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METHODS OF TEACHING CHRISTIAN STUDIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT-TEACHERS

BY

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Abstract

Observations have shown that, the teaching of Religions, either Islam or Christianity have not been effectively handled especially at Primary and Secondary School levels, probably because of the controversial nature of the subject. Many times, teachers who are not trained in the subject were requested to teach as a result of inadequate personnel. It is in view of this that this paper examined the extent to which appropriate methods are employed by Christian Religious Studies teachers to teach the subject, especially those on the training. Their exposure to various methods as early as possible will go a long way to improve Students' interest in the subject; and at the same time correct any wrong attitudes, students might have towards religion. To achieve this, the paper provides different methods that a student teacher can use to teach Christian Religious Studies. It is suggested among others that, teachers should be exposed to adequate training, seminars and workshops to improve their teaching skills especially in the area of religions, because religion is a very sensitive and controversial subject, which must be handled with all maturity to improve students' interest and at the same time promote peace and harmony in the society.

Introduction

The use of appropriate methods in teaching Christian Studies, especially during teaching practice, is very important. This is because apart from the fact that Christian Studies is an important subject in the school curriculum, it is also, one of the religions practiced in Nigeria, and a very sensitive issue in contemporary society. As such, a student-teacher handling the subject must be conversant with the happenings around him, and be familiar with various methods, in order to carry the learners along during his teaching practice, and as well arouse their interest in the subject. Buttressing this point, Ajidagba (2009), opined that, "exposure to the rudiments of classroom teaching

distinguishes trained teachers from those that have no such pedagogical skills when it comes to teaching in the classroom setting"

The above thus connote that, the use of teaching methods is very germane for effective teaching and learning to take place in any educational set up. As such to be successful in this endeavor, the student-teacher must make use of all available means and tools effectively, and not become a slave to anyone of it. To this end, the purpose for which this paper is written are majorly to describe the major methods of teaching Christian Studies with the aim of developing learners' interest in the subject, and to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the methods described.

Conceptual Background

In treating this topic, it is very germane to consider the meaning of teaching method and teaching practice. By way of definition, method can be said to be the ways, means or instruments the student-teachers want to adopt in order to achieve stated behavioural objectives. Akanbi (1997), in his words, defines it as 'simply an instrument used by the teacher to communicate to the learner the knowledge, ideal or truth under consideration'.

In the same vein, Dorling (2003), in the revised and updated illustrated Oxford Dictionary, contends of method as 'a special form of procedure, especially, in any branch of mental activity'. He goes further to define methodology as 'a body of methods used in a particular branch of activity'.

Teaching practice is a course, in a teacher training institution, which a student is expected to undergo before he can be considered to be professionally qualified as a teacher. Orebanjo (1992), speaking on the importance of teaching practice says: "No student teacher is therefore considered fit for the award of a teacher's certificate without obtaining a pass grade in Practical teaching'.

Considering the importance of the aforementioned discussions, it becomes pertinent for student-teachers of Christian Studies to be familiar with all the available modern methods of teaching the subject. Gone are the days when any teacher from any discipline would handle the subject with the notion that Christian Studies is about just reading and memorizing the Bible. The world today is dynamic and going technological daily. The student-teacher too must not be static, but must be well-trained in methodology and mastery of content, so as to be able to impart effective teaching into the learners.

Major Methods of Teaching Christian Studies

i. Story-Telling Method

This is a much-liked method by both young and old learners, provided the story is interesting, full of action and true to life. A great number of Biblical passages or topics could be taught in the form of story. It is important for the student-teacher to know the facts of the story in the correct order; use language that the learners can easily understand; ask relevant questions, while telling the story, to carry the learners along, and relate the story to the learners' lives. It is important to mention to them familiar subjects and experiences such as "so the fish that swallowed Jonah was as big as our church or bigger," "Peter's mother-in-law was very sick, her body was very hot, but Jesus healed her.

Edge (1976), gave the following rules a student-teacher of Christian Studies could follow in order to tell a story effectively:

- i. Know the story well.
- ii. See it clearly.
- iii. Feel it deeply.
- iv. Dramatize it: make the situation come alive before the class
- v. Build the story up to a climax: e.g. if the person in the story is in a difficult situation, give the details of his difficulty. Is he afraid? Doubting? Trusting? Will God deliver him? God Does! This is the climax.
- i. End it quickly
- ii. Listen to good story tellers and imitate them
- iii. Practice alone or in a small group
- iv. Keep trying
- v. Pray for the Lord's blessing on your presentation of His truth in story form.

ii. Dramatization Method

Learners love this method very much because they are directly involved in the activities physically, emotionally and mentally. But the student-teacher during practice must realize the fact that, loveable as this method is, by learners, it must be carefully prepared if learners are to benefit from it maximally.

The student-teacher therefore needs to remember the following facts when planning drama as stated by Akanbi (1997:46).

