

LEVERAGING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IN CHRISITIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES TO BRIDGE INEQUALITY GAP IN NIGERIA EDUCATION

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Abstract

The paper examines the integration of AI in Religious Education and its potential to enhance the quality of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Nigeria. Presently Nigeria is facing many challenges in her educational system which include educational inequality, limited access to technological tools, inadequate resources and teaching materials for CRE teaching, lack of digital skills, digital divides and socio economic disparities which affect the quality of education in Nigeria particularly Christian Religion Education. The paper further identifies the potential effects of integrating AI to enhance the quality of religious education. AI has the potential to improve the quality of teaching and learning in CRE, teacher's digital skill, learning outcomes, provide personal improvement and interactive learning experiences that stimulates real world environment deepening student's interest and engagement, provides opportunity to bridge the inequality gap in Education. However the paper highlights the Impact of AI in religious education which include teacher's digital skill. Parents Attitude to AI, children's interest, Ethical Considerations and suggestions were given as the way forward.

Introduction

Nigeria as a developing country has recognized the importance of integrating Artificial Intelligence into teacher's education to improve teaching and learning. The National Policy on Education explained that all teachers in educational institutions shall be trained for effective performance of their duties, (FRN 2013).

The Educational goals set by the Seventh National Development Plan and Vision 2020 in line with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals emphasized on the use of AI technology in the society which rises discussions on its impact in the society, such educational goals include;

- Improve access to quality education ensuring inclusive and equitable education that bridges the rural-urban gap in education.
- Developing 21st century skills by equipping youths with skills for national and economic development.
- Enhancing the quality of educational infrastructure, science and technology to improve learning outcomes.
- Training and developing teachers to improve teaching and learning, promoting gender equality and addressing disparity in education.
- Increasing educational funding to achieve universal access to equitable, inclusive and quality education.

Quality education provides resources and ensures that each child benefits from social, emotional mental cognitive and psychological development irrespective of gender, ethnicity economic status and geographical location. (Pius And Aii, 2019) says that the capacity of a school to offer essential facilities which enhance teaching

and learning that can lead to the attainment of educational goals is referred to as quality education.

Presently, Nigeria's educational system is besieged by so many challenges such as limited and inadequate resources, teachers' lack of digital skill and educational inequality and digital divide which hinder the attainment of quality education and national policy of education goals in Nigeria. Christian religious education is affected. Despite government pivotal efforts to enhance the quality of education in Nigeria, education has not progressed due to the problem of inequality in the system particularly, in CRE.

Reasons For Educational Inequalities In CRE

- Digital divides and unequal access to CRE resources, technological resources and innovations.
- Inadequate teaching materials and textbooks for CRE.
- Teachers' low quality and insufficient training for digital skill to enhance students' learning.
- CRE curriculum not able to address learning needs for inclusiveness.

The goal of Christian religious education is to produce enlightened students and individuals for a progressive society. It is very pertinent that CRE should be taken seriously. To achieve this goal, Christian religious Education CRE plays a very important role in human and national development, promoting moral value, ethical character, and civic responsibility for national growth. (Adeoye, Oluwole & Loto, 2013) emphasized that the educational system should assist students in developing good habit, skills, virtue and moral principle required for societal growth and cultural norms. CRE plays a very important role in inculcating the spirit of responsibility for national development. (Anyacho 2013) stated that to build a better Nigeria religious education should be taken seriously in our schools and Colleges for its potential to provide value orientation and moral teachings required for right attitude and progressive society.

However in view of the above to bring about inclusiveness, accessibility and quality education for the attainment of educational goals integration of AI tools in Christian religion education becomes very relevant in our educational system.

The importance of integration of AI in religious education cannot be overemphasized due to its role in our educational system. (Adegbite and Ogunleye 2021) observed that government and private sectors have supported AI driven technological growth and contributions to Nigeria transformation of 21st century revolutionizing various institutions such as education, finance, religion, governance and security. Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to the development of computer system capable of performing task that typically require human intelligence. These tasks include recognizing speech, making decisions, solving problems and identifying patterns. AI otherwise referred to as a digital technology encompasses a wide range of technologies, including machine learning, and natural language processing. AI is a transformative technology with the potential to revolutionize various aspects of our lives. Integrating AI in religion education can present numerous opportunities and challenges in an unprecedented way such opportunities include personalized learning, increase accessibility to educational materials and technology. It also presents significant challenges that need to be addressed to ensure its responsive and ethical use.

Application Of Artificial Intelligence (AI) In CRE

In the context of Christian Religious Education AI offers innovative opportunities fostering interactive, personalized and creative learning experiences that enhance learning. An application of AI tools such as intelligence tutoring system, virtual simulations and AI powered discussion platforms in Christian Religious Education allow learners to explore biblical narratives, ethical issues, historical contexts in immersive and engaging ways. (Anyebe 2025) noted that AI can support adaptive learning systems that responds to individual student's abilities providing CRE resources, instant feedback and challenges that can stimulate critical thinking and problem solving skills for the learners. However, AI can support teachers of CRE to design lesson plans, tracking students' engagement by analysing learning patterns and outcomes. It allows the educators to adjust instructional strategies, introduce innovations teaching methods in CRS Education thereby maintains high level of learners motivation.

Furthermore, AI driven education tools can enhance collaboration among CRS students platforms with AI capabilities, can monitor group interaction, suggest collaborative tasks and provide real-time guidance, communication and problem solving skill. (Hassan, Abdulkish and Menson 2024) emphasized that integrating AI into CRE encourages active participation for effective teaching and learning.

