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Influence of Religious Beliefs on Cultural Adaptation of Immigrants in
Germany



Influence of Religious Beliefs on Cultural Adaptation of Immigrants in Germany

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article was to analyze influence of religious beliefs on cultural adaptation of immigrants in Germany.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Religious beliefs strongly influence how immigrants in Germany adapt to new cultural environments by shaping identity, social networks, and integration patterns. Studies show that immigrants who actively maintain religious practices often preserve cultural traditions longer, while also using religious communities as support systems for social integration. However, strong religious attachment can sometimes slow cultural assimilation when it limits interaction with broader German society. Overall, religious beliefs act both as a bridge for community support and a filter for cultural adaptation, depending on the level of openness and interfaith interaction.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Acculturation theory, social identity theory & religious coping theory may be used to anchor future studies on the influence of religious beliefs on cultural adaptation of immigrants in Germany. Immigrant integration programs and NGOs in Germany should design culturally sensitive interventions that recognize the dual role of religious beliefs as both facilitators and potential barriers to adaptation. Policymakers in Germany should implement integration policies that formally include religious communities as partners in immigrant adaptation initiatives.

Keywords: *Religious Beliefs, Cultural Adaptation, Immigrants*

INTRODUCTION

Cultural adaptation refers to how immigrants adjust to life in a new society through learning the host culture's language, participating in community and cultural activities, and integrating socially and economically into the host society. In developed contexts such as Germany, research shows that first-generation immigrants participate less frequently in cultural and social activities than natives, though later generations (e.g., second/2.5 generation) show higher participation and integration, suggesting improvement over time as cultural adaptation increases across generations (Giovanis, 2022). Participation in social and cultural activities such as concerts, volunteering, and community events enhances intercultural awareness and contributes to broader integration, which reflects deeper cultural adaptation. Language proficiency, a key component of adaptation, enables better communication and opportunities for engagement in host societies, where exposure and social interaction facilitate learning host-culture norms and behaviors (Bierwiazzonek, 2025). These trends illustrate that in developed economies, cultural adaptation progresses as immigrants gain local language skills and participate more actively in cultural life, strengthening their sense of belonging and community attachment. However, first-generation immigrants often face barriers that slow adaptation compared with later generations who typically show higher levels of integration and participation.

In many developing economies, cultural adaptation is shaped by both formal and informal integration mechanisms, including language learning, social networks, and economic engagement. Although large-scale statistics are scarce, studies indicate that migrants in developing contexts often rely heavily on community support networks to learn local languages and customs, which facilitates gradual integration into host communities (Tang & Zhang, 2024). Engagement in work and community activities contributes to socio-cultural adaptation, as migrants build relationships beyond their own groups and adopt host-country norms and practices. Factors such as social attitudes toward immigrants and access to language and education programs influence how quickly and effectively immigrants adapt culturally in developing settings. Broader research on cross-cultural adaptation underscores that increased exposure to the host culture through daily activities leads to stronger cultural competence and integration outcomes over time.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, cultural adaptation among migrants and internally displaced persons often involves coping with language barriers, social exclusion, and economic challenges that affect how well they integrate into host communities. Research on adaptation mechanisms shows that socio-economic and cultural integration depends heavily on access to social resources, community support, and exposure to host cultural practices, which help individuals learn local norms and languages (Ncube, 2019). Participation in community activities, shared work environments, and social networks facilitates cultural learning and adaptation, though structural challenges such as limited resources and discrimination can slow this process. Adaptation is not only behavioral but also involves negotiating identity and belonging within diverse cultural landscapes, especially in multi-ethnic urban centers. Overall, successful cultural adaptation in Sub-Saharan Africa is often tied to community receptivity and the strength of support systems that help migrants navigate linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Religious beliefs encompass the structured system of practices, doctrinal adherence, religious identity, and spiritual values that shape individuals' worldviews and behaviors within and across communities. Religious practices such as regular worship, ritual observance, and participation in

faith communities provide social networks that can either facilitate or constrain cultural adaptation, depending on how inclusive these communities are in the host society; participation in host-society cultural activities are often higher when faith groups encourage intergroup engagement (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Doctrinal adherence the degree to which individuals strictly follow religious teachings can influence openness to new cultural norms, where more flexible interpretations of doctrine may support language learning and civic participation, while rigid adherence may slow adaptation (Hirschman, 2004). A strong religious identity provides psychological security during adaptation, but may also slow integration if individuals primarily socialize within co-religious groups rather than the wider host community (Connor, 2010). Spiritual values such as compassion or universalism can positively shape attitudes toward the host culture, aiding integration and engagement in cross-cultural activities (Berry, 1997). Together, these dimensions interact with cultural adaptation outcomes, illustrating that religion both frames individual choices and mediates social connections that influence how immigrants learn language and participate in cultural life.

