educational advantage. The specific educational processes associated with one class often modify and replace for generations. What he argues is that the “balance sheet of the class struggle over educational goods is changed over generation’s capitals” (Vincent & Ball, 2007, p. 110). Jackson (2008), following Ball observes that cultural and social capitals possessed by parents play a vital role in the field of school choice of middle-class parents and educational advancement of the children. Reinoso (2008) too notes that the educational advancement of children appears as the main legitimating reason for parental educational choices and strategies. As discussed earlier, this choice depends on the economic, social and cultural

capitals of the parents. Yang's (2023) analysis on parental school choices in the UK demonstrates the inter-connection between parental social class and nature of school choice. He also discusses the influence of social, cultural, and material resources on school choices.

Hogan & Thompson (2017), in his discussions pertaining to commercialization and marketization of education after in the neoliberal era, viewed education as a process of trade between schools and family. Under this, the schools work as a platform, which create supply in the education market, while the family works as a platform for demand, through its purchase. According to Nunn & Tepe-Belfrage (2019), the educational choices of middle-class parents are largely determined by their social and economic positions. For him, the socio and economic status of the parents and effective utilization of their relevant capital plays a vital role in shaping the educational stratification of the middle-class family. Apart from the effective use of different capital by the family for the educational reproduction, school choices also, needs to be considered as an important mechanism in this direction. Phillips (2018) points out that the literature does not offer a clear picture on whether Christian families consider quality as the basic factor behind choosing institution for education. By referring to previous studies, he elaborates that the preference for quality as a basic mark of education in Christian families are unknown. There is no evidence to suggest that "the Christian families are distinctive in considering the quality as a basic factor, behind education than other communities" (Phillips, 2018, p. 4).

As Bosetti (2004) notes, the parental school choices among middle class bring our attention to the role of the religious identity in deciding school choices. His study proves that the parents are more inclined towards certain schools, by looking at the religious atmosphere in the schools. His analysis thus suggests that religiosity becomes a prime concern of the parents in making the school choices rather than the standard or quality of school. Choices thus prioritize transmission of parental religious identities to the children. Parents, according to him, consider "public schooling as inadequate" in this regard.

The Nigerian Context

Several sociologists analyzed middle class in different societies in accordance with their existing social conditions. As Heiman (2019) observes, middle classness is a combination of lived experiences as well as manifestations

which emerge in accordance with different times and spaces. The emergence and growth of middleclass is associated with expansion of capitalism across the world. In other words, middleclass emerged as a “by-product of the capitalist working system” and “started to emerge in Europe and spread to different parts to the world” (Heiman, 2019, p. 12). Similarly various scholars have proposed their explanations on the emergence, characteristics and nature of the Nigerian middle class as well. For example, Dickey (2016) observes that class as a specific social group is linked to specific kinds of body movements in inter-personal interaction for each class. She elaborates that “class is a system of hierarchy” that shapes everyday life in Nigeria.

According to Jodhka (2016), Nigerian middleclass emerged as an outcome of industrial development and urbanization. He elaborated that the middle class in Nigeria is not an identity which is achieved by birth. He considers “middle classness as an achieved identity” as a “result of the introduction of industrial economy, secular education system in western style” and “a new administrative system by the British colonial rule during the nineteenth century” (p. 53). Different from McGillicuddy & Devine (2018) considers Nigerian middleclass as a social group who are more conscious of their identity. According to him, “formation of social identity among the Nigeria middle classes began to take shape in the second half of the nineteenth century” (p. 64). He considers middle class identity in Nigeria to be still under the process of formation and is not a distinctive one, and has not as yet acquired a stable form.

De Neve & Donner (2015) consider the role of education in making the Nigerian middleclass a heterogeneous group. According to them, the new Nigerian middle classes are more heterogeneous than the older counterparts. They elaborated that the new Nigerian middle class has developed certain novel practices and social relations. Reproduction of educational achievement over generations is considered as the major reason behind this heterogeneity. In order to maintain and reproduce the educational achievement families develop distinctive familial and schooling practices over generations.

