

## **Innovative Pedagogical Approaches in Religious Education: Panacea to Moral Decadence among Nigerian Youths in Post Covid-19 Pandemic**

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### **Abstract**

God made man higher than the lower animals, creating him in his own image and likeness, “**imago dei**,” and endowed him with intellect and will, thus making him the apex of all creation, yet man has from the origin exhibited instances of character deficiency. It has always been a constant and consistent rising and falling, wittingly or unwittingly, irrespective of the age. There is no time that man is totally free from one moral shortcoming or the other. This moral inadequacy is more prevalent among the youths. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in December 2019 unprognosticated. It landed suddenly, taking everyone, every country unawares. Actually, it left a lot of bad memories on its trail. The writer aims to restore moral standard which had been wobbling, even before the Covid-19 through Religious Education. Although traditionally, religious education has been on-going for years, he is strongly persuaded that the twenty first century religious education should adopt Innovative Pedagogical Approaches in tackling youths’ problems, especially as modern technology has influenced them adversely. Innovative Pedagogical Approaches as a medium in teaching religious education is geared to combat moral decadence among the Nigerian Youths. It is envisaged that this method will engender anew awakening for people to embrace Religious Knowledge and its practice, with greater seriousness and commitment. Sincerely, it is only aggressive Religious Education that has the capacity to help man answer these three-pronged constantly vexing and existential questions: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?

**Keywords:** Innovative pedagogy, Religious Education, moral decadence, youth

### **Introduction**

Youths are said to be the leaders of tomorrow. It follows that if the youths are well brought-up through sound religious and moral principles along with good parental tutelage, the society will be good, but if on the other hand, they are not well brought-up, the society will be worse off for it. At the end of the Nigeria/Biafra war, the government of Ukpabi Asika, came up with the obnoxious policy by which the government of Eastern Region of Nigeria forcefully took over all the Voluntary Agency-built and administered schools. Most of these were owned by the Roman

Catholic Mission. Their ‘Saints’ names were removed and replaced with “High School,” “Central School,” “Community School,” etc. Teaching of Religion, History and Christian moral lessons were dropped. George (2018), reported that focusing not on monetary gains but on their goal which was to win converts, the missionaries made sacrifices to fund the schools. The forceful take-over of schools by the military junta from the original owners disrupted the system. Soon after, indiscipline, low moral standard and poor quality of education set in. That was when work ethics and morality among teachers went to the wind. The Guardian, Nigeria, anchored by Muyiwa (2020) disclosed that Government takeover of schools was the biggest mistake in Nigeria. The problems are still with us today. Other resultant effects were the collapse of schools’ infrastructure, and all other structures, unimaginable crime wave and other aspects of atrocities and wantonness among students and pupils.

In December 2019 there emerged the novel COVID-19 pandemic. Almost at the same time, it started devastating, pounding and mercilessly decimating humanity, as one country or the other experienced its impact with greater or less intensity. Daily reports of fatalities were announced in tens, hundreds and even thousands. Peng (2020), divulged that by 12 June 2020, over 7.5 million confirmed cases of Corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) with more than 421,000 deaths in the world have been reported to the WHO. On account of this development, people were gripped with uncanny anxiety and apprehension. Life seemed to have come to a stand-still: schools were closed, churches resorted to virtual services, sporting activities halted, offices ceiled, big gatherings and all flights went to the cooler, open markets, however, if not for their daily sustenance would have been stopped, etc., Face masks instantly emerged and became mandatory for all outings and gatherings.

This nightmare and life-threatening scourge lasted about two years. David & Michael (2022), initially reported the Covid-19 to the WHO on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. It brought a lot of set-back to so many things.

Some people got used to abandoning already cultivated life-abiding habits, while others cultivated the impression that a number of things were no longer necessary. According to Oguntayo (2020),

the lockdown did not just affect Nigeria. Around the world, it resulted in the closure of several offices, enterprises, movie theatres, viewing areas, stadiums, and places of worship. It also had a significant impact on a number of other aspects, particularly how people congregate for gatherings and events. The 'new normal' has become the norm for most people, and online meetings are one example of this. However, since churches in Nigeria reopened two months after they had been closed in an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19 in the nation, there has been a significant impact on how people regard church services and a decrease in the number of people attending physical services. Religion is so crucial to a man's existence that it cannot be dismissed lightly.

