

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AS TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DURING COVID-19 ERA

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Abstract

The major function of education is preparation of learners for life. This function in the 21st century involves participation in an information-rich society, where knowledge is regarded as the main source for socio-cultural, political and economic development of nations. It is sad that the sudden outbreak of the deadly and a highly contagious virus called COVID-19 overwhelmed the entire world such that the educational sector was largely affected as the imposition of lockdown became prominent in containing the virus. Educational institutions were forcefully closed which had negative effects on the students, which had detrimental effect on academic performance and the entire sector. This paved the way for the need to continue education through digital modalities. Religious education in an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) driven era has not harnessed the rich potentials available for teaching and learning of the subject due to a number of constraints. The paper therefore examines the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as Tool for Effective Teaching and Learning of Christian Religious Education during and after Covid-19 Era.

Keywords: Covid-19, Christian Religion and Information and Communication Technology.

Introduction

There is no doubt that COVID-19 is a menace that has bedeviled and ravaged the world in many ways. It has retarded the economy, ravaged health system, destroyed hospitality business, and disrupted socio-political interaction and induced an unannounced shift from the traditional classroom settings in the educational sector. Sequel to the rising concerns about the spread of COVID-19 and the need to contain the virus, a growing number of tertiary institutions shut down their conventional classroom delivery. Consequently, a major strategy toward the containment of corona virus was by imposition of

lockdowns which automatically retrained people from partaking in social activities. This situation has particularly been of a great challenge to the education system across the world. The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in teaching and learning of Christian Religious Education is a Way of providing education to learners in order to assist them imbibe the required capacity to function effectively in the 21st century. ICT according to Blurton (1999) is “a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, to create, disseminate, store and manage information”.

Covid-19 and Its Impact on Education

The educational sector had a noticeable blow from the pandemic. The lockdown designed to curb the pandemic forced schools to close down. According to United Nations, the COVID-19 pandemic created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and continents. Closures of schools and other learning spaces impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population, up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle-income countries (United Nations, Aug. 2020).

In Nigeria, there was practically no preparation for the pandemic. The educational institutions, teachers and learners were not prepared for the online approach to learning. Furthermore, the lack of uncertainty and the indecisive direction of the pandemic made many schools initially give homework to students to keep them busy. However, as the pandemic situation progressed, it was found that the virus will be with humans for some time to come. As a result, different measures were adopted to mitigate the effect of schools' closure. Private schools, especially the high-fee and middle-fee paying ones, were more able to adopt online learning, perhaps because of better financial strength. On the other hand, the public schools were generally affected because they were not prepared nor equipped to operate an online programme. Some innovative teachers in few public schools, especially, Lagos State utilised WhatsApp to engage their students.

One of the major effects of the pandemic on the Nigerian education system is the increased educational inequality. Before the pandemic, out of school children was an issue. UNICEF estimates that more than ten million Nigerian children are out of school, 60 per cent of whom are girls. The majority of out-of-school children live in rural areas, while most are from low-income families. More children in these categories might not go back to school due to

school closure, which would swell up the enrolment of out-of-school children in the country.

As stated earlier, when the threat of COVID-19 ended in-person learning in 2020, schools attempted to adapt. Many of the high-fee schools moved almost swiftly to online learning, with little or no difficulty. Low-fee, as well as public schools, on the other hand, were not prepared for the online approach to learning. In some states, the Federal government, religious institutions and some NGOs tried to provide educational programmes on television and radio, irregular power supply and limited access to smart phones and other internet-connected devices among poorer households limited the effectiveness of the initiatives. At the same time, some who had smart phones could not afford data for online connections. All these have exacerbated the prevailing education inequality in the country. Despite all the obvious adverse effects of COVID-19, there is an advantage that the country can utilise out of the pandemic, and one among them is the integration of ICT in the teaching and learning today which Christian Religious Education is not left out.

Christian Religious Education

Religious Education is the teaching of a particular religion, and its varied aspects its beliefs doctrines, rituals, rites and personal roles. Christian Religious Education refers to process of developing a person's mind in which the Christian Religious teachings are incorporated and are indeed central to all other aspects of knowledge and skills acquired in a particular setting (Ivorgba 2006). The term Christian Religious Education/Religious studies and moral instruction are sometimes used interchangeably in academic and curriculum discourse. But in the paper Christian Religious Education is adopted as the religious education programme students receive in secondary schools as part of their curriculum requirement.

