TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF CHRIS TIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES: UNPACKING THE CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL PE DAGOGY

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Abstract
The acquisition of essential skills and knowledge is considered a primary aim of education to ef fectively navigate and succeed in various aspects of life. In modern times, the role involves proa ctive engagement in a society that is rich in information, where knowledge is considered the pri mary driver for the socio-cultural and politico-economic progress of nations. The teaching and learning of Christian Religious Studies has not fully utilized the abundant resources available i n the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) era, owing to several limitations. T his study analyzed the current status of Christian religious studies during this era, as well as th e factors that facilitate, inhibit, or hinder the integration of ICT in Nigerian basic education. Th e research provides recommendations for the effective integration of ICT initiatives in the teach ing of Christian religious studies within Nigerian educational levels in the contemporary era. T he research suggests that it would be beneficial for Nigerian education to be equipped with con temporary computer laboratories by the appropriate authorities, for the benefit of both student s and teachers. **Keywords**: ICT, Christian Religious Studies, Peda gogy, Teaching, Learning

Introduction

The merger of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in pedagogy serves as a m eans of imparting knowledge to students, thereby facilitating their acquisition of the necessary s kills to thrive in the contemporary era. Blurton (1999) defines "ICT as a heterogeneous array of technological instruments and resources that are employed for the purposes of communication, information creation, dissemination, storage, and management." ICTs are comprised of a syner gistic amalgamation of physical components such as hardware, software, media, and delivery s ystems. Tinio (2002) has identified "a range of technologies that include computers, the internet broadcasting technologies (e.g., radio and television), and telephony. In contemporary times, a diverse range of smartphones and touchpads has been unveiled. The swift advancement of ICT and its associated technology over the past few decades has had a noteworthy influence on the tr ansformation of various facets of teacher education. In contemporary times, scarcely any profes sion exists that does not necessitate the utilization of ICT in some capacity." According to Alad ejana (2007), "ICT is significantly transforming our lifestyles, education, and employment. ICT s exert a substantial influence on various domains of human endeavor.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the advantages of a population equipped with ICT in enha ncing the standard of education." According to Davis and Tearle [1999], "the utilization of tech

nology in education has the potential to enhance and intensify proficiency, foster student motiv ation and engagement, establish a connection between academic learning and professional appli cation, promote economic sustainability for future employees, and fortify pedagogy while facili tating educational reform." Inthecontextofcontemporar y globalized education, Agboola and Popoola (2015) maintained that, "The utilization of ICT is imperative for individuals to effectively access and apply information." Adeyemi (2019) corrob orated further that the "acquisition of such capability necessitates the incorporation of ICT withi n the context of the interconnected global community." Currently, there exists a significant nee d for educators who possess exceptional creativity and innovation skills to guide students towar ds achieving meaningful learning outcomes. In the same vein, Adigwe and Iyase (2018) averred "The presence of a proficient and productive educator is a crucial element that will positively i mpact the effectiveness of pedagogy in the educational process." Ogunlade and Oluwatayo (20 17) postulated that "attainment of successful teaching and learning within educational institutio ns has persistently posed a challenge in the field of education." Additional issues of concern as highlighted by Aderinoye (2016) pertain to the structure of the educational program, contentiou s aspects of the topics covered, and inadequate pedagogical approaches. C hristian Religious studies is a challenging subject to instruct in contemporary secondary schools The pedagogical methodology employed in the instruction of the aforementioned subject has u ndergone various stages. Previously, the focus was on imparting religious doctrines and utilizin g a factual examination-based methodology. Presently, the subject matter has shifted towards in quiry and empirical analysis as opposed to dogmatic instruction. Various terminologie s are employed to refer to the subject in contemporary educational institutions. The aforementio ned terms encompass a spectrum of concepts, including but not limited to the acquisition of kno wledge pertaining to religion, the academic discipline of religious studies, and the imparting of ethical guidance. In most cases, these terms are used interchangeably. One issue pertaining to re ligion is its inherent association with values, judgement, and emotions, resulting in a lack of con sensus within society. This has led to the subject's controversial nature, inconsistent linguistic d iscourse, and unstable conversational patterns, ultimately contributing to its technical difficulty. This is largely accountable for low enrollment in the subject/course in tertiary institutions. Hars hit, Neelu, Ajuja, and Faisal (2022) aver that "the major deficiency threatening the subject is ad equate use of innovative teaching aids and literature. By and large, this work seeks to unravel th e challenges militating effective integration of digital pedagogy in the teaching and learning of Christian Religious Studies in schools.