### **Role of Informal Education**

Informal education begins from the cradle and continues even to the grave. It is called informal because it occurs, outside the four walls of the classroom, in the child's home and outside school environment. This education encompasses all the ethos of instruction, upbringing and imparting of knowledge, as soon as the child starts to exhibit maturational readiness to learn. This has to do with the acquisition of various behavioural patterns, and skills, as time goes on, in the area of interpersonal relationship, how to relate with parents, siblings, elders, outsiders and strangers. It is the primary onus of the nuclear family to educate their child, then comes the extended family. Lorenzo (2023), in *Divini Illius Magistri* of Pope Pius XI (1963), emphasizes the rights of parents to direct the education of their children without hindrance from the state. It is their duty to realize that this onerous responsibility, with its high expectations, rests squarely on their shoulders. Nevertheless, Heckman (2011), explains that Informal learning can come from a licensed teacher if they teach you something outside of the curriculum, but under informal education, anyone can be a teacher regardless of credentials or whether or not they have a teaching license. In fact, it's most likely that your first informal teachers are your parents and the people you lived with growing up. Zhonglu and Zegi, (2018), stressed that education is the basic mechanism for enhancing the population quality of a nation, and education during childhood is the foundation for the formation of human labour-force quality. Childhood education not only affects the achievement and

happiness at the individual level, but also shapes the labour force quality and capacity of innovation to determine the potentiality of the development of a nation.

Parents must, therefore, take total and unequivocal responsibility over their children's up-bringing. They cannot abdicate this role to their maids, or house-helpers, without enormous regrettable consequences, since the latter's role is only ancillary. The book of Sirach admonishes fathers, in particular thus, "Have you children? Educate them and teach them to obey from their childhood. Have you any daughters? Guard their virginity and do not be indulgent towards them." (Sirach: 7; 23-24)

Parents should not be oblivious of the fact that their children are always watching them. During this critical and impressionable stage children learn fast, and virtually all information they capture sticks. Consequently, a child can either be well formed or badly formed. Hence the daily example cannot be ignored. It speaks louder than words. The Igbo proverb, "*nne ewu na-ata agbala, umu ya ana ele ya anya n'onu,*" is very apt here. If parents and in fact, guardians and those who have younger ones under their tutelage, know how much their behaviour impacts on their subordinates, especially those in their plastic age, they will be much more careful of what they do or say. The worst would be any form of scandal. On this Christ Himself said, "Obstacles are sure to come, but alas for the one who provides them! It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with millstone put round his neck than that he should lead astray a single one of these little ones." (Luke, 17:1-2)

Parents, on the other hand, should see the school, whether nursery, primary or secondary or even tertiary, as a major helper in this education process and appreciate the contributions of teachers. The following is what Lorenzo (2020), citing Pope Pius XI's (1963) teaching in the encyclical "Divini Illius Magistri," has to say. "Good teachers who are thoroughly prepared and well-grounded in the subject they have to teach, who possess the intellectual and moral qualifications required by their important office, who cherish a pure and holy love for the youths confided in them because they love Jesus Christ and His Church, are the result of perfect schools, not so much of good methods as of good teachers,"

### **Reports on Moral Decadence**

Nigeria's moral decline or decadence has long been a source of worry and concern for many people. The amount of moral decay in Nigeria, according to Nwodo (2016), is unsettling and distorts plans, policies, and procedures for moral education in all its manifestations. The degradation of the human person caused by this distortion is reflected in socioeconomic vices including kidnapping, armed robbery, rape, incest, cultism, touting, and cybercrimes.