Basically, there are three concepts to consider here, Christian, Religious and Studies Education. Christian connotes the "Christ like", "little Christ", those who behave and follow Christ and his teachings. Religious is a way of life or mode of worshipping while studies implies a learning process both in formal or an informal setting. According to Adeyinka, Okeke, Orebanjo and Izuchukwu (2000) Christian Religious Education is concerned with Christian teaching drawn from the Bible or stories from selected passages aimed at the training of the students to link Bible teaching with life in the society. This would enable them know their relationship with God and their fellow men particularly how to behave well in the community in which they live and learn.

Ilori (2005) describes the concept of Christian Religious Education in the following ways:

- i. It is an education that leads to the development of the whole individual in relation to God, to others and the environment;
- ii. It is the type of education that strives for the maturing of a person with the purpose that the individual becomes ever more aware of the gift of faith he or she has received;
- iii. It is an education that leads an individual to know how to worship God in Spirit and in truth;
- iv. It is an education that desires to establish the gospel in the heart and minds and social life of the people, so that truth and righteousness may flourish among them;
- v. It is all round education for the development of all human faculties, an education for full and adequate preparation for this life and future eternal life, an education in which emphasis is placed not only on intellectual and physical development, but also spiritual and moral development and character building;
- vi. It is an education that aims at helping a child to attain his or her full formation or completeness as a person; and
- vii. It has for its ulterior purpose the transmission of the Christian heritage of faith. Its purpose is the civilization of intelligence in order that the Christian young person may be able to receive full understanding of the Christian world views.

He went further to state that Christian Religious Education Strives to achieve the following:

Christian conversion: To lead individual to a genuine experience of the saving grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Christian education and curriculum: To help people grow toward mature Christian knowledge, understanding and conviction.

Development of Christian attitude and appreciation: To assist the students in developing Christian attitude and to help them have a Christian approach to life.

Development of Christian living: To help individuals develop habits and skills that promotes spiritual growth and apply Christian standard of conduct in every area of life.

Christian service: To lead people to invest their talents and skills in the service of God and humanity.

Christian worship: To help individuals to make Christian worship a vital and constant part of their regular lives.

Church membership: To guide the students into intelligent, active and devoted membership in a New Testament church.

Osamolu, Jamberlang and Fidelis (2013) defines Christian Religious Education as a practical and systematic science undertaken not just for the acquisition of knowledge alone but for the individual's physical growth, moral development, spiritual upliftment and character formation. Based on these considerations, Christian Religious Education is a learning process by which a person genuinely encounters Jesus Christ, follows His principles of life and teachings so as to be like Him and live right with God and man with the view of pleasing God here on earth and making heaven at last.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are information handling tools that are used to produce, store, and process, distribute and exchange information. These different tools are now able to work together, and combine to form networked world which reaches into every nook and cranny of the globe (UNDP Evaluation Office, 2011). It is an increasingly powerful tool for participating in global markets, promoting political accountability; improving the delivery of basic services; and enhancing local development opportunities (UNDP, 2016). ICTs are based on a combination of hardware, software, media and delivery systems. These technologies include computers, the internet, broadcasting technologies (Radio and television) and telephony (Tinio, 2002). According to Ogunsola (2015), ICT "is an electronic based system of information transmission, reception, processing and retrieval, which has drastically changed the way we think, the way we live and the environment in which we live". It can be used to access global knowledge and communication with other people (Ogunsola, 2015). Students who use ICTs gain deeper understanding of complex topics and concepts and are more likely to recall

information and use it to solve problems outside the classroom (Apple Computer, 2012).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will mean all electronic system that has to do with information gathering, processing and dissemination. These include all forms of computer system (mainframe, mini, micro, palm, pilot, etc.). According to Ehikhamenor (2013), information technology is a technique and the equipment that facilitates the acquisition, recording, processing, storing, retrieval, transmitting and receiving information that has been processed using some electronic equipment and appropriate methods.

UNESCO further defines information communication as the scientific, technological, engineering and management techniques used in information handling and processing. Igwe (2016) however stated that the term Information and Communication Technology originated from the coming together of three (3) technologies (micro electronics, computer and communication). Micro-electronics are made from the reduction of electronic circuits on silicon chips so as to receive a small raw data and organize it into meaningful information. Computers are the major platform upon which Information and Communication Technology stands on communication. The process of telecommunication using telephone and telegraphic lines to send messages from one place to another is the third aspects of Information and Communication Technology.

In addition, through ICT, students extend and deepen their knowledge, investigation, and inquiry according to their needs and interest when access to information is available on multiple levels (Forum on Education and Technology, 2011). Information communication technology (ICT) has no doubt changed the face of teaching and learning globally. Serious nations are taking the advantages inherent in ICT to impact on the educational sector.

