

Basic Challenges Confronting the Teaching of Christian Religious Studies in Nasarawa State Nigeria.

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Abstract

The study is designed to investigate the basic challenges of teaching Christian Religious Studies among secondary school students in Nasarawa State. Christian Religious Education is one of the earliest subjects in Nigeria school curriculum. It has made positive impact in the state education system at all levels but in spite of these achievements the teaching of the subject is still faced with a number of challenges. The paper observed inconsistency in government's Policy on Education and the use of unprofessional teachers. Various ways of curbing the challenges were also discovered. Based on the findings, recommendations were made on the basic challenges in teaching Christian Religious studies in Nasarawa State, so that the subject will achieve its desired goals in the lives of the learners.

Keyword: Christian Religious studies, Teaching Challenges, Education, Nasarawa State.

Introduction

Christian Religious Studies (CRS) is one of the major subjects missionaries bequeathed to Nigeria education system on the establishment of schools by the 19th century missionaries. During the missionary era, Bible knowledge otherwise known as Christian Religious Studies was the core subject. Subsequently, after independence, government took over schools; and there was a clarion call for the review of curriculum in 1983. The call was as a result of criticisms levelled against colonial education, which some scholars viewed as being too arts oriented and such lacked relevance to Nigerian's upliftment, political emancipation and infrastructural development. The study is designed to learn about the problem confronting the teaching of Christian Religious Studies in schools. Parents are misguided with the belief that any teacher can teach Christian Religious Studies, the authority concerned does not bother to recruit qualified Christian Religious Studies teachers. The pupils too

were misguided with the assumption that Christian Religious Studies is simple to pass, since they are Christians and can read the Bible. These among other factors have had adverse effects on the teaching of the subject in secondary schools in Nigeria.

Arinze (1982) observes that "the teaching of the subject Christian Religious Studies witnessed lack of control by principal/head teacher of training and assigning teachers" (p.28). He further maintained that pupils nowadays are groomed to be intellectual gait in science and technology with little or no interest in the moral growth. This is referred to as spiritual dwarfism. This argument summarizes the overall objectives of teaching and learning Christian Religious Studies in Nigeria. It is in the light of this, that the writer attempts to find out the challenges confronting the teaching of Christian Religious Studies in our contemporary schools. Judging from the state of the moral behaviour of school children, it seems that the subject is not achieving its major goal which lies in developing the learner's ability to attain intellectual and moral perfection.

Challenges Confronting the Teaching of Christian Religious Studies

This paper discusses the various challenges confronting the teaching of Christian religious studies in our secondary schools. There are challenges associated with the issue of agencies of Christian Religious Studies, curriculum, syllabus, scheme of work, internal and external factors, etc. These were examined in relation to material and resource constraints.

Therefore from the above, these challenges confronting the teaching of Christian Religious Studies are summarized under three major headings.

1. External factors
2. School factors
3. Resource factors

The major aim of the inclusion of Christian Religious Studies in the education curriculum is to raise generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and findings of others, appreciate dignity of labour, and those moral values, with broad national aim as good citizens. While in the secondary level, the subject is meant to prepare learners for useful living through inculcation of sound Christian attitude and values, and to prepare

learners for higher education. Akubue (1992), buttresses that, “there have been questions on the effectiveness of teaching Christian Religious Studies, in instilling discipline and moulding character of the learner” (pp.16-17).

Judging from the state of moral of school children, it seems that the subject is not achieving its major goal which is developing in learners, the ability to attain intellectual, moral perfection, and discipline so as to face their daily and future challenges as good citizens.

External Factors

One of the major external factors is the inconsistency of Government policies. This has no doubt affected and is still affecting the teaching of Christian Religious Studies.

Government Policy

The stand of Nigerian government on the teaching of religious studies is clear under the 6:3:3:4 system of education. Christian Religious Studies is a core course at the junior secondary school, while at the senior secondary school level it is made optional for the students. The Federal Government has always been in support of freedom of choice in the question of religion. In school, the child is forced to take any religious instruction not approved for by the parents. From the above observations, it is understood that Christian religious education is not only a subject to learn, but also a way of life. But what is not clear, is whether the teaching of this subject has made any meaningful impact on the student who learns it and on the Nigerian society as a whole.