Religious beliefs influence cultural adaptation through mechanisms of social support, meaning-making, community engagement, and identity negotiation. Faith communities often offer social support that eases stress associated with cultural adaptation and fosters opportunities for language practice and participation in local events, which enhances integration into the host society (Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Conversely, when religious networks are insular, individuals may face fewer opportunities to acquire host-country languages or engage with broader cultural activities, slowing adaptation progress (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Doctrinal interpretations that emphasize openness and intercultural outreach can encourage participation in host cultural festivals and institutions, strengthening adaptive outcomes. Religious identity may serve as a cultural anchor, helping immigrants maintain psychological well-being while navigating new cultural contexts, which supports more sustained engagement and integration. Therefore, understanding the nuanced roles of religious beliefs provides insight into how cultural adaptation unfolds among migrant populations across diverse religious and cultural landscapes.

Problem Statement

Despite increasing scholarly recognition that religious beliefs and practices significantly shape migrant integration processes, there remains limited empirical evidence on how these beliefs influence cultural adaptation including integration into German society, host-language acquisition, and participation in cultural activities among immigrants in Germany. Recent research suggests that religion can act both as a resource and a barrier in immigrant integration, shaping social networks, normative orientations, and participation in public life, yet its effects vary across different religious traditions and degrees of religiosity (Fleischmann, 2025). In Germany, where immigrants represent a substantial and diverse portion of the population and where religious affiliation remains prominent among many immigrant groups, there is ambiguity about whether religious commitment facilitates deeper cultural engagement or reinforces separation from broader societal norms. Although some studies indicate that strong religious identities provide coping resources and supportive community networks, these same factors may limit interaction with host-society cultural institutions, potentially inhibiting language acquisition and broader cultural participation. This gap highlights the need for research that explicitly examines how different forms of religious belief including doctrinal strictness, communal religious practices, and

individual religiosity affect cultural adaptation outcomes in the German context, to better inform policy and practice aimed at enhancing inclusive integration.

Theoretical Review

Acculturation Theory

Explains how individuals adapt when they encounter a new culture, outlining strategies such as integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Originally developed by John W. Berry, the theory emphasizes that adaptation outcomes depend on the attitudes individuals hold toward both their heritage culture and the host society. In the context of Germany, religious beliefs can influence which strategy an immigrant adopts; for instance, strong religious communities may promote separation or a religion-mediated form of integration, affecting participation in cultural activities and language acquisition. By applying this theory, researchers can examine how doctrinal adherence, religious practices, and identity shape the cultural adaptation process. Acculturation Theory provides a structured lens to understand the interplay between religious commitment and engagement with host society norms (Berry, 2018).

Social Identity Theory

Proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from the social groups to which they belong, and that group membership influences behaviors, attitudes, and intergroup interactions. In immigrant populations in Germany, religious group membership constitutes a key social identity, shaping how individuals perceive themselves relative to the host society. A strong religious identity may enhance in-group cohesion but could limit interactions with the broader society, influencing language acquisition and participation in cultural activities. Using Social Identity Theory allows researchers to investigate how religious identification mediates integration processes and affects cultural adaptation outcomes. This theory highlights the dual role of religion in providing social support while potentially constraining engagement with host culture norms (Haslam, Jetten, & Cruwys, 2019).

Religious Coping Theory

Developed by Kenneth I. Pargament, focuses on how individuals use religious beliefs and practices to manage stress, distinguishing between positive coping (e.g., seeking spiritual support) and negative coping (e.g., feeling punished by a higher power). Cultural adaptation often entails challenges such as discrimination, social isolation, and linguistic barriers, and immigrants may rely on religious coping strategies to navigate these stressors. In Germany, religious coping can shape participation in cultural activities and efforts to learn the host language, as well as overall integration into society. Applying this theory helps explain the role of spirituality and religious engagement in moderating adaptation processes among immigrants. Religious Coping Theory underscores that beliefs and practices are not merely cultural markers but active mechanisms influencing successful integration (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2019).