The Impact Of Artificial Intelligence In Religion Education

Integration of Artificial Intelligence in CRE can provide numerous opportunities. This technology has the potential to provide personalized learning, enhance teaching and learning experiences, and outcome provide access to educational materials and resources, providing engagement that enhance the quality of education.

Enhances the quality of the teacher: AI improves the quality of teachers in teaching and learning experience (Edeh, 2019). The use of AI can enhance teaching and learning; AI tools such as adaptive learning platform, virtual teaching assistance and AI driven software can create CRE content which helps the teachers to design lesson that are more innovative and interactive. It helps student to improve their engagement with global culture and history, providing online courses and interactive contents that make CRE more engaging and fun. (Alex and Erico 2018) noted that, AI tools and other technological tools are more interactive to improve teaching and learning outcome.

Personalized instruction: AI technology can monitor student progress in CRE, identify their strength, weakness and learning styles, this enables the teacher to tailor their instruction to meet individual needs. It provides personalized learning experience by adopting the teaching and learning content based on students progress and performance (Chen & Wang 2018). Personalized learning tailors educational content, resources and experiences that meet the unique needs, interest and abilities of individual learners.

Provide access to CRS education resources and materials: AI provide access to wide range of CRS educational resources and materials ranging from digital library which offer e-books to students, articles, resources and materials base on students' needs and interest ensuring that teachers have access to the most appropriate resources and materials for their instruction (Bilkestein & Cooper 2019). The accessibility of education resources and maintenance help to bridge the educational gap in the system and improve quality of education.

Improve teachers teaching experience: AI tool can provide teachers with professional training opportunities, stimulates real world CRS scenarios, enhancing engagement and teaching experience for better understanding of the content by students, and it enable them to impart skills to the students which are essential for socio-economic participation in Nigeria evolving economy, for national development and essential for 21st century.

The Challenges Of Integrating AI In Christian Religion Education

The integration of Artificial Intelligence in CRS education brings numerous opportunities for enhancing teaching and learning experiences, despite its potentials and laudabilities in CRS education, there abound some challenges. However AI presents several challenges that need to be address, such challenges are not limited to the following such as Teachers digital skill, students' lack of equitable access to infrastructure, internet, children's interest, parents' attitude, and ethical Considerations.

Lack of access to infrastructure: One of the challenges of AI technology is lack of equitable access to the required infrastructure, such as high speed internet connectivity or compatible devices to support the implementation of these technologies for effective teaching and learning of CRE students have limited access to devices for AI-powered CRE tools, and students in rural or under-resourced areas struggle with reliable internet and electricity disruption for AI tool usage. (Bower, Dalgarno, Kennedy, Lee & Kenney, 2019), maintained that many schools and educational institutions lack the necessary infrastructure such as high speed internet connectivity or compatible devices to support the implementation of these technologies effectively.

Teachers Lack of Digital skill and training: Many teachers lack the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to utilize AI in CRE class rooms. Some have not developed new skills and pedagogical approaches to leverage these technologies effectively (Kochaler and Mishra, 2009). Teachers' inadequate digital skills hinder AI adoption. Insufficient training of teachers restricts effective AI integration in CRE lessons.

High implementation cost and sustainable: AI tools and infrastructure are very expensive and implementation of AI in CRS education can be costly requiring huge investments, in hardwares, software's, training programs and technical support (Bower et al 2019). To ensure the sustainability of these technologies to enhance quality of education over time, educational institutions should consider long term funding strategies to support integration of AI for effective teaching and learning.

Parents Attitudes: Parents resistance to technology as result of fear, misconception of AI role in education of their children may limit their adoption of AI. Parents may worry about AI conflict with Christian religious ethics and values due to their religious and cultural concern. Parents attitude and lack of support may be a factor on how their children respond to AI technology. Parents support to AI driven education ensures responsible use of AI tool which encourages students engagement with AI powered tools for CRE.

Student Interest: This is one of the factor that affect the level of children access to AI tools. Some CRE content may not connect to the students areas of interest. Sometimes over use of screens or AI tools can lead to disinterest which hinder effective learning. Decline in interest is a factor affecting the level of digital access for learning.

Digital Divide: Unequal access to digital technologies, internet and AI tools hinder students engagement thereby varying students digital literacy level and educational

inequality gap in CRE. Nowadays, the issue of digital divide has attracted much attention that need to be addressed (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007).

Ethical Consideration: The use of AI tool in teaching and learning raises ethical concern due to the fact that AI powered system may collect and analyse large amount of teachers and students data therefore, raising questions about data privacy and security (Bower et al 2017). Additionally, AI tools can blur the boundaries between the physical and virtual worlds leading to ethical issues related to consent, safety and psychological well-being of teacher and learner.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that the disparity in accessing the digital technology in CRE has created educational inequality. Teacher's digital skills, parent's attitudes, children interest are among the factors that impact on the level of student's engagement on the use of AI in CRE and teaching for learning outcome. Furthermore AI tools offer opportunities that has the potential to bridge educational inequality gap, increase accessibility for quality education and attainment of educational and national goal in Nigeria for national development.

Suggestion

- Teacher's Training and Capacity Building: Teacher should receive professional development training in AI application, digital pedagogy for effective teaching and learning. Empowering teacher to effective teaching and learning to develop new skills for effective teaching.
- Government should ensure equitable access to infrastructure to enhance quality and equitable education, extending broadband coverage to remote areas, offering affordable internet plans and subsidies to low income families.
- Government should provide a clear guidelines and policies that will safe guide teachers and students' data adoption and ethical use of AI technologies to improve the privacy of teachers and students information's.

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