

Inclusive versus Conventional Christian Religious Studies Curriculum for Learners with Special Needs in a Post Covid-19 Era: Teachers' and Students' Perspectives

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Abstract

The study emphasized the practice of inclusive curriculum as against the normal conventional Christian Religious Studies (CRS) curriculum use in the senior secondary schools. The research tried to expose the limitations of conventional curriculum on both teachers and students and had taken initiatives to advocate that curriculum planners to adapt a more learner-centered curricular. This study was found to be significant because of the exposition of various curricular activities which focused on the solutions for educating students with a wide range of differences in post Covid-19 era for greater optimization. Four research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. It adopted a descriptive research design. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were employed in picking 35 teachers and 155 students drawn from the six education zones in Enugu state, Nigeria. The result showed that teachers strongly prefer conventional curriculum to the inclusive type; the students merely agree that conventional curriculum is preferred to them. The result also indicated that neither the subjects' gender nor their school location influences their preference for the type of curriculum.

Keywords: *Inclusive, Conventional, Christian Religious Studies (CRS), Curriculum, Learners, Special Needs, COVID- 19, Teachers, Students, Multimedia Learning*

I. Introduction

Most advanced countries have tried to improve the standards of education in order to accommodate students of various capabilities. However, despite the effort of many nations to roll out the education system for the benefit of every calibre of learners, Nigeria is still backward as it concerns students with special needs. Students that have to do with genetic composition, social, physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional

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disabilities are being described as special need learners (FRN, 2014: Section7: 119b). Generally, education should be accommodating, making provisions for every learner and at the same time, providing an environment that is accessible to all through excellent design and consideration of the factors that would accommodate special needs students for progress and optimization of teaching and learning in a post Covid- 19 era.

Coronavirus disease 2019, otherwise known as Covid- 19, the year in which the disease outbreak was first identified, is a highly infectious respiratory disease caused by a new coronavirus. The disease was discovered in China in December 2019 and then spread around the world, causing an unprecedented public health crisis (World Health Organization, 2020). The transition was more conspicuous in some countries than others, more advanced in terms of mortality rate, emotional, psychological trauma and otherwise, hence, the need for uniformity and revisiting the curriculum to include every learner. The society also advocates for an inclusive education in teaching and learning. Inclusive education is when all students, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate to general education classes that are in their own neighbourhood schools to receive high-quality instruction, interventions, and supports that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum (McManis, 2020).

A useful curriculum should equip the learner with the required knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to survive in his or her society (or any condition) (Offorma, 2005). In Offorma (2002) view, curriculum is the deliberately and systematically planned attempts to change the behaviour of young and inexperienced to enable them to gain the insight that helps them solve problems for a better society. This is the traditional or conventional type of curriculum, which society traditionally used in schools that focuses on individual student's needs. On the other hand, a curriculum that has the needs of the society is deliberately and systematically planned and translated into a body of knowledge, skills and attitudes grouped into subject topics taught to learners in schools (Carrington, S. & Elkins, J. (2010).

A nation is deemed fit globally if the societal needs and challenges are reflected in the school curriculum and effectively implemented, hence, the reason for advocating for an inclusive curriculum in Christian Religious Studies (CRS) for learners with special needs, especially in the post-covid-19 era. CRS is a branch of religion offered as an optional subject at the senior secondary school level in Nigeria (National Open University of Nigeria (2006). Due to the need for religion in an individual's life and conduct, the Federal Government of Nigeria integrated the teaching of Christian Religious Studies (CRS) into the curriculum of secondary schools. As documented in the National Policy on Education, FRN (2014), the broad aim of CRS is to inculcate in the recipients the moral lessons and instructions that would make him/her patriotic and effective citizen. The subject provides the moral foundation required by all the children in the society. Therefore, one should think that an inclusive curriculum is a good option since it is designed, planned and delivered to enable every student to be successful, regardless of his/her educational, dispositional, circumstantial, or cultural background (Giangreco, 2010).