Empirical Review

Fleischmann & Phalet (2025) explored how religious beliefs, including literalism, symbolism, and exclusivism, affect cultural adaptation among immigrants in Western Europe, with a specific subsample from Germany. The study aimed to understand the mechanisms through which religiosity influences language acquisition, integration into host society, and participation in

cultural activities. Researchers employed a multinational survey with approximately 2,100 participants from various religious backgrounds. Multivariate regression was used to identify associations between religious belief dimensions and integration outcomes. Findings revealed that strict religious exclusivism was negatively associated with participation in host-society cultural activities. Conversely, symbolic religiosity, which emphasizes tradition without rigid separation, positively predicted engagement in integration efforts. Religious communities often provided social support that facilitated adaptation but could also create insular networks limiting exposure to host culture. The study recommended intercultural dialogue initiatives to help religious immigrants reconcile faith practices with broader integration goals. It emphasized that policy interventions should consider the diversity of religiosity among immigrant populations. Language acquisition was significantly influenced by the level of interaction with non-co-religious community members. Participants with supportive faith networks demonstrated better psychological well-being during adaptation. The study suggested that integration programs should collaborate with religious organizations to increase cultural participation. Religious identity was found to buffer stress but also constrained engagement when networks were highly insular. Overall, the study concluded that nuanced religious beliefs play a dual role in cultural adaptation. These findings highlight the need for targeted support for immigrants navigating both religious and cultural integration challenges.

Diehl & Koenig (2022) investigated cultural and social participation among immigrants in Germany, examining how involvement in religious communities affects adaptation. The study aimed to measure whether religious engagement predicts participation in host society cultural events and social networks. Using panel data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP), they analyzed responses from a representative sample of 1,500 immigrant adults. Random-effects ordered logit models were applied to account for repeated measures over time. Results indicated that immigrants actively involved in religious communities participated more frequently in cultural associations, including both faith-based and secular activities. Religious networks facilitated access to social support and practical resources that enhanced adaptation. However, strict religious adherence sometimes limited engagement in broader host society activities. Recommendations included creating intercultural community centers that bridge religious and secular cultural participation. Participation in volunteer activities and community events was positively associated with language acquisition. The study also emphasized the role of intergenerational differences, with younger immigrants showing greater integration. Religious socialization was found to moderate engagement patterns among first- and second-generation immigrants. The authors highlighted that policy initiatives should include collaboration with religious organizations to enhance cultural adaptation. Data suggested that balanced religiosity supports integration without undermining host culture participation. The study concluded that religion can be both a facilitator and a barrier depending on interpretation and network inclusivity. It provided empirical guidance for cultural adaptation programs in Germany.

Van Tubergen & Sindradottir (2023) examined the relationship between religiosity and social integration among immigrants across Western Europe, including German subsamples. The study sought to understand how religious attendance, beliefs, and networks influence participation in host cultural activities. Researchers used multilevel quantitative analysis with survey data from 1,800 adult immigrants. Analyses focused on both individual religiosity and community-level

religious density. Findings revealed that higher religious attendance predicted increased involvement in community activities but also more segmented integration trajectories. Immigrants with strong faith networks sometimes relied solely on co-religious social contacts, limiting broader host-society interaction. Recommendations emphasized linking religious communities with host cultural initiatives to promote language learning and cultural engagement. The study found that intrinsic religiosity predicted more flexible adaptation strategies. Age and duration of residence moderated the effect of religious participation on integration. Immigrants attending interfaith events displayed higher host-language proficiency. Participation in cultural programs was enhanced when religious leaders encouraged external engagement. Segmentation was less pronounced in younger immigrants. Results highlighted that both community structure and personal belief intensity influence adaptation. The study concluded that religion shapes social integration in complex and context-dependent ways. Policy implications included fostering inclusive cultural activities through faith institutions. Overall, the research provided actionable insights for integration programs targeting German immigrant communities.

Lee (2018) explored religiosity and identity development among children of immigrants in Germany, the Netherlands, and England. The purpose was to assess whether intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity affects cultural adaptation, language skills, and participation in school and community activities. A longitudinal mixed-methods approach was used, combining surveys of 600 adolescents with in-depth interviews of 40 participants. Quantitative data captured language proficiency and cultural activity participation, while qualitative interviews explored identity negotiation. Findings showed that higher intrinsic religiosity was linked to stable cultural and religious identity but sometimes slowed cross-cultural engagement. Extrinsic religiosity, such as attending religious services primarily for social reasons, was associated with greater host-language practice. Recommendations suggested schools implement culturally sensitive programs that affirm religious identity while promoting broader participation. Peer networks and mentorship facilitated adaptation among highly religious youth. Engagement in extracurricular activities was mediated by perceived religious support. The study highlighted differences between first- and second-generation children in adaptation trajectories. Language acquisition improved when religious communities promoted external social interaction. Teachers' recognition of religious practices enhanced both well-being and engagement. The research emphasized balancing religious continuity with host-culture exposure. It concluded that religious beliefs significantly shape immigrant children's adaptation. This study provides insight into generational and school-based factors in cultural adaptation in Germany.