Other examples of moral rot include acts of disobedience to parents, elders, and established authority, insubordination, sloth, idle chatter, neglect of responsibility, ritual murder, child trafficking, evident deterioration, and all corruption's obvious effects that appear to defy resolution. Nwodo (2016) observes once more that there are frequently media reports of ethno-religious disputes, exam leaks, student unrest, secret cults, sexual abuse, credential forgery, drug usage, and other instances of indiscipline across the nation. Observations show that a significant portion of today's youth are terrible, not only as a result of the adverse influences of society but also because certain homes have failed to fulfill their primary obligations of instilling socio-cultural values in the afflicted youth. Sexual harassment, which has been extensively reported as a threat to academic success, appears to have been caused by moral decay as it affects a new culture of nudity among females. According to Ugoagu (2017), moral decadence presents itself through prostitution and other types of sexual abuse, along with the accompanying diseases like AIDS and the HIV virus.

The mothers and the Catholic Women Organization have severally expressed their vexation and annoyance with regard to the culture of immodest dressing among girls in the secondary schools and campuses. One adage says, "Dress the way you wish to be addressed." "Osun Defender" (2017) states that immodest dressing simply means an act of exposing oneself to the public and dressing inappropriately in a way that does not comply the values and culture of the society particularly in Africa. Many have complained of nudity, rampant sex abuse, abortions, use of drugs and alcohol, teenage pregnancy, prostitution, and all form of aberrant life style among the youths. The Guardian (2022); cautions that given their involvement in hard drug usage, Nigerian adolescents' current

health state is depressing and concerning. In Nigeria, more than 11% of young people use hard drugs like Syrup, tramadol, diazepam, cocaine, Shisha mix, and "mkpurummiri," among others. Ujummadu, (2021) explains that mkpurummiri is a crystal narcotic hallucinogen that is capable of destroying a person mentally. It is estimated that 75 percent of the users in our society are adversely affected. And they have become a burden to their families and communities. Marwa (2022), in Daily Trust said in Benin Edo State Capital that one out of four drug users in Nigeria are a female. Cases of this moral decadence among our youths are legion. The negative effects of biting poverty, has gradually diminished parental supervision.

Parents are ever busy nowadays, coupled with greed and unbridled pursuit for material acquisition, they spend very little time with their children at home. It gives rise to armed robbery, cultism, 419, prostitution, abortion, child trafficking and abuse. Obiano (2016) asserts that as a result of this process, parents and guardians leave the house early in quest of resources for survival and return home exhausted, abdicating their duties to strangers and modern technology. The end consequence is negative habits picked up via media including television, movies, video games, cell phones, the internet, and social media. These manifest as inappropriate clothing, a permissive lifestyle, crazy parties, and drug misuse. Some are very scandalous in their life style, ungodly, irreligious, dishonest, irresponsible, drunkards, lazy, jobless or unemployable, and have no good example for their children to emulate. On the other hand, everyone is aware that the rate of corruption, in all its ramifications has reached alarming proportions. In fact, it has gone nuclear. And the youths are the product of the society.

### **Role of Moral and Religious Education**

If one is not a good Christian, or a good Muslim, or a good Traditionalist, etc., then one cannot be a good citizen. This is because the tenets of these religions have one basic thing in common, integrity of life. There is no separate teaching, or education to prepare one for being a good citizen, it is the same education or teaching for being a good person. According to Adebisi (2018), moral education is "helping children acquire those virtues or moral habits that will enable them individually, live good lives and at the same time become productive, contributive members of their communities." Morality, according to Nwachukwu (2017), has to do with a person's attitude

or behaviour, as explained by Onyekwere, (2018). A person's attitude might be developed on a personal, professional, structural, or cultural level. Deeply ingrained and long-standing human perceptions, values, beliefs, lifestyles, cultural practices, and religious beliefs may be easily and tenaciously translated into attitudes that may either advance or obstruct the moral evolution of society. If people evade these various attributes in their different religious affiliations, then they lack the necessary ingredients that are essential prerequisites for good citizenship. It is a fact the man and society exercise reciprocal influence on each other. That is to say that man makes the society and the society make man.

