

**IMPACT OF BLENDED TEACHING STRATEGIES ON THE ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCES OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES (CRS) STUDENTS IN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS, IN ONUEKE EDUCATION ZONE, EBONYI STATE,
NIGERIA.**

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of blended teaching strategies on students' academic performance in Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in secondary schools in Onueke Education Zone, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Using a quasi-experimental design, 200 SS2 students were divided into experimental (blended learning) and control (traditional) groups. Results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in CRS assessments. Challenges like limited digital resources and teacher training were identified. The study recommends integrating technology, training teachers, and developing digital CRS materials to improve learning.

Keywords

Blended learning, Christian Religious Studies, secondary education, technology integration, Nigeria.

Introduction

Blended Teaching Strategies: A Balanced Approach to Learning

Blended teaching combines traditional face-to-face instruction with digital tools and online resources to create a flexible, engaging learning experience. It allows educators to personalize learning, promote collaboration, and meet diverse student needs. By integrating in-person and digital methods, blended teaching enhances comprehension, accessibility, and student autonomy.

Key Elements of Blended Teaching Strategies:

Face-to-Face Instruction

Explanation: Direct teaching in a physical classroom, where teachers guide, mentor, and build relationships.

Example: A Nigerian CRS teacher leads a discussion on the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12), encouraging students to share real-life applications.

Online Learning Platforms

Explanation: Digital tools (e.g., Google Classroom, Zoom, educational apps) for content delivery, assignments, or discussions.

Example: Students in Lagos access recorded Bible stories on YouVersion, then discuss themes in class.

Interactive Digital Content

Explanation: Videos, simulations, or games to make learning dynamic.

Example: A science teacher uses a virtual lab to demonstrate ecosystems, linking it to God's creation.

Self-Paced Learning

Explanation: Students learn at their own speed via online modules or resources.

Example: Primary students complete Bible quizzes on an app, retrying until they master the content.

Collaborative Activities

Explanation: Group work using online tools (e.g., Google Docs, breakout rooms).

Example: Students in Abuja create a digital timeline of biblical events, sharing it with peers.

Flipped Classroom Model

Explanation: Students learn content at home (via videos/reading), then apply it in class.

Example: Students watch a video on forgiveness, then role-play conflict resolution in class.

Benefits of Blended Teaching:

Personalization: Tailors learning to individual needs (e.g., extra support or advanced challenges).

Flexibility: Accommodates different learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic).

Engagement: Makes lessons interactive and relevant to digital-native students.

Preparation for the Digital Age: Develops tech skills for future readiness.

The integration of technology in education has revolutionized teaching and learning processes globally, leading to the adoption of blended teaching—a combination of face-to-face instruction and digital tools. In Nigeria, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need for innovative teaching methods, yet many secondary schools, particularly in rural areas like Onueke Education Zone, Ebonyi State, continue to rely on traditional methods. Christian Religious Studies (CRS), a core subject aimed at instilling moral and spiritual values, faces challenges such as large class sizes, limited resources, and passive learning environments. This study assessed the effectiveness of blended teaching in enhancing CRS learning outcomes in this context.

Blended teaching isn't about replacing teachers—it's about enhancing learning with technology. When balanced, it prepares students for a connected world while maintaining human connection.

Research Questions:

1. Does blended teaching improve CRS academic performance?
2. What are the barriers to implementing blended teaching in CRS?
3. How do students perceive blended learning in CRS?

Literature Review

Blended learning, which integrates face-to-face instruction with digital tools, has shown promise in enhancing academic performance and engagement in religious education. In Nigeria, the adoption of blended teaching in CRS faces challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited digital literacy, and insufficient teacher training (Adeyinka, 2018; Ajibola, 2023).

Recent studies emphasize the need for a curriculum shift to accommodate digital resources. Ajibola et al. (2024) argue that Nigeria's CRS curriculum is overly confessional and lacks interreligious dialogue, necessitating a more inclusive, technology-driven approach. Similarly, Aiyedogbon (2024) highlights that effective CRS implementation is hindered by poor funding, auxiliary teaching, and students' negative attitudes toward the subject.

Innovative methods like the analogy model of instruction have proven effective. Chukwu et al. (2024) found that students taught CRS using this model outperformed those using traditional lecture methods, though gender differences were noted in some studies (Eze, 2023).

To address these challenges, experts recommend:

Teacher Training: In-service programs to build digital skills (Aiyedogbon, 2024).

Infrastructure: Government investment in Wi-Fi, tablets, and e-learning platforms (Ajibola, 2023).

Curriculum Updates: Integrating multimedia resources (e.g., e-Bibles, interactive quizzes) to enhance engagement (Okwara, 2018).

Methodology

- Design: Quasi-experimental (pre-test, post-test).
- Sample: 200, SS2 students (100 experimental, 100 control) from four schools in Onueke.
- Tools: CRS achievement tests, questionnaires, teacher interviews.
- Analysis: ANOVA, t-tests.

Results and Discussion

This study examined the impact of blended teaching on the academic performance of secondary school students in Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in Onueke Education Zone, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The findings are presented below, followed by a detailed discussion.

