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## Students' Preferences for Methods of Teaching Christian Religious Studies: A study in Senior High Schools in Mfantseman Municipality, Ghana

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### **Abstract:**

*Methods of teaching have implications for students' academic performance. Therefore, teachers' choice and students' preferences of methods adapted to teaching are vital. This study focused on students' preferences for teaching methods in Christian Religious Studies in the Mfantseman Municipality of the Central region of Ghana. The descriptive cross-sectional research design was adopted in this study. The population for this study was 2152, comprising six CRS teachers and 2146 CRS students from five schools. All the six CRS teachers were included in the study. Out of 2146 CRS students, 327 were selected using the proportionate sampling technique. The sample size for the study was therefore 333. Questionnaires, made up of both open-ended and close-ended questions were used to collect data from students and teachers. Data collected was analyzed using SPSS version 22.0 for windows.*

*Descriptive statistics: frequency counts and percentages were used for data analysis. The results revealed that, CRS teachers used the discussion method mostly when teaching because, among many reasons, it allows students to participate in the lesson. CRS students there also prefer the discussion method to all the other methods used by the CRS teachers. It was recommended that government agencies responsible for the training of teachers should introduce CRS teachers to all the methods of teaching for them to be able to use other teaching methods suggested by the CRS syllabus and not rely solely on the discussion method.*

**Keywords:** Students, religious education, preferences, methods of teaching

### **1. Introduction**

Education is a basic need and a human right that should be granted all human beings on no other grounds, but just by virtue of being human. As a result of the religious dimension education has taken, there is a branch referred to as Religious Education/Studies (R E/S). The history of Religious Education can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century in England when religious groups together with the state introduced religious education into the curriculum of English schools in 1870 (Jackson, 2013). In order to be religion specific, it takes after the name of the said religion such as Christian Religious Education, Islamic Religious Education, African Religious Education just to mention a few. Though the subject is recognized as part of the educational curriculum in most European countries, over the years, there have been varied concepts, traditions and approaches towards teaching it (Jäggle, Rothgangel & Schlag, 2013; Franken & Loobuyck 2011; Jackson, Miedema, Weisse & Willaime 2007; Kuyk, Jensen, Lankshear et al., 2007; Miedema, 2007). In Hungary for instance, two schools of thought have emerged on RE. Whiles one argues that RE is a relic of the past and should have no place in any impartial and neutral state, others hold the view that it plays a major role in a pluralistic state (Schreiner, 2003).

Again, whiles RE is taught using the confessional/denominational/catechetical approaches in countries such as Poland, Ireland, and Italy by religious communities, it is taught using the non-confessional approach in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Norway, Sweden by the state. However, in England, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Russia and Spain, the teaching of RE is a collaborative effort between the state and the religious bodies and is taught using the confessional/non-confessional approach. In these countries, RE is either voluntary or obligatory (Schreiner, 2003). In Australia for instance, the doctrinal approach dominated the teaching of RE until the 1960s. This was followed by the Kerygmatic or Bible salvation approach in the mid-1960s until the Experiential and life-centred approach became dominant in Australia until it gave way for the Christian praxis approach which is based on Habermas' critical theory concerned with the emancipatory way of knowing which led to critique and reflection and subsequently to new knowledge, liberation and change (Lovat, 1989). The subject-oriented approach was adopted and gave way to the Phenomenological or Typological approach in the

1990s. These approaches were descriptive and concerned the study of the characteristics of religion (Kenyon, 2013). According to Grimmit (1973), religious beliefs cannot be taught as if they were facts; they are by nature experiential. This means, since religion is based on the experiences of the individual, its teaching must be student-centred and not teacher-centred.

As noted by Buchen (2005), the education field has shown remarkable improvement and durability; through turbulent times it has survived. But this survival has not purged it of all problems aside the global attention given it; especially Christian Religious Education as regards its pedagogy. In England for instance, despite many changes in recent decades, Christianity still has a significant place in the religious education curriculum. One would expect that, with much attention given it, teaching and learning of Religion would be devoid of any shortfalls.

