

Student's Variables and Academic Performance in Christian Religious Studies in Calabar Municipality, Nigeria

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Abstract : *In recent times, there have been numerous cases of student's poor performance in Christian religious knowledge in most external examinations. Worried by this trend of events, the researchers took an in-depth investigation into students variables and how there influence students academic performance in Christian Religious Studies in Secondary Schools in Calabar Municipality, Nigeria. 411 senior secondary two students offering Christian Religious Studies were randomly selected from among ten secondary schools. Using questionnaire and student's academic achievement test, the researchers carefully collected data on the variables viz: sex, age and attitude towards Christian Religious Studies. Independent t-test and One way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for data analysis. The result of data analyzed showed that the three student's variables: sex, age and attitude have a significant influence on student's academic performance in Christian religious studies. it was recommended that government and school administrators should consider helping school children achieve functional academic achievement when they are still young and that parents should encourage their children to go to school younger to enable them perform better in schools.*

Keyword: *student's variables, student's sex, student's age, student's attitude and academic performance,*

Introduction

Student's effective learning outcome in secondary and other institutions of learning in recent times have been the concern of stake-holders in Nigerian education system (parents, guardians, teachers, counselors and government). This is because success in education is highly instrumental to the development of a nation; this includes scientific and technological development, socio-economic and political advancement and general life's successes. Various subjects are taught to students in secondary schools, Abioye and Adekunle (1991) are of the opinion that, every subject taught in secondary school has its unique value and importance to the whole education process.

The uniqueness of Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK) emerges from its dual function of simultaneous development of the intellectual

ability and moral character of the students. It also emphasizes the affective domain of education taxonomy - the domain which many seem to be silent about or even neglect completely. In the same vein, Okafor (1992) said that Christian Religious Knowledge helps to inject sanity into society and minimize the turning of a nation into a police state by cultivating citizens who acknowledge metaphysical sanctions, whose acceptable behaviors are often determined not just by external constraints but by spiritual consideration. Poor performance occurs yearly and more students are running away from the subject of CRK. This alarming rate of poor performance in Christian Religious Knowledge has generated growing concern from various quarters, the parents, teachers, schools and the government (Lawal, 2002; Lawal, 2010).

Ikechukwu (2014) asserted that Christian Religious Knowledge has been one of the most important subjects being taught in the Secondary Schools in Nigeria. This is because the subject helps to streamline the thought, character, moral and aspiration of the students. It also offers hope for the future, integrate, discipline, harmonious and progressive society. Ocheoha (2005) opined that Christian Religious Knowledge has also as its duty the formation of personality and character in the students. Ocheoha (2005) further added that its curriculum has been designed with intent that students should be given a complete theory of life; a philosophy which emphasizes that God should be the joy of their youth, the strength of their age and the life of their immortality. Also, Akubue (1992) added that Christian Religious Knowledge is expected to fulfill the student's great solemn mission of making spiritual values in this world of change; the wellspring of sanctity in the midst of evil, the beacon of idealism in age of cynicism and a ground hope in the face of discouragement and mounting fear by strengthening the student's awareness of moral realities. Christian Religious Knowledge in addition, inculcates conduct so as to bridge the gap between creed and deed, ideals and action. This means that, students should be equipped to live in the world guided by moral ideas of loyalty to God, charity and justice to their neighbor. The study of CRK should help students give the best reasonable action in a given circumstance. It is designed to compel interests to beget habits and to influence behaviors. On the whole, religious studies makes one truly a citizen of his nation by inculcating in him the required civic responsibilities. The civic aim is summarized by Akubue (1992) as:

"Give to your country the best service of your religion and give to your religion the best service of your citizenship. This means that religious life should include obligation to the state, as well as,

to God. It should thus bring the students to the performance of civic duty, in supplying the highest and noblest motives, in developing the character of the students and inculcating correct moral principles and social obligations".

Accepting this view, Ocheoha (2005) explained that Religious studies mounts campaigns for better citizenship through her curriculum offerings containing lessons topics which seek to make righteousness prevail, to make justice reign, to spread beauty, gentleness, wisdom and peace, to widen opportunity of increasing goodwill, to foster industry and thrift, education and culture, reverence and obedience, purity and love, honesty, sobriety, and devotion to common good. In addition, according to Okonkwo (2007), Christian Religious studies teach the necessity and duty of participation in government and encourage the cultivation of better relations, socially, professionally, industrially and commercially with others irrespective of their religious inclinations.

