

ENHANCEMENT AND INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper discussed Christian Religious Studies (CRS) education with a view to introducing enhancement and innovations necessary for the course curriculum. Making use of qualitative research methodology, it examined the level of adequacy of higher CRS course curriculum using Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) CRS curriculum as a sample. Suggested innovations for enhancing the level of adequacy of higher CRS course curriculum include introduction of religious ethics, ethics of the teaching profession, ICT and a trade/entrepreneurship programme. Problems facing introduction of sustainable innovations in higher CRS education include poor planning and funding, poor implementation of the 9-3-4 educational policy, and societal disregard for CRS as a career. Finally, strategies for introducing sustainable innovations for enhancing higher CRS education in Nigeria include retraining of existing CRS teachers, provision of infrastructure and technology, and effective monitoring and evaluation of CRS programme. The foregoing strategies were recommended for adoption.

Keywords: Christian Religious Studies; Enhancement; Innovations

It is generally agreed among scholars that education is the process of transmitting information/ideas that can enhance all round development of a person in terms of intellect (cognition), emotion (affection) and skill (psychomotor). Educationists like Uyagu (2012), Ringim (2012) and (Adeniyi, 2012), among others, have buttressed the foregoing definition. Being an educational course, Christian Religious Studies (CRS) Education perfectly fit into this definition. Hence, CRS can be defined as a deliberate, systematic and sustained effort at developing cognitive, affective and psycho motive domains of students through academic study of religions.

The objectives of studying CRS, according to Kwasau (2013) and Oluwawunsi, Titus and Abimbola (2014), are moral, social, civic, religious, spiritual/personal and academic objectives which align with the justifications for its inclusion among school subjects. The score card of CRS at the moment reveal the need for enhancement and innovations of the course especially at the tertiary level of education. Inherent in the new 9-3-4 curriculum are basic enhancement and innovations for all subjects, CRS inclusive. For CRS, such enhancement and innovations include making CRS a core/compulsory course for (Christian) students from primary school to junior secondary school and, of course, throughout secondary school especially for students of humanities (Arts) related career. In sum, 9-3-4 system has not only made CRS functional and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based but also an inescapable gateway to humanities (arts) related careers such as

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Law, Philosophy, Mass Communication, Languages (Local/Foreign), Dramatic Art, Creative Art, Archeology, Guidance and Counselling, etc.

But attention, in this paper, is focused on CRS at higher or tertiary level. For the sake of clarity, higher CRS refers to post-secondary CRS, which is offered as a teaching career at National Teachers Institute, Colleges of education, and Universities. Unarguably, CRS, at this level, is essentially concentrated on a mere academic study of religions almost to the neglect of moral, ethical and civic development of pre-service or student-teachers. Admittedly, a few irrelevant courses are still part of the CRS curriculum at this level. Similarly, CRS, at this level, is neither functional nor ICT based. Some enhancement or innovative measures are necessary to correct this trend.

Enhancement and innovation are strategies for improving the quality of a phenomenon towards development. Innovation implies doing the same thing in different ways by means of better procedures/methods. Hence, innovation naturally results in enhancement. Enhancement and innovation, in the context of this paper, refer to measures/strategies to boost the efficacy, efficiency and relevance of CRS as a career course in our ivory towers.

The general purpose of this paper is to critique CRS course curriculum at the tertiary level with a view to suggesting some innovations that can enhance the course; discuss obstacles to successful introduction of innovations in higher CRS education and strategies for introducing innovations in higher CRS education. In response to the preceding remarks, this paper shall answer the following research questions in order to guide the study.

1. What is the level of adequacy of higher CRS course curriculum using Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) CRS programme as a sample?
2. What are the problems facing introduction of meaningful innovations for enhancing higher CRS education in Nigeria?
3. What are the strategies for introducing innovations for the enhancement of higher CRS programme?

A Critique of ABU CRS Course Curriculum

ABU course curriculum for preparing pre-service teachers in CRS education is used as a case study to show the level of adequacy or otherwise of the program. The choice of ABU is based on the fact that the writers were products of the ABU CRS curriculum; hence, they are in a better position to critique or evaluate the curriculum in order to enhance it via some innovative courses or measures. The table below shows the course curriculum for the award of B.Ed (Christian Religious Studies) at ABU, Zaria, which was in place till 2013.