A recent report by Ofsted (2010) highlighted three main issues. First, while it received more attention than other religions, it was often incoherent: "Pupils' understanding of Christianity, while deeper in some respects compared with their understanding of other faiths, was often unsystematic and confused" (p.12). The second concern was that, pupils' understanding did not develop through their schooling. Many of the primary and secondary schools visited did not pay sufficient attention to the progressive investigations of the core beliefs of Christianity (Ofsted, 2010). This had been a concern in a previous Ofsted report: although schools organize carefully sequenced units of work on other faiths, their approach to Christianity is often much less rigorous and more fragmented; work on specific aspects of Christianity, such as the life of Jesus or the Bible, is isolated from an investigation of the religion itself (Ofsted, 2007). Finally, Christianity was presented in a stereotypical and simplistic manner, and 'insufficient attention was paid to diversity within the Christian tradition' (Ofsted, 2010). Similarly, the Biblos project, conducted at the University of Exeter, found that pupils often struggled with gaining a theological understanding of the Bible (Copley, Freathy, Lane & Walshe, 2004). These current concerns are part of a long history of changes about how Christianity should be taught. In this light, the adoption of the confessional approach to religious education in 1944 was followed by a switch in 1988 to a non-confessional approach (UK Government, 1988). This approach was heavily condemned, paving way for a more child-centred approach to teaching Christianity.

In Africa, Christian Religious Education was taught using the confessional approach. This is corroborated by Onsongo (2008) when he says, "CRE was brought by the missionaries for evangelical purposes. In the mission schools, the local people (Kenyans) were taught to read and write using the Bible as the main reference book" (p.14). It should be noted that, CRS is taught using the traditional lecture method (talk and chalk) (Asogwa & Echemazu, 2011). Gbenda (2004) stresses that, students' enrolment and interest in CRS could as well be a result of inadequate provision of teaching aids, fewer professional teachers and lack of incentives among other things. Authorities in the field have over the years, based on research (Situma, 2016; Buchanan, 2011; Barnes 2011), made calls for a change in the approach to teaching of Christian Religious Education. A few of such calls will suffice; the pluralistic and materialistic nature of the present society cannot allow the use of traditional methods of teaching religion; to some extent, religion has become a private affair, so the approach in teaching it should be one that can help the students make his/her own free choice, particularly in matters relating to value acquisition (Onsongo, 2008). Religious beliefs cannot be taught as if they were facts; they are by nature experiential (Grimmit, 1973). One thing however stands out clearly from the foregoing; that is, the talk has not been on the "what" (content) but the "how" (methodology or pedagogy). Pedagogy itself is a contested term, but it involves activities that evoke changes in the learner. It determines the extent to which concepts are grasped by students and as a result, its importance cannot be overemphasized. The Ghanaian CRS teacher is not handicapped in terms of methods as the CRS syllabus suggests a wide range of teaching methods such as the lecture, role play, question and answer, brainstorming, discussion, use of resource persons, excursions etc. With the wide range of teaching methods in the syllabus, the teacher determines which one to use at a given time. The question is, are students' interest considered in the selection of these methods? If so, do they have any preferences relative to the methods employed by their teachers?

## 2. Context and Purpose of Study

In Africa, the teaching of CRS dates back to the 19th century (Banjo, 2003). The importance of CRS in the present social, political and religious affairs of Ghana cannot be over emphasized. In spite of this, in Ghana and Nigeria, the lecture method is on the dominance with regards to teaching CRS, even though there are several teaching methods the syllabus prescribes (Asogwa & Echemazu, 2011). Over the years, a major setback that has been the teaching of CRS in Africa has been that of teaching methods. According to Abdulhamid (2010), the lecture method used by teachers have made many students lost their interest in learning and consequently may reduce students' enrolment in some subject areas. This is because, it is teacher-centred. The students may end up having low interest which could lead to poor academic performance in CRS. The view of students losing interest in CRS was confirmed during off-campus teaching practices researchers were involved in at Kwegyir Aggrey SHS in the Mfantseman Municipality. On a regular basis, researchers were inundated with reports by CRS students concerning their declining interest in the subject although they admitted it was not very demanding intellectually/academically. Although this could be as a result of other factors, researchers were more curious in knowing the methods CRS teachers employed, why they did and to view these methods from students' perspective. Also, it was realized there has not been any empirical study conducted on this issue in senior high schools within the Mfantseman Municipality and in Religious Education. These reasons informed the conduct of this study to look at students' preferences for teaching methods in Christian Religious Studies in the Mfantseman Municipality. This study was guided by the following research questions;

- What method(s) are used by CRS teachers in the teaching of CRS in Mfantseman Municipality?

- Why do CRS teachers in the Mfantseman Municipality prefer the method(s) they use over the others in teaching CRS?
- What methods do CRS students in the Mfantseman Municipality prefer to be used by CRS teachers?
- 4. What are the reasons for CRS students' preferences for method(s) used in teaching CRS by CRS teachers in Mfantseman Municipality?