On the other hand, there seem to be a connection between the attitudes of students regarding learning of Christian Religious Studies and their academic performance. Sometimes students develop negative attitude to a subject due to some factors associated with the teachers and vice-versa. Either way, it hinders students' performance. More so, it can be said that apart from the attitude that has been mentioned, there is issue of students' sex. The assumption that male children are intellectually more endowed than their female counterpart sometimes can retrogress the confidence of female students and invariable create an associated problem of self-concept vis a vis attitudinal changes. More so, the age of the student in the learning of CRK is an important aspect of learning that enhances performance, a much younger age could make the learner lack

ability to understand basic abstract concepts, this could be detrimental to success in learning,

From the researcher's personal observations, it was revealed that Calabar Municipality and Cross River State as a whole is a predominantly Christian society with little fraction of Muslim, with lots of institution that teaches the tenets of Christianity, which is similar to what is learnt in schools. Leveraging on these, churches, Christian-religious organizations and secondary school students should be expected to perform very well. Unfortunately, despite the importance attached and efforts made to the learning of CRK as a subject, students' achievement in CRK does not equate the input made by the society which is relatively Christian dominated. There has been a fall in students' academic performance in CRK over the years as compared to other subjects in the school system. Despite the above relevance of Christian Religious Knowledge, observation reveals that students have not shown interest in the subject as well as performed credibly well in examinations administered to measure learning outcome. On the whole, more worrisome is the performance of students in external examinations on the subject. The West African Examination Council (WAEC) in the last three year (2012-2014) results in seventeen popular subjects indicates that only 35.26%, 23.58% and 33.45% respectively passed CRK with credit passes. What are the necessary factors that lead to this dwindling performance?

The major challenge facing the school system in Nigeria is how to improve the dwindling students learning outcome. The knowledge strand of CRK which is emphasized in schools is further reinforced by Bible classes/sermons in churches, home bible study programs on radio and television, which in most; if not all cases the students in CRK do participate in. It is thus expected that students' achievement and interest in the subject should be encouraging. Poor performance occurs yearly and more students are running away from the subject. This alarming rate

of poor performance in Christian Religious Knowledge has generated growing concern from various quarters, the parents, teachers, schools and the government. One is also worried because of the relative importance of the subject to education excellence and moral development, if care is not taken, the country will be eroded of its moral values and cultures if the trends continue like that.

Research has identified various factors as influencing learning outcomes, perhaps the most important of these factors is the question of attitude of the learner, attitudes are positive or negative feelings that an individual holds about objects or ideas, (Adebisi, 2006). King (1981) declared that attitudes are generally regarded as enduring though modifiable by experience and or persuasion and are also learnt rather than innate. The author went further to say that achievement of any learner will to a great extent depend on his attitude towards the learning materials, hence there is the general belief that a positive attitude more often than not lead to successful learning. Earlier studies by Butler and Uren (1997) have also shown that lack of interest on the part of students make them to perform low. For example, there is some evidence to suggest that at about age 17, most adolescents reach a crisis in the process of shaping their attitudes to religious beliefs and practices and that this crisis is resolved, one way or the other by about the age 20. Simonton (2001) has also confirmed in his study that attitude towards many school subjects can be affected by a host of factors, such as student ability, age, sex, developmental crisis, lack of textbooks, teachers, peer influence and school environment.

According to an investigation conducted on the attitude of most secondary school students towards Christian Religious Knowledge, most students that are doing it, do it not because they are interested in it but as an additional subject to complete the number of subjects required in the Senior School Certificate Examination. Some do say, I offer it because I am a Christian (Simonton, 2001).

In his Cheben (2002) study on students' attitude and towards Christian Religious Education (CRE) and their academic performance in CRE in Lelan Division of West Pokot District, Kenya, the study aimed at establishing indicators of positive attitude and identify strategies that could be instituted to undo the negative factors that do not promote effective learning, teaching and assessment of the subject. The research further determined whether lack of updated teaching and learning resources has an influence on students' achievement and performance in Christian Religious Education. Data obtained was organized and analyzed using descriptive statistics, showed that students' performance in Christian Religious Education in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education was affected by a series of conditions and attitudinal factors that existed in the school and home environments.

