

Human rights promotion in the south east Nigeria: The influence of Christian religious education

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Abstract

Human rights have been threatened in recent years globally especially in Nigeria where human rights situation has continued to deteriorate. This study investigated human rights promotion in the south east Nigeria and the influence of Christian religious education among primary school teachers. The study adopted descriptive cross sectional research design. The population of the study comprised of all the public primary school teachers of CRS from the five South-East states in Nigeria. The researchers selected only 100 professional trained CRE teachers using accidental sampling techniques. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data while Mean and Standard Deviation was used to analyze the data. The result revealed the overall mean scores of ($\bar{x} = 3.2$). This indicated that CRE has an influence in the promotion of fundamental human right among the population. The result of the study further indicated that CRE has an influence in the promotion of morals and principles towards the promotion of fundamental human rights, with the overall mean scores of ($\bar{x} = 3.21$). Again, the mean scores of ($\bar{x} = 3.3$), revealed the influence of effective teaching of CRE in schools for the promotion of human fundamental right in the south eastern Nigeria. The study concluded that the School managers and teachers should fully recognize the aims and objectives of CRE and should emphasize the Christian virtues in daily activities of the school as a way of indoctrinating them with the basic social teachings of Jesus as embedded in the National Policy of Education.

Keywords: Human Rights Promotion; Influence; Primary School Teachers; Christian Religious Education; South East Nigeria

1. Introduction

Human rights have been threatened in recent years all over the world more especially in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the human rights situation has continued to deteriorate. Thus, Human right is not only violated by government but many religious leaders, intellectuals, politicians and journalists [1]. For more than a decade of democratic governance in Nigeria, and endorsement of universal declaration of human rights charter, Nigerians still face a lot of human rights abuses [2]. A Study has observed that cases of human rights violations is high in Nigeria which has become a culture of impunity in the Africa's most populous country [3].

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Rights, has been conceptualized as a “moral-political claims which by contemporary consensus, every human being has or is deemed to have upon his society or government,” claims which are recognized “as of right” and “not by love or grace or charity.”[4]. Human rights refers to as a “rights which all human beings have by virtue of their humanity, such as the right to life, dignity of human person, personal liberty, fair hearing and freedom of thought, conscience and religion. They provide a common standard of behavior among the international community [5]. They are natural, rational, inviolable, and unalterable, the deprivation of which would constitute a grave affront to one’s sense of justice [1]. In other words, violation of human right ranges from extra-judicial killings, illegal detention, and destruction of property by security forces amongst others. Research have revealed other forms of human rights abuses in Nigeria to includes motorists’ harassment and extortion by security personnel, political assassinations, and undemocratic imposition of candidates in leadership and intimidation of political opponents [2,6].

Report from the National Human Rights Commission has revealed several complaints it receive on human right violation which is estimated to 1,701,519 in 2021[7]. The figure, the commission reported to be higher than the 1,287,280 complaints received in 2020 and the highest so far since its establishment in 1995[7]. According to the Human Rights Report, in the first quarter of the year, 341,997 complaints were received by the Commission while the second quarter recorded 464,800, the highest number of complaints per quarter. A drop to 440,800 was recorded in the third quarter but rose slightly to 453,760 complaints, being the second highest per quarter [2,7]. Promotion of human rights is pivotal in order to fulfill the fundamental task of becoming a human person thus, fulfilling the calling as an image of God. In this case no person, organization or state has the right to violate the right and dignity of being human as violation of fundamental human rights is a sin against God [8].

It is against this background that the present study focused on ascertaining the factors associated with the violation of human right in Nigeria south east of the country. Also to find out the influence of Christian religious education on human rights promotion. This is because studying about human rights promotion implies a critical look from a religious, moral perspective and the teaching of Bible. In a pluralistic society like Nigeria especially in the south eastern Nigeria, the concern for human rights represents the potential development of a universal doctrine and humanity. Human rights are gifts and demands of God. However, societies understood human rights differently and as such conferred civil rights in different ways. In this way civil rights are a subject to legislative acts or political fiat. Human rights however, are God given and are not alterable by persons, groups or regimes [9]. Every society is to as matters of moral obligation develop policies and programs that recognizes and protects basic human rights. Biblically, human rights are grounded in God’s act of creating, reconciling and redeeming the creation. This relationship of God to His creations gives human beings their inalienable human rights. The righteousness of God which is expressible in creation, reconciliation and redemption of human is the basis of His covenant; and human rights are alive and realizable in this covenant.

