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PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR INTEGRATING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AT THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AMUMARA

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Abstract

This study explores the Philosophical Foundations for Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Theological Education at The Apostolic Church Theological Seminary Amumara (TACTSA). TACTSA has yet to prioritize AI literacy among educators and students, resulting in a gap in modern technology adoption. This omission prevents the Seminary from harnessing an interdisciplinary approach, integrating theology, AI, and education, and developing a framework for evaluating innovations. The study investigated the perceptions of theological educators, students and other stakeholders on integrating AI in theological education with the objectives of exploring the perceived impact of AI on theological educators, concepts, and human motivation/spiritual growth, and identifying associated philosophical frameworks, ethical concerns, and future opportunities/challenges at TACTSA. The study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings of the respondents. The data collection method involved in-depth interviews with 80 respondents, who were selected using a purposive sampling method. The findings reveal a complex landscape of perceptions regarding AI's impact on theological education at TACTSA. While AI offers opportunities for enhanced learning and personalized education, it also poses challenges such as bias and depersonalization. Educators must prioritize transparency, accountability, and fairness, and develop AI literacy and ethics guidelines to mitigate these risks.

Keywords: AI, theological, education, pedagogical, philosophical framework, epistemology

Introduction

The burgeoning integration of artificial intelligence in various sectors has precipitated a paradigmatic shift in the educational landscape, necessitating a critical examination of its far-reaching implications on theological education. The foundational works of Jasanoff (2015) and Hasse (2017) that explore the intricate relationships between sociotechnical imaginaries and far-reaching implications of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), on educational paradigms has made the pursuit of integrating AI in educational settings a pivotal aspect of the ongoing digital transformation in teaching and learning. As the technogenic model of civilization continues to shape human's understanding of knowledge production and dissemination, it is essential to develop a nuanced understanding of technology's role in shaping learning experiences (Ihde, 1990; Feenberg, 1999).

This study aims to foster pedagogical congruence and epistemological coherence in the use of AI in theological education. The Apostolic Church Theological Seminary Amumara has not invested in developing AI literacy among its educators and students. As

a result no thoughtful and intentional approach to AI integration has been adopted by the school. This lack in the use of modern technology has denied the seminary an integrative field of knowledge, and development of a configurative framework for evaluating innovations at the intersection of theology, AI, and education. Thus, the seamless integration of AI in theological education necessitates a critical examination of the underlying epistemological and pedagogical frameworks (Lepskii, 2022). The integration of AI in theological education especially in a seminary such as TACTSA no doubt can also raise important philosophical questions about the nature of knowledge, the role of the teacher, and the relationship between technology and theology. However, theological education at TACTSA is at a critical juncture, her students are aware of AI and have been employing it in their various assignments but not properly harnessed. Some also are afraid of using AI while those who do employ it secretly as if they are cheating.

As the world becomes increasingly complex and interconnected, theological educators in TACTSA must adapt their teaching methods and instructional designs to prepare students for effective ministry in the 21st century. One of which is the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in theological education. The literature on AI in education is vast and growing rapidly. Studies have shown that AI can improve student learning outcomes, increase student engagement, and facilitate more effective assessment and evaluation methods (Baker, 2016; Dziuban et al., 2018). However, the literature on AI in theological education is limited. Few studies have explored the potential benefits and challenges of integrating AI in theological education, and even fewer have examined the philosophical foundations for doing so. To address this gap, this paper proposes a philosophical framework for integrating AI in theological education, seeking to explore the perceived impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the role and authority of theological educators, traditional theological concepts, and theological understandings of human motivation and spiritual growth. Also to identify the ethical concerns and future opportunities and challenges associated with integrating AI in theological education at The Apostolic Church Theological Seminary Amumara. The framework is based on three key concepts: pedagogical congruence, epistemological coherence, and theological integrity.

