

REVOLUTIONIZING CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES EDUCATION LEVERAGING ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Christian Religious Studies (CRS) education in many Nigerian Colleges of Education (CoEs) is often constrained by pedagogical methods that emphasize rote memorization over deep theological inquiry, failing to prepare teachers to address the complex moral and ethical questions of the 21st century. This paper investigates the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to revolutionize CRS teacher education in Nigeria. The statement of the problem is the pedagogical stagnation that produces teachers ill-equipped for modern challenges. Research objectives focus on exploring how AI can address these shortcomings. Utilizing a qualitative literature review methodology, this study analyzes secondary data. Key findings reveal that specialized AI technologies, including biblical exegesis tools, immersive historical simulations, and ethical dilemma chatbots, can facilitate personalized, interactive, and critically engaging learning. The study recommends a strategic, phased implementation, substantial investment in teacher training, a comprehensive curriculum redesign to include digital theology, and the development of a national policy for AI in religious education. In conclusion, the thoughtful and ethical integration of AI is critical for modernizing CRS education in Nigerian CoEs, ensuring the preparation of a spiritually mature and intellectually equipped teaching workforce.

Key words: Revolutionizing, Christian Religious Studies Education, leveraging, Artificial Intelligence.

Introduction

A significant problem confronting the Nigerian education system is the pedagogical stagnation within Christian Religious Studies (CRS) programs in its Colleges of Education (CoEs). Instruction in this critical subject, which is meant to foster moral development and spiritual literacy, is often reduced to the rote memorization of biblical narratives and doctrines, failing to equip prospective teachers with the skills for deep theological reflection, critical thinking, or comparative religious analysis (Susan, 2025). This approach produces teachers who are unable to guide their own students through the complex ethical and social issues of the modern world from a well-grounded faith perspective, thereby perpetuating a cycle of superficial religious education. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents a paradigm-shifting opportunity to revitalize Christian Religious Studies education, transforming it from a subject that is often dogmatic and static into a dynamic, interactive, and intellectually rigorous field of inquiry.

The imperative to engage with technology in theological and religious education is a growing global trend. In the West, seminaries and divinity schools are

increasingly using digital tools to enhance biblical studies, streamline research, and create new platforms for ministry in a digital age (Papakostas, 2024). AI-powered platforms are being developed for complex linguistic analysis of ancient texts, simulating ethical dilemmas for pastoral training, and analyzing trends in religious discourse online. In the broader African context, where religion plays a central role in public life, there is a growing recognition of the need for a technologically literate clergy and laity. However, the integration of advanced technologies like AI into theological education remains nascent, often hindered by a combination of resource constraints and a cautious approach to reconciling faith with technological innovation (Hassan, 2023). This caution, while understandable, risks leaving religious education disconnected from the lived realities of a digital generation.

In Nigeria, the conversation around AI in education has almost entirely bypassed the humanities, particularly a subject as foundational as Christian Religious Studies. While the national curriculum aims to use Christian Religious Studies to instill values of morality and national unity, the teacher training for this subject has largely been untouched by the digital revolution (Adesina, 2023). The curriculum often lacks interdisciplinary connections to ethics, philosophy, or history, and instructional methods are dominated by lectures that offer little room for dialogue or critical inquiry. Practical training for teachers focuses on classroom management rather than on how to facilitate complex conversations about faith and morality. This creates a critical gap: the very institutions responsible for shaping the moral and spiritual educators of the nation are themselves in dire need of a pedagogical and intellectual renewal.

This study is motivated by the urgent need to bridge this gap and reimagine Christian Religious Studies education for a complex, pluralistic, and digital world. It moves beyond a general discussion of EdTech to a focused analysis of how specific AI applications can be leveraged to fundamentally redesign the Christian Religious Studies curriculum and its instruction in Nigerian CoEs. By examining existing literature on AI in religious education and contextualizing it within the unique challenges and opportunities of the Nigerian system, this paper addresses the problem of pedagogical inertia. It aims to provide a clear, evidence-based argument that investing in AI for Christian Religious Studies teacher education is not a threat to faith, but a critical necessity for preparing teachers who can cultivate a faith that is both deep and intellectually robust.