The following were summarized as fundamental human rights according to Nigeria constitution as follows. Right to life, Right to dignity of human person (respect of dignity; not to be subjected to torture/inhumane treatment, slavery or abuse), Right to personal liberty (freedom from physical coercion, freedom to establish a home, bring up children, to worship according to conscience and pursuit of happiness), Right to freedom of thought, expression of feelings, movement, right to relate, and associate with others in peaceable way [10]. In Christian tradition and belief, these seven virtues- love, patience, faithfulness, self-control, joy, humility, peace (see Gal 5;22) combines with the four cardinal virtues- prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude to build and support fundamental human rights. That is why Christian religion teachings gives man the habitual and firm disposition to do good; that is the ability to live life in conformity with the laws of creation and existence. A breach in the law of creation could lead to the extinction of man from this planet.

In the National Policy of Education, there are aims and objectives which are designed to be achieved through the teaching of CRE. These include: a) Respect for the worth and dignity of the individual. b) Faith in man’s ability to make rational decisions as well as share responsibility for the common goal of the society. c) Respect for the dignity of labor and promotion of emotional, physical, and psychological health of all [11]. This policy is well spelt out in the secondary level of education for which CRE was made compulsory for the junior classes. CRE was designed to raise a generation of people who can respect the view and feelings of others, who can respect the dignity of labor as well as appreciate those values specified in the broad aims [11].

In this study, fundamental human rights are to be viewed from the perspective that rights are inherent to all human irrespective of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language or religion. These rights include right to life, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, right to work and education. The above scenario informed the decision to investigate human rights promotion in the south east Nigeria through Christian religious education. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to assess the influence of Christian Religion Education in the promotion of the fundamental human rights in Nigeria, specifically the study intends to ascertain the influence of;

- Christian Religion Education in the promotion of fundamental human right in the south Eastern Nigeria.
 - Christian morals and principles in the promotion of fundamental human rights in the south eastern Nigeria.
 - Effective teaching of CRE in promotion of human fundamental right in the south eastern Nigeria.
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2. Research Method

2.1. Study Design and Setting

A descriptive cross sectional research design was conducted between April to September 2023 to investigate human rights promotion in the south east Nigeria with the influence of Christian religious education among primary school teachers of CRS. South Eastern Nigeria comprises five Igbo speaking states in the Southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria with the projected population of 3,244,671 years in 2016 and a total landmass of 25,533km² [12].

2.2. Population for the Study

The population of the study comprised of all the public primary school teachers of Christian Religious Education (CRS) in the South Eastern Nigeria.

2.3. Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the study was 100 accessible CRE primary school teachers in South-Eastern states. The 100 accessible teachers were selected through accidental sample technique. Accidental sampling, also known as convenience sampling, is a type of non-probability sampling technique where participants are chosen based on convenience. This means that the researcher selects participants who are easily accessible or available at the time of the study.

2.4. Instrument for Data Collection

Questionnaire was the only instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire was entitled - "Human Right Promotion and Christian Religious Education (HRPCRE)". The instrument was face validated by two experts in the field and measurement and evaluation to ensure usability of instrument, clarity of sentence, relevance to the purpose and appropriateness of the language and expression to the respondents. The instrument was administered to 30 other Primary School Teachers different from the sample of the study. After which it was subjected to a reliability test using test-re-test. The reliability test yielded a strong internal consistency of 0.85. Prior to the distribution of questionnaires, formal introduction of the study was given by the researchers and informed consent obtained from all the prospective participants. The researchers conducted the administration and distribution of the questionnaire to all the participants. The items of the questionnaire were organized to elicit responses from the participants without any bias.

2.5. Study Analysis

After a critical cross-check of the returned copies of the questionnaire for completeness of responses, the quantitative data generated were analyzed using SPSS batch 21. Mean and Standard Deviation were the statistical tools used for data analysis and interpretation of the results. The criterion mean of 2.50 and above was interpreted as acceptance of the items stated in the questionnaire whereas the any mean score below 2.50 was interpreted as rejected. The findings were presented using tables.