Conceptualizations

edagogical congruence refers to the alignment between teaching methods, learning objectives and student outcomes. The effective integration of artificial intelligence in theological education at The Apostolic Church Theological Seminary Amumara will hinge on the harmonization of instructional design, learning outcomes, and assessment strategies. This harmonization will ensure that AI-driven educational tools and platforms align with the institution's learning objectives and outcomes as proposed by Garrison & Anderson (2003); Biggs (1996). In the context of AI-enhanced theological education, pedagogical congruence necessitates a reevaluation of traditional teaching methods and learning strategies. Leveraging on AI-powered adaptive learning systems will enable educators in TACTSA to create personalized learning pathways that cater to the unique needs and abilities of each student as Laurillard, (2013) underscores. Moreover,

pedagogical congruence enables educators to design and deliver instruction that is aligned with the institution's learning objectives and outcomes, thereby promoting a more efficient and effective learning environment. Ultimately, the harmonization of instructional design, learning outcomes, and assessment strategies is crucial for harnessing the potential of AI in theological education.

The institution can go for an adaptive learning system that uses AI to provide personalized feedback and assessment in biblical studies, aligning with specific learning objectives and still maintain their philosophy of education. The achievement of learning objectives in systematic theology could be supported by creating also a virtual learning environment that uses AI to facilitate discussion, reflection and collaborative learning. In the same vein one –on-one support and guidance to students in pastoral theology which is a key aspect of theological education in TACTSA can be provided through an intelligent tutoring system that uses AI. These innovations will improve student learning outcomes, enhance teaching effectiveness and increase efficiency and productivity by reducing unnecessary complexities. Moreover, the impending arrival of AI in theological education presents a unique opportunity for educators to reimagining the learning experience, promote digital literacy, and cultivate a community of learners who are equipped to thrive in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. Introducing AI to the theological education at TACTSA will not be without its challenges. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is poised to transform various fields of knowledge, including biblical interpretation. However, Chabata (2023) observes that in Zimbabwe, AI has been met with suspicion, perceived as a secular and human-centered technology that could potentially lead to spiritual decline, moral decay, and the trivialization of Christian teachings. Chabata (2023) in their study utilized Colossians 2:8 as a framework to explore the compatibility of AI with the biblical warnings against "philosophy, empty deceit, human tradition, and the basic principles of the world." The Zimbabwean context served as a case study to investigate whether the concerns of the early Christian church regarding worldly philosophies resonate with contemporary attitudes towards AI among clergy, theologians, Christian believers, and scholars of religious studies. Employing qualitative research methodologies rooted in African Biblical Hermeneutics and Exegetical Analysis, this study found that AI, much like a tool wielded by a craftsman, can either edify or undermine biblical interpretation, depending on one's perspective and approach. This similar challenge of stigmatizing AI as humanistic and profane technological system could be met with in TACTSA, Nigeria.

Knowledge claims and beliefs must be consistent even in theological discusses. Scholars in theological institutions should not be afraid of passing their belief systems through epistemological crucible. While belief could be true or false, knowledge is always true; belief changes, knowledge is constant; belief is persuasive, knowledge is instructive. This is why there must be consistency between knowledge claims and beliefs. The notion of epistemic harmony (Polanyi, 1958) is crucial in the context of integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) in theological education at TACTSA.

Epistemic coherence refers to the internal consistency and logical harmony of knowledge structures and belief systems (Lakatos, 1970). In the context of AI-enhanced theological education, epistemic harmony necessitates the design of AI-powered tools and platforms that facilitate the development of logically coherent and consistent knowledge frameworks (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). For instance, an AI-driven conceptual mapping tool could be employed to support student learning in systematic theology, providing a visual representation of key concepts and their interrelationships (Jonassen, 2006). In the pursuit of epistemic coherence in theological education, it is essential to consider the intricate relationships between knowledge, justification, and coherence (Thagard et al., 2002). Epistemic coherence ensures systematic and logical connections between beliefs, propositions, and concepts (Shogenji, 2001). In the context of integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) in theological education at The Apostolic Church Theological Seminary Amumara, epistemic coherence assumes a critical role in ensuring that AI-powered tools and platforms facilitate the development of coherent and justified knowledge frameworks.