Kasomo (2011) carried out a similar study on students' attitudes and the teaching of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Secondary Schools in Kenya. Using both closed and open ended questionnaire administered to participants in nine secondary schools. Based on the analysis, the paper concluded that there are no significant differences among respondents of different backgrounds in their attitudes towards CRE. The respondents' conception of the nature of CRE falls in two groups: a positive oriented group which holds that CRE has utilitarian value and the other group that view CRE as non-functional subject.

Sex has been regarded as an important affective factor that plays a specific role and influences students learning. The influence of sex as it relates to performance in CRK is also worthy of examination. It seems to be a general trend that females tend to be more religious than males (Ntia 1995; Ohiri-Aniche, 2000). In Lawal (2010) study to assess factors affecting academic achievement of Students in Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) in Christian Religious Knowledge, the author used 300 SSIII students in secondary schools drawn from five schools in

Abeokuta North Local Government Area in Ogun State of Nigeria. Using questionnaire as the instrument for data collection and Chi square for data analysis, the questionnaire was in four sections. The results reveal that the calculated Chi-square value is 84.42, while the table value is 3.84, the hypothesis was therefore rejected. It was therefore held that there is a significant difference in academic achievement scores of male and female students. in Christian Religious Knowledge. In other words, female students had better academic achievement scores in Christian Religious Knowledge than male students.

Similarly, Abdu-Raheem (2012) carried out a study on the influence of gender on secondary school students' academic performance in south-west, Nigeria. The results of 2003/2004 to 2007/2008 West African School Certificate Examinations (WASCE) were collected on English Language, Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Economics, Geography, Government, Yoruba, Christian Religious Studies and French from 10 Secondary Schools selected from 5 States in Nigeria. The samples consisted of 2,305 students, using Chi-Square for data analysis, the study revealed that male and female students performed equally in English language. Males performed better than females in Mathematics, Science and Social Science while females also did better than males in CRK, with a Chi-square value of 7.78, $p < 0.05$. Similarly, Adepoju and Ogurinde (2006) in their study of students' factors as correlates of academic achievement in Junior Secondary School Religious Studies found out that gender was not a significant contributor to academic performance in CRK.

Another student variable that has been considered to influence students' academic performance is age. Cognitive development and maturity (which are associated with age) are necessary for a worthwhile performance of students. Age of the individual, as it increases, usually affects the various developmental changes. It also affects every area of human performance (Ukueze, 2007).

Therefore, it has become necessary to examine the extent to which age affects the academic performance in CRK. Olopoenia (2005) in her study of the influence of age on academic performance in Economics reported that high but negative correlation exists between age and performance in Economics. The implication of this is that students achieve better grades in Economics at younger age. One then may wonder if the same trend would be observed for CRK at Senior Secondary School level.

In a related study by Adepoju and Ogurinde (2006) on students' factors as correlates of academic achievement in Junior Secondary School Religious Studies, the oldest missionary school in the 2005 Osun State Junior School Certificate Examination (JSCE) in CRK. The result reveals that age was not a significant contributor to academic performance in CRK. This further implies that older and younger students would have no significant difference in their achievement in JSCE CRK. Jabor, Machtmes, Kungu, Buntat and Safarin (2011) reiterated that the action of delaying school promotion to give certain advantage to some students or retaining students in certain class to ensure students achieve certain level of performance could be a futile effort to enhance students' performance. Jabor et al (2011) concluded that when students are older than their classmates, their average academic performance declines and continue to decline the older they get. On age and achievement, Simonton (2001) observed that Lehman found correlation between age and achievement in a series of studies conducted. New Zealand Center for Educational Research and Development (NZCERD, 2009) reported that 'our students do better at the secondary level than at the primary level'. However, White's (1992) study showed that as students become older, the correlation between age and school performance diminishes. Worried by this trend of events, the researchers therefore seek to answer the questions whether

students' variables (attitude, gender differentials and age) do significantly influence their academic performance in Christian Religious Studies in Secondary Schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State?.

METHODOLOGY

The survey design was adopted for this study because data was specifically collected from the sample of the study through the use of questionnaire. The study area is Calabar municipality, which is one of the 18 Local Government Areas of Cross River State. Calabar is the seat of the state capital, Calabar Municipality is one of the two local government areas making up the state capital. The people of this area generally speak Efik, Quas, Ejagham and English language. They practice, Christianity, African traditional religion (ATR) and some pockets of other religion like Islam. The educational institutions (secondary schools in Calabar Municipality includes; twenty two (22) public secondary schools and thirty eight (38) private secondary schools approved by government and other tertiary institutions including the University of Calabar, Cross River University of Technology, School of Health Technology and Schools of Midwifery, Psychiatry and Nursing. The population of this study comprise 6567 students (both males and females) in Senior Secondary School two (SSS II) in the twenty two (22) public secondary schools and thirty eight (38) private secondary schools in Calabar Municipality. Using multi stage random sampling technique, a total sample of 411 Senior Secondary II students offering CRK from ten secondary schools in the area were selected for the study. There were 235 female and 176 males, their ages ranging between 12 to 23 years.

