

## Part 2

### International Education Issues

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#### Religion as an External Determinant of the Education Systems of the BRICS Member Countries: A Comparative Study

##### **Abstract**

Various internal and external determinants influence an education system. External determinants include language, demographics, geography, technology, politics, and financial and economic trends. Religion is also one of these external determinants that can influence an education system, as well as the education systems of the. The BRICS member countries consist of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The BRICS member countries are one of the most organized and supportive international cooperation organizations that currently exist.

Religion is considered a controversial and sensitive topic. This research aimed to determine how religion as an external determinant influences the education systems of the BRICS member countries. The study focused on the differences and similarities that can be identified based on religion as an external determinant of the various education systems in the BRICS member countries. The BRICS member countries were deliberately chosen for this study because each member state is considered a n secular country in terms of religion, yet each member state treats religion differently in their country. The comparative method was used during this study to identify the best practices from the BRICS member countries. The interpretive research paradigm was used during this study using the qualitative research approach. The document analysis was used during the study to analyse the content of policies, legislation, articles, and government publications using content analysis to be able to identify themes to be able to perform the comparison between the different education systems of the BRICS member countries.

The findings from this study are as follows: Religion as an external determinant of an education system does have a significant influence on the education systems of the various BRICS member countries. It is very important to observe and describe these findings from the context of the various member states.

Keywords: BRICS organization, determinants, religion, education, education systems, values and norms, Comparative Education

## **Introduction**

Religion and education are considered important aspects of human society (Hungerman, 2013, p. 52). Religion has a significant impact on the outcomes of individuals' lives, for example, more generosity, a lower level of risky behaviour and these individuals have better health. In this study, the focus was specifically on the external determinant, namely religion and its influence on the education systems of each of the member states of the BRICS organization respectively. BRICS is an acronym for an organization of five growing national economies, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. De Beer (2017, p. 1) emphasizes that the BRICS member countries have a co-operation agreement in various areas, including finance, health services and education. An important area where the BRICS member countries work together in education. BRICS member countries still face several challenges in providing quality education even though the BRICS organization has put development strategies in place for education. One of the possible reasons for the mentioned challenges may be the different religions practiced in each of the BRICS member countries. Research results published by the Pew Research Centre (2016, p. 116) accentuate those various religions showed an impact on the establishment of schools, for example, Christian monks built libraries that helped with Latin, Greek and preserve Arabic writings and thus universities developed. In India, members of the Buddhist and Hindu monasteries were considered as the most educated persons in the country. In 2012, a study was launched by Wolhuter to determine the impact of religion on the South African education system by analysing ten countries' handling of religion in education. The following nine countries and one European region were used in the study by Wolhuter (2012) namely the United States of America, Western Europe, Armenia, Israel, Iran, Malaysia, Japan, Tanzania, South Africa, and Brazil. Baker (2019, pp. 42-43) indicated that religion cannot be left out in the education system, as religion has a significant influence on various parts of the education curriculum, even though there was a great cultural impact of the education revolution in the world. Because the BRICS member countries have a mutual co-operation agreement, a comparative study was needed to examine the different views of the different countries to identify possible best practices that can be applied by each of the five mentioned member countries within their respective education systems.

## **Theoretical conceptual framework**

### *BRICS organization*

The BRICS organization consists of five member countries, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (De Beer, 2017, p. 1). The reason for the formation of this organization is, among other things, the cooperation about education and economy, in developing countries.

### *Determinants*

Steyn et al. (2017, p. 23) describe determinants (contextual factors) as the factors that have a direct impact on the nature and functioning of a particular education system. The factors are divided into two categories, namely internal

(educational, historical, and reciprocal nature) and external factors (demographics, climate and geography, economics and science, politics, legislation, philosophy and language). This study focused on religion as an external determinant. According to Steyn et al. (2017, p. 10), the internal determinants are the forces and factors that are within a particular education system and the forces and factors that determine the current situation of the education system, while external determinants are the forces and factors that come from outside the education system that influences the education system.

### *Education*

Education is defined as the deliberate, planned action whereby the educators enable the learners to acquire the desired competencies so that the learners can live out their calling in all facets of their lives (Steyn et al., 2017, p. 11).

### *Education systems*

An education system can be defined as a framework or structure to effectively provide for the educational needs of a particular target group (Steyn et al., 2017, p. 15). Steyn and Wolhuter (2014, p. 56) define an education system as the structure where education is presented in an effective way to satisfy the needs of a group of people in a specific environment. In this study, the national education systems of the BRICS member countries were used to determine how religion as an external determinant influences the education systems.