Concept of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a broad and rapidly evolving field of computer science dedicated to creating systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence. These tasks include learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and language understanding (Russell & Norvig, 2016). At its core, AI involves the development of algorithms that can process vast amounts of data, identify patterns, and make predictions or decisions without being explicitly programmed for every possible scenario. The field can be broadly categorized into two main types: Narrow AI, which is designed to perform a specific task (e.g., facial recognition or

language translation), and General AI, a more theoretical form that would possess the ability to understand, learn, and apply knowledge across a wide range of tasks, much like a human being. Currently, all existing AI applications fall under the category of Narrow AI. The importance of AI is increasingly evident across various sectors, from healthcare and finance to transportation and entertainment, where it drives efficiency, innovation, and personalization. In academia, AI is revolutionizing research and instruction by enabling complex data analysis, automating routine tasks, and creating new pedagogical possibilities.

The application of these technologies in education is a subject of growing scholarly debate. Ouyang and Jiao (2021) conceptualize the evolution of AI in education through three paradigms: AI-directed (where AI acts as a tutor), AI-supported (where AI collaborates with the learner), and AI-empowered (where AI augments learner agency). They argue that the ultimate goal is to move towards the AI-empowered paradigm, fostering human-centered learning. Similarly, Chaudhry and Kazim (2021) highlight four key areas of AIEd research: reducing teacher workload, providing contextualized learning, revolutionizing assessment, and developing intelligent tutoring systems. They emphasize that for AI to be effective, it must be integrated ethically and with the teacher "in the loop." Supporting this, Hassan (2023) notes that the convergence of AI with other technologies like Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) offers immersive and tailored experiences that can reimagine traditional pedagogies. From the researcher's perspective, these scholarly interactions reveal a consensus that AI is not merely a tool for automation but a transformative force that can reshape the very nature of teaching and learning. Its true value lies not in replacing human educators, but in augmenting their capabilities and creating more personalized, adaptive, and engaging learning environments for all students.

Christian Religious Studies Education in Nigerian Colleges of Education

Christian Religious Studies (CRS) is a core academic subject within the Nigerian educational system, designed to impart knowledge of Christian beliefs, history, and ethics. Its historical emergence as a formal subject was tied to the work of Christian missionaries, who established the first Western-style schools in the country. The objectives of Christian Religious Studies, as outlined in the national curriculum, are multifaceted: to foster spiritual and moral development, to promote an understanding of Christian heritage, to encourage ethical behavior and good citizenship, and to contribute to inter-religious harmony and national unity (Adesina, 2023). The relevance of Christian Religious Studies education in a deeply religious and pluralistic society like Nigeria cannot be overstated. It is intended to be a cornerstone for character formation and for providing a moral compass to young citizens. The Colleges of Education (CoEs) are the primary institutions tasked with preparing the teachers who will deliver this crucial curriculum at the basic education level.

However, the current state of Christian Religious Studies education in many Nigerian CoEs is characterized by significant pedagogical and curricular weaknesses

that undermine its stated objectives. The curriculum is often delivered as a static body of facts to be memorized, rather than a living tradition to be critically engaged with. Instruction is dominated by the lecture method, where students passively receive information about biblical stories, dates, and doctrines, with little opportunity for dialogue, critical inquiry, or personal reflection (Susan, 2025). The curriculum often lacks interdisciplinary depth, failing to connect biblical teachings to contemporary ethical dilemmas, social justice issues, or philosophical questions. This critique is echoed in the broader literature on Nigerian education. Ahmadi and Lukman (2015) point to the general problem of outdated curricula and teacher-centered pedagogy as a major challenge to effective education in Nigeria. Fasinro, Akinkuotu, and Aina (2024) highlight the misalignment between intended and implemented curricula as a systemic issue. From the researcher's perspective, CRS education in Nigerian CoEs is in urgent need of a revolution. It must transition from a model of rote learning to one of reflective practice, from dogmatic instruction to dialogical exploration. The strategic integration of AI offers a powerful set of tools to catalyze this very transformation.

AI Technologies for Christian Religious Studies Education Revolution

A revolution in Christian Religious Studies education can be powered by a suite of specialized AI technologies designed to foster deep, critical, and interactive engagement with theological content. These tools can move students from passive recipients to active participants in the learning process.

