

Challenges to Effective Implementation of Christian Religious Studies Curriculum: A Study of Secondary School Pupils in Ebonyi State of Nigeria

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Abstract

The study is designed to investigate challenges to effective implementation of Christian Religious Studies among secondary school pupils in Ebonyi state. Two research questions were raised to guide the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Ebonyi state is the area of study and the population comprised all the 232 CRS teachers in the area. 200 teachers from the government owned schools were selected out of 232 CRS teachers using purposive sampling technique. Fixed response questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. Mean was used to analyze data. The results show-cased many factors that challenges effective implementation of CRS curriculum among secondary schools pupil. Various ways of curbing the challenges were also discovered. Based on the findings recommendations were made on effective implementations of CRS curriculum so that the subject will achieve its desired goals in the lives of learner. This forms the major contribution of the study.

Keywords: Challenges, Implementation, Christian Religious Studies, Curriculum, Objectives

Introduction

Christian Religious Studies (CRS) is one of the major subjects missionaries bequeathed to Nigerian education system on the establishment of schools by the 19th century missionaries. The aim was to train people who will be of immense help to the colonial trinity goals (God/Christianity, government/colonization and Gold/commerce). In other to achieve the above, the major curriculum contents of their educational system were Bible knowledge, Arithmetic and English language for communication. To implement fully the contents, adequate attention was given to the understanding of the place of God in man's life (Nsongo, 2001). During the missionary era, bible knowledge otherwise known as CRS was the core subject. Subsequently, after independence, government took over schools; there was a clarion call for review of curriculum in 1983. The call was as a result of criticisms leveled against colonial education, which some scholars viewed as being too arts oriented and as such lacked relevance to Nigeria upliftment, political emancipation and infrastructural development (Ocho, 2005). Ocho further explained that the situation led to the modification of the curriculum with greater emphasis on sciences and technological subjects.

Following the shift in the study of CRS, motivation started dwindling, and interest in the subject dropped. Arinze (1982) noted that with the review in curriculum the study of CRS was no longer taken seriously as was in the time of the missionaries. Arinze (1982:28) observed that the teaching of the subject witnessed slackening of control by principals /head teachers, difficulty of training and assigning teachers, placing the subject in the school timetable, teachers' lack of commitment and other defects such as students' dishonesty, examination malpractices and disrespect to mention but a few. In support of the above assertion, Ndarwa (2007) maintained that pupils nowadays are groomed to be intellectual giants in science and technology with little or no interest in the moral growth, this he referred to as spiritually dwarfism. Ndarwa maintained that when the children /pupils grow older, they may create an avenue to close the spiritual vacuum. Some of the pupils may join secret cults to perpetuate evil in diverse forms. In this way the goals and objectives of including CRS in the school curriculum has been jeopardized.

The major aims of inclusion of CRS in the education curriculum is to raise generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, appreciate dignity of labour and those moral values specified in the broad national aims as good citizens. While at the secondary school level the subject is meant to prepare learners for useful living through inculcation of Christian attitudes and values, and to prepare learners for higher education (Akubue, 1992:16-17).

To this effect, CRS is designed to achieve many goals in the lives of the pupils ranging from teaching the pupils about God to the teaching of moral values which is geared towards shaping human behavior. These values are embedded in the stories and events recorded in the bible (drawn from the life of Christian and other mystical beings). Notwithstanding the lofty aims of CRS, studies by Ali and Akubue (1988) showed that learners' moral attitude have not improved greatly especially at this era. Meanwhile, an appraisal of CRS curriculum contents revealed that the subject has the potentials required to build one's moral character. The

question now is why is the implementation of the subject curriculum contents difficult? Effective implementation of CRS curriculum is all about ensuring adequate positive results of CRS on the lives of the learners. Akubue (1992) observed that effective implementation of CRS curriculum is closely tied to teachers' performance or ability to influence his class positively. This means that an effective teacher has the responsibility of ensuring that the aims of the subject is achieved through his authority as an arbiter, skilled and competent in his field and through the authority derived from his general behavior in and outside the classroom.

