

Relationship Between Born Againism and Academic Pursuit among Undergraduate Students in South-East Nigeria: Implications for Counselling

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to ascertain whether born againism correlate with academic pursuit among undergraduate students in South-East of Nigeria. The participants were 126 undergraduates identified as born again students and 110 undergraduates identified as non-born again students from Nigerian Universities in the South-East of Nigeria. The selection of the participants was done using snowball and volunteer sampling techniques. Students' religious activities questionnaire and cumulative grade points average were the primary measures used in the study. Point-Biserial correlation was used to analyze the data gathered. The results show very low negative relationship between engagement in religious activities and academic pursuit among born again students. By gender, there was a perfect positive relationship between born againism and academic pursuit among female undergraduate students and a very low negative relationship between born againism and academic pursuit among male undergraduate students. The implications and limitations were discussed based on these findings.

Key words: Academic pursuit, born again, born againism, counselling, undergraduate students

INTRODUCTION

The term "born againism" is often synonymous with Protestantism (Mullin, 2012). Born againism has permeated the fundamentalist denominations and expanded into institutions of higher learning. The challenge is that some students in the institutions of higher learning have used the concept "born again" to the extent that their goal of academic pursuit is getting thwarted. It seems that many have been brainwashed with wrong ideology of this concept. As a result, one might be tempted to ask the following questions: "Is it wrong to be born again? Is the practice of born againism not religious? Are people lacking the right knowledge about the concept? Or are they applying the knowledge in a wrong way?" If yes is the answers, then, it is disheartening but not surprising because as it may be difficult for man to develop a virtue unless he has knowledge of the value to develop, it may equally be difficult for an individual to develop high intellectual and moral virtues related to academic pursuit without proper knowledge of what they want to achieve and how to achieve it.

For the Christians, the Bible already said "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge" (Hosea, 4:6, NIV). When somebody lack knowledge, the person is likely to

lose facts or information regarding what is true. Accordingly, knowledge means "to be aware of something, to be certain about it, to learn and remember something, to be familiar with something, to be able to recognize or identify something, to be able to distinguish between things, to have enough experience and training and to be intimate with something" (Ozumba, 2001). The implication is that knowledge is ambivalent and prone to several understanding and interpretations. Thus, most people find it difficult to understand the reality of being born again. Sometimes, what most people call 'born again' is exactly what it is not.

In the Christian perspective, the origin of the term "born again" is the New Testament when "Jesus said, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again'" (John 3:3 NIV). It is a term associated with salvation in mainstream Christianity, usually meaning the baptism. Christians who profess to be born again often state that they have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (Robert, 1993; Bornstein, 2005). In the case of the current born again movement, scriptural terminology is being used by most people to teach the opposite of its original meaning. The great doctrine of man's need for miraculous new birth is being presented in a way that denies the very point it is supposed to teach. Thus, young people, especially

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students in the institutions of higher learning, may be vulnerable to academic failure in the name of self-perceived born again. This is appears to be very common among undergraduate students in the South-East, Nigeria where people generally practice religion more than rendering true service to God.

As Okafor (2006) observed, many have held with Karl Marx that religion is an impediment to human progress. Many historic church denominations understood being “born again” as a spiritual regeneration via the sacrament of baptism by the power of the water and the Holy Spirit. This understanding persists in Roman Catholicism, in some parts of Anglicanism, in Lutheranism and in Eastern Orthodoxy. However, the Evangelical Protestants have predominantly understood being born again as an experience of conversion, symbolized by deep-water baptism and rooted in a commitment to one's own personal faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. This same belief is also an integral part of Methodist doctrine and connected with the doctrine of Justification.