Moral and religious education plays a very vital role in instilling in individuals highly coveted and enviable eternal values. And it is difficult to separate morality from Religion, hence moral and religious education go hand-in-hand. On the basis of recent studies, progress has been achieved in getting a deeper understanding of moral education. In the words of Nwodo (2016), "moral education is a process by which principles of right and wrong are being instilled in the child/individual." It illustrates how educational theory and practice have moral elements. Hence one meets a lot of the so-called highly educated people who unfortunately lack sound education. These people are merely literate, but not really educated. Sound education is holistic. It is integral. Sound education permeates and encompasses the totality of the human person. Sound education manifests itself in gentility and qualitative and noble character repertoire. It is this type of education that in fact, prepares man for real life. Hence literacy alone is not necessarily education. Christ tells us, "By their fruits you will know them." Such social vices and negative behaviours as: tribalism, racism, religious bigotry, theft, ethnicism, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, human trafficking, ritual murder, kidnapping, dishonesty, unbridled greed, unreliability, etc., often orchestrated by arrogance and money-bag, betray individuals with very poor educational background. Encountering such persons evokes pity, and in fact, seems to give the impression that their case is pathological.

Children are growing up with the world at their fingertips, with limitless information and opportunities just a few clicks away, in the absence of parental oversight and communication. More than ever, people are prepared to get what they want when they want it. According to Staff

Writer (2020), this unrestrained feature of their technological endeavours is unavoidably formative because it teaches kids to live on excess, which is the fundamental cause of moral degradation. Still emphasizing the duty of parents and the government to be more serious about proper education and mentoring of the teenagers, According to Lawal (2022), experts emphasised that the government should not be left out as one of the perpetrators, despite the fact that moral decadence among adolescents has been mostly placed on parents' proper raising of their children and the media for airing some critical scenes capable of poisoning innocent minds.

Once the society is infected with moral decadence it suffers from systemic decay. Moral decadence is a cankerworm in the society. It is this moral decadence that the religious education has come to fight through the innovative pedagogical approach. While religion takes care of the spiritual side of man, helping him to find relevance in life, morality avails him of the categories of right judgment –good must be done, evil must be avoided. In this regard, Lorenzo (2020), in Pope Pius XI's *Divini Illius Magistri* (1963), asserts that there is no ideal education that is not Christian education.

### **Innovative Pedagogical Approaches in Religious Education**

Innovative pedagogical approach in modern education is highly important. Its advantages outweigh its disadvantage, if any. According to Istance (2019), this innovation is essential and must integrate seamlessly with the pedagogies used in classrooms and schools all over the world. It is crucial to promote pedagogical knowledge since it is at the heart of teacher professionalism. However, given the lack of accepted definitions and the sheer quantity and dynamism of the relationships involved, patterns of pedagogical practice at a system level (let alone internationally) are extremely difficult to comprehend. Yet, it is so important that it cannot be left as a “black box” hidden behind classroom doors. Pushpita, (2021) maintains that, Pedagogy of the twentieth century differs from the pedagogy of the twenty-first century in drastic ways. From rote learning to learner centered-approaches, from theoretical knowledge to practical hands-on experiences, from teacher oriented to student oriented, from memorization to innovation, we have come a long way. The new century led to substantial changes in teaching methods and didactics. Still on this, Carlos (2021), in Paolo Freire's(1979), *Education for Critical Consciousness* criticized the old system of

education terming it, “banking system of education,” whereby the student merely gives back exactly what has been deposited in him, without any skill, or positive impact in his life’s condition. Towards this, he advocated critical pedagogy. According to Grady (2010), the main goal of this study, "Researching Religious Education Pedagogy through an Action," has been to pinpoint certain groups or families of cutting-edge pedagogical techniques while avoiding becoming lost in the plethora of various teaching strategies. The paper outlines six techniques that fall somewhere in the middle of the theoretical spectrum between general ideas like inclusivity or cultural relevance and particular instructional strategies.

He enunciated the following first five Pedagogical Approaches in Teaching as:

1. Constructivism – or the Constructive Approach
2. Collaborative Approach
3. Inquiry Based Approach
4. Integrative Approach
5. Reflective Approach

In addition to the foregoing five variables, the writer introduced the following two, for more comprehensive treatment.