The instrument for data collection is a ten (10) item instrument titled, "ICT Utilization and Students Variable Questionnaire." (IUSVQ) and a 20 item CRK Achievement Test (CAT) were designed by the researcher for data collection with

a four point Likert scale response options. The second instrument is a 20 item CRK achievement test designed to address major topics covered in SS II syllabus in CRK. This instrument is designed to test students' knowledge and different skills in CRK. The test is multiple choice type with four options for each of the 20 questions.. After obtaining approval from the various principals of the secondary schools, the researchers and the subject teachers administered the instruments themselves and collected same.

A total of 411 copies were administered out of this number, 400 were properly filled and returned, while only 11 (2.6%) were either wrongly filled or not returned. Only those that were correctly filled were used for analysis. Analysis of data was therefore based on four hundred (400) respondents. Independent t-test and One way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for data analysis. Three research questions and three hypotheses were formulated to direct the study thus: To what extent does students' attitude influence their performance in CRK in secondary schools in Calabar Municipality? How does students' sex influence their academic performance in CRK in secondary schools in Calabar Municipality? How does students' age influence their academic performance in CRK in secondary schools in Calabar Municipality? There is no students' attitude towards CRK does not significantly influence their academic performance in CRK in Calabar Municipality,

student's sex does not significantly influence students' academic performance in CRK in Calabar Municipality and student's age does not significantly influence students' academic performance in CRK in Calabar Municipality.

Results and discussions

The results of the analyses are presented hypothesis by hypothesis as shown below.

Hypothesis one: Student's attitude towards CRK does not significantly influence secondary school students' academic performance in CRK in Calabar Municipality. Students' attitude was categorized into positive and negative attitude. The result of the independent t-test analysis of this hypothesis is presented on table 1.

The result on table 1 shows the CRK academic achievement mean scores and standard deviations for the two categories of respondents for attitude towards CRK. The mean score for students with positive attitude was greater than the mean score for students with negative attitude ($15.9 > 8.2$); this produced t-value of 33.9 with a p-value higher than the .05 significance level with 398 degree of freedom. This implies students' attitude towards CRK has a significant influence on academic achievement in CRK. In other words, students with positive attitude performed better than students with negative attitude. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate is upheld.

Table 1: Result of independent t-test analysis of the influence of Attitude on academic achievement in CRK

Dependent Variable	Attitude	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	P-value
Academic performance	Negative	252	8.2	2.2	398	33.9	.000*
	Positive	148	15.9	2.1			

N=400, P <.05, significant*

Hypothesis two

Secondary school student's sex does not significantly influence students' academic performance in CRK in Calabar Municipality

The independent variable in this hypothesis is Secondary school student's sex, while the dependent variable is students' academic performance in CRK; secondary school student's sex in this case was categorized into male and female. The result of the independent t-test analysis to test this hypothesis is presented on table 2.

Table 2: Result of independent t-test analysis of the influence of sex on academic achievement in CRS

Dependent Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p-value
Academic performance	Male	122	10.73	4.4	398	2.41	.016*
	Female	278	11.86	4.2			

N=400, P <.05, significant*

The result on table 2 shows the CRK academic achievement mean scores and standard deviations for the two categories of respondents for sex. The mean score for female students was slightly greater than the mean score for male students (11.86>10.73); this produced t-value of 2.41 with a p-value higher than the .05 significance level with 398 degree of freedom. This implies students' sex has a significant influence on academic achievement in CRK. In other words, female students performed better than male students in Christian Religious Studies.