According to Melton (2008), born again is a phrase used by many Protestants to describe the phenomenon of gaining faith in Jesus Christ. It is an experience when everything they have been taught as Christians becomes real and they develop a direct and personal relationship with God. According to Purves and Partee (2000), sometimes the phrase “born again” seems to be judgemental, making a distinction between genuine and nominal Christians. Occasionally, the phrase seems historic, like the division between Catholic and Protestant Christians. Furthermore, the term usually includes the notion of human choice in salvation and excludes a view of divine election by grace alone. An early example of the term in its more modern use appears in the sermons of John Wesley. In the sermon printed under the title of ‘A New Birth’ he writes “none can be holy unless he be born again” and “except he be born again, none can be happy even in this world. For a man should not be happy who is not holy.” Also, “I say, (a man) may be born again and so become an heir of salvation”. Wesley also states infants who are baptized are born again, but for adults it is different. The church supposes that all who are baptized in their infancy are at the same time born again. But, it is sure all of riper years, who are baptized, are not at the same time born again (Southey and Southey 2010; Wesley, 1831).

Academic pursuit relates to schooling or learning especially at an advanced level. It is the act of acquiring new or modifying and reinforcing, existing knowledge, behaviours, skills, values, or preferences and may involve synthesizing different types of information. Learning is not compulsory; it is contextual. It does not happen all at once but builds upon and is shaped by previous knowledge. To that end, learning may be viewed as a process, rather than a collection of factual and

procedural knowledge. Learning produces changes in the individual and the changes produced are relatively permanent. Human learning may occur as part of education, personal development, schooling or training. It may be goal-oriented and may be aided by motivation. Academic pursuit is therefore a goal-oriented process of learning in which individuals acquire higher knowledge.

Scholars have observed that religious belief, religious group participation and spiritual orientation are linked to academic motivation, good academic standing and time spent studying. Religious engagement appears to offer a positive influence in other ways. Students who participate in “spiritual” activities claim to have greater emotional wellbeing. Religious communities offer support in times of stress. Studies of African American students have found that students use prayer, Bible reading, church services and meditation as important coping tools. A detailed study at the University of Indiana reports among other findings that “involvement in religious activities and spirituality-enhancing activities does not seem to hinder and may even have mild salutary effects on engagement in educationally purposeful activities and desired outcomes of college.” It is also observed that, as a rule, religious students are less likely to take part in the triumvirate of activities common to most students’ college experience: drinking, drugs and partying (Railsback, 2006; Foubert *et al.*, 2012).

Some other studies even found that religious students tend to behave more ethically. For instance, Perrin (2000) presented college students with a number of “ethical” situations and scenarios. About 44% of born again students chose the “more ethical” response to the scenario while only 26% of non born again students did the same. Students at religiously affiliated colleges are also more likely to be involved in pro-social behaviour. Studies of students enrolled in college and particularly those which focus on students enrolled in religious or elite institutions discussed the effects of religion on college success (Regnerus, 2003). It focuses on personal religiosity or on religious participation and these indicators are likely to produce positive effects. In contrast, more sophisticated longitudinal research shows that sectarian religious affiliation and biblical fundamentalism have a substantial negative effect on educational attainment (Sherkat and Darnell, 1999). In some cases, religious devotion can impede success in school. North Carolina State University professor Alyssa Bryant’s research found that some evangelical students devote so much time to their religious commitments that they have little room left for studying. Bryant asked “do religious students do better because of their religious adherence? Or is it more that good students tend to join religious groups?” It is quite unclear whether born again students do better than other students in terms of

academic pursuit. The problem of this study is posed as a question: “does born againism correlate with academic pursuit among undergraduate students?”. In this regard, the purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between born againism and academic pursuit in South-East of Nigeria. Specifically, the study also investigates whether gender would moderate the relationship between born againism and academic pursuit among the undergraduate students.

Research questions:

- What is the relationship between born againism and academic pursuit among undergraduate students in South-East Nigeria
- How does gender moderate the relationship between born againism and academic pursuit among undergraduate students in South-East Nigeria

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: The participants of the study were 126 undergraduates identified as born again students and 110 undergraduates identified as non born again students from Nigerian Universities in the South-East of Nigeria. The selection of the participants was done using snowball and volunteer sampling techniques.