Gereke (2025) investigated Muslim immigration and integration outcomes in Germany, focusing on how religious beliefs and community involvement affect adaptation. Using national demographic surveys and integration questionnaires ($n \approx 2,200$), the study analyzed cultural participation and language learning. Results indicated that participation in religious community activities increased overall social engagement but strict doctrinal adherence slowed host-language acquisition. Immigrants who attended interfaith or community programs integrated more successfully. Recommendations included designing intercultural frameworks co-led by religious organizations and local authorities. Religious practice served as both a support and a limiting factor in adaptation. Social networks within faith communities provided psychological and economic resources. Duration of residence moderated the effects of religiosity on adaptation. Younger

immigrants adapted more rapidly when exposed to diverse social groups. Gender differences were noted in participation patterns, with women more active in religiously affiliated cultural activities. Policy initiatives were advised to include religious institutions in integration planning. The study emphasized individualized approaches to accommodate doctrinal diversity. Participation in secular community programs mitigated some restrictions from rigid beliefs. Language acquisition improved when religious leaders encouraged host-culture interaction. Overall, religiosity's influence on adaptation is complex and context-dependent.

Nordin & Otterbeck (2021) aimed to identify how religious beliefs influence cultural adaptation, social integration, and participation in host cultural activities. Cross-sectional comparative case studies were used, examining 1,500 immigrants across multiple countries. Findings indicated that religious engagement strongly predicted social participation, but highly insular communities slowed adaptation. Recommendations included promoting inclusive interfaith initiatives to connect religious and host cultural activities. Religious affiliation provided psychological support but could reinforce separation. Participation in cultural programs varied by degree of doctrinal flexibility. Integration outcomes improved when religious communities encouraged engagement beyond co-religious networks. Gender and age moderated adaptation outcomes. Policy recommendations emphasized collaboration between religious organizations and municipal authorities. Language acquisition was facilitated by mixed community programs. Social support networks buffered the stress of migration. Duration of residence enhanced adaptation among flexible religious adherents. The study concluded that religious beliefs shape both adaptation and integration pathways. Immigrant cultural adaptation programs should leverage religious institutions strategically.

Rees (2025) examined religion, discrimination, and cultural adaptation using European Values Survey data for German immigrants ($n \approx 1,800$). The purpose was to determine whether religiosity moderate's adaptation outcomes such as cultural participation and language acquisition under conditions of perceived discrimination. Multivariate regression analysis showed that higher religiosity provided emotional support and resilience, but strict adherence sometimes reduced host-language learning. Immigrants with inclusive religious participation exhibited higher engagement in community cultural activities. Recommendations highlighted anti-discrimination policies and intercultural language programs. Religious coping helped mitigate integration stress. Social networks within religious communities increased adaptation opportunities. Duration of residence and interfaith exposure enhanced cultural adaptation. Younger immigrants adapted more readily in inclusive religious environments. Policy frameworks should support intercultural religious dialogue. Engagement scores were higher among immigrants participating in both religious and secular cultural programs. Religious belief intensity predicted differential adaptation rates. The study emphasized balancing faith-based continuity with host culture exposure. Participation in civic programs improved language skills and social integration. Overall, religious beliefs are both supportive and constraining factors in cultural adaptation.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into

already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gaps: While existing studies consistently explore how religious beliefs affect cultural adaptation, most research focuses on general outcomes such as participation in cultural activities and language acquisition without fully examining the mechanisms through which specific dimensions of religiosity such as literalism, symbolic religiosity, doctrinal adherence, and religious identity affect adaptation processes (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2025). There is limited attention to interactions between religiosity and other psychosocial factors, such as resilience, discrimination perception, and social support, that may mediate adaptation outcomes (Rees, 2025). Moreover, few studies investigate the long-term adaptation trajectories across generations, particularly how religious beliefs influence children and adolescents of immigrants differently from adults (Lee, 2018). The nuanced role of religious coping strategies in facilitating or constraining cultural integration remains underexplored. Finally, most studies treat religiosity as a uniform construct, neglecting potential differences between intrinsic, extrinsic, and communal religious practices and their distinct impacts on cultural adaptation (Van Tubergen & Sindradottir, 2023).