6. E-learning Approach
7. Youth Crime-Watch Approach

**Constructivism or constructivist approach:** The teacher arranges students to teach each other in pairs. It is required of the pupils to independently come up with compelling queries. Constructivism (2020) is founded on the premise that people actively create or make their own knowledge and that reality is determined by your experience as a learner, according to Staff Writer (2020). In religion there may be certain questions, which by nature, are sometimes inhibitive, that is, people do not feel comfortable asking them, especially in public; here, students should feel free to ask such questions. Such questions should not be regarded as a no-go area, and each student should attempt to answer those questions one after another, ensuring that teaching and learning are interactive and student centred in nature. If there are areas where students’ answers do not

correspond to the Church's stand, especially in matters of doctrine, the teacher to be actively participatory in the teaching/learning experience.

**Collaborative approach:** On cooperative teaching/learning, students work together on activities or learning tasks in a group small enough to ensure that everyone is involved. Here, Staff Writer (2022), states that Collaborative teaching, also known as team teaching, is a specific approach to classroom instruction. In it, two teachers work with a single a single class of students at the same time. There are many models to team teaching, including station teaching and paralleling teaching, and, used effectively, each can meet the needs of different groups of learners. Students/pupils in this group may work on separate tasks contributing to a general common result, or may work together towards the achievement of a task shared by all. They can organize group discussions or debates on certain topics of interest. The topics here should be in the area of religion, and should be existential, that is touching things that affect authentic religious practice in the society. In each case students should work together for the benefit of all.

**Inquiry-based approach:** In this case teaching and learning based on inquiry method is an approach that enables students to build their knowledge and understanding through research and exploratory activities focusing on already acquired knowledge. According to Shanmugavelu (2020), inquiry-based learning is a student-centred teaching strategy that motivates students to research actual issues and pose questions. Students actively participate in the learning process in this kind of learning environment. This inquiry method demands higher-order thinking skills and critical thinking before arriving at conclusions. Teachers should make effort to acquaint themselves of the Church's latest teachings in areas such as the social teachings. It will help the teacher to widen the students' scope in those fields. They do not jump into conclusions without serious mental exercise.

**Integrative approach:** A more sophisticated or complex level of learning is possible when using an integrated approach to teaching and learning, in which the teacher empowers the student to combine prior knowledge and experiences to support new knowledge and experiences. Integrative learning, as defined by Jim (2022), is a method in which the learner combines existing information

and experiences to support new knowledge and experiences. By doing this, students build on their prior knowledge and apply it to more complicated new situations. This theory contends that when students take ownership of their education, they develop critical thinking skills. In point of fact, those things that students learnt as pupils in the early stage about God, about man and religion, etc., should be good materials to draw from at this stage. We wanted a literacy program which would be an introduction to the democratization of culture, a program with men as its subjects rather than as patient recipients, a program which itself would be an act of creation, capable of releasing other creative acts, one in which students would develop the impatience, aggressiveness and vivacity which characterize search and invention,

**Reflective approach:** The Reflective approach, gives the teacher the opportunity to do a type of introspection and thereby enable him/her to embark on reflective examination on his/her beliefs about teaching and learning to ensure that he/she has the proper disposition to undertake teaching. Smith (2022), explained that if you feel that your teaching is becoming a bit stale or you're unsure of a lesson's effectiveness, reflective teaching is the best way to regain your confidence and interest in education. Reflective teaching is teacher's practice of thinking, writing, and/or speaking about their lessons and their teaching methods and approaches. This is because, in as much as teaching is a profession, it is more of a vocation especially as this topic involves the teaching of Religion. Reflective practice is usually considered a form of cyclical and systematic enquiry where teachers carefully collect evidence about their teaching practice in order to analyze, interpret, and evaluate their experiment with the intention to improve their future teaching (Ponsawan & Sumalee, 2021).

There should be sufficient manifestation of empathy, on the part of the teacher borne out of morality. If morality does not propel what the teacher does, it will lack the prerequisite ingredients of empathy and compassion. Teachers are supposed to have the passion for the job. It is this frame of mind or attitude that is most desirable in teaching. It is this objective and critical thinking about their teaching, both before and after that produces realistic evidence of effective teaching. Because of its urgency and topical nature, the writer wants to explore the positive impact of E-learning approach in this regard. Equally considered important is the Youth Crime Watch. These two variables will be considered later.