The notion of epistemic coherence is closely tied to the concept of justification, which involves the evaluation of evidence and arguments in support of a particular belief or proposition (Amaya, 2008). In theological education, epistemic coherence requires that students develop a nuanced understanding of the relationships between different theological concepts, propositions, and frameworks (Dilley, 2013). Furthermore, epistemic coherence involves the consideration of multiple perspectives, including those from philosophy, science, and scripture (Süt, 2021). Theological beliefs and practices must be consistent. In the realm of theological education, the notion of doxastic harmony (Plantinga, 1983) assumes paramount importance, particularly in the context of integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into theological education. Doxastic harmony refers to the systematic and logical consistency of theological convictions and praxis (Lakatos, 1970). In this context, AI-powered tools and platforms must be designed to facilitate the development of theologically nuanced and coherent convictions and praxis. For instance, an AI-driven immersive learning environment could be employed to support student learning in pastoral theology, providing a simulated context for practicing pastoral skills and fostering empathetic understanding (Jonassen, 2006).

The synergy between artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and online learning has sparked profound philosophical and theological inquiries regarding the intersections of human emotions, cognitive development, and spiritual growth (Yu & Tian, 2025). However, existing virtual learning environments often neglect the pivotal role of affective and emotional factors in shaping user experiences, particularly within the context of religious education and moral development. Yu & Tian (2025) carried out a study that undertakes an exploratory analysis of an emotionally intelligent virtual learning platform, incorporating a philosophical examination of the impact of technology-mediated learning on human emotions, ethical reasoning, and spiritual formation. The findings suggest that emotionally responsive design enhances learner engagement, mitigates negative emotional experiences, and augments satisfaction, with a significant majority of users (over 85%) expressing positive emotional responses. The implications of the study extend beyond

technological advancements, addressing fundamental philosophical concerns regarding the nature of learning, digital embodiment, and the intersection of artificial intelligence with religious pedagogy (Yu & Tian 2025). If theological education in TACTSA acknowledges students' emotional and spiritual needs, emotionally intelligent design can enrich AI integrated religious education, fostering a more profound engagement with theological discourse, moral reflection, and community-based learning.

The Apostolic Church Theological Seminary Amumara is located at Obibi Amumara in Ezinihitte Mbaise LGA of Imo State Nigeria. Amumara, a historic community nestled in the heart of Ezinihitte Mbaise, boasts a rich cultural heritage that spans centuries. The ancestral roots of Amumara's people are intertwined with the storied past of the Ngwa-Igbo, a migratory group that settled in the area, leaving an indelible mark on the region's history. A significant milestone in Amumara's history was the establishment of Ezinihitte Mbaise as an independent Local Government Area in 1989, marking a new era of self-governance and autonomy for the community. Today, Amumara's cultural identity remains deeply rooted in its traditional music, dances, and customs, which continue to play a vital role in community development efforts. The revered Ọjị Ezinihitte cultural festival serves as a powerful symbol of unity and conviviality, reflecting the community's unwavering spirit of fraternity and cooperation. The Apostolic Church Theological Seminary, Amumara (TACTSA), located in Imo State, Nigeria, has a rich history spanning five decades already. Founded on January 25, 1975, as the Apostolic Bible College (ABC) Amumara by The Apostolic Church Nigeria then Igbo Field (now Igboland Territory), the institution began with a modest staff of five members, a clerk, and twenty-two students. Over the years, TACTSA has undergone significant transformations, including its upgrade to a theological seminary in 1997.