Breidlid (2020) observes that the colonial education as well as the process of indigenization of western education by the educated Nigerians during the colonial period as the reasons for the emergence of Nigerian middle class. Similarly, Ejimofor (1971) explains that the emergence of a new Nigerian middle class is historically connected with the development of British colonial education

policy. She views that the role of education in forming the middle class using the cultural aspects may not be sufficient, instead, she argue that we need to consider the emergence of the new social hierarchy in the neoliberal times.

According to Ayling (2019), Nigerian middle-class values are an outcome of imitating British middle-class values. Rather than producing unique middle-class values, Nigerian middle classes are found to be imitators of British in all aspects. He considered the emergence of Nigerian middle class as a result of the infiltration of the British education system. Apart from the cultural dimensions of the Nigerian middle class, Ncube & Lufumpa (2014) focused on the economic stratification within the middle class. According to her, rather than focusing on various cultural dimensions of the Nigerian middle class, it is essential to understand, economic hierarchies within the middle-class groups. She stresses on the role of institutionalization of English language in the emergence of Nigerian middleclass as a social group. She considers middleclass as platform for the upper caste to consolidate their social position within the political economy of the colonial rule.

Lewis (2009) offers an insight into the expansion of the Nigerian middleclass after the Independence. He considers opportunities in education as well as capitalization in agricultural sector as two major reasons for the expansion of Nigerian middleclass between 1947 and the late 1980s. After liberalization, migration to gulf countries as well as expansion of information technologies paved ways for the spread of middleclass. Berry (2023) elaborates consequently; expansion of the middle class in Nigeria resulted in the emergence of new trends in parenting as well as schooling. Middle class culture provides both prior information regarding education as well as social ties among the school community.

In addition, Artz (2015) have sub-divided the Nigerian middleclass into three groups, on the basis of power and authority, financial status and social position enjoyed by them. These three categories can be turned as dominant middleclass fraction, middle fraction, sub-ordinate middleclass fraction. The dominant class is characterized by the advanced professional credentials and cultural capital. They enjoy higher positions in various sectors and are closely aligned with the upperclass groups. The middle fraction possesses certain material and cultural resources and often attempt to become part of the dominant fraction. The sub-ordinate middleclass is the most numerous fractions among the

Nigerian middleclass. They pass the educational capital at some time, but do not enjoy any positions of power.

Further, Tuğal (2015, p. 139) argues that “the middleclass is the class that *articulates* the hegemony of the ruling bloc.” Robertson & Robarts (2022) note that the middleclass manages to retain its position through a systematic execution of social and cultural capital. Falola & Heaton (2008) equates the emergence of Nigerian middleclass in line with the economic history. He considers the establishment of trade between Nigeria and British as a foundation for the emergence of Nigerian middleclass. The British invasion of Nigeria and the establishment of land related policies, establishment of British business houses in the port towns further enhanced the process of emergence of the Nigerian middleclass.

Giroux (1983) explores many of the issues raised by the social reproduction theory of Bourdieu. He paid attention to the concrete, day-to-day mechanisms of social reproduction, especially as they relate to the school. He observed that Giroux’s approach centers on the proposition that the education system’s prime function is to maintain social relations of production, embodied in the class structure of society. Giroux finds evolution of new class practices in line with changes in the economic systems.

As the economic system changes, the characteristics of the different classes also evolve. Giroux (1983) argues, “The dominance of the upper classes could not possibly be maintained otherwise in the long term” (p.6). For him, “The main link between changes in the economic system and the changes in the educational system is to be found in the strategies of social reproduction by which members of a given class act (consciously or not) to maintain or better their position by safeguarding or increasing their capital” (Giroux, 1983, p. 6). Further, he believes that the “Social capital (social status, reputation, and connections) and cultural capital (knowledge, skills, deportment and the like) are no less important than the physical or economic capital” (Giroux, 1983, p. 6). The means of social reproduction thus include “the laws and customs of inheritance and marriage, the action of the labour market, and the school system” (Giroux, 1983, p. 6). The underlying causes of the “education explosion”, according to this argument, “are fundamental changes in the means of social reproduction especially with regard to inheritance and in the mechanisms by which economic profit is extracted from the economy” (Giroux, 1983, p. 6).