Table 1: ABU CRS Course Curriculum

100 LEVEL			
S/No	Course Code/No	Course Title	Credit Unit
1.	EDCS 101	Introduction to the Study of Religion	2
2.	EDCS 103	Study of World Religion	3
3.	EDCS 105	Intertestamental Period	2

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4.	EDCS 103	Introduction to Constitutional Studies in Nigeria	3
5.	EDUC 101	History of Education	2
6.	GENS 101	Nationalism	1
7.	GENS 102	Environmental Health	1
8.	GENS 103	English and Communication Skill	2
9.	GENS 107	History and Philosophy of Science	1
10.	EDCS 102	Introduction to new testament	3
11.	EDCS 104	The Pentateuch	3
12.	EDCS 108	African Traditional Religion and Culture	2
13.	EDCS 102	Introduction to Psychology	2
200 LEVEL			
14.	EDCS 201	Introduction to old testament	2
15.	EDCS 203	Early Church History to 432AD	3
16.	EDCS 205	Subject Method	2
17.	EDCS 207	Dialogue in a Pluralistic Society	2
18.	EDCS 201	Sociology of Education	2
19.	EDCS 203	Psychology of Learning	2
20.	EDCS 207	Curriculum Studies	2
21.	EDCS 209	Instructional Technology	2
22.	GENS 201	Moral Philosophy	1
23.	EDCS 202	Background to new testament	2
24.	EDCS 204	History and Religion of Israel	2
25.	EDCS 206	Church Reformation	3
26.	EDCS 208	Biblical Ethics	2
27.	EDCS 210	Introduction to the study of Islam	2
28.	EDUC 204	Educational Psychology	2
29.	EDUC 208	Philosophy of Education	2
300 LEVEL			
30.	EDCS 301	Subject Research Method	2
31.	EDCS 303	Old Testament Theology	3
32.	EDCS 305	Synoptic Gospel	2
33.	EDCS 307	Christian Dogma	2
34.	EDCS 309	Manners and Customs in Bible Land	2
35.	EDUC 301	Educational Statistics	2
36.	EDUC 303	Curriculum Studies	2
37.	EDUC 309	Fundamentals of Guidance and Counselling	2
38.	EDCS 302	St. John's Gospel	2
39.	EDCS 304	Philosophy of Religion	2
40.	EDCS 308	Sociology of Religion	2
41.	EDCS 310	Pauline Epistles	2
42.	EDCS 312	African Independence Churches	2

43.	EDCS 316	Religion, Social Change and Conflict Resolution	3
44.	EDCS 318	Christianity in East and South Africa	3
400 LEVEL			
45.	EDUC 401	Teaching Practice	0
46.	EDCS 403	Project	3
47.	EDCS 404	Nigerian and West African Church History	2
48.	EDCS 406	Hermeneutics	2
49.	EDCS 408	General Epistles	2
50.	EDCS 412	New Testament Theology	3
51.	EDCS 414	Prophets of Israel and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature	2
52.	EDCS 416	Distinguished African Church Leaders	2
53.	EDUC 402	Measurement and Evaluation	2
54.	EDUC 404	Curriculum Innovation and Implementation	2

The table presents fifty four (54) items course curriculum in the preparation of CRS teachers. Generally, nearly all CRS courses are either inadequately taught or taught as if they were no spiritual power inherent in them to transform life due largely to spiritual coldness of CRS lecturers and their approach of objectivity/practicality. It is therefore suggested, by way of enhancement and innovation, that a spiritually revived and academic competent person be employed to teach higher CRS and ‘Spiritual Formation’, as a course, should be introduced. Recently, ABU CRS session has breathed some fresh air into the course curriculum through the introduction of some new courses namely ‘Women in the Bible’; ‘Comparative religion’; ‘World religion’; ‘Christian marriage and the family’; ‘Introduction to Christianity’; ‘Psychology of religion’; and ‘Faith and doubt’. Certainly, these newly introduced courses have enhanced the status of CRS course curriculum. In addition to the foregoing newly introduced courses, this paper recommends religious ethics; ethics of the teaching profession (or teacher code of conduct) and ‘Nigerian Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches’, which are presently receiving currency in Religious Studies, as worthy of introduction to further enhance the programme.

A look at the table reveals no course that develops the psychomotor (skill) of the learner. For instance, there is no course on ICT or on trade/entrepreneurship. This has restricted CRS education only to the cognitive and affective domains, leaving out the psychomotor domain. Enhancing the functionality of CRS in this age of technology requires innovations like Computer studies/ICT, entrepreneurship study and a trade subject in any economic activities.

Another worthy innovative measure is dynamic academic programme exchange/interactions between lecturers and students of CRS and IRS sections. For instance, Islamic oriented courses in CRS course curriculum should be taught by lecturers from IRS section and vice versa. Similarly, students of IRS and CRS should be able to take elective courses from each other’s sections/departments in order to promote healthy religious dialogue, understanding and tolerance.

Moreover, employment of (fundamental or fanatical) Roman Catholic Reverend Fathers or clergy from other denomination as CRS lecturers should be discouraged as much as possible as these set of scholars, wittingly or unwittingly, tend to be highly denominationally biased and usually teach by indoctrination. However, the writers have encountered a few clergy cum lecturers who usually do not bring 'church' into the classroom. These kinds of scholars are ideal for CRS education or teacher preparation.