3. Results

3.1. Research Question 1: What is the influence of Christian Religion Education on the promotion of fundamental human right?

Data in Table 1 shows overall mean scores of ($\bar{x} = 3.2$). This indicated that CRE has an influence in the promotion of fundamental human right in the south eastern Nigeria. Moreover, all the items indicated the influence of CRE on the promotion of human right because their cluster mean high above the criterion mean of 2.5, except item 9 which stated that "Equal treatment for all irrespective of size, age, complexion, tribe" had a mean score $\bar{x} = 2.41$ less than 2.50 criterion mean.

Table 1 Mean scores of the influence of CRE on the promotion of fundamental human right in the south eastern Nigeria? ($n = 100$)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean (\bar{x})	Remark
1.	Disciplining every act of injustice and selfishness.	35	43	10	12	301	3.01	Accepted
2.	Encouraging empathy and care for others.	41	40	10	9	313	3.13	Accepted
3.	Rewarding every good behavior.	39	31	20	10	299	2.99	Accepted
4.	Encouraging self-esteem and respect.	31	47	12	10	299	2.99	Accepted
5.	Through right conducts and modeling.	41	44	10	5	321	3.21	Accepted
6.	Ensuring that students receive their right.	30	40	20	10	330	3.30	Accepted
7.	Encouraging freedom of opinion in the class.	64	30	0	6	352	3.52	Accepted
8.	Maintaining law, peace and order in the class.	60	28	5	7	341	3.41	Accepted
9.	Equal treatment for all irrespective of size, age, complexion, tribe, etc.	30	70	30	30	240	2.41	Rejected
10.	Maintaining equity in the class.	51	40	-	8	368	3.68	Accepted
11.	Shunning every form of victimization.	55	45	-	-	355	3.55	Accepted
12.	Shunning favoritism in its total form.	60	32	8	-	352	3.52	Accepted
13.	Encouraging selfless services.	60	30	5	5	345	3.45	Accepted
	Overall Mean						3.20	

Key: Mean of 2.50 and above Accepted; Less than 2.50 is Rejected

3.2. Research Question 2: What is the influence of Christian morals, principles in promotion of fundamental human rights in the south eastern Nigeria?

Table 2 Mean scores of the influence of Christian morals, principles in promotion of fundamental human rights? ($n = 100$)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean (\bar{x})	Remark
1.	Peace	80	80	-	-	380	3.80	Accepted
2.	Love/charity	69	31	-	-	369	3.69	Accepted
3.	Kindness and humility	50	50	-	-	350	3.50	Accepted
4.	Respect	76	20	-	-	380	3.80	Accepted
5.	Trustworthiness	30	60	2	8	282	2.82	Accepted
6.	Truthfulness/honesty	50	40	5	5	335	3.35	Accepted
7.	Compassion/empathy	60	20	10	10	330	3.30	Accepted
8.	Tolerance	40	30	10	20	290	2.90	Accepted
9.	Patience	31	33	16	20	275	2.76	Accepted
10.	Equity	40	30	20	10	300	3.00	Accepted
11.	Contentment	49	32	7	11	317	3.17	Accepted
12.	Justice/fairness	38	31	12	19	286	2.86	Accepted
	Grand Mean						3.21	

Data in Table 2 shows overall mean scores of ($\bar{x} = 3.21$). This indicated that CRE has an influence in the morals and principles from promotion of fundamental human rights in the south eastern Nigeria. This is evidence as all the items had a cluster mean score above the criterion mean of 2.5, which shows the influence of CRE on Christian morals and principles for promotion of fundamental human rights.

3.3. Research Question 3: What is the influence of effective teaching of CRE in schools for the promotion of human fundamental right in the south eastern Nigeria?