- i. Preparing a suitable place
- ii. Getting the learners involved in the organization and preparation.
- iii. Providing simple and relevant apparatus suitable for the learners.

In the aspect of the practicability of the drama, Abioye and Ojebode (2001), suggested that: parts that are difficult should not be slated for dramatization. For example, topics like King Herod and the Massacre of the innocents, the murder of Abel by Cain (Gen. 4:8-15), or any story dealing with murder, terror or warfare should not be put on stage.

The reason for the above is because young learners can be easily disturbed and frightened at the shortest mentioning of blood or murder. Examples of Bible stories that can be dramatized include: The Good Samaritan (LK 1:10); the call of Samuel; The lost sheep or the lost coin; the feeding of five thousand etc.

Among the advantages to be derived from a well planned drama include the following.

- i. Learners are trained to speak clearly and boldly to a large audience.
- ii. The spirit of cooperation and team work is encouraged.

In case the dramatization method is not well handled, the following disadvantages may result. For instance, the class may become rowdy as learners scatter and the student-teacher loses grip of controlling them. This puts him at a disadvantage in case his supervisor is around to assess him.

iii. Questioning Method:

This is also known as Socratic Method. It is commonly used by all categories of teachers. The student teacher as well can appropriately employ it during teaching practice to impart knowledge to learners. Questions are asked in the process of teaching to discover whether learners are comprehending what is being taught or not. By so doing, the attention and interest of the learners are sustained.

For a student-teacher of Christian Studies using this method, during his practical teaching, the following points should be closely observed as suggested by Abioye, and Adekunle (1991). Questions should not be ambiguous, must be clear, definite in meaning and wording, and should always deal with the essential. In addition to this, vague questions should as much as possible be avoided. For instance, 'when did God call Moses?' is a vague question since; God spoke to Moses many times. A better way of wording this could be 'where was Moses when God called him to go and speak to Pharaoh to release the children of Israel?' Similarly, questions suggesting answer should not be asked. For example, "Did Jesus heal Peter's mother-in-law of fever?" Yes. Did Judas Iscariot betray Jesus? Yes.

If this method is properly used by the student-teacher, he will find his teaching practice interesting, not only to himself but to the learners as well. From the learners' answers, he gets to understand their ability, weaknesses or problems, and as such be in a right position to assist them individually and collectively as a class.

iv. Project Method

Akanbi (2007), explained the importance of using Project Method. He opined that children learn in two ways, orally and visually. Many of them learn rapidly where oral teaching is linked with visuals or concrete things they can see or touch. With this understanding, the student-teacher can successfully and conveniently use this method to teach Christian Studies. The learners under the close supervision of the student-teachers are mainly involved in the planning, gathering information and carrying the projects to a reasonable completion. The project could be carried out in groups or by individuals in different forms such as building up charts, drawing objects or writing essays. Normally, such projects are not completed within a lesson. Though project method enables learners to learn by doing, develop spirit of co-operation and tolerance of others, it should at the same time correspond to their age.

The student-teacher has to strictly supervise the project, so as to avoid learners making mistakes. After completion, the project should be evaluated and properly kept for record purpose. Although it is a good method of making learning experimental and permanent, it is sometime very expensive and time consuming.

v. Excursion/Discovery Method

This is another method that makes the teaching and learning of Christian Studies very existing. It is also another means of Instructional media, the importance of which Sofowora (2001), emphasized and maintained that, Instructional media enhances Comprehension, Retention and Call. To achieve this in the above method, the learners and the student-teacher visit places of interest to discover information those are relevant to the topic being discussed.

Proper arrangements are put in place before embarking on the excursion. The consent of the school authority, parents or guardians of learners and the place to be visited is sought. In addition, the condition of the vehicle to be used and the driver with all his particulars are very necessary issues to put in place to make for successful excursion, at the end of which learners acquire lasting impressions and adequate knowledge of the topic learnt.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It must be borne in mind that the world is changing. As such, the student teacher must vary his methods of teaching Christian Studies. The question of just reading and memorizing Bible stories is not enough. There are various methods, as discussed above which could be employed to make the teaching and learning of Christian Studies interesting to both teachers and learners, and at the same time increase the number of learners offering the subject, especially at the post-primary level.

Additionally it has been observed that students no longer develop interest in offering Christian Studies, especially at tertiary institutions. While other departments are registering good number of students during admission exercise, Department of Religious Studies always have poor turnout of students. Most times, the few students who eventually find themselves in the department see it as the last resort.

It is therefore suggested among others that, Student teachers of Christian Studies should employ methods that will arouse the interest of learners in the subject.

Furthermore, Government should endeavor to provide the needed facilities for student teachers who may not be buoyant enough to provide such from his already leaned purse.

Also, Philanthropists, Religious Organizations and NGOs could be encouraged to subsidize the tuition fees of any student who may be interested in studying Christian Studies.

When all these are put in place the teaching and learning of Christian Studies become interesting to both learners and teachers of the subject. By so doing, they become useful members of the society for national development

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