The Concept of Information Communication Technology I CT is an abbreviation commonly used to refer to the field of technology that deals with the proc essing, storage, and communication of information. In its most narrow definition, information r efers to a communication, whether it be spoken or written, that is Forum for Education Studies 2 024, 2(4), 1646. comprised of a structured arrangement of symbols. Alternatively, information can also refer to the significance that can be derived from such a communication or collection of communications. Data can be captured or conveyed. The phenomenon in question may be docu mented through visual symbols or transmitted through oscillating patterns of energy known as waves. According to the definition, information refers to any event that has an impact on the co ndition of a system that is in a state of flux. The term encompasses a multitude of connotations a cross various contexts. Furthermore, Olawale (2012) averred that "the notion of information is i ntricately linked to the concepts of oblige, transmission, dictate, representation of facts, method command, awareness, intention, insight, model, cognitive, substitute, and particularly tendenc

y or measurement. In fact, the term "information" may be defined as data that has been processe d.” Effective communication necessitates the presence of a sender wh o conveys a message to a designated recipient. Communication has the potential to take place ac ross significant temporal and spatial expanses. Effective communication necessitates that the in volved parties possess a shared communicative ground. The process of communication is deem ed to be concluded when the recipient has comprehended the message conveyed by the sender. I nformation technology (IT) refers to the utilization of computer systems and software applicati ons for the purpose of organizing and processing data. The field of Information Technology (I T) involves the utilization of microelectronics-based computing and telecommunications to acq uire, process, store, and distribute various forms of information, including vocal, pictorial, textu al, and numerical data. Information Technology (IT) encompasses a broad range of fields, addit ionally, but is not restricted to a series of computer software and data structures. It involves the management of technology and its various applications. In summary, any means of presenting d ata, information, or knowledge through visual media using various multimedia distribution cha nnels falls within the scope of the IT field. Ivorgba (2006) opined, “Religious Education refers t o the instruction of a specific religion, encompassing its diverse components such as beliefs, do ctrines, rituals, rites, and individual responsibilities.” The term “Christian Religious Studies” p ertains to the cognitive advancement of an individual, wherein the teachings of the Christian Re ligion are integrated and serve as the focal point of all other forms of knowledge and competenc ies acquired within a specific environment. The National Policy on Education (2 004) emphasized that the “Nigerian government emphasizes the integration of ICT in education as part of its broader strategy to improve educational quality. Recent revisions and implementat ions of this policy have focused on enhancing digital skills among both students and Forum for Education Studies 2024, 2(4), 1646. educators. Similarly, the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) further delineates that NITDA has launched initiatives aimed a t promoting ICT in education, including the development of e-learning platforms and resources that can be utilized in teaching Christian Religious Education.”

Need for ICT in Nigerian schools

The significance and necessity of contemporary technologies in the realm of religious educatio n generally cannot be overstated. Upon careful observation, it can be inferred that there exists a certain degree of ICT integration in Nigerian education. ICTs have a significant impact on educ ation in Nigeria, according to the National Policy of Education established by the Federal Gover nment of Nigeria in 2004. The Policy on Education further states that the government must prov ide the necessary infrastructure and elementary school training programs in order to fulfill this goal. Currently, computer education is listed as a pre-vocational elective for junior high school students and a vocational elective for el ementary school students. According to Ogyeman’s (2021) assertion, “the objective of govern ment is to facilitate the provision of essential infrastructure and training required for the comple te assimilation of ICT at the basic education level of Nigeria. The Nigerian education ministry h as not yet developed ICT for education policy. This result may have been influenced by the note d anomalies and lack of durability of the country’s ICT policy.”

Okebukola (1997) observed that the “inception of computer educa tion in Nigerian schools can be traced back to the latter part of the 1980s. They maintained the p roposed strategy involved the implementation of pilot schools to disseminate innovative compu ter education practices initially to secondary schools, followed by primary schools. Regrettably, the project failed to progress beyond the allocation and implementation of individual computin

g devices." Forum for Education Studies (2024).

