

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF TEACHING CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES FOR SKILLS ACQUISITION IN NIGERIAN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

Christian Religious Studies is an academic discipline taught at the various levels of our educational system. Its main objective is to produce a community of people who are morally and spiritually developed for the wellbeing of the society in general. On the basis of the above exposition the paper examines the concepts of Christian religious studies and Colleges of Education. In addition to the above, the paper also examines the objectives of Christian Religious Studies, the problems and prospects of teaching the discipline for skills acquisition in the Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigerian's philosophy of education provides that instructions in school at the various levels should be oriented to, among others, moral and spiritual values as pre-requisite for smooth and stable interpersonal human relations. This means that the discipline is designed to cultivate cordial and harmonious interpersonal relationships between God and fellow human beings. The philosophy of Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) Christian Religious Education programme hinges on this preamble. Therefore Christian Religious Studies programme is geared towards the production of teachers who possess full awareness of God's relationship with man and whose personal character and discipline reflect authentic Christian values and virtues, such that they will be able to function effectively as custodians of sound moral and spiritual qualities particularly in their interaction with

young learners in the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.

High level of moral decadence, indiscipline, corruption and other vices that are prevalent in Nigeria today are largely due to ineffective teaching of Christian Religious Studies in our schools. Apart from academic aspect of our educational system which develops the intellect of the teeming youths in the regular and irregular educational programmes, the teaching of Christian Religious Studies is necessary to also develop the moral and spiritual wellbeing of the youths. Through the teaching of Christian Religious Studies at all levels of our educational system, the nation shall be able to boost of a community whose ways of life and actions will produce the needed peace, harmony, security of life and property, fear of God and love for ones neighbour and country required for a sustainable national development.

In order to achieve these virtues, the teachers who have been saddled with the responsibility of imparting knowledge in the classroom situation should be well prepared through training for the challenges ahead in the Nigerian Colleges of Education.

Conceptual Clarification

Before justice can be done to the subject matter, intellectual responsibility demands that certain operational terms as used in the context of this paper be briefly explained for proper understanding of the main ideas. These operational terms include:

1. Christian Religious Studies; and
2. Colleges of Education

Christian Religious Studies

According to National Commission for College of Education (NCCE) (1992), Christian Religious Studies is an academic discipline designed for the moral and spiritual development of individuals in the country. This means that moral and spiritual development is very important for national development. Again, Lekwat (2000) also defined Christian Religious education as veritable channel of acquiring a sound moral and spiritual development for peaceful co-existence. This preposess that Christian Religious Studies is necessary for the inculcation of sound moral and spiritual values in the society. In the context of this paper, Christian Religious Studies is a course of study that inculcates in the learner a sound moral and spiritual development for harmonious relationship between God and men and between man and his fellow human beings.

Colleges of Education

Colleges of Education according to the National Policy on Education (2004) are tertiary institutions established by the federal, state and private individuals to produce intermediate manpower and teachers who will teach at the primary and the junior school levels. With the introduction of the Universal Basic Education scheme in 1999, and the national standard set by the Teachers Registration Council, the products of Colleges of Education shall teach at the primary school level since the minimum qualification for teaching at the level is NCE certificate. These Colleges are expected to be well funded and equipped with educational facilities to enable the learner acquire the necessary teaching skills required for the performance of their duties.

National Objectives of Christian Religious Studies in Nigeria Colleges of Education

The National Objectives of Christian Religious Studies according to NCCE (1992) are as followed:

The learners should be able to:

- i. Demonstrate sound knowledge and appreciation of the moral values needed to live as a Christian in the various stages of growth and development.
- ii. Express accurately and respectfully what the various churches and religious groups believe and practice and to eliminate prejudice and intolerance.
- iii. Explore the place and significance of religion in human life and so make a distinctive contribution to one's search for a faith by which to live.
- iv. Logically resolve tension and conflicts arising from interplay of traditional practices and gospel values
- v. Radiate attitudes and values which are typical of a mature and responsible member of the Christian community such as love, respect, honesty and service,
- vi. Demonstrate professional proficiency for teaching CRS in the primary and junior secondary schools; and
- vii. Express satisfactory intellectual capacity to benefit from further education in Christian Religious Studies.