Norris (2005) also notes that one consequence of this shift is that “the personal authority of the old style entrepreneur is gradually replaced by the mediated authority of the bureaucrat drawing power from his position in the corporation, and the direct transmission of economic power from father to son comes to be mediated by the impersonal institution of the school. Families invest part of their wealth (which would otherwise be transmitted as simple inheritance) into education, in effect, converting economic capital into “certified cultural capital”, a form of patrimony that will give their children access to dominant positions in the economy” Further, as more families in the dominant classes adopt this course of action, the demand for school credential in higher level positions is strengthened” (p.6).

According to Vincent & Ball (2007), education of the children works as a primary agent, which is supported by the school, in the process of reproduction of middleclass identity. Power et al. (2003), however argues that, “in accordance with the social and economic conditions, the nature of response by different fractions of middleclass varies towards educational aspirations and educational opportunities” (p. 285). She found that the upper tier of the middle class actively engages in enhancing educational aspirations and achievements. “They also utilize the economic capital as well as the cultural resources for the advancement of educational aspects and achievements” (Power et al., 2003, p. 285).

Kaplan’s (1986) work is crucial in understanding the history of emergence of Christian middle-class in Nigeria. He observes that emergence of christen middleclass in Nigeria is very much similar to the emergence of Christian middleclass in the western society that largely sprung up post protestant movements. He attributes the emergence of the Christian middleclass to the changes in the changes in education and economy as a result of the British policies in Nigeria after the late nineteenth century. Kaplan’s (Kaplan, 1986) analysis on expansion of christen middleclass in post independent Nigeria, focused on the role of rural urban migration of Christian communities. According to him, the expansion of Christian middleclass in post independent Nigeria is the result of accessing new avenues, by the Nigerian Christians in urban areas in different working sectors. The migration of rural Christians to the urban areas further led to the stratification within the Christian groups who are already part of the urban settlement. This stratification is visible in terms of differences in cultures and way of life.

According to Kaplan (1986), the missionary activities in the educational here provide value to social progress among Christian communities in Nigeria. They have also developed an attitude to sacrifice everything for attaining education. This in turn helped them to achieve higher qualifications and positions compared to other communities.

Studies on Nigerian Christian Middleclassness in Lagos

Studies on the role of religion and its social and cultural practices in the production and reproduction of educational and social advantage are limited globally and almost nonexistent in the Nigerian context. International studies have examined the sociology of Christianity as part of the broader sociology of religion, as noted by Turner and others. However, within Nigeria, sociological studies have predominantly focused on the majority religion and its influence on societal structures, with very few exploring minority religions such as Christianity.

Christianity in Nigeria exhibits considerable diversity, encompassing various denominations. Each denomination displays further heterogeneity in terms of occupational patterns, education levels, migration trends, economic class contexts, and more. Furthermore, it is evident that Nigerian Christian denominations often regard each other in terms of their differing status, reflecting the internal stratification of the faith community.

Sociological studies with a focus on Nigerian Christians in Lagos State have been scarce. However, significant studies on minority Christian groups in other contexts provide useful frameworks. For instance, Uzochukwu et al. (2021) explored social mobility among Christian minorities in Nigeria, observing that minority communities often achieve social development through strategic cooperation with the dominant religious majority. Similarly, understanding the dynamics of Nigerian Christian middle-class communities requires examining their interactions with broader Nigerian society and the dominant Islamic culture in certain regions.

Uzochukwu's (2021) analysis highlights that education and occupation serve as key instruments of social mobility for minority Christian communities. In the Nigerian context, this insight is particularly relevant. Nigerian Christians in Lagos State, similar to their counterparts elsewhere, often prioritize professional advancement to secure and maintain their social status. Families

strategically organize their resources to support education as a means to achieve upward mobility. The nature of education accessed by Nigerian Christians is often influenced by family background, including financial status, family size, and aspirations. This orientation underscores the instrumental role of education as a pathway to socioeconomic advancement.