Though Nigeria is also making efforts to join the ICT fray, these efforts appear to be ineffective. Computer laboratories are largely non-existent in many public schools across the country. And where they exist, they are nothing to cheer. Due to this general neglect and other factors, comprising corruption, outdated curriculum, ill-motivated teachers, materialism and academic laziness on the part of Students and Teachers, the nation has been reaping mass failure in public examinations. Arising from this, stakeholders are calling on

government to provide basic facilities including ICT-driven teaching aids for the nation's educational system (The Punch Newspaper, 2012).

Therefore, the impact of ICT in Nigerian education sector and any other developing society cannot be overemphasized. It is very pertinent if one can note that technological advancement has shown lights to the dark paths of students all over the globe.

Usefulness of ICT in the Teaching and Learning of Christian Religious Education

Since the advent of ICT, and its application to education a number of disciplines have deployed it in their classroom instruction and Christian religious education cannot be an exception. The point has been underscored that modern technologies are essential for effective and efficient teaching and learning. One of the basic objectives of educational technology is to improve teaching and learning. It is that the introduction and use of ICT in teaching Christian religious education can rectify the problems inherent in the teaching of the subject. According to Sofowora, (1994) instructional media can enhance comprehension, retention and recall. Akambi (2007) opines that many of the students can learn more rapidly where oral presentation is linked with visual or concrete 'objects' that they can see, touch or handle.

It has been found that ICT can promote students' intellectual qualities through higher order thinking, problem solving improved communication skills and deep understanding of the learning tool and the concept to be taught (Sutton, 2006). ICT can also promote a supportive interactive teaching and learning communities, and provide learning tools for students, including those with special needs (Hawkins, 2002). Franke (1985) states that computer graphics have been used to illustrate relationships of all kinds, especially dynamic process that cannot be illustrated by individual pictures. In this way, the Ten Commandments, the crossing of the Red Sea, the Exodus, the baptism of Jesus, miracles of Jesus, St Paul's missionary journeys can all be presented using Power Point accompanied by field and animation effects better with computer better than with any other media.

ICT can help students learn both about religion and from religion through providing 'real life' communicative skills; providing access to a wide range of information and different 'view point', and helping students with organization, recording, reporting and communicating findings. For example, the internet can be used to find out how Easter or Christmas is celebrated around the world

through finding information, personal accounts, photographs, sounds and video clips; establishing e-mail dialogue with another school to enable students to interact with children of other religious backgrounds, or use the e-mail to contact visiting speaker; virtual visits to various different Christian churches, using multimedia packages to present a new religious education topic in a stimulating way, with graphics, text and sound animations using digital photos or video of visit to enhance follow-up work and to enrich displays.

ICT is not all about computers and website; one can also use audio cassettes, CDs, OHP, TV, camcorders, cameras, videos, telephone and scanners. In fact, the computers can be manipulated to do almost anything one programme it to do. Without taking the “students out of the classroom, it is now possible to make an excursion or pilgrimage, to Jerusalem, or any other part of the world, to see shrines, to read lives of saints, to make an independent theological analysis and to get an answer to the simplest question religion.

Factors Impeding the Use of ICT in Teaching and Learning of Christian Religious Education in Nigerian Schools

Christian religious education as a subject with its core value is on training individuals in the way of God and making them morally sound has suffered the dear need ICT integration in Nigeria due to the following reasons:

1. The most significant of these is the low ICT penetration and usage among Nigerian schools. Recent figures indicate that by 2011, only about 56.5% penetration had been achieved in the country (Internet World States (2013).
2. Throughout the country, the basic ICT infrastructure is inadequate. The nation’s schools in the same vein lack the requisite telecommunication infrastructure capable of transporting multimedia messages. There is need for schools to have broad-band access so that online resources for teaching and learning can be obtained.
3. Poor economic conditions and their effects on middle level manpower is another barrier to implementation of ICT in Nigerian secondary school system. An average middle-income Nigerian cannot afford the basis technological gadgets. Thus, the computer and related communication facilities are still very much a luxury in most institutions, homes and offices. This has made the integration of necessary online resources (e-

mail, world-wide-web, etc.) into secondary education difficult (Ifenedo and Ololube, 2007).