An inclusive curriculum has components that relate to placement, retention, progression, employability, practical lessons and group work (National Open University of Nigeria, 2006). Due to the lack of guidelines provided to teachers and education institutions on how they can transform from conventional curriculum to inclusive curriculum, many times curriculum is used for the sake of using it. Using an inclusive curriculum in teaching can help promote deeper learning and positively impact creating a learner-centered teaching

environment. Inclusive teaching can gain better attention from learners, achieve higher retention rate, and encourage better participation rate among learners (Kiili, 2005).

The inclusive curriculum aims to 'join-up' and embeds good practice to improve every student's learning experience and chances to be successful in life (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2020). An inclusive curriculum leads to multimedia teaching and learning. Multimedia learning can help to promote deeper learning and has positive impact in creating a learner-centered teaching environment. Multimedia learning is able to gain better attention from learners, achieve higher retention rate and also encourage better participation rate among learners. Multimedia learning is said to be effective in the transformation process from traditional teaching approach to inclusive or blended learning (Shank, 2005).

The inclusive curriculum, unlike the conventional type, though not much popular yet in Nigerian schools setting, has been shown in literature to have some merits. It is the intention of this researchers that having formally educated both teachers and students on the meaning of both types of curriculum, their merits and possible demerits, to subject them to comparatively evaluate the two types of curriculum with Christian Religious Studies (CRS) as the subject of reference. This is the focus of this study.

Objectives of the Study

- (1) To determine teachers and students' ratings of conventional and inclusive Curricula
- (2) To ascertain the influence of teachers and students' gender on their ratings of Conventional and inclusive curricula.
- (3) To explore the influence of their school location on their ratings of conventional and inclusive curricula.

Research Questions

1. What is the mean rating of CRS teachers' preference of Conventional curriculum?
2. What is the mean rating of CRS teachers' preference of Inclusive curriculum?
3. What is the mean rating of students' preference of Conventional curriculum?
4. What is the mean rating of students' preference of Inclusive curriculum?

Hypotheses

1. Gender of the subjects (teachers and students) is not a significant factor of their rating of preference of the type of curriculum.
2. Location of the subjects (teachers and students) does not significantly influence their rating of the type of curriculum.

II. Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey involving thirty- five (35) CRS teachers and one

Hundred and fifty- five (155) CRS senior secondary school students, purposively drawn from 15 schools. That is, 3 from each of six education zones in Enugu State. The criterion of purposiveness was that the teachers must be at least a holder of at least an NCE certificate in CRS, while the students were those who are opting to offer CRS at the SSCE and NECO examinations.

The instrument used for the study was Teachers and Students Rating of Inclusive and Conventional Curricula (TARIAC) developed by the researcher. It has two parts- 1 and 2. Part one sought information on background of the respondents while part two has two sections. Section A focused on the teachers' ratings while section B was on the students' ratings. The ratings elicited information using a 4-point Likert type scale of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD). While the instruments were personally administered to the teachers by the researcher, the CRS teachers in each of the sample schools assisted the researcher in administering the instruments to the students. Mean rating and t-test were used in responding to the research questions and hypotheses respectively.

III. Results

The results of the study are here under presented in accordance with the guiding research question and hypotheses

Research Question One:What is the mean rating of CRS teachers' preference of Conventional curriculum?

Table 1: Mean rating (X) and standard deviation (S) of CRS students and teachers' of Preference of conventional curricula

Type of respondent	N	X	Interpretation
Teachers	35	3.90	SA
Students	155	3.16	SA

As shown in table above, the mean rating, X, of teachers rating of their preference for conventional curriculum is 3.90. This is interpreted to mean strongly agree implying that the teachers strongly agree to the preference for the conventional curriculum.

Research Question Two: What is the mean rating of CRS teachers' preference of inclusive curriculum?