Design: The design of this study is correlation survey.

Measures: Students’ Religious Activities Questionnaire (SRAQ). This is a 15 item questionnaire that asked the participants to indicate how they have been engaging in religious activities in the campus on a four point rating scale of Very Often, Often, Rarely and Never. Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). The CGPA was used to check the academic performance of the participants for the preceding academic session. The participants were asked to write their cumulative grade point in the box provided on the questionnaire. Students with CGPA of =1.00-2.49 were considered as low-achieving students, students 2.50-3.49 were average students, 3.50-4.49 were considered as high achieving students and those with ACGP of 4.50-5.00 were considered as very high achieving students.

Data analysis: Point-Biserial correlation was used to analyze the data and answer the research questions in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 showed no significant relationship between born againism and academic pursuit for both born again and non born again students. However, r value of -0.16 showed a very low negative relationship between

Table 1: Summary of Point-Biserial Correlation result born againism and academic pursuit

Results	Bom again	CGPA	Non born again	CGPA
Pearson Correlation	1	-0.166	0.085	-0.184
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.063	0.376	0.053	
N	126	126	111	111
Pearson Correlation	-.166	1	-0.021	0.164
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.063		0.825	0.085
N	126	126	111	111
Pearson Correlation	0.085	-0.021	1	0.115
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.376	0.825		0.228
N	111	111	111	111
Pearson Correlation	-.184	0.164	0.115	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.053	0.085	0.228	
N	111	111	111	111

Table 2: Summary of Point-Biserial Correlation result of the relationship between born againism and academic pursuit among male and female students

Results	Male	CGPA	Female	CGPA
Pearson Correlation	1	-0.133	1.000**	0.080
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.483	0.000	0.675	
N	30	30	30	30
Pearson Correlation	-0.133	1	-0.133	-0.155
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.483		0.483	0.414
N	30	30	30	30
Pearson Correlation	1.000**	-0.133	1	-0.177
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.483		0.084
N	30	30	96	96
Pearson Correlation	0.080	-0.155	-0.177	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.675	0.414	0.084	
N	30	30	96	96

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

engagement in religious and academic achievement among born again students while -0.18 r value also showed a very low negative relationship between engagement in religious and academic achievement among non born again students. This implies that being born again or not being born again does not determine academic pursuit.

The result in Table 2 shows that there is a perfect positive relationship (r = 1.00) between born againism and academic pursuit among female undergraduate students and a very low negative relationship (r = -0.133) between born againism and academic pursuit among male undergraduate students.

This study has confirmed that born againism and academic pursuit does not have significant relationship when considering born again and non born again students but that when considering gender, significant relationship exists. To clarify the first instance, being born again does not stop any body from being serious in his or her academic activities. Somebody can attend all religious activities and still perform better in academics and somebody can stay away from all religious activities and still do not perform well in academic works. Success in academics may therefore depend on one’s ability, effort and proper time management not necessarily dependent on engagement or non engagement in religious activities. This supports Sherkat and Darnell (1999)’s finding that religious participation are likely to produce positive effects. Again, the finding provides answer to Bryant

question of: “do religious students do better because of their religious adherence?” The answer is that most often students do better not because of their religious adherence.

The second finding, however, showed that gender moderate the relationship between born againism and academic pursuit. This is because in the correlation result females showed perfect positive relationship while males showed very low negative relationship. The reason for this might be that females are more dedicated to religious activities than their male counterparts. As a result, issues like diligence, prudence, hard work, honesty, commitment and truthfulness should be examined in an attempt to know whether “born againism” affect academic pursuit due to such positive values. These values could have positive influence on student’s behaviour to the extent that they do well in their academic pursuit. An individual who is not born again can lack these values and thus fail in his academic pursuit. Success or failure in academic pursuit is not therefore directly embedded on the issue of being or not being born again. If an individual values hard work and commitment he will strive to succeed always irrespective of his religious affiliation. If he values honesty and truthfulness he will be honest to himself and his prospects. Such a person will not allow the influence of others to over shadow him because of his values. In other words, what individual values direct his behaviour. For instance, going to school, studying effectively, being steadfast in studies, performing well in examination and interest to advance in education are the manifestations of values such as commitment, hard-work, prudence, honesty and truthfulness. Thus, the absence of these values may result in poor academic pursuit irrespective of religious attachment (whether born again or not).