### 3. Methodology

Kerlinger (2001), defines research design as a plan and strategy of investigation seeks obtain various research questions. The descriptive cross-sectional survey was used in this study. The descriptive design was adopted because, the study collected data to describe students' preferences to teaching methods in Christian Religious Studies in the Mfantseman Municipality. Polis (2004), notes that, descriptive survey design is chiefly to analyse, explain and record facts about an event as they occur in their natural or current state. In descriptive designs, data is collected using questionnaires and interviews from identified respondents. In sample survey, the researcher draws a sample from the population of interest. Babbie (2007) notes that, ensuring that items on a questionnaire or interview guide are clear, getting respondents to respond to items in the right manner and having the questionnaires on time are some difficulties associated with the use of descriptive design.

#### 3.1. Sample

This study was carried out in the Mfantseman Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. There are five Senior High Schools in the Municipality with six CRS teachers. The population for this study was 2152, comprising six CRS teachers and 2146 CRS students. All the six CRS teachers were included in the study. Out of 2146 CRS students, 327 were selected (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The sample size for the study was therefore 333.

The proportionate sampling technique, where the number of participants from each group is determined by their number relative to the entire population (Sindu, 1984), was used to determine the number of participants (students) from each school. The simple random sampling was then be used to select the respondents from the schools.

Table 1 contains details of the contribution of each school towards the population in terms of numbers which helped in determining the sample size.

Schools	Population	Sample Size
Kwegyir Aggrey SHS	458	70
Mankessim SHS	736	112
Abeadze SHS	41	6
Methodist SHS	323	49
Mfantseman SHS	588	90
Total	2146	327

Table 1: Population and Sample of Study  
Source: Mfantseman Municipality, 2017

#### 3.2. Instruments

The instrument used for the study was the questionnaire. There were two questionnaires; questionnaires for teachers and questionnaires for students. They were made up of close and open-ended items. Questionnaires for the teachers comprised three sections; sections A, B and C. Section A dealt with socio-demographic background information of the respondents (teachers) with the remaining sections, B and C covering "What method(s) are used by CRS teachers in the teaching of CRS in Mfantseman Municipality?" and "Why do CRS teachers in the Mfantseman Municipality prefer the method(s) they use over the others in teaching CRS?" respectively. The students' questionnaire was in three sections; A, B and C. The A section covered demographic information of the students while the remaining sections, B and C concerned "What methods do CRS students in the Mfantseman Municipality prefer to be used by CRS teachers?" and "What are the reasons for CRS students' preferences for method(s) used in teaching CRS by CRS teachers in Mfantseman Municipality?" respectively. The instrument was given to colleague researchers to ascertain how they meet face and content validity. A pilot test was also carried out in Fettehman Senior High School and Awutu Winton Senior High School located in the Gomoe East District in the Central Region of Ghana. A reliability coefficient of Cronbach's alpha of .81 and .90 were obtained for students' and teachers' instruments respectively.

#### 3.3. Analysis

Data collected using the questionnaires were analysed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 22.0) for windows. Descriptive statistics such as tables, percentages and frequencies were used to determine the direction of the responses.

## 4. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1. What are the Method(S) Used by CRS Teachers in the Teaching of CRS in Mfantseman Municipality?

This research question sought to find out the teaching methods used by CRS teachers in teaching CRS in the Mfantseman Municipality. To this end, responses from teachers and students were sought using the questionnaire.

Teachers were to rank nine teaching methods in the order they mostly used. Aside this, they were asked to respond to 10 closed-ended questions to further help in determining the method they mostly used in teaching CRS. The Students were also asked to respond to 10 closed-ended questions on the methods used by their teachers when teaching CRS. Table 2 presents details of their responses.

Teaching Methods	Teachers N (%)		Students N (%)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Lecture	1(16.7)	5(83.3)	133(40.7)	194(59.3)
Discussion	6(100.0)	0(0.0)	299(91.4)	28(8.6)
Roleplay	0(0.0)	6(100.0)	83(25.4)	244(72.6)
Q&A	6(100.0)	0(0.0)	283(86.5)	44(13.5)
Fieldtrip	0(0.0)	6(100)	7(2.1)	320(97.9)
Textbook Reading	4(66.7)	2(33.3)	278(85.0)	49(15.0)
Resource Person	1(16.7)	5(83.3)	263(80.7)	63(19.3)
Brainstorming	5(83.3)	1(16.7)	267(81.6)	60(18.4)
Story telling	5(83.3)	1(16.7)	82 (25.1)	245(74.9)

Table 2: Methods Used by CRS Teachers in Teaching CRS in Mfantnsiman  
Source: Field Data, 2018