Idumwonyi (2018) ethnographic studies on Christian minorities in Nigeria also provide an analytical lens for understanding the role of ritual and religious practices among Nigerian Christians. Viswanathan explored the intersection of religious practices, social life, and identity formation under the dominant presence of Hinduism. Translating this framework to Lagos State, one could examine how Nigerian Christians navigate their social and religious identities within the broader cultural and religious milieu of Nigeria.

Robinson (2003) underscores the historical role of minority Christian communities in shaping their socioeconomic positions through foreign trade, political influence, and their association with established social structures. Similarly, Nigerian Christians in Lagos State historically enjoyed privileged access to educational institutions, particularly those established by missionaries, which facilitated their entry into the middle class. This legacy positions them uniquely in contemporary Nigerian society. Ndukwe (2008) noted the absence of sociological studies on the clergy's role in Christian communities. In Lagos, the role of church leaders in shaping the middle class warrants investigation, particularly their influence on education, professional advancement, and social cohesion.

Another significant area of study is the role of Nigerian Christian women in Lagos society. Drawing parallels from Uchem's (2003) and Obasi & Nnamani (2015) critical analysis of Christian women in Nigeria, future research could explore how Nigerian Christian women navigate their roles in politics, civil society, and cultural representation, including their clothing and participation in public life. Such studies could shed light on the interplay between tradition and modernity in shaping gender roles within the Nigerian Christian middle class.

Drønen's (2018) comparative study on the migration of Christian communities provides another valuable perspective. Applying this framework to Nigerian Christians in Lagos, research could explore migration patterns, both within Nigeria and internationally, and how these movements influence the

transmission of religious practices, community cohesion, and socioeconomic mobility.

In conclusion, the theoretical and empirical gaps in understanding the role of religion, particularly Christianity, in shaping the Nigerian middle class are evident. The production and reproduction of advantage in social and educational domains for Nigerian Christian middle-class groups remain underexplored. This highlights the need for focused research on the familial, cultural, and social practices of Nigerian Christians in Lagos State to explain their social and educational dynamics. Such studies would contribute significantly to the broader understanding of religion's role in shaping socioeconomic hierarchies in Nigeria.

Implication

This research has made a significant contribution to the understanding of the relationship between social, religious, and educational classes in Nigeria. By highlighting the role of mission education and family strategy in social mobility, this study enriches the existing literature on the sociology of religion and middle-class identity. These findings support the argument that social structure and religious practices influence each other, which is in line with Weberian theory of the relationship between religion and class. The study also identified gaps in previous studies, prompting the development of a more comprehensive theory of the dynamics of the Christian middle class in the Nigerian context.

In practical terms, the results of this research can be used by policymakers and educators to design more effective programs in supporting social mobility among Christian communities. By understanding how education and family values contribute to social progress, interventions can be directed to empower underserved groups. In addition, this research can assist religious organizations in formulating better strategies to support their members in achieving educational and economic goals.

The excellence of this research lies in its in-depth qualitative approach, allowing for a richer understanding of individuals' experiences in their social contexts. With a focus on the Christian community in Lagos, the research offers new insights relevant to contemporary social dynamics in Nigeria. The results not only broaden academic knowledge but also have the potential to influence social practice and public policy.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research paves the way for further studies of the interaction between religion, class, and education in a broader context. The success of the qualitative approach shows that similar methods can be applied in other countries with different social contexts. Further research may explore the differences between Christian denominations or compare the experiences of the Christian middle class with other ethnic or religious groups.

While it provides valuable insights, this study has limitations. First, focusing on one location (Lagos) might limit the generalization of the findings to other areas in Nigeria or other countries. Second, the limited sample size in the interviews can reduce the representativeness of the data. Therefore, further research is needed to overcome these limitations by expanding geographical coverage and increasing sample sizes to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the Christian middle class in Nigeria and beyond.