Onowughe (2008) asserts that, "in recognition of the value attached to the subject, it was not only offered in the secondary school, but also in all levels of education, it is considered fundamental to the development of sound education"(p. 73). The essence of teaching Christian Religious Studies includes academic, moral, civic and spiritual objectives. In Christian religious education, it's obvious that students are taught the way of life. Thus, the teaching of the subject instils discipline and obedience in the learners. The study enables students to learn the tenets of the faith and to live a life that is pleasing to God.

To this effect, a Christian religious study is designed to achieve many goals in the lives of both the teacher and the students in the aspect of shaping

human behaviour through teaching of moral values which are God-centered. These values are embedded in the stories and events recorded in the Bible, drawn from the life of Christians and other mystical beings. Notwithstanding the lofty aims of Religious Studies by Ali and Akubue (1988) buttress that, "learners' moral attitude has not improved greatly, especially at this era, meanwhile, an appraisal of Christian religion studies curriculum contents revealed that the subject has the potentials required to build one's character" (p. 22).

The major challenge in the schools is that Government has approved the teaching of moral education as a separate subject from religion, and even adopted books on it for use in the schools. Along with the long-standing argument that moral teaching cannot be separated from religion, many teachers of religion teach moral lesson in their classes. A few of them who reluctantly use some newly released books on moral education continue to draw their examples from religion. To them teaching morality not through religion is like a tree with leaves, trunks and branches but without root.

Professionally qualified teachers outnumbered the unqualified non-specialist teachers of Christian Religious education, but teaching aids in general appeared not to be fully utilised and were grossly neglected in same school in Nasarawa state.

Attitudes of principals, Teachers and Students

Many principals see the subject as a soft option and feel reluctant to vote money for its instructional materials. They only encourage Students to add it to their list of subjects for public examinations, so as to have the adequate number of credits for higher studies.

The study identified various challenges to the effective implementation of the subject. The challenges range from poor understanding of pedagogical aims of the subject, societal moral decadence, to lack of passion and love for the subject. Hence they need to adhere strictly to the demands of stake holders in education of children, because factors affecting teacher's preparation and execution of their duties effectively jeopardise the aims establishing the subject in the school.

The same feeling is shared by many teachers and students. Teachers of other subjects who feel Christian Religious studies content is easy to master and

teach, therefore needs minimum time. Fellow students also feel that only those who cannot make the sciences or the so called tougher subjects offer Christian Religious studies. This is disappointing because in the early days of missionary education, there was no discrimination as pupils freely took the sciences as well as the arts. However, nowadays, many Christian Religious Studies teachers as well as some of their students are not proud to be associated with the subject.

Therefore, the confusion is still there with some teachers teaching moral education based on natural reasons and not out of religious commitment. Religion is itself a part of the social instruction of any given society. Any societal moral code cannot be compiled without religious values. Thus, religion has a significant role to play in the formulation of any societal moral code.

Teachers' Factor

The problem that surrounded the teacher factor has to do with quality and quantity. Orebanjo (1974) states that,

some interesting discoveries in her research discovers that teachers of home economics, biology or any subject as long as they are Christians and can read the Bible were allocated Bible knowledge periods in secondary school when the government takeover the school, the situation improved as posting to school were done by schools board based on academic qualification (p. 83).

However, the quantity is still not adequate. It is discovered that graduates who offered Christian Religious studies were considered qualified. This is in line with the assertion of Njoku (2014) who averred that, "an effective teacher must be approachable, considerate, has respect for all, promote value diversity, fairness, encourage pupils to learn, generous with praise and apply good network of resources in administrating his duty" (p.44). Teachers with deep knowledge of the subject are masters of the content, and could always make appropriate use of skills to manipulate the lesson thereby making effective implementation of the subject possible. Ocho (2005) pointed out the importance of society values on the teaching of C.R.S. by revealing that the societal is at the cross road in terms of moral decadence (p.74).

Nglass (1986) counting on the position of teaching Christian religious studies in Cross River State said that, "the principal's work involves planning,

directing, coordinating and managing both human and material resources. He is the liaison officer between the school, the ministry of education and the community” (p. 54). Hence the Principal has important roles to play in ensuring effective guidance services. Researches have been carried out from time to time in several parts of the schools to find out the situation with instructional materials in Christian religious studies. Ekpunobi (1982) said that, “Though there are different kinds of teaching aids that can be profitably used by the teacher, only few were provided and therefore used. This is the major challenge, as it affects the degree of students, students' interest in the subject and understanding of their work” (p. 22). This applies to the teaching of Christian Religious studies in most of the schools in Nasarawa state.