Going by the above scenario, the major factor in effective implementation of CRS curriculum is the professional preparation of the teacher. The teaching of CRS demands a lot of competencies on the side of the teacher in that excellence is required in manipulating instructional aids, assessment and management of instruction to ensure that the desired impact is made in the learner. This means that a CRS teacher is required to develop a coherent understanding of the pedagogical aims of the subject. It is only a teacher with appropriate religious professional formation or one who has clear vision of the Christian milieu; and lives in accordance with it that would be able to give the required inspiration needed to put into practice what they have learnt. This implies that the commitment of the teacher is of immense importance in the curriculum implementation. Akubue (1992) noted that the teachers' integrity to faith and life is an approach to implementation of CRS curriculum. For instance experience of God's mercy and love can go a long way in changing students' view or behaviour about one another. Majority of what happens in the life of a learner is being determined by the teachers' efficacy; hence it appears that the basic problem to effective implementation of CRS curriculum has to do with the teachers' dispositions.

Statement of Problem

Right from inception of education in Nigeria, CRS has been one of the core subjects in both primary and junior secondary schools. However, there have been questions on the efficacy of CRS programme in instilling discipline and moulding character of the learner. Judging from the state of the moral behaviour of school pupils, it seems that the subject is not achieving its major goals, which is developing in learners the ability to attain intellectual and moral perfection, discipline them both mentally and morally so as to face their daily and future challenges as good citizens (Akubue, 1992).

Studies reveal that most students that participated in the 2008, 2009 -2010 in WAEC examination performed poorly in CRS in Ebonyi State (WAEC Chief Examiners Reports of 2010). Studies by Anyanwu (1989), Adukwu (2004) and Gbenda (2004) revealed poor teaching methods, lack of concrete instructional materials and poor interest in the subject as problem facing the teaching of CRS. One could wonder why students loss interest on the subject irrespective of its relevance. Could it be as a result of government's lack of commitment? Subsequently, there has been rapid growth of social ills among students across the country (Njoku, 2012). The above observations seem to suggest that CRS is taught in schools without much impact on the lives of the people that is, without achieving its sets objectives in pupils' lives. The problem of this study, therefore, is to identify challenges to effective implementation of CRS curriculum among secondary schools pupils in Ebonyi State

Research Questions

In carrying out a summative evaluation of the challenges to effective implementation of CRS curriculum, the following questions are raised to guide the study:

- a. What are the challenges to effective implementation of CRS curriculum in secondary schools?
- b. How could the challenges be curbed to ensure effective implementation of the curriculum among secondary school students?

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design aimed at investigating the challenges to effective implementation of CRS curriculum among secondary school pupils in Ebonyi State. The population comprised all the CRS teachers within the state, which, according to information from SEB is 324 CRS teachers from all the 186 secondary schools in the state (Ibiam, SEB records unit, 2015). 200 CRS teachers were selected out of the 324 teachers in the area using purposive sampling technique. The selection of only teachers from government owned schools is to ensure that the schools possess almost similar learning environment. Fixed response questionnaire was the instrument for data collection and was face validated by experts in educational measurement and curriculum studies in terms of clarity of items, appropriateness of language and expression to the respondents and relevance to the purpose of the research. The questionnaire was distributed to all the CRS teachers in the sampled schools. Mean was used to analyze the data obtained. Criterion mean of 2.50 was raised by adding the assigned values of responses and dividing it with the total number of the responses options which is the summation of $4+3+2+1 = 10/4 = 2.5$. Therefore, any score below 2.5 was rejected while 2.5 and above was accepted.

Data Presentation

Table I: *Mean Score of Respondents on Challenges to Effective Implementation of CRS Curriculum among Secondary Schools Pupils. N = 200*

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Remark
1	The vast nature of CRS curriculum and syllabus	80	110	-	10	3.3	Accepted
2	Time allocated to the teaching of CRS in schools	120	80	-	-	3.6	Accepted
3	Teachers' inability to integrate faith and life approach in teaching the subject	80	75	35	20	3.0	Accepted
4	Teachers' belief and code of practice	110	70	12	8	3.4	Accepted
5	Poor understanding of the pedagogical and theological aims of the subject	150	50	-	-	3.7	Accepted
6	Lack of concrete instructional materials	120	80	-	-	3.6	Accepted
7	Abstract content /topics of the subject	98	90	-	2	3.3	Accepted
8	Societal value of the subject	120	80	-	-	3.6	Accepted
9	Negative media/internet influence	156	43	-	1	3.77	Accepted
10	Moral decadence in the society	152	48	-	-	3.76	Accepted
11	Problem of how to make learners pass examination other than application of what they have learnt.	101	75	14	10	3.31	Accepted
	Grand mean					3.47	

Table I shows that items 1-11 on challenges to effective implementation of CRS curriculum among secondary school student in Ebonyi State obtained a mean above 2.50. The grand mean of 3.47 indicates high level of acceptance of the items in the above table as challenges to effective implementation of CRS curriculum among students in the secondary schools.

