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ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN AKURE SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to assess the learning difficulties in Christian Religious Studies in Akure South Local Government Area of Ondo State. Two (2) research questions were raised to guide this study using a descriptive survey design. The sample comprises of 100 senior secondary school students selected randomly from ten secondary schools. The instrument used for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire. The research questions were answered using frequency count, percentage and mean. Findings showed that perceived difficult topics in CRS by senior secondary school students are: sovereignty of God, Faith in God, Social Justice, and True Religion, Holiness and Divine Call, Punishment and Hope, Justification by Faith, Law and Grace, Faith and Work, Jesus teaching about Himself. It was recommended that adequate attention and preparation should be given to those identified difficult topics in CRS during teaching and learning processes. This will enable the students to overcome these difficulties.

Keywords: Christian Religious Studies (CRS), Performance, Learning difficulties.

Introduction

Christian Religious Studies (CRS) is one of the most important subjects being taught in the secondary schools in Nigeria (Ikechukwo 2014 in Wambura, 2016). This is because the subject helps to streamline the thought, character, moral and aspirations of the students. It also offers hope for the future, integration, discipline, harmony and progress in the society. CRS contributes to the formation of personalities and character in the students. Christian Religious Studies also prepare the students to understand the basic teachings of Christ, develop Christian attitudes to hard work and devotion to duty, selfless service to God and humanity and peaceful co-existence and non violence (Chinooneka & Mupa, 2015)

Kosoko-Oyedeko (2013) stated that CRS serves as a foundation of moral and spiritual guidance to students and it gives them a sense of direction and the ability to differentiate between right and wrong, good and bad. The major aims of the inclusion of CRS in the school curriculum is to raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feeling of others, appreciate the dignity of labour among others.

Akubue (1992) observed that CRS is a subject which aims at developing and fostering in the lives of the students attitudes and values such as respect for life, obedience to constituted authorities, self responsibility, selfless service to God and humanity. CRS is an art subject that teaches students moral behavior, fear of God, knowledge and skills that will make them contribute their opinion in socio economic, political and moral development of any society or organisation they find

themselves. CRS is a subject of study in schools taught to acquaint students with the basic knowledge of Christian doctrines. Its aim is to inculcate into the students moral and spiritual values which will give rise to character formation and patriotism (Edube & Odiegwu 2014, Okoro, 2012).

Despite the importance accorded CRS, students seem not to be interested in learning the subject but just to pass (Kalu, 2012). This is reflected in the low enrolment and poor performance of students in the subject at the school certificate level. Most students in schools seem to attend CRS classes just because it is one of the compulsory subjects in the school curriculum at the basic education level. The subject is seen as something that should be taught in churches and teachers have nothing new to impart in the learners (Kalu, 2012).

Several studies have been carried out to investigate students' attitude towards CRS. For instance, Adewumi (2007) examined the problems affecting the teaching and learning of CRS in Oyo State while Bolorunduro (2012) examined and analysed the problems and the difficulties encountered by CRS students in the learning of CRS and found out that the abstract nature of some topics in Christian Religious studies have made it difficult for students to perform creditably well in certificate examinations. Another study conducted by Oladipo (2016) on difficulty level and students' interest showed that strategies and methodology of teaching are some of the reasons leading to poor performance in Christian Religious Studies.

Statement of the Problem

Christian Religious Studies is one of the subjects on the school curriculum. Initially students' enrolment was quite high to the extent that most arts students register for the subject at the school certificate examination. However, the researcher observed that the enrolment and performance of students have not been encouraging in recent past despite all the efforts put in place in the teaching of the subject. Researchers have posited that difficulty levels of some topics and other associated factors are responsible for the poor performance. Some other scholars opined that the abstract nature of the subject is another reason. Based on the foregoing it is worthy to note that study on assessment of learning difficulties in Christian Religious Studies among senior secondary school students is a problem that can be investigated.

Research Questions

The following research question were raised and answered in this study.

1. What are the topics in CRS the senior secondary school students' perceived to be difficult?
2. What are the factors that constitute difficulties in learning CRS topics at senior secondary school?

Methodology

Descriptive research design of a survey type is the research design that was used for this study. The population of this study comprised all CRS students in senior secondary schools in Akure South Local Government Area of Ondo state. A purposive sampling technique was adopted. Fifty senior

secondary schools (50) were selected and two students each were selected from the schools making a total of one hundred (100) respondents. A self-developed questionnaire tagged "Assessment of learning difficulty levels among CRS students" was used as an instrument for data collection in the study. It consisted of two (2) sections. Section A contained items on demographic data of the respondents. Section B has fifteen (15) items in four-point likert scale and it focuses on CRS topics. A reliability co-efficient using test-retest method of 0.71 was obtained through the Pearson Moment-Correlation Coefficient method. The co-efficient revealed that the instrument was reliable enough to carry out the study. Data collected were analysed using the descriptive statistics of frequency counts, mean and percentages.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the topics in CRS that senior secondary school students' perceived to be difficult?