The Role of a Christian Religious Studies Teacher

It is needful for the teacher of Christian Religious Studies to be trained. His training must combine sound knowledge of the content of his subject with the professional aspect. This is particularly necessary for the handling of the important subject. The teacher must have a complete knowledge of the content of Christian Religious studies, not only through reading of the Bible, but also reading commentaries, teacher's hand book, modern translations, learning the original language of the Bible and other books, so as to ensure proper understanding of contents.

Having mastered the content, the teacher now has a unique role in the class room. Preparation is vital for any teachers who want to be successful in the class room. Preparation involves the study of the syllabus for the teacher's class, and the drawing up from it the scheme of work on weekly basis for a whole year.

Ekpunobi (1992) asserts that another important preparation is the lesson notes. This is a daily work; the lesson plan has to do with the practical component of the teacher's work, the mastery of the content is the knowledge component” (p. 46). The teacher's note of lesson is very important for the wealth of information it contains.

Orebanjo (1974) indicates that “if preparation is carefully done, the lesson should come out successful as mastery of teaching devices and method are very central to performance” (p. 32). The teacher should understand the theory and practical aspects of the various methods. The teacher should build appropriate and adequate class activity into the lesson as the learner needs to

understand their lesson methods such as dramatisation methods, discussion method, inquiry method, the project method and storytelling method, should be used to the fullest advantage of teacher of religion. The teacher must not force his/her opinion down the throat of learners but finds the opportunity to discuss moral issues with them. A good teacher of religion will use them suitably with the class. Therefore the aids, especially pictures, need to be clear and bold.

Christian Religious teachers can only act and behave like Jesus when they share his qualities. Even though Jesus was a son of God, the Holy Spirit can work in the life of Christian teachers to instil these same qualities of Jesus in the students.

Some of these qualities are discussed bellow:

1. *Maturity*: Jesus was a balanced and matured person and as a result he won the love and respect of those who knew him. The Christian teachers need to develop socially, as well as mentally and spiritually (Lk 2:40, 2:52).(NIV)
2. *Humility*: Jesus was the most humble person who ever lived. We read how He left riches of heaven to become men's servant. Teaching is the act of serving, a process of humbly guiding others not to be oneself but to emulate the Lord's doing and His word.
3. *Variety*: The great amount of variety in the way Jesus taught, keeps his learners enthralled and excited. He varied the way he began his lesson, the way he captured attention, the way he involved his learners, the way he challenged them, and the way he defended their values and developed their skills.
4. *Intimacy*: Jesus was close to his disciples, spending extended period of time with them. One of his purpose of calling them was that "they might be with him (Mk3:14) (NIV).

If Christian teachers are to be like Jesus, they will share the same goals that He had. Christian teachers are to:

- i. Give opportunities for students to respond in faith to Jesus.
- ii. Foster spiritual growth and maturity.
- iii. Model the truth by exemplary living.
- iv. Communicate truth clearly so that it is understood.

- v. Change students to practically live out what they have learnt.

The Qualification for Teaching C.R.S

Hendricks (1987) lists qualifications for C.R.S teachers as thus;

- I. Because the teachers are the communicators of truth, he must be openly and boldly a Christian. Christian education demands Christian teachers. Anything less will not result in Christian education.
- ii. Every C.R.S teacher must know the Bible, because it is the word of God and is relevant to all subjects. This principle must be applied to C.R.S
- iii. The C.R.S teachers must communicate in every aspect of his life and work, in all his being, to the truth, including honesty.
- iv. The teacher must seek excellence: This is seeking after intellectual to the glory of God, and a C.R.S teacher should be contented with nothing less than superiority in this area.
- v. The C.R.S teacher must truly love his students, not only should he love them but also genuinely like and understand them.
- vi. True C.R.S teacher should exercise complete submission to the great teacher (Jesus Christ) (p. 14)

Affirming to the above listed qualification of a good C.R.S teacher, Billy (2002) quoting Orinva (1991) states that “if a religious teacher is to continue to teach in our schools, the teacher well”(p. 36). The work (teaching profession) should be left in the hands of specialists. Indeed, there is need for higher degree skills in teaching Christian Religious studies.