1. **AI-Powered Biblical Exegesis and Research Assistant:** Such a tool, using Natural Language Processing (NLP), could allow student-teachers to perform complex analyses of biblical texts. For instance, they could trace the use of a specific Hebrew or Greek word across the entire biblical canon, compare different manuscript traditions, or access a curated library of scholarly commentaries on a particular passage, all within a single interface. This transforms scriptural study from simple reading to a research-oriented activity (Papakostas, 2025).
2. **Immersive Historical and Cultural Simulations:** Using Virtual Reality (VR), students could take a virtual tour of first-century Jerusalem, explore the layout of the Pauline churches, or witness a simulated event from church history. This provides a rich, contextual understanding that is impossible to achieve through textbooks alone (Hassan, 2023).
3. **AI-Driven Ethical Dilemma Chatbots and Simulators:** These could be developed to train teachers in moral reasoning and pastoral care. These chatbots could present students with complex, real-world ethical scenarios (e.g., issues of social justice, bioethics, or interpersonal conflict) and guide them through a process of theological reflection and decision-making, allowing them to practice their skills in a safe and reflective space (Papakostas, 2025).
4. **AI-Powered Comparative Religion Platforms:** These tools could analyze and visualize the core tenets, historical development, and sacred texts of different world religions, facilitating a more nuanced and respectful approach to interfaith dialogue, a crucial skill in Nigeria's pluralistic society Ouyang and Jiao (2021).

5. **Adaptive Learning Platforms:** These can be tailored for CRS to create personalized study plans. An AI system could assess a student's knowledge of church history or biblical geography and then recommend specific readings, videos, or interactive modules to fill any gaps, ensuring a solid foundation for every trainee teacher (Chaudhry & Kazim, 2021).

The potential of these tools is a subject of growing scholarly interest. Ouyang and Jiao (2021) describe a paradigm where AI empowers learners, giving them agency. Holmes, et al (2019) emphasize AI's role in making learning more relevant. From the researcher's perspective, these AI technologies can fundamentally shift CRS education in Nigerian CoEs from a passive, memory-based subject to an active, inquiry-based discipline.

Benefits of AI Technologies for Christian Religious Studies Education

The integration of AI technologies into Christian Religious Studies education in Nigerian Colleges of Education offers a wealth of benefits that can deepen theological understanding, enhance pedagogical skills, and increase the relevance of the subject. These benefits move beyond mere efficiency to fundamentally alter the nature of learning.

1. **Fostering Deep Critical and Analytical Engagement:** AI-powered exegesis tools can allow students to move beyond a surface-level reading of the Bible to a more scholarly analysis, exploring linguistic nuances, historical contexts, and diverse interpretative traditions (Papakostas, 2025). This cultivates a more intellectually robust faith and equips future teachers to handle complex scriptural questions with confidence.
2. **Creating Immersive and Contextualized Learning Experiences:** Through VR and AR, abstract historical and cultural concepts can be made tangible. Students can virtually walk the streets of ancient Corinth or explore the geography of the Holy Land, leading to a much richer and more memorable understanding of the biblical world than can be gained from maps and pictures alone (Hassan, 2023).
3. **Developing Ethical Reasoning and Pastoral Skills:** By engaging with AI-driven ethical dilemma simulators, trainees can grapple with complex moral issues in a structured and reflective environment, learning to apply theological principles to real-life situations. This is a crucial form of practical training that is currently absent from most CRS programs (Ouyang and Jiao, 2021).
4. **Enhancing Instructional Efficiency and Personalized Learning:** Lecturers can use AI to automate the assessment of foundational knowledge, freeing up class time for more substantive theological discussion. Adaptive learning platforms can cater to the diverse levels of biblical literacy among students, ensuring that every student is appropriately challenged (Rahiman & Kodikal, 2024).
5. **Promoting Digital Literacy and 21st-Century Skills:** By using these tools, student-teachers not only learn CRS content but also develop critical digital

literacy skills. They learn how to evaluate online sources, use digital research tools responsibly, and communicate complex ideas in a digital format, preparing them for the modern classroom (Papakostas, 2025).

Scholars have affirmed the transformative potential of such approaches. Ouyang and Jiao (2021) argue that AI can foster learner agency, which in Christian Religious Studies translates to empowering students to become independent theological thinkers. Holmes, Bialik, and Fadel (2019) stress AI's ability to connect learning to real-world problems. From the researcher's perspective, the most profound benefit for the Nigerian context is AI's potential to elevate the intellectual and spiritual quality of CRS education.

Challenges of Adopting AI Technologies for Christian Religious Studies Education in Nigeria

The integration of AI into a sensitive and foundational subject like Christian Religious Studies within Nigerian Colleges of Education presents a unique and complex set of challenges that go beyond the usual technical and financial hurdles. Acknowledging these is crucial for a realistic approach.