**E-learning approach:** E-learning, a fascinating innovation has proved to be the best and very convenient means to impart knowledge. It appears to gather momentum during the novel Covid-19 pandemic which grounded practically every outdoor activity. The writer feels that e-learning should be employed in moral and religious education. Sunil (2017), maintains that schools which use E-learning technologies are a step ahead of those which still have the traditional approach towards learning. Teachers and lecturers nowadays should acquaint themselves with the knowledge of this modern technology. However, the concept of non-electronic teaching with the help of books and lectures should not be abandoned or taken lightly.

**Youth Crime Watch approach:** Youth Crime Watch of Nigeria is a youth-led organization with Special Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council. Its mission is to foster an environment free from crime, drugs, and violence that is suitable for learning and living. Youth Crime Watch of Nigeria is a positive organization that makes our schools and neighbourhoods a better place to live.

The Youth Crime Watch's mission is to eradicate all sorts of criminal behaviour and all forms of deviant behaviour from society. Members work together to guarantee that crimes are eliminated so that the environment is tranquil for everyone. Staff Writer (2022) asserted that the rise in crime over the past 10 years as a result of the country's continuing economic crisis and moral decline has necessitated a very urgent need to reverse the unfavourable trend.

The author claims that the program's participants will gain the most from it because it will aid in the development of the virtues of self-control, integrity, hard work, friendliness, purpose, and total faith in God. Numerous innocent people lost their lives during armed robberies, burglaries, and rapes during this time as a result of the rising incidences of robbery combined with victim rape. In response to the high rate of crime in schools and communities, inappropriate clothing that can lead to rape, risky driving among young people, militancy, kidnapping, and hostage-taking in the Niger-Delta, and a cycle of retaliatory violence throughout the entire Federation, Youth Crime Watch of Nigeria was established on October 7, 2002. To ensure that everyone can study and teach in a secured environment

## **Conclusion**

Teachers of Religion, must as a matter of urgency, adopt the Innovative Pedagogical approaches in teaching religion, if the society must survive. Though the novel Covid-19 pandemic had dealt with the populace adversely, yet it has some advantage. An old adage says: ***“it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good.”*** The Covid-19 has therefore, exposed teachers and learners to various ramifications of internet learning such as online learning, virtual classroom learning, zoom learning, e-learning, etc. The traditional methods were replaced by e-learning. Am (2022). When it becomes necessary, the teacher can adopt any of these methods to ensure that teaching and learning of religion is sustained. He can also use the Blended learning whereby he combines digital learning tools with more traditional classroom face to face teaching. The teacher can equally organize children/students to form constructive, collaborative groups. This method was developed by great psychologists whereby groups were formed to discuss and share ideas together. Even though Religion is about doctrines and tenets, yet teachers of religion should apply their creativity to improve on their methods without watering down the doctrines. It is also necessary for parents, teachers, and guardians to be good and exemplary mentors to their youngsters in this modern technology-propelled and highly sexualized world.

Education has to be child/student centred. Children like to play, and they learn a lot through playing together. Therefore, those who teach catechism in the various parish churches, or Sunday-school should make use of stories, plays, films, dramas, projectors, etc. Religious education with its practice is not just about passing examinations with excellent grades, or acquiring big certificates, but about the consciousness of the linkage between man and man, and with God at its apex. but with injecting in it such innovative, pedagogical and creative skills, creative thinking, analytical skills, problem solving skills, and facilitation skills, students will be more likely to imbibe the message, and become much better, sincere, balanced, well-adjusted citizens and committed Christians, not just while they are in school, but as citizens.

This expectation should be seen in peoples ‘daily occupations: in the way they handle their families, money, civic responsibilities, commerce, politics, positions of power, etc., bearing in mind those beautiful admonitions from the divine Master: “It is not those who say to me, “Lord,

Lord”; who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matt: 7;21). Again, in (Matt.10:32, and (Luke 12: 8), He says, “So if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of men, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of men, I will disown him in the presence of my Father in heaven.”

### **Recommendation**

The writers of this article highly recommend it to parents who are the first teachers of their children, especially through precepts and the daily examples, to the priests and pastors, as mentors and instructors of growing-up children, to teachers in the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, pupils, and all categories of students and the youths as well

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