Conclusion

The Nigerian Christian middle class in Lagos represents a critical site for understanding the interplay between religion, education, and socioeconomic mobility. Historically shaped by missionary education and colonial influences, these communities have leveraged education as a strategic pathway to secure and sustain their middle-class status. Despite their achievements, significant heterogeneity exists, influenced by denominational diversity, migration patterns, and gender roles. Church leadership and religious practices further shape their social identity and cohesion. However, empirical gaps remain in understanding the nuanced roles of family dynamics, clergy influence, and migration in reproducing middle-class advantages. Future research should adopt a multidisciplinary approach to unravel these complexities and deepen insights into how Nigerian Christian middle-class communities navigate and contribute to broader societal hierarchies. This study provides a foundation for such inquiries, enriching the discourse on religion, class, and education in Nigeria and beyond.

References

Almquist, E. M. (1966). Social Class and Religiosity. *The Kansas Journal of*

- Sociology*, 2(3), 90–99. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23308511>
- Ammerman, N. T. (2020). Rethinking Religion: Toward a Practice Approach. *American Journal of Sociology*, 126(1), 6–51. <https://doi.org/10.1086/709779>
- Artz, L. (2015). *Global entertainment media: A critical introduction*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Atkinson, W. (2024). The class differentiation of older age: Capitals and lifestyles. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 75(4), 554–573. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.13112>
- Ayling, P. (2019). Whiteness: The Symbol of Quality Education in Contemporary Nigeria. In *Distinction, Exclusivity and Whiteness* (pp. 63–76). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-5781-7_5
- Ball, S. J. (2003). *Class Strategies and the Education Market*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203218952>
- Bartunek, J. M. (1984). Changing Interpretive Schemes and Organizational Restructuring: The Example of a Religious Order. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 29(3), 355. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393029>
- Berry, S. (2023). *Fathers work for their sons: accumulation, mobility, and class formation in an extended Yorùbá community*. Univ of California Press.
- Bosetti, L. (2004). Determinants of school choice: understanding how parents choose elementary schools in Alberta. *Journal of Education Policy*, 19(4), 387–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093042000227465>
- Breidlid, A. (2020). Beyond the Western paradigm. In *Indigenous Knowledges and the Sustainable Development Agenda* (pp. 12–32). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367853785-2>
- Burges, S. E., & Chadwick, T. W. (1947). The Diary of Samuel Edward Burges, 1860-1862. *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, 48(2), 63–75. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27571919>
- Crompton, R. (2006). Class and Family. *The Sociological Review*, 54(4), 658–677. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2006.00665.x>
- Csordas, T. J. (1988). Elements of Charismatic Persuasion and Healing. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 2(2), 121–142. <https://doi.org/10.1525/maq.1988.2.2.02a00030>
- De Neve, G., & Donner, H. (2015). Revisiting Urban Property in India. *Journal of South Asian Development*, 10(3), 255–266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973174115611760>

- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2009). *Handbook Qualitative Research*. Pustaka Pelajar.
- Dickey, S. (2016). *Living Class in Urban India*. Rutgers University Press.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1ch78w3>
- Dillabough, J. (2004). Class, culture and the 'predicaments of masculine domination': encountering Pierre Bourdieu. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(4), 489-506. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569042000236970>
- Drønen, T. S. (2018). Christian Migrant Communities. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 30(3), 227-251. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341412>
- Ejimofofor, C. O. (1971). *The colonial roots of the Nigerian crisis: a study of British policies and administration in Nigeria*. The University of Oklahoma.
- Esther, H. S. C. (1995). Parent Involvement: A Comparison of Different Definitions and Explanations. *Chinese University Education Journal*, 23(1), 39-68.
- Falola, T., & Heaton, M. M. (2008). *A History of Nigeria*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511819711>
- Garnett, N. S. (2010). Affordable private education and the middle class city. *University of Chicago Law Review*, 77(1), 201-222. <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclrev/vol77/iss1/9>
- Giroux, H. (1983). Resistance in the New Sociology. *Harvard Educational Review*, 53(3), 257-294.
- Goldthorpe, J. H. (2007). "Cultural Capital": Some Critical observations. *Sociologica*, 1(2), 5-15.
- Heiman, R. (2019). *Driving after Class*. University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520960312>
- Hogan, A., & Thompson, G. (2017). Commercialization in Education. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.180>
- Horton, R. (1960). A Definition of Religion and Its Uses. *Journal of Royak Anthropological Institute*, 90.
- Idumwonyi, I. M. (2018). *An ethnographic study of gender dynamics in Benin religion and a Pentecostal congregation in Benin City, Nigeria*. Rice University.
- Jackson, T. (2008). *Becoming King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the making of a national leader*. University Press of Kentucky.