In nearly 90% of Nigeria's public schools, there is no technology in the cla ssroom. The inference drawn from this is that the employment of traditional teaching tools such as chalkboards and textbooks remains prevalent in the majority of Nigerian secondary schools. New Partnerships for African Development evaluation of African students' ICT proficiency an d experience yielded a similar subpar rating. Importantly, Zinox Computers, a private consortium, has undertaken a commendable initiative aimed at revolutioni zing the utilization of ICT in education across all three levels of the educational hierarchy, rangi ng from primary to tertiary education, within the country. First Bank and Zenith Bank have cont ributed their financial resources to facilitate Nigeria's attainment of a substantial level of per ca pita computer and internet usage, thereby aligning with other developed nations.

In addition, the Digital Bridge Institute (DBI) has significantly contributed to enhancing computer literacy among the academic community in Ni geria. The organization has initiated a comprehensive program to address the lack of skills amo ng Nigerian school staff in utilizing computers and related accessories. This program aims to tra in and develop the skills of education sector personnel in a "train the trainer" scheme. The organ ization's efforts are in response to the absence of corresponding initiatives by other organizatio ns providing computers and accessories to Nigerian schools. The objective of this program is to expedite the acquisition of computer skills among Nigerians to meet the educational demands o f the 21st century. The country has been partitioned into six geopolitical zones by DBI utilizing the Adapt Definition and Meaning (ADAPT) adaptation scheme. The trainees are typically sele cted from tertiary institutions and undergo a rigorous and comprehensive workshop that covers Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and internet usage. The anticipated outcome is that at the c onclusion of the imparting and acquiring skills program, the trainees would acquire the necessar y skills and knowledge to assume the role of trainers upon their return to their respective institut ions. Religion is widely regarded as a crucial element in contemporary societies, and as such, it s significance cannot be disregarded or marginalized without potentially dire repercussions for said society. Religion is deemed an essential and inescapable facet of human existence. The imp ortance of instilling moral grounding in young individuals cannot be overstated, as it plays a crit ical role in shaping their overall personality development and moral growth. As Qmoregbe (199 0) astutely observed, "the advancement of a nation is contingent upon the ethical maturation of its populace. During the pre-Christian era, the primary focus of traditional religious education was the cultivation of ethical principles, even prior to the advent of Christianity. Christianity ha s emphasized the importance of moral education for both individual and societal growth." The National Policy on Education's Section 3(3) underscores the significance of instilling virtue am ong individuals for proper interpersonal relationships and to foster character development.

Potentials of ICT to schools Accordi ng to Sutton (2006), "the utilization of ICT has the potential to enhance students' cognitive abili ties by facilitating higher-level thinking, problem-solving, enhanced communication abilities, a nd a thorough Forum for Education Studies 2024, 2(4), 1646. Understanding of the teaching me thod and its underlying idea are all expected outcomes." According to Harkins [24], "ICT has th e potential to foster interactive teaching and learning communities that are supportive in nature.

Furthermore, ICT can function as a beneficial asset for students, including those with exceptional requirements, by offering them diverse educ ational aids." Franke (1985) has reported that "computer graphics have been employed to repres ent diverse relationships, particularly those that are dynamic in nature and cannot be effectively

conveyed through singular images." The utilization of PowerPoint, complemented by field and animation effects, presents an effective means of showcasing significant biblical events such as the Ten Commandments, the crossing of the Red Sea, the Exodus, the baptism of Jesus, the miracles of Jesus, and St. Paul's missionary journeys. This multimedia approach surpasses other forms of media, particularly in terms of its capacity to convey information. In addition to efforts aimed at promoting literacy and numeracy, empirical evidence exists to support positive results in various academic fields, including mathematics, modern foreign languages, science, history, geography, physics education, and the creative arts. According to Ifinedo and Ololubo (2007), "ICT has the potential to facilitate students' learning about and from religion by enhancing their practical communication skills, granting access to diverse information and perspectives, and supporting them in tasks such as organization, documentation, reporting, and dissemination of their findings." The internet can serve as a valuable tool for exploring the global observance of Easter and Christmas through the acquisition of information, personal narratives, visual media, and audio recordings. Additionally, it can facilitate communication between schools of varying religious backgrounds via email correspondence or with guest speakers. Multimedia software can be utilized to create interactive presentations on religious education topics, incorporating graphics, text, and sound animations. Digital photographs and videos of visits to Christian churches can also be employed to enhance subsequent coursework and displays. ICT encompasses a diverse array of tools and technologies that extend beyond conventional computing and website development. The aforementioned items encompass a variety of technological devices such as audio cassettes, CDs, overhead projectors (OHP), televisions, camcorders, cameras, videos, telephones, and scanners. Due to their high level of manipulability, computers have the capability to execute a vast array of tasks through programming. Currently, it is possible to undertake a journey or religious journey to Jerusalem or any other global destination without physically removing students from the classroom. This allows for the exploration of shrines, the perusal of saints' biographies, independent theological analysis, and the attainment of answers to basic religious inquiries. The adoption of ICT in the teaching of CRS is crucial for enhancing educational outcomes and making learning more engaging. This process will enhance the learning experience; ICT tools can facilitate interactive learning, making religious education more engaging for students. Multimedia resources such as videos, animations, and interactive quizzes can help illustrate complex concepts better than traditional methods. According to Agyeman (2023), ICT usage in teaching and learning further grants access to resources. He maintained that ICT provides access to a wealth of online resources and forums for Christian Education Studies. Recent revisions and implementations of this policy have focused on enhancing digital skills among both students and educators. Similarly, the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) (2023) further delineates that NITDA has launched initiatives aimed at promoting ICT in education, including the development of e-learning platforms and resources that can be utilized in teaching CRE.