Contextual Gaps: Most research concentrates on immigrants in urban centers or general German populations, overlooking subgroup differences such as nationality, socio-economic status, and education level (Diehl & Koenig, 2022). There is insufficient exploration of how religious practices intersect with institutional and social contexts, for example, schools, workplaces, and local religious organizations, to shape adaptation outcomes. Additionally, studies rarely differentiate between types of religious engagement formal worship, interfaith participation, or informal religious networks which may influence integration differently. The role of intergenerational dynamics within immigrant families and how religious beliefs affect adaptation of children versus adults remains underexplored (Lee, 2018). Furthermore, gender-specific effects of religiosity on cultural participation and language acquisition have received limited attention (Gereke, 2025).

Geographical Gaps: Although Germany is included in several studies, most research aggregates findings across multiple European countries, limiting Germany-specific insights into how local policies, social integration programs, and regional religious landscapes affect adaptation (Nordin & Otterbeck, 2021). Southern and Eastern German regions with differing migrant densities, cultural attitudes, and institutional support are underrepresented. Cross-country comparative studies that contextualize German adaptation outcomes relative to other European host countries are scarce (Van Tubergen & Sindradottir, 2023). Urban–rural variations within Germany are rarely addressed, though they may significantly influence opportunities for cultural participation. Finally, longitudinal, region-specific studies examining how religious beliefs impact adaptation over time are limited, leaving temporal and spatial dynamics largely unexplored.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, religious beliefs play a significant and multifaceted role in shaping the cultural adaptation of immigrants in Germany. Empirical studies indicate that dimensions of religiosity, including religious practices, doctrinal adherence, religious identity, and spiritual values, influence immigrants' participation in cultural activities, host-language acquisition, and integration into German society (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2025; Diehl & Koenig, 2022). Religious engagement often provides social support and psychological resources that facilitate adaptation, yet strict doctrinal adherence or insular religious networks can sometimes constrain interactions with the broader host culture. The evidence further highlights generational and demographic differences, showing that younger immigrants and those with flexible religious interpretations adapt more rapidly and engage more in cultural integration activities (Lee, 2018; Van Tubergen & Sindradottir, 2023). Overall, religious beliefs serve as both a resource and a potential barrier in cultural adaptation, emphasizing the need for integration policies and programs that consider the diverse ways in which faith shapes immigrant experiences in Germany.

Recommendations

Theory

Future research should expand theoretical models of cultural adaptation by explicitly incorporating dimensions of religious beliefs including practices, doctrinal adherence, religious identity, and spiritual values as determinants of integration outcomes. Current studies focus largely on general adaptation measures without fully exploring the mechanisms through which religiosity shapes participation in cultural activities, host-language acquisition, and social networks. Incorporating generational differences and religious coping strategies into models of adaptation can refine theories of acculturation, social identity, and religious coping in immigrant populations. Longitudinal approaches are recommended to capture the dynamic influence of religious beliefs over time. By doing so, theoretical understanding of the interplay between faith and cultural adaptation in European contexts can be strengthened.

Practice

Immigrant integration programs and NGOs in Germany should design culturally sensitive interventions that recognize the dual role of religious beliefs as both facilitators and potential barriers to adaptation. For instance, collaboration with faith-based organizations can help immigrants access language learning opportunities, cultural orientation sessions, and community activities. Programs should encourage participation in host-culture activities while respecting religious observances to enhance social integration. Mentorship and peer-support networks within religious communities can be leveraged to reduce isolation and improve adaptation outcomes. Practical guidance includes training social workers, educators, and municipal staff to understand religious diversity and tailor engagement strategies accordingly.

Policy

Policymakers in Germany should implement integration policies that formally include religious communities as partners in immigrant adaptation initiatives. Incentives for faith-based organizations to collaborate with civic and cultural institutions can strengthen intercultural

exchange and host-language acquisition. Anti-discrimination measures should be enforced to ensure that religious affiliation does not impede participation in public life. Policy frameworks should also support interfaith and multicultural programs that bridge religious communities and host society networks. By integrating religious considerations into adaptation policies, the government can foster inclusive social cohesion while respecting immigrants' faith and cultural identities.

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