1. **Risk of Theological Bias and Doctrinal Rigidity:** AI systems are trained on data, and in the case of theology, the data is never neutral. An AI tool trained predominantly on data from a single theological tradition will inevitably reflect its biases. Deploying such a tool in the ecumenically diverse context of Nigeria could lead to the promotion of one doctrinal viewpoint over others, undermining the goal of a balanced religious education (Papakostas, 2025).
2. **Danger of Spiritual Dehumanization:** CRS education is fundamentally about spiritual formation, character development, and the cultivation of wisdom. An over-reliance on AI, such as chatbots for ethical guidance, risks reducing the spiritual journey to a set of algorithmic procedures and devaluing the indispensable role of the human teacher as a spiritual guide and moral exemplar (Popenici & Kerr, 2017).
3. **Infrastructural Deficits:** The most significant practical barrier is the poor state of infrastructure in many Nigerian educational institutions. A lack of reliable electricity, limited and expensive internet bandwidth, and an insufficient number of computer devices for students would render even the best-designed AI platforms useless (Eberendu, 2014).
4. **Digital Skills Gap Among Lecturers:** Many lecturers in the CoE system are "digital immigrants" and may lack the skills or confidence to effectively integrate complex AI tools into their teaching. Without extensive and ongoing professional development, there is a risk that expensive technology will be underutilized or used ineffectively (Hassan, 2023).
5. **Scarcity of Contextually Relevant Digital Resources:** High-quality AI tools for theological study require vast, well-structured, and digitized datasets. There is a comparative lack of high-quality, digitized resources from Nigerian and African theologians, church historians, and ethicists. This means that most

off-the-shelf AI tools are likely to be culturally and theologically misaligned with the Nigerian context.

Scholars have raised similar concerns globally. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) note that the ethical implications of AI are a major, yet under-researched, area of concern. From the researcher's perspective, the adoption of AI in CRS education in Nigeria must proceed with extreme caution and critical reflection. A "technology-first" approach would be disastrous.

Implementation Strategies for AI in Nigerian Colleges of Education

To successfully integrate AI into Christian Religious Studies education in Nigerian Colleges of Education, a strategic, phased, and context-aware implementation plan is essential. A top-down, one-off approach is destined to fail. The following strategies offer a roadmap for a more sustainable approach.

1. **Develop a National Policy and Strategic Framework:** This framework, led by the Federal Ministry of Education and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), must outline a clear vision, set realistic goals, and establish ethical guidelines for AI in education. This policy would provide the necessary direction and coherence for individual institutions to follow (UNESCO, 2021).
2. **Adopt a Phased, Pilot-Based Approach:** Rather than attempting a nationwide rollout at once, the government and development partners should select a few CoEs as pilot institutions. These centers would receive intensive investment in digital infrastructure and serve as testbeds for different AI models and pedagogical approaches, allowing for learning and adaptation before scaling up (Papakostas, 2025).
3. **Invest Massively in Human Capacity Development:** A robust and continuous professional development program must be launched for lecturers. This training should focus not just on the technical skills needed to use AI tools but, more importantly, on the pedagogical skills required to design innovative learning experiences with them (Chaudhry & Kazim, 2021).
4. **Foster Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and Collaborative Research:** The government should partner with reputable EdTech companies to provide access to cutting-edge AI tools and technical expertise. Furthermore, CoEs should be funded to establish research units focused on AI in education, collaborating with university computer science departments to develop AI solutions tailored to the Nigerian context (Holmes, Bialik, & Fadel, 2019).
5. **Curriculum Review and Content Digitization:** The CRS curriculum must be reviewed to integrate digital literacy and AI ethics as core competencies. A major national project should be initiated to digitize the works of Nigerian and African theologians, creating the datasets needed to build contextually relevant AI tools (Papakostas, 2025).

Scholarly consensus supports such a multi-pronged strategy. Ouyang and Jiao (2021) advocate for a human-centered approach where technology empowers learners

and teachers. In the researchers view, the success of AI in Nigerian CoEs will hinge on strategic patience and a commitment to building a strong foundation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the strategic infusion of Artificial Intelligence into Christian Religious Studies education presents a monumental opportunity to rescue the discipline from pedagogical inertia within Nigerian Colleges of Education. AI can transform teacher training by enabling personalized, critically engaging, and contextually rich learning experiences. However, this promising future is contingent upon a cautious and deliberate approach that confronts the profound challenges of infrastructural deficits, the digital skills gap, and the critical need for theologically sound AI systems. The successful leveraging of AI in this context is therefore not a simple technological fix, but a complex policy choice requiring a long-term, human-centered vision.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this review, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Develop a National Policy for AI in Religious Education.
2. Invest in digital infrastructure and contextually relevant resources.
3. Mandate specialized professional development for all Christian Religious Studies lecturers.
4. Launch interdisciplinary pilot programs in selected Colleges of Education.
5. Revise the Christian Religious Studies curriculum to include digital literacy and AI ethics.

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