The imperative of the above innovative measures have been underscored by Ojebiyi and Ogunbiyi (2012) in their critique of teacher preparation/education curriculum in general. Their critiques, which shall be mentioned shortly, are applicable to CRS education in particular. According to them, the general education curriculum (CRS education curriculum inclusive) is faced with the problems of inadequate period allotted to teaching practice (that is, six weeks of teaching practice is considered grossly inadequate for pre-service teachers aspiring to be professional teachers); much emphasis on theory over and above skills and practical knowledge; lack of mentoring, inadequate methodology courses for a period of four-year B.A (Ed) or B.Sc (Ed), inadequate supervision of pre-service teachers throughout their short period of teaching practice, etc. The foregoing inadequacies or problems can be addressed through some innovative measures such as making teaching practice a year programme with adequate mentoring and supervision. If well planned and implemented, a year of teaching practice, may not necessarily elongate the period of four-year B.A (Ed) or B.Ed of CRS teacher training into five years as final year project writing and teaching practice can go *pari passu*.

Problems Facing Introduction of Meaningful Innovations in Higher CRS Education

Poor planning and funding: Planning and funding are central to educational development. Etejere, Ojo and Lawal (2012) agreed that proper planning and funding are responsible for the success of every good educational policy or programme. They further stated that inability of the federal and state governments to effectively sustain educational funding demonstrates lack of adequate government planning. With poor planning and funding, implementation of any meaningful enhancement and innovation in higher CRS education would be near impossible.

Poor implementation of 9-3-4 policy: The bane of Nigerian education sector is poor educational policy implementation even in the face of good planning and funding. Ojelade (1998) in Etejere, Ojo and Lawal (2012) noted that implementation has been a serious handicap to most genuine efforts aimed at developing the educational system in Nigeria. Inadequate implementation of religious studies education syllabus can hamper enhancement and innovations. *Poor Societal Regard for CRS:* Perhaps, no course experiences social disregard as CRS education. This is due in part to inter and intra religious or denominational division/disunity especially in doctrines and beliefs; moral corruption and bankruptcy among religious people; rivalry of Islam with Christian religion; secularism and secular tendencies in Nigeria, etc.

Strategies for Introducing Sustainable Innovations in Higher CRS Programme

Retraining of Existing CRS Teachers: Retraining of teachers implies teachers' capacity building. Existing CRS teachers should be retrained in order to improve their spiritual, personal and professional/academic skills (Oluwawunsi, Bongotons and Titus, 2014). Retraining for skill

improvement in the foregoing areas is an effective strategy with inherent multiplying innovative effects for sustainable enhancement in higher CRS education in this country.

Provision of Infrastructure and Technology: Provision of ICT facilities can facilitate enhancement and innovations not only in science/technology related careers but also in chalk-and-board programmes like CRS education. ICT is a tool for repositioning RSE for access and quality in this globalised world (Oluwawunsi and Titus (2014). This is because technology, precisely ICT, can be used to address the problem of weak instructional methods and enhance good instructional delivery process of CRS programme.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Sustainable enhancement and innovations in higher CRS education can be achieved via effective monitoring and evaluation of CRS programme. Supervision and inspection are vital to enhancement and innovations; otherwise, teachers will just relax and teach as usual (Apagu, Yaduma, Langa and Andurai, 2014).

Increased Enrolment Strategies: The more the graduate teachers in the field of CRS education the more its enhancement and innovations. Oluwawunsi and Torpev (2014) have observed increasing students' apathy for CRS as a career choice and have suggested that individualized and societal re-orientation strategies are efficacious approaches by which students can be encouraged to opt for career in CRS. In addition to this, more students would be attracted to seek career education in the field of CRS if there is adequate motivation in terms of high societal value for religious study as well as job availability with good salary for religious studies graduate teachers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has discussed CRS education with a view to enhancing it via some innovative measures. Using ABU CRS curriculum as a sample, it has recommended some innovative measures which, among others, include introduction of religious ethics, ethics of the teaching profession, 'Nigerian Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches', elongation of the period of teaching practices to one full year, adequate supervision and inspection, ICT and a trade/entrepreneurship programme (which would transform CRS to a functional education) and a balanced emphasis on the objectives of CRS education. Problems facing introduction of sustainable innovations include poor planning and funding, poor implementation of the 9-3-4 policy, societal disregard for CRS as a career. Finally, suggested strategies for introducing sustainable innovations in higher CRS education in Nigeria include retraining of existing CRS teachers, provision of infrastructure and technology, monitoring and evaluation and increased enrolment strategies for recruiting prospective students to take to career in the field. This paper hereby recommends the foregoing strategies for adoption in order to provoke unprecedented enhancement and innovations in higher CRS education in Nigeria. In addition to this, government should fund humanities (arts) related careers, especially CRS education.

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