Table 2 shows that all the teachers (100%) make use of the discussion method in teaching although other methods such as the Question and Answer, Textbook reading and the Brainstorming method are also on use. With regards to the discussion method, out of the 327 students engaged in the study, 299 (91.4%) said their CRS teachers employ the discussion method while 6(100.0%) of the CRS teachers agreed to using it when teaching. The question and answer method come next as the most dominant teaching method employed by teachers in the Mfantnsiman Municipality attaining a majority of 86.5% and 100% from students' and teachers' data respectively. It was thus concluded that, the discussion method was the most dominant method of teaching employed by CRS teachers in the Mfantnsiman Municipality when teaching CRS. This finding contradicts that of Sindu (2016) and Njoku (2009) which revealed that, Christian Religious Education teachers mostly used the talk and chalk as well as the lecture method in the Bungoma County in Western Kenya and Ebonyi state in Nigeria respectively when teaching. Such a disparity in findings could be as a result of an influx of the Kenyan and Nigerian educational sector by out-of-field teachers who have no or little appreciation of religious education methodologies and as a result, resort to the use of the lecture method which is the easiest. The remaining teaching methods in terms of ranking from both students' and teachers' data in Table 2 do not agree aside role play, fieldtrip and brainstorming. An interesting finding however was that, with regards to storytelling and resource person methods used by teachers, data from students and teachers disagreed. Whereas 5(83.3%) teachers indicated they use storytelling method in teaching CRS, 245(74.9%) of the students said their teachers do not use it. Same on resource person, as 5(83.3%) of the teachers said they do not use it, 264(80.7%) of the students said their teachers use it. This disagreement could be due to students and teachers having inadequate or different appreciation of the story method and who a resource person relative to their usage in teaching. It may also be the case that, while students were being truthful, teachers decided to be economical with the truth or vice-versa.

#### 4.2. Why Do CRS Teachers in the Mfantnsiman Municipality Prefer the Teaching Method(S) They Use over Others in Teaching CRS?

This research question sought to know why CRS teachers in the Mfantnsiman Municipality preferred the teaching methods they mostly used when teaching CRS. This time, responses were sought from teachers only by asking them to answer an open-ended question. Teachers were simply asked "why do you frequently use the method rated 1 when teaching CRS topics?" The major themes in their responses were coded and analysed. Results of the analysis have been presented below in Table 3.

Teachers' Justification	No.	%
Students participation and topic understanding	3	50.0
Allows peer teaching and students participation	1	16.7
Understanding of topics by students	1	16.7
Allows student-teacher learning and students participation	1	16.7
Total	6	100.0

Table 3: Justification for Mfantnsiman Municipality CRS Teachers' Choice of Teaching Method  
Source: Field Data, 2018

In Table 2, it was concluded based on the results that, CRS teachers within the Mfantnsiman Municipality mostly use of the discussion method in teaching. In Table 3, four out of the six teachers representing 66.7% state that students' participation and understanding is the reason they use the discussion method in teaching CRS. Allowing peer teaching and facilitating student-teacher learning are also other reasons for their use of the discussion method. Therefore, students'

participation, understanding of topics, facilitation of peer learning and student-teacher learning are CRS teachers in the Mfantsiman Municipality's justification for the use of the discussion method in teaching CRS.

#### 4.3. What are CRS Students in Mfantsiman Municipality's Preferences For Method(S) Used by Their Teachers in the Delivery of CRS Lessons?

This research question was interested in finding out CRS students' in Mfantsiman Municipality's preferences for teaching methods used by the CRS teachers. Responses were sought from all the 327 CRS students. Students were asked to rank nine teaching methods in order of preference such that, assigning one to a particular teaching method meant a student preferred it to a teaching method he assigned nine. Their responses were analysed to find out the high (methods ranked 1) and low (methods ranked 9) preferences. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

Teaching Methods	High Preference N (%)	Low Preference N (%)
Lecture	5(1.5)	208(63.6)
Discussion	126(38.5)	3 (0.9)
Role play	53(16.2)	5(1.5)
Q&A	24(7.3)	3(0.9)
Textbook Reading	20(6.1)	26(8.0)
Resource Person	3(0.9)	28(8.6)
Brainstorming	26(8.0)	16(4.9)
Story telling	65(19.9)	8(2.4)
Fieldtrip	5(1.5)	30(9.2)