In 2008, the National Universities Commission (NUC) approved TACTSA's affiliation with University of Uyo for undergraduate degree programs, leading to the institution's status as a university college. Subsequent NUC visits in 2011, 2018 and 2023 resulted in full accreditation for TACTSA's degree programs. Today, TACTSA boasts a student population of approximately 130 undergraduates, 30 lecturers (including three professors and nine PhD holders). The institution has also established study centers in Aba, Umuahia, and Owerri. TACTSA is committed to developing leaders who will be "fishers of men" while pursuing sound theological, philosophical, spiritual, and practical education with distinctively innovative perspectives on socioreligious economy of the 21st Century. The institution prioritizes academic excellence and spiritual efficacy, utilizing its human resources to produce leaders fit for ministry and society. TACTSA offers various programs, including Certificate in Theology, Diploma in Theology, Bachelor of Theology, Bachelor of Arts in Religious and Cultural Studies, Postgraduate Diploma in Theology, Master of Arts in Systematic Theology, and Master of Arts in Biblical Studies.

Methods

This section presents the findings from a phenomenological study that explored the perceived impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on theological education at The Apostolic

Church Theological Seminary Amumara. The study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings of the respondents. The data collection method involved in-depth interviews with 80 respondents, who were selected using a purposive sampling method. The respondents comprised: 40 Students, 15 Lecturers, 10 Ex-students, 10 AI experts, and 5 School board members. The respondents' answers were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, which involved identifying, coding, and categorizing themes and patterns in the data. The analysis is organized around the following research questions:

1. How do you envision artificial intelligence (AI) impacting the role and authority of theological educators in the socialization and formation of students for ministry at The Apostolic Church Theological Seminary Amumara?

2. In what ways do you think the presence of AI might challenge or reinforce traditional theological concepts, such as the image of God, sin, and redemption?

3. How do you perceive the relationship between AI and theological understandings of human motivation, self-actualization, and spiritual growth?

4. What philosophical frameworks or perspectives do you think are essential for understanding the intersection of AI and theological education, and how might they inform the integration of AI at the seminary?

5. How do you think AI might impact the development of critical thinking, biblical interpretation, and other essential skills for ministry, and what steps can be taken to mitigate any negative effects?

6. What ethical concerns or questions arise when considering the integration of AI in theological education, particularly with regards to issues like bias, accountability, and transparency?

7. Looking ahead to the next 5-10 years, what opportunities or challenges do you foresee arising from the intersection of AI and theological education, and how can the seminary prepare to address them?

Discussion

The findings reveal a complex and multifaceted landscape of perceptions regarding the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on theological educators. On one hand, some respondents enthusiastically envision AI as a transformative tool that can enhance learning, facilitate personalized education, and support administrative tasks. They see AI as a means to augment the educational experience, making it more efficient, effective, and engaging. On the other hand, other respondents express concerns about AI's limitations, potential inaccuracy, and inability to replace human mentors. They worry that over-reliance on AI might lead to a diminishment of critical thinking, spiritual growth, and meaningful human connections. These concerns highlight the need for careful consideration of AI's integration in theological education, balancing its benefits with concerns about ethics, cultural sensitivity, and human connection. Ultimately, a nuanced understanding of these complexities can inform strategies for effective AI adoption,

ensuring that technological advancements serve to enrich, rather than diminish, the theological educational experience. The impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on traditional theological concepts is a complex and multifaceted issue. Some respondents expressed concerns that AI might challenge or undermine these concepts, citing potential pitfalls such as misinformation, poor interpretation, and the simplification or redefinition of core theological ideas. For instance, AI's limitations in providing accurate and nuanced information could lead to incomplete or inaccurate understandings of concepts like sin, redemption, and the image of God.

On the other hand, others saw AI as an opportunity to enrich and deepen understanding of theological concepts. They argued that AI can provide new perspectives and opportunities for reflection, reinforcing beliefs about human creativity and divine qualities. Additionally, AI can facilitate exploration of fresh perspectives on traditional concepts like redemption and sin, potentially leading to a more nuanced and informed understanding of these ideas. However, there is a cautionary note to be sounded. While AI can be a valuable tool for theological exploration, it is essential to balance technological advancements with careful consideration of their implications for theological understanding. The relationship between Artificial Intelligence (AI) and theological understandings of human motivation, self-actualization, and spiritual growth is a complex and multifaceted issue. Some respondents expressed skepticism about AI's potential impact on spiritual growth, citing its limitations as a machine created by humans. They argued that AI lacks spiritual introspection and cannot fully comprehend the complexities of human motivation and spiritual growth.