Hypothesis three

Age of secondary school students does not significantly influence students' academic performance in CRK in Calabar Municipality. The independent variable in this hypothesis is students' age, while the dependent variable is academic performance in CRK. The students' age was categorized into below 14 years old, 15-17 years old and greater than 18 years. Table 3 shows the result of One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Table 3: One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the influence of age on academic achievement in CRK

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD
Age	Below 14 years	140	11.56	4.09
	15-17 years	199	11.20	4.36
	Above 18 years	61	9.57	4.53
Total	400	11.08	4.33	

Variable	Source of Variation	SS	df	Ms	F	P-value
Between Groups	172.932	2	86.46	4.68	0.10*	
Within Groups	7503.75	397	18.46			

*significance of the group at P <.05, df = 2 and 397

The result on table 3 shows the CRK academic achievement mean score, standard deviation and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the three groups of respondents. Students below 14 years old had the highest mean score of 15.56, followed by students within the age range of 15-17 years (11.99) and above 18 years (9.57). This produced an F-value of 4.63 with a p-value of .010 which is lower than .05 significant levels at 2 and 397 degree of freedom. This implies that age significantly influence students' academic achievement in

CRK. This further implied that the mean differences for the three groups of respondents are statistically significant. To understand which group made the difference that produced the significant influence, a post hoc test analysis was carried out on the data via Fisher's protected t-test analysis. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Fisher's protected t-test analysis of the influence of students' age on academic performance in CRK.

Dependent Variable	Age	N	Mean	SD	Groups	t	p-value
Academic Performance	Below 14 years	140	11.56	4.09	1 vs 2	0.77	.442
	15-17 years	199	11.20	3.93	1 vs 3	3.05	.003*
	18 years -above	61	9.57	3.94	2 vs 3	2.57	.012*

*significant at $P < .05$

From table 4, the results shows t-value for groups 1 vs 2 ($t=0.77$), groups 1 vs 3 ($t=3.05$) and groups 2vs3 ($t=2.57$). Group 1 vs 2 implies non significance, as the p-value was greater than calculated t-value at the .05 significance value, meaning that the mean performance of students aged below 14years when compared with 15-17 years is not significant. However, the t-value of 3.05 (below 14 years vs 18 years and above) and 2.57 (15-17 years vs 18 years above) had p-values lower than the calculated t-value at 0.5 significant level respectively.

This finding is in consonance with earlier studies by Butler and Uren (1997); Simonton (2001); Lawal (2010) which shows that lack of interest on the part of students make them to perform low in school subjects. The data analysis however revealed that students' gender significantly influences academic performance in CRS, whereby female students performed better than male students. The finding of Lawal (2010) that female students performed better than male students in CRS; in other words, gender has a significant influence on students' performance in CRS supports this findings. However, the finding of this study does not support the findings of Adepoju and Ogurinde (2006) who carried out a study on students' factors as correlates of academic achievement in Junior Secondary

School Religious Studies found out that gender was not a significant contributor to academic performance in CRS.

In support of this finding is the findings of Abdu-Raheem (2012) who carried out a study on the influence of gender on secondary school students' academic performance in south-west, Nigeria, his findings revealed that female did better than males in CRS, with a Chi-square value. Thus, there exists a significant influence of gender on academic performance in CRS.

This finding does not support the findings of Adepoju and Ogurinde (2006) who found out that age was not a significant contributor to academic performance in CRS. This further implies that older and younger students would have no significant difference in their achievement in CRS. These findings could be as result of the subject area (CRS) which involves morality and ethics, which at a younger age; students may not be exposed to certain character traits that will make them loose interest in CRS. On the other, older students find themselves in activities that contradict the class lesson in CRS, thereby resulting to a feeling of low interest in the subject, which in the long run, leads to low academic performance. This finding is supported by White (1992) which showed that as students become older, the correlation between age and

school performance diminishes in subject like CRS.

Conclusion

This research therefore concluded that students' attitude, age and gender thus significantly influence student's academic performance in CRS among Senior Secondary Schools students in Calabar Municipality.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:

1. Governments, counselors and concerned agencies should develop programs aimed at sensitizing students on the need to develop positive attitude towards all school subjects in order to boost student's academic achievement in the subject area
2. Both male and female students should be encourage to choose Christian Religious Knowledge as a subject since it imbues in the learners moral, civic and social responsibility especially now that every Nigerian is seen as lacking morally.
3. Parents and guardians should encourage their wards to go to school early enough to enable them use their early age advantage to guarantee their improved academic performance as compared to delay education of students.
4. Considering the dual purpose of Christian religious knowledge, it is mandatory that government and other school curriculum planners should make the subject a compulsory subject especially now that the country is facing a huge wave of moral decadence and poor citizenship.

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