### *Religion*

The theory of religion is classified into two categories namely substantive and functional theory. The substantive theory focuses on the content and meaning that religion holds for man. The substantive theory emphasizes that people live out faith because their beliefs make sense if they retain values (Pals, 2006, p. 13). Edward Tylor and James Frazer are considered the founders of this theory of religion. The said scientists believed that religion does not consist of any supernatural revelation or miraculous events but can only be accepted from natural explanations and theories. Tylor and Frazer further believed that religion could be explained by examining how religion began so that religion could be perceived by its simplest form (Pals, 2006, p. 44).

## **Research aims and objectives**

The primary research objectives of this study was to describe the nature of religion as an external determinant in the education systems of the BRICS member countries. The secondary research objectives were as follows. Firstly, to determine and analyse the differences regarding religion as an external determinant of the education systems of the BRICS member countries. The second objective was to examine and determine the differences regarding religion as an external determinant of the education systems of the BRICS member countries. Lastly, possible best practices regarding religion in the education systems of the BRICS member countries were identified. These best practices can then be applied by BRICS members states.

## **Research design and method**

Nieuwenhuis (2018, p. 52) explains a paradigm as a set of beliefs or assumptions about fundamental aspects of reality that give rise to a specific worldview. This scholar further emphasizes that a paradigm deals with the basic assumptions based on religion. The qualitative research approach was used in the study. Nieuwenhuis (2018, p. 52) states that qualitative research involves an open, flexible method without strict guidelines. Qualitative research deals with the in-depth investigation of a set phenomenon.

### *Sampling*

In this research, non-probability sampling was used. The purposive sampling in the non-probability sampling sphere is ideal for this study because the BRICS member countries are a supranational grouping that was deliberately selected for this study. Relevant documents on religion in the BRICS members states and its effect on education were sourced.

### *Data collection*

Data were analysed and generated by analysing different documents along with relevant literature. Legislation and policy documents regarding religion of all five BRICS member countries were the emphasis for data collection in this research.

### *Data analysis*

Document analysis is described as an appropriate method in comparative studies and for that reason, the document analysis was used in this study. According to Bowen (2009) and Dreyer (2016), the research questions in a study can be answered by studying the relevant documents and then interpreting them to gain the meaning and knowledge of the study.

## **Findings**

The main reason for this study was to conduct a study that is comparative to determine the nature of religion as an external determinant of the BRICS member countries. Each member state of the BRICS organization's religious composition is unique and diverse and therefore significant differences and similarities have been found in the education systems of the BRICS member states.

### *Differences and similarities regarding the freedom of religion in the BRICS member countries*

Freedom of religion in BRICS member states is clearly defined according to each member state's Constitution and therefore every citizen has the right to this freedom. In practice, according to the literature, the citizens of certain countries, unfortunately, do not always have this right to freedom. Citizens may not convert to any other religion in certain parts of India. Of all the five member states, China's religious activities are controlled and restricted most and even most of all the countries in the world. Russia and India are also struggling with religious

restrictions by the state. South Africa and Brazil compared to Russia, India and China have significant and even less religious restrictions.

Minority groups regarding religion are experiencing significant opposition in Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Although Russia guarantees freedom of religion for all citizens, the minority groups are disadvantaged and even restricted in religious activities. Minority groups in Brazil, for example, the Afro-Brazilian groups do experience opposition to their religion. China finds itself in a unique situation as there are 55 minority groups in China. This situation poses potential problems for the Chinese government as all the ethnic groups' freedom of religion must be taken into account. South Africa did experience religious restraint during the COVID 19 pandemic in 2020, but religious restraint, in general, is relatively rare.

### *Differences and similarities regarding the religious composition in the BRICS member countries*

All five BRICS member states are considered multi-religious countries. Each type of religion has its challenges, as each religion has its rituals and views, and all five BRICS member states must take these rituals and views into account because of their Constitution. Only Russia's and India's Constitution clearly states that these two countries do not give one religion preference over the other (secular in nature). In India, the Hindu religion is mainly practiced. Most of the Chinese population consider themselves atheists but Taoism also plays an important role in Chinese society. In South Africa, Russia, and Brazil the various forms of the Christian religion are most practiced in these countries (Christianity, Orthodox Catholic and Roman Catholic). Although all five BRICS member states are considered multi-religious countries, there is one type of religion that is preferred in each country namely Roman Catholic (Brazil), Orthodox Catholic (Russia), Hinduism (India), Atheism (China) and Christianity (South Africa). From the latter statement it can be deduced that even though the five BRICS member countries are regarded as multi-religious countries, the majority religion does have a greater impact (especially in schools) compared to that of minority religions.

### *Differences and similarities regarding religion as a curricular activity in the education systems of the BRICS member countries*

Religion is dealt with significantly differently in the education systems of the BRICS member states. In the Indian and Chinese schools, no religious activities are allowed according to the respective constitutions, while any religious activities may take place in the Brazilian, Russian and South African schools, provided that the activities comply with various guidelines. Essentially, any religious activity is offered only in primary schools in Brazil, provided attendance is voluntary. Religion in the Brazilian schools is influenced by the Roman Catholic religion and this event could be detrimental to the minority groups in Brazil as not all religions' views are taken into account. According to Russian law, learners in Russia have the free choice to choose the religious module in which he or she wants to be taught. In Russian schools, the latter legislation is not always implemented correctly, as the school's resources determine which module the learners should take. The latter handling of religion causes unhappiness among the learners and parents as they do not have the free choice about which religious module they want to be taught.