Table 3 Mean response scores of effective teaching of CRE for the promotion of fundamental human rights.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean (\bar{x})	Remark
1.	Recognize their aims and objectives of including CRE in school curriculum.	74	10	10	6	352	3.50	Accepted
2.	Encourage their students through effective teaching to always maintain truth and respect.	45	32	10	13	309	3.09	Accepted
3.	Provide students through adequate training the opportunity to develop their faith in God.	49	61	-	-	379	3.70	Accepted
4.	Through effective teaching provide learners with rewarding educational opportunities so as to develop their talents and contribute to a better world.	50	30	10	10	320	3.20	Accepted
5.	Protect students/learners against exploitation so that they may grow in spiritual health and strength.	63	22	15	20	368	3.68	Accepted
6.	Using biblical experiences to dissuade students from prejudice and discrimination.	41	50	-	09	323	3.23	Accepted
7.	Using Christian examples to lift the moral standard of the students for a better life.	72	15	03	10	339	3.39	Accepted
8.	Through biblical illustrations open the avenue for them to appreciate the teachings on freedom, justice and mutual respect for all.	70	30	-	-	370	3.70	Accepted
9.	Build in the students the curiosity and pride to be a true Nigerian.	31	31	10	28	155	1.55	Rejected
10.	From biblical examples, teach the students love so that they may grow with trust in themselves and others.	50	18	12	-	304	3.04	Accepted
11.	Establish ground rules to maintain Law and Order.	60	25	07	08	337	3.37	Accepted
12.	Through balanced relationship establish trust equally.	70	18	12	-	358	3.58	Accepted
13.	Perform every duty efficiently and effectively.	80	15	05	-	375	3.75	Accepted
14.	Discipline every negative attitude.	35	42	15	08	304	3.04	Accepted
15.	Encourage every positive behavior.	30	40	20	10	390	3.90	Accepted
	Grand mean						3.30	

Data in Table 3 shows overall mean scores of ($\bar{x} = 3.3$). This indicated the influence of effective teaching of CRE in schools for the promotion of human fundamental right in the south eastern Nigeria. Moreover, all the items indicated the influence of effective teaching of CRE in schools for the promotion of human right in the south eastern Nigeria as their cluster mean is above the criterion mean of 2.5, except item 9 which stated that “Build in the students the curiosity and pride to be a true Nigerian” had a mean score $\bar{x} = 1.55$ less than 2.50 criterion mean.

4. Discussion of Findings

Results of the study in Table 1 showed that respondents agreed that CRE can promote and sustain fundamental human rights in Nigeria. This was evident from the grand mean of ($\bar{x} = 3.2$) which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. The finding is understandable because Christian Religion Education has the capacity of inculcating good moral behaviors in the student which in turn could help re-shape him to respect human dignity as well as offer rights to one's opinion and against exploitation of any kind. The effective teaching of Christian Religion to student will expose them to appreciate God, others and as well preserve them for posterity. The objectives CRE however, are geared towards preservation of life and maintenance of human relationship with his creator and environment. The subject designed to inculcate in the life of the young people the essential norms or learning capable of giving man a sense of social responsibility [2].

This is in line with Oser and Reichenbach as quoted by Njoku that ... “the content and objectives Christian Religion Education are detailed and rich enough to deal with the present moral crises in the society which centers on denial of fundamental human rights”[13]. This means that the aims and objectives of Christian Religion Education are arranged to equip students with the required moral values for an active and responsible integration against social evil, denial of rights and exploitations.

In the same view, Flugel discovered that the essence of including Christian Religion Education in the school is to reinforce in the student the social virtues acquired at home so that they can apply them in the school and society at large for effective relationship[14].The teaching of Christian Religion Education in Nigerian schools should emphasize the need for human respect to life, and good relationship especially in Nigeria where people are always in a group, so the primary target of CRE is to build up individuals that will develop the security and ensure security of life and property, freedom of rights as well as shun any form discrimination [1].

Table 2 revealed Christian moral and principles that could promote and sustain human fundamental rights. Christian Religion teaches virtues like love, peace, respect, truthfulness, tolerance, equity, justice, contentment and compassion just to mention but a few. These virtues were used by Jesus in Christian teaching to showcase how man needs to live with others. For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded by the apostle Matthew chapter 5:1-48, Jesus taught his followers the need to love, to be patient, humble, merciful (compassion) and so on[15]. These virtues are principles that guide human morality.