These objectives are laudable but they are saddled with certain problems militating against its achievement for skills acquisition in the Colleges of Education.

Problems Militating against the Teaching of Christian Religious Studies for Skills Acquisition

The problems facing the teaching of Christian Religious Studies in the Colleges of Education for skills acquisition include:

- i. Inadequate supply of qualified and competent Christian Religious Studies teacher.
- ii. Inadequate supply of instructional materials
- iii. Unconducive teaching environment
- iv. Poor supervision and
- v. Poor motivation of the Christian Religious Studies teachers.

Inadequate Supply of Qualified and Competent CRS Teacher:

Qualified and competent CRS teachers are in short supply. This is a result of decline in the number of entrants of CRS students into Colleges of Education. There is an assumption that the choice of study CRS in the Colleges of Education is a result of weak ordinary level results in external examinations, and that students who opted to read CRS as a course of study are people with low mental ability. In view of inadequate supply of CRS teachers in the school system, non-specialists who have little or no experience of teaching CRS are often recruited to teach the subject. This terrible situation is bound to impede on teaching for skills acquisition in the Colleges of Education as well as at other levels of our educational system.

Inadequate Supply of Instructional Materials:

Adequate instructional materials which are necessary pre-requisite for teaching for skills acquisition are not available in most of our Colleges of Education. Without adequate instructional materials, the teaching of CRS shall be based on mere story telling which is theoretical base than practical. It is sad to note that most Colleges of Education do not have methodology laboratory as prescribed by NCCE for practical teaching of CRS in the Colleges of Education.

Unconducive Environment:

The teaching of CRS is often crippled by hostile environment where religious intolerance is experienced. Some government officials who share different faith from Christianity may decide to starve CRS department with funds and personnel in order to frustrate the efforts of those few teachers teaching the subject. Sometimes they try to suppress the teaching of CRS by denying qualified CRS candidates admission into the Colleges of Education. As a result of this situation the few available teachers are often overloaded and frustrated leading to poor teaching that negates acquisition of skills by the recipients.

Poor Supervision of Teaching Instruction:

Another problem facing the teaching of CRS in the Colleges of Education is poor supervision of the CRS teacher. Most of the newly employed CRS teachers need to be properly supervised and monitored to ensure that they are using the right teaching method for the teaching of CRS. Most of these new teachers rely heavily on the story telling method which is more theoretical than practical. Teaching for skills acquisition should focus attention on relating what is being taught to the practical and real life situation of the learners.

Poor Motivation of the CRS Teachers:

The poor conditions of service which affects the performance of teachers generally in Nigeria is also applicable to the CRS teachers. The salary and other allowances of the CRS teachers are not proportional to that of their counterparts in other religious groups. Poor motivation of the CRS teachers could frustrate their efforts of teaching for skills acquisition in the Colleges of Education

Prospects of Teaching Christian Religious Studies for Skills Acquisition in the Nigerian Colleges of Education

Christian Religious Studies like any other academic discipline has the prospect for skills acquisition through effective teaching and learning. In order to make this possible NCCE should ensure through its accreditation exercise that the following arrangement exists in the Colleges of Education for effective teaching of Christian Religious Studies.

- i. Adequate supply of competent and qualified CRS lecturers
- ii. Availability of methodology laboratory
- iii. Practical oriented teaching
- iv. Admission of qualified and interested entrants
- v. Effective supervision of instruction
- vi. Constant review of CRS curriculum.