4. The absence of electric power grids in most parts of the country has also affected the implementation of the ICT policy in the country. The epileptics nature of electric power supply in Nigeria makes it difficult to really utilize even the available facilities.
5. At the present, the use of computer, access to internet and other tools of ICT are limited to the urban areas, and the challenges faced by ICT sector in the country includes particularly the fact that the people in the rural areas are yet to know how to use the computer.
6. The low percentage of teachers who have ICT skills and the challenges of the massive ICT education drive needed to correct and develop the huge human resources base at national and institutional levels in the faculty and student population (Agyeman 2007) is another notable constraint.
7. Governments' low budget does not make meaningful provision for ICT in the secondary level of education in Nigeria, and hence the failure to incorporate compulsory TCT in the school curriculum especially at the primary and post primary levels.
8. The absence of policy at the ministerial level has not helped to coordinate ICT projects and programmes being carried out separately by agencies operating in the education sector, and this can lead to resource wastage and duplication. The aforementioned factors have conspired to stall the various efforts at launching Nigeria boldly into the global ICT platform.

Promoting the Use of ICT in the Study of CRS in Nigerian Schools during and Covid-19 Era

One positive outcome of the COVID-19 outbreak for Nigeria is the 'enforcement of virtual learning into our education system. Without COVID-19, virtual learning incorporation in our schools could probably have taken another decade. Virtual learning has become imperative in promoting and sustaining educational development globally, considering the disruptive effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on traditional ways of teaching and learning the Christian religion. With this is COVID-19; nobody knows what other occurrences will happen in future and will lead to interruption of the activities of the educational system in Nigeria. The situation should also engender

Nigeria's integration into the technological divide. After all, many schools were able to adapt to online learning during the schools' closure. As the COVID-19 schools' closure has brought into limelight the inadequacies in our ability to integrate technology into our education system, this should spur us into action. Blended learning should be integrated in the teaching and learning of Christian religion, especially in tertiary institutions of learning.

Blended Learning and Teacher Preparation

The question may be asked, whether teachers have any prominent role to play in this development? For the proper online process in a school, Garrison (2009) argued that three conditions are necessary,

1. social presence
2. cognitive presence and
3. teaching presence

These three interact through climate setting, content selection and discourse support. For these interactive modes to operate, the service of the teacher is necessary, and the teacher must have the required competencies (Casanova, Moreira and Costa, 2009). This is because, for online learning class to become operational, the teacher has to set optimal class sizes for online teaching, design online course materials using multiple strategies, make teaching more interesting to students/build an engaging experience (use of pop-up questions etc.), assist those who were unresponsive and are slow learners in e-classes, cultivate community amongst students, establish and reiterate routines, educate students about plagiarism, acknowledge student accomplishments, appraise students' learning through online tests, ensure the teacher-learner relationships in online classes among other things. The question that needs to be asked is whether most Christian religious teachers can function as an online learning facilitator? Online learning facilitation requires specialised skills, which are very paramount for successful facilitation.

Way Forward

This paper hereby recommends the following steps which if carefully followed, will help to promote the integration of ICT in the teaching and learning of Christian Religious Education in Nigerian schools:

1. **Curriculum for training of Christian religious teachers must involve basic ICTs/computer mastery.**

In order to promote the use of ICT in the teaching and learning of CRS, teachers in colleges of education and Faculties of education in

universities should be given proper training on the use of ICT and its gadgets by including it to their curriculum to aid them master the use of it and thereby using it as a tool for teaching of CRS.

2. Teachers of Christian Religion at all level should avail themselves of opportunities available to acquire basic ICT skills

It is important for Christian religious teachers who are not literate should make opportunities which can assist them in the mastery of ICT gadgets by attending seminars and workshops on training of teachers for better performance on the use of ICT for teaching of Christian religion.

3. Mode of promotion for teachers from one cadre to another should include computer literacy

In order to ensure that teaches acquire **basic** knowledge on ICT, it is important to regard any promotion **of teachers base** on their level of computer literacy as it would encourage all teachers to seek knowledge on the use of ICT in teaching of Christian religion since it forms a requisite for promotion to be considered.

4. Provision of ICT facilities in schools

In order to promote the use of ICT in teaching and learning of Christian religion in the Nigerian Schools, it is necessary for the government or bodies in charge to make readily available ICT gadgets, thus, teacher trainers and trainee teachers can have access to ICTs within their schools and using it to teach the students.

5. Attempts should be made to develop a crop of school leadership who are committed to ICTs implementation in schools

Leaders are expected to lead others in embracing ICT. School administrators and heads should actively be **part of the people** developing ICT issue through project and initiatives. These leaders will be able to give leadership through knowledge from the multiple training and initiatives. In achieving this NITDA (National Information technology Development Agency) and the Digital Bridge Institute should develop appropriate programmes for school administrators through the Federal Ministry of Communication's portal.

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