The study revealed that Christian Religion has moral principles that could if properly taught enhance human relationship with him and others. This means that the fundamental human rights are part and parcel of Christ's teachings. From creation, God set a rule that guides the universe if man cares to obey. The golden rule of Jesus Christ which says: love your God, and love others as you love yourself is capable of helping man to preserve and sustain others from any form of victimization, discrimination and denial of rights [16]. Therefore, fundamental human right is well spelt out in teachings of Christian Religion, and as such these, principles could help in promoting and sustaining man's right to life and property. Thus, effective Christian Religion Education will enhance man's ability to defend human fundamental rights. This finding is quite interesting because, Christian moral principle encourages team spirit, self-control, moral objectivity, courage, fairness, prudence, and forgiveness. These principles are a guide to doing the right thing. They are set to help man live well with his environment, as well as secure his environment.

Results of the Table 3 showed that respondents agreed with the items as desired ways in which effective teaching of CRE could be done to help promote and sustain human fundamental rights. This finding emphasized the impact of effective teaching of CRE as a major factor in promotion and sustenance of human rights. The above findings agreed with the view of Max Stackhouse [17] (Max L. 1984). CRE teachers have a greater role to play in ensuring that fundamental human rights are maintained and sustained. The finding is appreciated in that teachers' commitment is paramount to any curriculum implementation. If teachers of CRE possesses qualities like: leading by example, respect for people's opinion/right, encouraging a balanced relationship with trust, equity and justice; encouraging positive behavior, truthfulness, maintaining sanity and dissuading prejudice and discrimination, demonstration of good moral judgment, exhibition of Christ-like qualities and so on; they will help to instill love, care and respect for others which in turn promotes and sustains human fundamental rights. According to Njoku and Eluu, effectiveness of any strategy depends greatly on the teacher handling it [13]. If teachers of CRE could teach in line with the aims and objectives of CRE, it is obvious that students would learn these fundamental human rights and know how to maintain it as a way of promoting and sustaining the rules. It is worthy of note that ethical and spiritual development of human being is fundamental in the study of Christian religion and as such teachers of CRE require appropriate strategy to be able to achieve the objectives. Isimiran also shared the view that the effective approaches to the teaching of CRE includes: providing adequate training to students to give them an opportunity to develop faith in God and respect for His

creations. It will also protect students against exploitation so that they in turn grow in spiritual health and strength free from discrimination and prejudice, as well as lift their moral standard for better co-existence. In a nut shell respondents affirms that where teachers are effective and teaching efficient, appreciation and promotion of fundamental human rights is assured [6].

5. Conclusion

Fundamental human rights are rights given to us from God. In the midst of human struggle, there is a need to affirm the power of freedom that comes through the free Grace of God. That is to say that God's involvement in human programs is the reality which prevents despair from failures and overwhelming frustrations in attempts to exist. This reality can be better achieved if teachers of CRE who are equipped to educate the people will rise to the challenge of effective instruction which in turn endows students to respect human dignity and right. Thus, teachers and content of CRE are capable of equipping students to appreciate and promote fundamental human rights for peaceful co-existence.

The findings have implications for teachers, government and school management. The findings show that Christian religion contains moral principles that can guide students to learn how to respect others' rights and privileges, that there are various ways by which the teaching of CRE could help promote and sustain fundamental human rights; and that if CRE teachers carry out their duties diligently and effectively, the student will appreciate and master the rules guiding human existence which is transformed into fundamental human rights. In this case, the school management and government should support Christian Religion Education teachers through in- service training and refresher courses on modern approaches to the teaching and learning of CRE so as to achieve the aims and objectives of CRE as stipulated in the National Policy of Education. The implication therefore, is that commitment to the teaching approaches of CRE is paramount in promoting and sustaining fundamental human rights in Nigerian States.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- That CRE teacher should through effective teaching inculcate in the student the spirit of love which is fundamental to human existence and human relationship.
- Teachers' of CRE should emphasize the moral principles as drawn from the Bible as ultimate in human relationship.
- Government and the general public should encourage effective teaching of CRE as a process of supporting fundamental human rights; hence the objective of CRE has all it takes to promote human rights and privileges.
- There should be adequate provision of time for the teaching of CRE hence it will enhance effective teaching

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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