Adequate Supply of Competent and Qualified CRS Teacher:

Churches and religious leaders should sensitize parents to the importance of CRS in the school to the development of individual and the community at large, and encourage their children to choose it as a course of study in the Colleges of Education. This effort will increase enrolment of entrants in the Colleges of Education. Where the trained CRS teachers are not available Hauson (1999) remarked that the untrained ones are drafted into the class to teach it. It must be mentioned at this point that only the trained CRS teachers have the experience of teaching the course for skill acquisition.

Availability of Methodology Laboratory:

Availability of methodology laboratory is important facility prescribed by NCCE in the minimum standards document. This facility will enable the CRS teacher to select appropriate teaching methodology for the teaching of CRS in the class. Crampton (1999) asserted that the use of appropriate teaching methodology is capable

of making teaching more practical and effective. This means that teaching of CRS for skills acquisition requires among others the availability of methodology laboratory.

Practical Oriented Method of Teaching:

Alfred (2000) asserted that teaching of CRS in the Colleges of Education should be based on practical rather than the old theoretical method. According to him, teaching of CRS in the Colleges of Education should be related to the practical and real life situation in the Christian world. This means that the teaching of CRS in the class should be relevant in solving certain life situation, problems such as unemployment, religious intolerance, poverty as well as other vices prevalent in the society. Such method of teaching CRS can foster and facilitate skills acquisition. Even if the story method is employed, it should be related to the practical experience of the learner for proper understanding of the subject matter for skills acquisition.

Admission of Qualified and Interested Entrants

Admission of entrants to study CRS in the Colleges of Education should only consider those who are qualified and interested in the CRS as a course of study. Candidates who are deficient in securing appropriate subject combination often fall back on CRS because it is easy to pass at the ordinary level. Some of these candidates choose CRS not because they have genuine interest in it., but because they have no any other alternatives. In order to properly identify those who have genuine interest in the subject, some aptitude questions should be designed and administered to the candidates as post JAMB test to really identify those who have genuine interest in these subjects. It must be mentioned that interest is very important in any course of study for skills acquisition.

Effective Supervision of Instructions:

Supervision of instruction is very important for skills acquisition especially to the newly employed CRS teachers. Because of inexperience most of the new CRS teachers use the traditional method of story telling to teach CRS in school. Such new teacher can be supervised by the most senior lecturers to put them through in the use of modern method of teaching the course. Again, the senior lecturers can also assist the new teachers by making input in the lecture notes of the new lecturers. The newly employed lecturers should be encouraged to relate their teaching to real life situation for skills acquisition in the Colleges of Education.

Constant Review of the CRS Curriculum

The CRS curriculum should be reviewed from time to time to be relevant to the real life situation in the country. The curriculum should incorporate more practical activities for students studying the course. Such practical activities will enhance active participation by the students in the teaching and learning process. When students participate in an activity, there is the tendency for them to learn and assimilate the practical aspect of the course for skill acquisition. Those teaching activities should also include the teaching and learning of virtues such as honesty, humility, patience, tolerance and love which are necessary pre-requisite for peaceful co-existence in the country.

Conclusion

The general objectives of teaching Christian Religious Studies in the Colleges of Education is to inculcate in the individuals a healthy interpersonal relationships between men and God and among members of the society. In order to achieve this, there should be adequate supply of qualified CRS teachers, availability of methodology laboratory, teaching of CRS should be practical, admission of qualified entrants, effective supervision of instruction and constant

review of the curriculum of CRS in the Colleges of Education for skills acquisition oriented teaching and learning.

Recommendations

In view of the identified problems facing the teaching -of Christian Religious Studies in Colleges of Education for skills acquisition the following recommendations are advanced:

- 1) There is the need for adequate supply of qualified and competent teachers to teach Christian Religious Studies in Colleges of Education.
- 2) There is also the need to provide adequate instructional materials for practical oriented teaching and learning
- 3) Effective supervision of instructions should be enhanced
- 4) Constant review of the curriculum of Christian Religious Studies is necessary to incorporate the learning of good virtues.
- 5) Entrants into the Christian Religious Studies discipline should be properly screened to ensure that only qualified and interest candidates are admitted.

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