Others saw AI as a potential tool for facilitating personal growth and spiritual development, but emphasized the importance of recognizing its limitations. They noted that AI can analyze human behavior and identify trends, but ultimately, spiritual growth is a deeply personal and relational process that cannot be reduced to data or algorithms. While AI can be a helpful tool for reflection and self-awareness, it cannot replace the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. The intersection of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and theological education requires a multifaceted approach, incorporating various philosophical frameworks and perspectives. Some respondents emphasized the importance of integrating ethics, epistemology, and theology to foster a nuanced understanding of AI's implications for ministry. Others highlighted the need for ministers to embody Christian values and serve as living examples of Christ, as AI challenges traditional biblical interpretation and understanding. Additionally, respondents suggested that Christian ethics or virtue ethics could provide a helpful framework for guiding the use of AI in theological education, ensuring that it aligns with faith and deepens theological convictions. Ultimately, the goal is to harness AI to serve God's purposes, while maintaining the integrity of theological education.

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in theological education can significantly impact critical thinking, biblical interpretation, and ministry skills. AI can enhance learning resources, facilitate analytical tools, and personalize education, making biblical interpretation more thorough and accessible. For instance, AI can provide

historical and linguistic analysis, enabling students to gain a deeper understanding of the biblical text. However, there is a risk of over-reliance on technology, loss of personal engagement, and oversimplification of complex issues. To mitigate these risks, educators must emphasize critical thinking, balance technology use, and encourage ethical reflection. Students should be taught to use AI as a tool, not a crutch, and to question, analyze, and think critically about the information AI provides. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in theological education raises significant ethical concerns. Respondents highlighted the potential for bias in AI algorithms, lack of transparency in decision-making processes, and the need for accountability. There is a risk that AI-driven assessments and decisions may perpetuate biases, compromising fairness and theological integrity.

To mitigate these risks, educators must prioritize transparency, accountability, and fairness in AI-driven processes. They must also safeguard the human element in theological education and ensure that technological advancements do not compromise theological integrity. Furthermore, respondents emphasized the importance of using AI responsibly, upholding ethical standards, and avoiding the distortion of truth. The integration of AI in theological education comes with both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, AI can enhance personalized learning, research, and virtual mentorship, increasing accessibility and inclusivity. It can also provide new opportunities for teaching and learning, easing the growth and mastery of theology for both students and educators. However, there are also challenges to consider, such as job displacement, bias, depersonalization, and information overload. To address these concerns, institutions like TACTSA must develop AI literacy, foster experimentation, establish ethics guidelines, and invest in faculty development and critical thinking. Moreover, educators must ensure that AI enhances, rather than undermines, the mission of the seminary, preserving the human connection that is vital in theological education

Conclusion

This study explored the philosophical foundations for integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) in theological education at The Apostolic Church Theological Seminary Amumara. The findings reveal a complex scenario of perceptions regarding AI's impact on theological educators, traditional theological concepts, and human motivation. While AI offers opportunities for enhanced learning and personalized education, it also poses challenges such as bias, depersonalization, and information overload. To mitigate these risks, educators must prioritize transparency, accountability, and fairness in AI-driven processes. The development of AI literacy and establishment of ethics guidelines are also crucial. The integration of AI in theological education requires a nuanced understanding of its benefits and limitations. Educators can harness the potential of AI by acknowledging the complexities and challenges of its adoption to enrich theological education while preserving the integrity and human connection essential to ministerial formation. As the seminary looks to the future, it is crucial to adopt a thoughtful and intentional approach to AI integration. This involves making transparency, accountability, and fairness in AI-driven processes of utmost importance and ensuring that technological advancements

serve to enhance, rather than diminish, the theological educational experience. TACTSA thus, can navigate the opportunities and challenges of AI, ultimately strengthening its mission to form ministers for effective service in the church and the world.

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