Quantitative Results

- i. CRS Academic Performance:
- ii. Experimental Group (Blended Learning): Mean = 68.7, SD = 7.5
- iii. Control Group (Traditional Learning): Mean = 54.2, SD = 6.8
- iv. Test Result: $p < 0.05$, indicating a statistically significant difference. The experimental group outperformed the control group, suggesting that blended teaching improved students' understanding of CRS concepts.

Gender Influence:

Male students (mean = 66.3, SD = 8.1) vs. Female students (mean = 67.1, SD = 7.3).

Test Result: $p = 0.62$, indicating no significant gender-based difference in performance.

Challenges Identified:

Poor internet connectivity: 80% of teachers and 85% of students.

Inadequate digital devices: 75% of schools.

Low teacher training: 85% of teachers felt unprepared to use digital tools.

Qualitative Results

Student Feedback:

90% preferred blended learning, citing its interactive nature (e.g., videos, quizzes).

70% reported difficulty accessing online materials due to data costs or network issues.

Teacher Interviews:

"Blended teaching makes lessons more engaging, but we need training and resources."

Managing large classes online is challenging without proper infrastructure."

Discussion

The findings align with Garrison and Kanuka (2004), who noted that blended learning enhances engagement and critical thinking. The experimental group's higher scores may result from multimedia resources (e.g., Bible videos, interactive quizzes) that cater to visual and auditory learners. This supports Okwara's (2018) assertion that digital tools make religious education more relatable.

However, infrastructure challenges (poor internet, devices) echo Adeyinka's (2018) concerns about Nigeria's digital divide. Without government investment, scalability remains limited. Teacher training is critical; as Eze (2021) emphasized, unprepared educators struggle to integrate technology effectively.

The absence of gender disparities suggests blended learning is equitable, but accessibility issues (data costs, device sharing) may disadvantage some students. Culturally, the study's context (semi-urban Onueke) may differ from urban areas with better resources.

Conclusion

This study underscores the potential of blended teaching to transform Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in Nigerian secondary schools. By integrating digital tools with traditional face-to-face instruction, students in the experimental group significantly outperformed their peers in conventional settings, demonstrating improved comprehension and engagement. However, the success of this approach hinges on addressing critical challenges: inadequate infrastructure, limited teacher training, and unequal access to technology. Without concerted efforts from policymakers, school administrators, and communities to bridge these gaps, the benefits of

blended learning may remain inaccessible to many. To realize a future where CRS education is both effective and inclusive, stakeholders must prioritize investment in digital resources, capacity building, and localized content development. Ultimately, blended teaching is not a panacea, but a catalyst for equipping students with the skills to thrive in a digital age while nurturing their moral and spiritual growth.

Recommendations

To optimize blended teaching in CRS and address the identified challenges, the following strategies are proposed:

- i. Government and Policymakers
- ii. Infrastructure Development:
- iii. Provide solar-powered Wi-Fi and digital devices (tablets, laptops) in schools.
- iv. Improve electricity access in rural areas through renewable energy solutions.

Funding:

Allocate a specific budget for CRS digital resources (e.g., e-Bibles, online platforms).

Establish a grant scheme for schools to develop blended learning projects.

Policy Support:

Mandate blended learning in teacher training curricula (NTEP).

Develop a national framework for digital CRS content creation.

School Administrators

- Teacher Training:
- Organize regular workshops on digital tools (Google Classroom, Moodle, Zoom).
- Partner with NGOs (e.g., ICT4Dev) for tech capacity building.
- Resource Allocation:
- Designate computer labs for CRS classes and ensure maintenance.
- Create a school ICT committee to oversee blended learning implementation.
- Community Engagement:
- Involve parents in providing internet access or devices for students.

Curriculum Developers

Content Digitization:

Develop interactive CRS materials (videos, podcasts, quizzes) aligned with the Nigerian curriculum.

Incorporate local cultural contexts (e.g., Igbo/Nigerian case studies in Bible stories).

Flexible Assessments:

Include online assignments, group projects, and multimedia presentations.

Teachers

Pedagogical Adaptation:

Blend lectures with digital tools (e.g., use YouTube for Bible narratives, Kahoot for quizzes).

Encourage collaborative learning (online discussions, group projects).

Continuous Learning:

Join online CRS teaching communities (e.g., UNESCO's ICT in Education platform).

Student Support:

Provide offline alternatives (printed materials, audio recordings) for students without devices.

Students and Parents

Digital Literacy:

- Attend school-organized tech workshops.
- Use devices responsibly and ensure safe online behavior.
- Access Solutions:
- Share devices within families or community centers.
- Use low-data learning apps (e.g., offline Bible apps).

Researchers

Future Studies:

Conduct longitudinal studies on blended learning's long-term impact on CRS retention.

Explore gender-specific challenges in technology adoption.

Implementation Timeline

Short-term (6 months): Train teachers, pilot blended CRS modules in select schools.

Mid-term (1–2 years): Scale to all schools in Onueke; monitor progress.

Long-term (3–5 years): Evaluate outcomes, refine strategies, and expand to other subjects.

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