- James, C. E., & Parekh, G. (2021). Fixed Trajectories: Race, Schooling, and Graduation from a Southern Ontario University. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 51(4), 67–84. <https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v51i4.189081>
- Jodhka, S. S. (2016). Ascriptive hierarchies: Caste and its reproduction in contemporary India. *Current Sociology*, 64(2), 228–243. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392115614784>
- Jodhka, S. S., & Prakash, A. (2016). *The Indian Middle Class*. Oxford University Press. <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-indian-middle-class-9780199466795?cc=id&lang=en&>
- Jones, B. (1975). Max Weber and the Concept of Social Class. *The Sociological Review*, 23(4), 729–757. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1975.tb00538.x>
- Kaplan, S. (1986). The Africanization of Missionary Christianity: History and Typology. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 16(3), 166–186. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006686X00128>
- Koehrsen, J. (2017). Boundary Bridging Arrangements: A Boundary Work Approach to Local Energy Transitions. *Sustainability*, 9(3), 424. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su9030424>
- Lareau, A. (2000). *Home Advantage: Social Class and Parental Intervention in Elementary Education*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Lareau, A. (2001). Linking Bourdieu's concept of capital to the broader field: The case of family-school relationships. In *Social class, poverty and education* (1st ed., pp. 77–100). Routledge.
- Lewis, P. (2009). *Growing apart: Oil, politics, and economic change in Indonesia and Nigeria*. University of Michigan Press.
- Lleras, C. (2008). Hostile School Climates: Explaining Differential Risk of Student Exposure to Disruptive Learning Environments in High School. *Journal of School Violence*, 7(3), 105–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220801955604>
- Macleod, S. (2007, January). Saddam's Hanging Reverberates Through the Middle East. *TIME*. <https://time.com/archive/6939951/saddams-hanging-reverberates-through-the-middle-east/>
- McCloud, S. (2007). Putting Some Class into Religious Studies: Resurrecting an Important Concept. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 75(4), 840–862. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfm068>
- McGillicuddy, D., & Devine, D. (2018). "Turned off" or "ready to fly" – Ability grouping as an act of symbolic violence in primary school. *Teaching and*

- Teacher Education*, 70, 88–99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.11.008>
- Merriam, S. B., & Grenier, R. S. (2019). *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Mulcare, R. S. (2020). *Challenging the dominant discourse of young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds: social mobility, aspirations and the role of intersectionality* (Issue June) [University of Birmingham]. <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/10897/>
- Ncube, M., & Lufumpa, C. (Eds.). (2014). *The Emerging Middle Class in Africa*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315757896>
- Ndukwe, O. (2008). *Christian faith and social transformation: John Howard Yoder's social ethics as lens for revisioning the ecclesiological identity of the South Central Synod (SCS) of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (The PCN)*. Stellenbosch University.
- Nevill, T., Savage, G. C., & Forsey, M. (2023). It's a diagnosis for the rich: disability, advocacy and the micro-practices of social reproduction. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 44(2), 239–258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2022.2145931>
- Norris, C. (2005). From personal to digital: CCTV, the panopticon, and the technological mediation of suspicion and social control. In D. Lyon (Ed.), *Surveillance as Social Sorting (privacy, risk, and digital discrimination)* (Vol. 1, pp. 249–281). Routledge.
- Nunn, A., & Tepe-Belfrage, D. (2019). Social reproduction strategies: Understanding compound inequality in the intergenerational transfer of capital, assets and resources. *Capital & Class*, 43(4), 617–635. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309816819880795>
- Obasi, C. O., & Nnamani, R. G. (2015). The Role of Umuada Igbo in Conflict Management and Development in Nigeria. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 05(04), 256–263. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2015.54027>
- Phillips, D. R. J. P. (2018). *Evaluating Contemporary Protestant Missions to Children at Risk in South India: Investigating Foundations and Principles for Future Christian Mission*. School of Divinity, The University of Edinburgh.
- Pope, W. (1973). Classic on Classic: Parsons' Interpretation of Durkheim. *American Sociological Review*, 38(4), 399. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2094211>
- Power, S., Edwards, T., Whitty, G., & Wigfall, V. (2003). Education and the Middle Class. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 51(4).