Chinese law clearly states that no religious activity may take place in public schools, yet the ruling party of China wants to establish atheist principles in their learners in schools. China has the most ethnic groups compared to the other BRICS member countries. According to legislation and policies, minority ethnic groups derive several advantages over schools. The ethnic groups pose several challenges for the government of China as all the ethnic groups' views in their education systems have to be taken into account. Various documents, including the South African Schools Act number 76 of 1996, the CAPS (2011) and education policies of the various provinces, provide clear guidelines on how religion may be dealt with in the South African schools. In South Africa, Religious Studies is offered as an elective to provide learners with the necessary knowledge of different types of religions worldwide. All learners in South Africa are exposed to the concept of religion through a subject namely Life Orientation. Teachers in South Africa have the challenge of respecting all kinds of religions and not preaching their views on religion. This challenge of respecting all religions can lead to conflict in schools, as learners may feel discriminated against if one type of religion is singled out during a hall opening. The Indian government is experiencing opposition from the minority groups regarding religion in schools as certain religions enjoy preference about the compilation of academic textbooks. This preferential treatment of religion is contrary to the Indian constitution, as no religion may be singled out or discriminated against. The preference given to a particular religion in textbooks may result in a possible negative effect on the education system of India.

*Differences and similarities regarding the legal framework of religion in the education systems of the BRICS member countries*

Regarding religious policy, there is a clear distinction between the five BRICS member countries. In China and India, there is no official religious policy in their education system as no religious activities may take place in public schools. Only education laws in Brazil and Russia stipulate those religious activities may take place in schools, but no official religious policies are applied in the education systems of the latter two countries. Although India should not experience problems regarding religion in its schools, there are still problems. The South African constitution provides clear guidelines that religious activities may take place in public schools. As the South African schools allow religious activities, various problems arise in the education system. The governing bodies of schools in South Africa are confronted with challenges regarding religion, as they are responsible for the religious ethos of the school.

*Differences and similarities regarding the influence of society on religion in the education systems of the BRICS member countries*

Religion has a significant impact on the education systems of all five BRICS member countries. Religion in Brazil among the minority groups causes violence because they are discriminated against. Currently, there is a significant increase in discussions and contradictions regarding the constitutional inclusion of religion in schools and the controversial inclusion of gender and sexual issues in the standards and policies in Brazilian schools. In Russia, the four traditional religions are singled out. Minority groups regarding religion that are not part of the four traditional

religions are strictly controlled by the Russian government. This handling of religion is causing unhappiness among the people of Russia. The Islam religion which is considered by Russia to be one of its religions is restricted in schools as Muslim traditional clothing is banned in schools. The Chinese government finds itself in a unique situation as China has 55 minority groups and all the groups must have access to education. The majority religion in China is Atheism which is subtly made visible in government by schools by teaching some of the principles of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism which is contrary to the Chinese Constitution that no religion may take place in public schools. This action can cause potential conflict among society. South Africa is currently experiencing a morality crisis due to religion. About 60% of the total population of South Africa indicated that they attend some religious activity weekly. From these statistics, likely, the moral behaviour of South Africans is strongly influenced by the attendance of religious activities. From the above information, it can be deduced that teachers in South African schools experience challenges concerning moral values. Because only 60% of the population attends a form of religious activity every week, it is a difficult task for the teachers to guide the learners on the right path due to the close connection between religion and human moral values. In India, the population is experiencing challenges regarding different types of religions. The conflict has arisen over the years between the Hindu and Islamic religions. This conflict is proof that the Constitution of India is not made into practice. All religions in India have the right to freedom but the legislation is a big challenge for the Indian government as the people do not respect all the different types of religions. In line with the latter statement, more people in India are being killed due to differences in religions. The conflict is of great concern to the Indian government. Along with the conflict, India is facing major challenges regarding human development status because parents do not want to place their children in a modern education system. As parents in India do not agree with the current education systems in terms of religious principles, the action causes a vicious cycle that causes learners to show low literacy levels which means that they cannot get educated. These learners cannot escape from their current situation which has an infinite negative cycle for the learners.

## Conclusion

The findings from this study are as follows: Religion as an external determinant of an education system does have a significant influence on the education systems of the various BRICS member countries. It is very important to observe and describe these findings from the context of the various member states. Best practices have been proposed to try to improve the influence of religion as an external determinant on the education systems of the BRICS member countries, but it is not part of this article.

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