Challenges of ICT Integration and utilization of in teaching and learning of Christian Religious Studies The utilization of ICT has become pervasive in various domains of human activity in modern times. The pervasive nature of increased usage is evident across nearly all academic disciplines. However, this innovation has not been observed in the domain of Christian Religious Studies pedagogy. The lack of enthusiasm towards Christian Religious Studies may be ascribed to the indifferent disposition of either the instructors or pupils, or conceivably, the absence of engagement with the s

ubject matter. While there is no strong enga gement between the learner and the teacher in respect to ICT adoption, there lies a serious probl em from government agencies in the implementations of ICT policies at all educational levels. The experience is more of a rhetorical formula where much is said yet little or nothing is done. This serves as a clarion call to the government and its agencies to be more proactive in terms of project implementation in the Nigerian schools. Specifically, the following challenges are ident ified:

1. Unreliable electricity supply and limited internet connectivity hinder ICT integration, p articularly in rural areas
2. There are significant disparities in access to ICT between urban and rural areas, and bet ween affluent and economically disadvantaged communities and this has posed a great l imitation to accessing ICT tools by CRS teachers
3. Many teachers lack the necessary skills to effectively integrate ICT into their teaching p rocesses. They are left with no choice but to use what is available to them.
4. Inadequate funding has also become a major challenge in education. This is critical beca use limited financial resources constrain the acquisition and maintenance of ICT equip ment in schools.
5. Language barriers can be another challenge to the integration and utilization of ICT. Th e predominance of English in ICT tools and resources can be a challenge in multilingual contexts like Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are intended to enhance the use of ICT integration and utilization in t he context of Christian Religious Studies.

1. The relevant agencies provide modern computer laboratories in Nigerian basic educatio n levels. Additionally, governments at all levels should subsidize computers for instituti ons, teachers, and students to facilitate their procurement and use both in schools and at home, thereby enhancing productivity in Nigerian schools.
2. Budgetary allocation for education in Nigeria should be enhanced to meet the United Na tions Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) benchmark of 26% of the country's annual budget. This will facilitate the allocation of adequate funds towa rds the development of ICT at the basic education level across the nation.
3. There should be an increase in the availability of workshops for religious education teac hers to enhance their knowledge and skills in utilizing ICT at the basic education level s ettings.
4. The implementation of an ICT-based education system necessitates a reliable source of electricity. It is imperative to focus on ensuring that Nigeria assumes the role of a net ele ctricity supplier, as opposed to relying solely on the private sector and individual initiati ves.
5. Schools should undergo classroom retrofitting in order to facilitate the integration of IC T facilities.

Conclusion

It is evident that students derive pleasure from learning through ICT owing to the widely held b

elief that it enhances their retention and elaborates on lessons. The merger of ICT in the pedago gy of religious education at all levels of education will be a notable advancement. The governm ent has expressed a strong interest in promoting the use of ICT by educators to enhance the learn ing experience of students. In order to accomplish this objective, it is imperative for the govern ment to transcend the mere rhetoric approach and establish essential infrastructure and support systems that are required to effectively initiate the integration of ICT at all levels of learning.

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