Christian Religious Teachers should learn from Jesus teaching method. Thus, they can:

- a. Motivate by capturing their students' attention and their curiosity.
- b. Stimulate their students to think and ask questions
- c. Respond to their student's questions, by being well prepared, and asking additional questions.
- d. Respond to questions with openness, interest and respect and by challenging students' ideas.
- e. Learn to make their speech full of interesting puzzles, comparisons, riddles and questions.

The Purpose of Teaching Christian Religious Studies

The purpose of teaching Christian Religious Studies is found in the personal and spiritual knowledge of God. When there is an encounter with God, a change is brought to play in person's moral character from within. Christian Religious Studies serves as a fountain of moral and spiritual guidance for the students.

Through the teaching of religious studies, the soul will be awakened and the purpose of God for man will be achieved. Though individuals cannot be educated into conversion, but through Christian religious studies, they can reach to God in Christ. A true knowledge of God through faith in Christ can be achieved also by the study of Christian religion. Christian religious studies is as important as a foundation for morality, it is in recognition of this that Government directed that no other secular subject like Mathematics, English, Economics must hinder the teaching of religious studies in our secondary school levels. Christian Religious Studies is one of the core courses at the junior secondary school. It is obvious that children should develop in the clear knowledge of their surroundings, but it is more important that they should grow in the true knowledge of the word of God. This will make a balance of their academic works and sound morals, which lead them to be God fearing. Digga (1991) noted that:

school may suffer training process if the teachers are lacking behind. He also affirmed that on C.R.S teachers status, he observe that very little emphasis has been made on teaching professional in this area, this is largely as a result of the misguided belief that, any believer can teach or guide C.R.S pupils in primary school without professional studies in C.R.S (p.23)

Affirming to the above observation and emphasis, Billy (2002) quoted Orivnva (1991) states that if a religious studies teacher is to continue to teach in our schools, such a teacher needs to teach well, therefore the work or teaching profession should be left in the hands of specialists. Indeed, there is need for high degree of skills in teaching Christian religious knowledge.(p. 36). Teacher's interest is another challenge confronting the teaching of C.R.S. In school, some people become teachers by accident and they find themselves teaching C.R.S. because they feel it is the easiest subject to handle. Lekwat

(1984), on the other hand, buttresses that “some religious education teachers suffer inferiority feelings and do not command prestige, because they do not pull their weight in their communities, and also they do not demonstrate the social and spiritual responsibilities which go with the calling of becoming a religious studies teacher” (p. 18) Therefore, their conscience does not allow them to feel equal to other people.

Billy (2002) expresses his concern when he says; “the problem of teachers ranges from poor qualification in primary school to lack of devotion to teaching in other levels of our education institutions” (p. 15).

Conclusion

The study identified various challenges to the effective teaching of Christian Religious Studies. The challenges ranging from poor understanding of the theological aims of the subject, societal moral decadence, lack of passion and love for students and the job to poor communication technique in the teaching of the subject. In this case Government should show positive interest to the teaching of C.R.S, teachers should have passion for the job and properly equipped with current trend in teaching through seminars in order to keep up with their field. Lack of sufficient professionally trained teachers is another challenge affecting the teaching of C.R.S. in school in Nasarawa state. Government on its part should provide all needed instructional materials and equipment in the primary and secondary schools for the teaching of C.R.S schools.

From the forgoing it can be concluded that the challenges affecting the successful teaching of the C.R.S curriculum, lies with the methods of teaching Christian Religious Studies, use of unqualified C.R.S teachers and inadequate facilities in the schools.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study, the researcher made the following recommendations.

- Teachers of CRS, as matter of fact, should be equipped through training, so that they will be properly grounded in the theological aims of the subject.
- The subject should be made compulsory at all levels of our education like

the use of English, bearing in mind the role the subject as designed to achieve in the learner.

- The teacher of C.R.S should show interest in the students and also in the religion. Without this interest in the students and the teaching of religion, the students will not benefit from the subject.
- Teachers of Christian Religion Studies should be able to lay good example, and have interest in the religious they are teaching.
- There is need for the school management to organize and encourage C.R.S teachers to attend workshops and seminars.
- Government on its part should provide all instructional materials and equipment lacking in primary and secondary schools.
- Priority should be given to qualified teachers in the field to teach the subject in the primary and secondary schools.

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