Table 2: *Mean Scores of Respondents on Ways of Curbing the Challenges to Effective Implementation of CRS Curriculum among Secondary School Students in the Area. N = 200*

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Remark
12	Teachers being passionate about the job	55	75	30	40	3.0	Accepted
13	Teachers striving to maintain a balance between faith and learning	70	50	60	20	2.8	Accepted
14	Having love for the students as modeled on the love of Christ	90	90	10	10	3.3	Accepted
15	Teachers' maintaining strong personal and professional character	101	89	05	05	3.4	Accepted
16	Demonstration of competence in instructional practices, assessment and management of instructions	120	80	-	-	3.6	Accepted
17	Use of good expressions in communication	150	50	-	-	3.7	Accepted
18	Maintaining conducive learning environment and good student-teacher relationship	180	20	-	-	3.9	Accepted
19	Demonstration of good code of conduct and belief	70	99	21	10	3.4	Accepted
20	Teaching with concrete instructional aids	80	120	-	-	3.4	Accepted
21	Streamlining the curriculum and syllabus of the subject	150	50	-	-	3.7	Accepted
22	Strong emphasis on the importance of teaching CRS in schools	42	155	-	3	3.1	Accepted
23	Proper understanding of the theological and pedagogical aims of the subject	100	99	-	1	3.4	Accepted
24	Use of appropriate and students centered teaching approaches while teaching CRS	102	98	-	-	3.5	Accepted
25	Improving on the societal values of the subject	75	92	20	13	3.1	Accepted
26	Regulating film /programmes shown in the internet and medias	80	120	-	-	3.4	Accepted
27	Increase the time allocated to the teaching of CRS	120	80	-	-	3.6	Accepted
28	Organizing and encouraging CRS teachers to attend seminars and workshops regularly	80	110	5	5	3.3	Accepted
	Grand mean					3.3	

Table 2 shows that the respondents agreed that the items listed above are ways of curbing the challenges to effective implementation of CRS curriculum among secondary school students. The grand mean of 3.3 is above the criterion mean of 2.50 shows high level of acceptance of the factors as ways of curbing challenges to effective implementation of CRS curriculum among secondary school students.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of the study are summarized as follows:

- Factors like time allocated to the teaching of CRS, vast nature of the curriculum and syllabus, teachers beliefs, abstract contents of CRS, lack of concrete instructional materials, moral decadence occasioned by negative internet/media influences and poor understanding of the pedagogical and theological aims of the subject are the challenges confronting teachers in the implementation of CRS curriculum among secondary school students in Ebonyi State.
- The study revealed that teachers who are passionate about their job have love for their student, maintain strong personal and professional character, competent in the use of instructional aids and practices, build up conducive environment, exhibit good conduct, good understanding of the pedagogical and theological aims of the subject could help in curbing the challenges that mars effective implementation of CRS curriculum.

Discussions

Results of the study in table 1 showed that respondents agreed with the items as factor that poses challenges to the effective implementation of CRS curriculum among secondary school students. This was evident in the results which emphasized the impact of teachers' commitment to duties as a major factor in the implementation of CRS curriculum. The above finding is in line with the view of Nsongo (2001), who asserts that CRS teachers have major part to play in implementation of the curriculum. The finding is quite interesting in that teachers' commitment is paramount to implementation of any given curriculum. If CRS teachers are committed to their duties, understand the pedagogical and theological aims of the subject then implementation of the content would be achieved. Data provided indicates that there is little or no emphasis on CRS in most schools despite the moral role of the subject. Similar observation was made by Ndarwa (2007) that there is need for the subject to be considered equally important like the sciences and languages as prerequisite to entrance into higher institution admission. Sometimes negative comments are made by other members' of the staff concerning the subject especially during assemblies or career choice forum. These comments demean the status of the subject thereby making students to have negative attitudes towards the subject. The study unveiled that moral degradation in our society, occasioned by negative media and interest has influence on the student's psycho-social life. The above scenario makes it difficult to mould students' behavior. This is understandable because the students belong to society. The impact of secularization and explosion of knowledge occasioned by internet (www) have turned the world into a global village, and this makes religious studies seem irrelevant to the business of living (Nsongo, 2001).