Table 2: Mean ratings of CRS teachers’ and students on preference of inclusive curricula

Type of respondent	N	X	Interpretation
Teachers	35	3.15	A
Students	155	3.02	A

As evident in table 2 above teachers’ mean rating, X, for their preference for inclusive curriculum is 3.15 which in the table is interpreted to mean that they agree to their preference to inclusive curriculum.

Research Question Three: *What is the mean rating of CRS students’ preference of Conventional curriculum?*

In table 1, above it is also shown that the mean rating of students’ preference for the conventional curriculum is 3.16 which is interpreted in the table to mean that the students strongly agree to their preference for conventional curriculum.

Research Question Four: *What is the mean rating students rating of CRS students’ preference of inclusive curriculum?*

Table 2 shows that the mean rating of students’ preference for the inclusive curriculum is 3.02 which is interpreted in the table to mean that the student agree to their preference for inclusive curriculum.

Hypothesis one: Subjects’ gender is not a significant factor of the rating of their preference of conventional curriculum

Table 3: t-test of the subjects’ rating of their preference of type of curriculum by gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Sig.	Decision
Male	81	33.78	2.90	188	0.60	NS
Female	109	34.01	3.12			

The t-test shown in table reveals that the means of 33.78 and 34.01 for male and female teachers' respective ratings of their preference for the type of curriculum with the degree of freedom df of 188 is significant at 0.60 level. Therefore, at the level of 0.05 the difference between the two means of males and females is not significant. In other words, there is no real difference between the male and female teachers rating of their preference for conventional curriculum. Thus, teachers' gender is not a significant factor of their preference for the type of curriculum.

Hypothesis Two: *location of the subjects (teachers and students) does not significantly Influence their rating of the type of curriculum*

Table 4: t-test of the subjects' rating of their preference of type of curriculum by school location

Location	N	Mean	SD	df	Sig.	Decision
Urban	98	37.78	12.90	186	0.34	NS
Rural	92	34.32	19.14			

The table 4 shows that the means of 37.78 and 34.32 for urban and rural subjects' respective ratings of their preference for the type of curriculum with the degree of freedom df of 186 is significant at 0.34 level. Therefore, at the level of 0.05 the difference between the two means of urban and rural located subjects is not significant. In other words, school location is not a significant factor of the subjects rating of their preference of the type of curriculum.

Summary of Results

The results of this study have shown that:

- Teachers generally show that while teachers strongly prefer conventional curriculum to the inclusive type, the students merely agree that conventional curriculum is preferred to them.
- Neither the subjects' gender nor their school location influences their preference for the type of curriculum.

IV. Discussion, Implication and Conclusion

The results of this study have shown, among other things, that while teachers of CRS have a stronger preference to the conventional curriculum in the subject than the inclusive type, the students merely agree in that

direction. In other words, teachers in the subject are more disposed to the adoption of the conventional curriculum in teaching the subject.

The foregoing result can be explained from the point of view of the fact that between the two curricula type, the conventional type appears to be much more familiar with the teachers who were likely to have been trained in their teacher education programme using the conventional curriculum as opposed to the inclusive type that is relatively new in Nigeria education system. This is more so as the inclusive curriculum is more of a special type of curriculum as it is designed for “the anticipation of general and collective requirements of disabled people” (National Open University of Nigeria, 2006), the latter of which is not common in Nigerian education system.

Implied from the foregoing is that since the use of inclusive curriculum is not common in Nigerian education system, it is therefore not strange, as revealed in this study, that both teachers’ and students’ gender and their school location do not influence the subjects preference to any of the curricula. Implied from these results therefore is that, despite the tremendous pedagogic merits associated with the use of inclusive curriculum as evident in literature, it is shown that it has not been duly embraced in used in Nigerian education system. Consequently, the latter loses the benefit inherent in its adoption and use.

V. Recommendation

Therefore, it is recommended that stakeholders in education in Nigeria should via relevant policy specifications recommend its adoption and workable strategies should be put in place towards ensuring the development and adoption of inclusive curriculum not only in CRK but in other school subjects.

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