Table 1: Percentage analysis of the senior secondary school CRS topics that students perceived difficult

S/No	Topics in CRS	Difficult %	Not Difficult %	Remark
1	Sovereignty of God	73	17	Difficult
2	Faith in God	78	22	Difficult
3	Disobedience and Consequences	32	68	Not Difficult
4	Birth, Baptism and Temptation	29	73	Not Difficult
5	Social Justice and True Religion	68	32	Difficult
6	Holiness and Divine Call	71	29	Difficult
7	Miracles	25	75	Not Difficult
8	Punishment and Hope	64	36	Difficult
9	Parables	39	61	Not Difficult
10	Justification by Faith	80	20	Difficult
11	Law and Grace	88	12	Difficult
12	Sermon on the Mountain	44	66	Not Difficult
13	Faith and Work	65	35	Difficult
14	Leadership	24	76	Not Difficult
15	Jesus teaching about Himself	78	22	Difficult

Table 1 showed the secondary school CRS topics that students' perceived to be difficult. It was revealed that out of the respondents who participated in the study, 73% noted that Sovereignty of God is difficult while 17% said it is not difficult, 78% noted that faith in God is difficult while 22% noted that it is not difficult, 32% noted that Disobedience and Consequences is difficult while, 68% said it is not difficult, 29% noted that Birth, Baptism and Temptation is difficult while 73% said it is not difficult, 68% noted that Social Justice and True Religion is difficult while 32% noted that it is not difficult, 71% noted that Holiness and Divine Call is difficult while 29% noted that it is not difficult, 25% noted that Miracles is difficult while 75% noted that it is not difficult, 64% noted that

Punishment and Hope is difficult while 36% noted that Punishment and Hope is not difficult, 39% noted that Parables is difficult while 61% noted that it is not difficult, 80% noted that Justification by Faith is difficult while 20% noted that it is not difficult.

That is to say that nine out of the 15 topics in CRS listed in the table were noted to be difficult. Thus, the perceived difficult CRS topics by secondary school students' are sovereignty of God, Faith in God, Social Justice and True Religion, Holiness and Divine Call, Punishment and Hope, Justification by Faith, Law and Grace, Faith and Work, Jesus teaching about Himself.

Research Question 2: What are the factors that constitute difficulties in learning some topics in Christian Religious Studies?

In order to assess the factors constituting difficulties in learning some CRS topics, students' response in the variables were subjected to mean analysis. With a benchmark of 2.5 any variable that has a mean below the benchmark was considered not to be one of the factors while any variable that has mean above the benchmark mean was considered to be one of the factors. The result are shown in table 2

Table 2: Mean analysis on the factors constituting difficulties in learning some topics in Christian Religious Studies.

S/No	Factors	Mean	Rank
1	CRS curriculum is too wide	2.72	4 th
2	Some of the topics are too abstract to understand	3.86	1 st
3	Instructional resources are not well utilized	2.95	3 rd
4	Students are not familiar with some names and places in the Bible	3.74	2 nd
5	Teachers attitude towards the teaching and learning is not encouraging	2.61	5 th

Discussion of Findings

Findings of this study showed that CRS secondary school students' perceived some topics as difficult among the topics on the curriculum. The findings corroborated Cinooneka and Mupu (2015) who discovered that failure to use variety of media in the teaching and learning of CRS resulted into failure in grasping basic topics in the subject. This means that the use of various instructional media is essential for mastery of content in CRS. Also, Makewa, Roli and Ngussa (2012) concluded that media resources are useful in teaching difficult topics in CRS Findings also revealed that some topics are too abstract to understand. This finding agreed with Eze (2012) which stated that CRS is an arts subject which is so abstract that learners find it difficult to gain to gain enough experience from its oral teaching alone. One of the reasons attributed to the negative performance of students in CRS is the abstractness of the subject.

The outcome of this study revealed that coverage of large curriculum content, unfamiliarity with some names and places in the Bible are factors constituting difficulties in learning some CRS topics. These finding is in line with Wambura (2017) who discovered that teachers' failure to make use of life approach methods and strategies in explaining some places and names in the Bible made it

difficult for students' to grasp subject content. Furthermore, these findings also showed that instructional-resources are not well utilized and that teachers' attitude towards the teaching of CRS is not encouraging. The findings also revealed that gender of CRS students had no significant influence in students' learning difficulties.

Conclusion

The poor performance of students at the certificate examination prompted the researcher to find out whether there are difficult topics that making students to perform below expectation in recent examinations. The findings of this study invariably indicated that there are difficult topics which the students cannot comprehend and some are too abstract to understand for them. The researcher is of the opinion that appropriate steps have to be taken by the teachers and curriculum developers in order to make the subject less cumbersome for the students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn in this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The identified topics should be given adequate attention in order to make it more interesting for the students.
2. Instructional resources and appropriate methodology should be used by the teachers in the process of teaching and learning.
3. Teachers should change their attitude to the teaching of CRS and try as much as possible to cover the curriculum content within the stipulated period.

Teachers of CRS should be encouraged by the school authority to use various innovative teaching methods to a very high extent, especially methods like stimulation, drama, discussion and demonstration which involve action. In doing this the level of students' interest in CRS will be enhanced.

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