Many students misconceived what born again actually mean. Many students who are not spiritually matured often misconceived what born again really mean. To them the reality of spiritual life is not known. Some of them think that to be born again means to be in the church every time. That is why they often miss lectures in the name of attending one church programme or the other. This kind of students believes that effort does not result in good academic performance. Their believe is that in as much as they perceive themselves to be children of God they will pass their exams with good grade even with little or no effort. Of course, their experience has always been the reverse side of it because the Bible says “study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needed not to be ashamed but rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV). With this scripture, students need to study irrespective of their perceived stand with God if success must be recorded in their academic pursuit. They should understand that academic success is not all about

calling the name of God for 24 h but by doing what one is supposed to do (like reading, attending classes regularly and taking part in every class activity, etc.). But this does not mean students should not work for God. Rather it means students should serve God and study hard so that God can reward their good works by giving them academic excellence.

CONCLUSION

This study has confirmed that being born again or not being born again ordinarily do not have much to do with academic pursuit of students. In the light of these, we recommend there should be prompt religious cum academic orientation and reorientation for all undergraduate students. Also, religious and academic counselling should be given to undergraduate students.

IMPLICATIONS

Again, the findings imply that counsellors are needed in every institute of higher learning to give students opportunity to have somebody to talk to and get solution to their problems. Where there are counsellors, students get help to balance academic pursuit and religious activities so as to function very well. Also, the findings imply that female students should be counselled on how to obtain a balance between religious activities and academic pursuit.

LIMITATIONS

The limitation of this study coincided with the general limitation of correlation study in that the relationships among the variables investigated cannot actually imply causal relationships. Also, the attitude of the participants was another limitation because sometimes it is difficult for somebody to disclose their faith to others. This was why we chose snowball and volunteer sampling techniques so that the participants will join the study willingly. As Coleman puts it, “pursuing academic excellence has nothing to do with trying to be perfect”. What really matters is the values students have in life and the way religion is being operated by the religious leaders. It would be nice for people to be born again since there is need for holy life and also since spiritual values are to be promoted in our society. But, the way the concept is being misused seems that there is no reality in it anymore. Therefore, there is need for people to embrace what Aristotle termed “virtues” and for students to be taught

the enduring values which are transcendent and reflect man's destiny of immortality. Also, there is need for religious leaders to have what Warnock termed "expanded sympathy" that can reduce whatever predicaments religion must have inflicted on their followers. When these are observed, the students are likely to excel academically and become successful in their endeavours (Appendex 1).

APPENDEX

Appendex 1: Students' religious activities questionnaire Instructions: In each of the items, from 1 to 15, tick the response option applicable to you

Items	Very Often	Often	Rarely	Never
Don't go to choir practice	-	-	-	-
Attend prayer meetings	-	-	-	-
Don't attend 'all night' service	-	-	-	-
Take part in soul winning	-	-	-	-
Go for bible study class	-	-	-	-
Visit brethren	-	-	-	-
Don't attend workers'/leaders' meeting	-	-	-	-
Go for fasting service	-	-	-	-
Don't attend evening worship service	-	-	-	-
Visit pastor/church leader	-	-	-	-
Pay tithe	-	-	-	-
Attend Sunday service	-	-	-	-
Attend revivals and crusades	-	-	-	-
Make financial contributions	-	-	-	-
Spend time preparing for outreach service/programme	-	-	-	-

Cumulative Grade Point Average: Please write your CGPA for the preceding academic session in the box provided below

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