- Reinoso, A. O. (2008). Middle-Class Families and School Choice: Freedom versus Equity in the Context of a 'local Education Market.' *European Educational Research Journal*, 7(2), 176–194. <https://doi.org/10.2304/eerj.2008.7.2.176>
- Rieger, I. A. (2023). Popular Religion or Lived Religion? Exploring Indigenous Religious Festival Practice in Mexico. *International Journal of Latin American Religions*, 7(1), 124–146. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41603-023-00191-z>
- Robertson, S., & Roberts, R. (2022). *Rethinking Privilege and Social Mobility in Middle-Class Migration*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003087588>
- Robinson, R. (2003). *Christians of India*. Sage.
- Roth, G., & Schluchter, W. (1984). *Max Weber's vision of history: Ethics and methods*. Univ of California Press.
- Santana, C. H. V., & Ferrario, M. N. (2022). Middle classes and the rise of authoritarian populist rulers: A comparison between contemporary Brazil and India. *Virtual Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA)*, May, 1–46.
- Stark, R. (1986). The Class Basis of Early Christianity: Inferences from a Sociological Model. *Sociological Analysis*, 47(3), 216. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3711376>
- Syamprasad, K. . (2019). Merit and caste as cultural capital: Justifying affirmative action for the underprivileged in Kerala, India K.V Syamprasad University of Winchester, Winchester, UK. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 17(3), 50–81. <http://www.jceps.com/archives/7043>
- Tuğal, C. (2015). Elusive revolt: The contradictory rise of middle-class politics. *Thesis Eleven*, 130(1), 74–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513615602183>
- Tzanakis, M. (2011). Bourdieu's social reproduction thesis and the role of cultural capital in educational attainment: A critical review of key empirical studies. *Educate*, 11(1), 76–90. <http://www.educatejournal.org/index.php/educate/article/view/251>
- Uchem, R. (2003). Overcoming Women's Subordination in The Igbo African Culture and in the Catholic Church. *Annual Journal of Women for Women International*, 1(1), 32–35. <http://www.iiav.nl/eazines/email/CriticalHalf/2003/No1.pdf>
- Uzochukwu, B. S., Okeke, C. C., Ogwezi, J., Emunemu, B., Onibon, F., Ebenso, B., Mirzoev, T., & Mir, G. (2021). Exploring the drivers of ethnic and religious exclusion from public services in Nigeria: implications for sustainable

- development goal 10. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 41(5/6), 561-583. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-02-2020-0036>
- Vincent, C., & Ball, S. J. (2007). 'Making Up' the Middle-Class Child: Families, Activities and Class Dispositions. *Sociology*, 41(6), 1061-1077. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038507082315>
- Weber, M. (1930). Wissenschaft als Beruf. In (*Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen und Reden zur Philosophie, Politik und Geistesgeschichte* (pp. 752-761). Duncker & Humblot. <https://doi.org/10.17104/9783406660764-752>
- Weber, M. (2013). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Merchant Books.
- Yang, L. (2023). *Constructing Early English as a Foreign Language Education in China: A Case Study of Parents' Choices in a Changing Educational Context*. University of Newcastle, Australia.