Table 4: Students' Preferences for Teaching Methods Used by CRS Teachers

Source: Field Data, 2018

The results from Table 4 shows that 126 (38.5 %) out of the 327 students who participated in the study rated the discussion method one, indicating high preference. It has only 3 (0.9%) students giving it a lower rating of 9 indicating the lowest in terms of their preference for the discussion method. This agrees with Mutsotso (2004) who concluded that 72.2% of CRE students in Vihiga County in Western Kenya preferred the discussion method. This is closely followed by the story telling method, which has 65 (19.9%) students rating it one and 8 (2.4%) rating it nine in terms of preference. Role play comes third with 53 (16.2%) students rating it one with 5 (1.5%) students rating it nine. Table 4 further shows that CRS students within the location of the study have a strong dislike for the lecture method as 208 (63.6%) students rated it nine, indicating a strong dislike in terms of preference. Therefore, the discussion method is the teaching method preferred by CRS students in the Mfantsiman Municipality.

#### 4.4. What are the Reasons for Students' Preferences for Teaching Methods Used in Teaching CRS by CRS Teachers in the Mfantsiman Municipality?

The last research question was to find out the reasons CRS students had for their preference for the teaching methods used by the teachers when teaching CRS in the Mfantsiman Municipality. Again, only students were asked to respond to an open-ended question in the students' questionnaire. The major themes in their responses were coded and analysed. Table 5 presents the results of the analysis.

Teaching Method	Students' Justification	%
Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allows peer teaching</li> <li>Facts are easily recalled</li> <li>Lessons are easily understood</li> <li>Makes class lively</li> <li>Teacher is able to clarify students' comments</li> </ul>	126(38.5)
Lecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lessons are not interrupted</li> <li>Lessons are easily understood</li> </ul>	5(1.5)
Brainstorming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning is made easy</li> <li>Lessons are easily understood</li> </ul>	26(8.0)
Fieldtrip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allows for verification</li> <li>Stress reduction</li> <li>Learning is made easy</li> </ul>	5(1.5)
Textbook Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Easy comprehension of lesson</li> <li>Creation of mental images</li> </ul>	20(6.1)
Role play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creation of mental images</li> <li>Learning is made fun</li> <li>Facts are easily recalled</li> <li>Lessons are made practical</li> </ul>	53 (16.2)

Teaching Method	Students' Justification	%
Story Telling	Moral lessons are easily derived Facts are easily recalled Allows high student concentration	65(19.9)
Resource Person	Clarification of facts Easy comprehension of lesson	3(0.9)
Q&A	Facts are easily recalled Broadening of knowledge Lesson easily understood	24 (7.3)
Total		327(100.0)

*Table 5: Justification for Mfantisman Municipality CRS Students' Preference for CRS Teaching Methods  
Source: Field Data, 2018*

The results in Table 5 show that 126 (38.5%) students cite easy understanding of lesson, recall of lesson facts, class being lively and teacher being able to clarify students' comments as justification for their preference of the discussion method. Therefore, understanding of lesson, recall of lesson facts, class being lively and teacher being able to clarify students' comments are the reasons CRS students in the Mfantisman Municipality prefer the discussion method when employed by their CRS teachers in teaching CRS.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions can be drawn from the findings of the study. Although CRS teachers employ a lot of methods in teaching CRS, the discussion method was found to be the most dominant method used by CRS teachers in the Mfantisman Municipality in teaching CRS, because it allowed for students' participation, peer and student-teacher learning and made students understand CRS lessons better. Furthermore, CRS students in the Mfantisman Municipality prefer that their teachers use the discussion method when teaching CRS because, it made the CRS lessons lively, helped them understand lessons, recalled facts easily and gave their teachers the opportunity to respond to their comments. Finally, the use of the lecture method is rarely used by CRS teachers in the Mfantisman Municipality when teaching.

It is recommended, based on the findings that, government agencies responsible for the training of teachers should empower CRS teachers to be able to use other teaching methods suggested by the CRS syllabus and not rely solely on the discussion method when teaching CRS. Also, since some teaching methods require resources for its proper usage, adequate resources should be made available by the Ghana Education Service and Ministry of Education to facilitate the usage of methods such as field trips, role play among others. Finally, to ensure that students' preferences are met with regards to the teaching methods employed by their teachers when teaching, students should be allowed to access their teachers periodically. When it is realized that students' pedagogical preferences are not being met, adequate measures should be taken by authorities to address this problem. This study limited itself to CRS teachers and students in second-cycle institutions. Another study of this nature could be carried out in first-cycle institutions in other parts of the country among RME teachers and students. Also, studies could be conducted on why CRS teachers do not employ other teaching methods suggested by the CRS syllabus when teaching CRS.

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