Among the challenges listed are abstract and vast nature of CRS content, poor usage of instructional aid and methods. The study revealed that teachers are rarely exposed to seminars and workshops, and as such are not abreast with the current trend in their field. Non attendance to workshops and seminar affects teachers' methods, techniques and approaches in teaching. It is obvious that teachers who are current in their field of work could manipulate instructional aids, harmonize vast content and manage the given time to ensure effective implementation of the curriculum. This finding is in agreement with Njoku (2012) who said that teachers need to upgrade their teaching skills in order to keep up with the demands of the fast changing society.

The findings of table 2 revealed various ways in which challenges to effective implementation CRS could be curbed. The respondents however agreed that approaches like adoption of good communication skill, good code of conduct / practice, strong emphasis on the importance of CRS, appropriate use of student- centered methods and techniques, love for student and passion for the job will enhance effective implementation of CRS curriculum among secondary school students. The finding is captivating because teaching pupils CRS without love as modeled by Christ will not yield positive impact on the pupils. An effective teacher needs to have passion for his job as well as being just and equitable. This is in line with the assertion of Njoku and Njoku (2014) who averred that an effective teacher must be approachable, considerate, has respect for all, promotes value diversity, fairness, encourage pupils to learn, generous with praise and apply good network of resources in administering his duty. Teachers with deep knowledge of the subject are masters of the contents and could always make appropriate use of skills to manipulate his lesson thereby making effective implementation of the subject possible. Ucha (2004) pointed out the importance of societal values on the teaching of CRS by revealing that the way society and parents view the subject affects the students' choice and interest; and advocate for positive view of the subject so that its desired goals in the life of the learner would be achieved especially now that society is at the cross road in terms of moral decadence. This implies that the teachers, parents and society at large needs to be positive concerning the teaching and learning of CRS, if the subject must achieve its major goals in the learners.

Educational Implications

The findings have implications for teachers, general public, administrators and the government. The findings unveiled teachers' lack of passion for their job, societal moral decay and media negative influences as

the major challenges which affects implementation of CRS curriculum. This implies that for effective implementation of CRS to be achieved, government, society and teachers' factors must be addressed. In this case government should show positive interest to the teaching of CRS; teachers of CRS should have passion for the job and be properly equipped with current trend in teaching through seminars in order to keep up with their field. Media houses should be guided on what to air to the general public. The finding of this study, if strictly looked into, will enhance effective implementation of CRS curriculum in the schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need for the school managers to not only organize, but encourage CRS teachers to attend workshops and seminars because the job of moulding human behavior is dynamic; hence regular attendance to seminars will equip them, with new approaches and methods for effective implementation of CRS curriculum among pupils.
2. There is need for administrators to support the teaching of CRS in terms of provision of instructional materials and allocation of adequate time to the teaching of the subject.
3. Both governments, society and school management should emphasize the teaching of the CRS. In other words, greater emphasis on the importance of the subject is required. The subject could be made compulsory at all levels of our education like the use of English bearing in mind the role the subject is designed to achieve in the learner.
4. Teachers of CRS as a matter of importance should be equipped through training and retraining so that they will be properly grounded in the pedagogical and theological aims of the subject. Effective teaching is dependent upon teachers' skills and knowledge; and these variable must be sorted out to enable the teaching of the subject achieve its set goals in the learners' lives.

Conclusion

The study identified various challenges to the effective implementation of the subject. The challenges ranging from poor understanding of pedagogical and theological aims of the subject, societal moral decadence, lack of passion and love for students and the job, poor communication technique to vast and abstract nature of subject. Solutions to these inadequacies have also been sought; hence they need to adhere strictly to the demands of stakeholders in education of children, because factors affecting teachers' preparation and execution of their duties effectively jeopardize the aim of establishing the subject. This otherwise mars the general aim of education, which is geared towards developing in man the knowledge and right attitude towards his neighbor.

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