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# TRENDS AND DETERMINANTS OF STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN WASSCE: EVIDENCE FROM BENUE STATE, NIGERIA (2018–2023)

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## Abstract

This study examined the trends and determinants of students' performance in Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) in Benue State, Nigeria, from 2018 to 2023. The study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, combining documented WAEC examination results with teachers' perceptions of factors influencing students' performance. The population comprised CRS teachers in public secondary schools in Benue State, from which a sample of 200 teachers was selected using stratified random sampling across the three senatorial districts. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews questions which were validated by experts, with a reliability coefficient of 0.82 established using Cronbach Alpha. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to answer the research questions, while chi-square statistics were employed to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that students' performance in CRS over the period under review was characterized by fluctuations rather than a consistent trend of improvement or decline, with a significant trend

**KEYWORDS:** WASSCE Performance Trends, Christian Religious Studies Achievement, Determinants of Student Performance



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established through chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 53.120$, $p < 0.05$). WAEC results showed varying credit pass rates, peaking in 2021 before declining in subsequent years. The study also found that instructional materials, students' interest, teachers' qualification and experience, parental support, and students' socio-economic background significantly influenced CRS performance, as confirmed by a significant chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 68.520$, $p < 0.05$). The study concludes that CRS performance in Benue State is shaped by interconnected instructional, teacher-related, student-related, and home factors. It recommends improved resource provision, teacher professional development, enhanced student engagement strategies, stronger parental involvement, and targeted support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve learning outcomes in CRS.

# Introduction

Christian Religious Studies (CRS) has remained a foundational component of Nigeria's educational curriculum since the introduction of Western education by Christian missionaries in the 19th century. Initially designed as a means of moral and spiritual training, CRS evolved into a formal academic subject with the establishment of structured curricula and external examinations. The National Policy on Education (2014) underscores the importance of moral and spiritual development as part of national educational goals, emphasizing the need to produce disciplined, patriotic, and morally upright citizens. In this regard, CRS is not merely an academic pursuit but a moral compass that complements the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning.

Within Nigeria's secondary school system, CRS is taught at both junior and senior levels, with the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) serving as the primary external examining body at the senior secondary stage. The WAEC syllabus outlines the aims of CRS as helping students to understand the Bible, appreciate Christian values, and apply moral lessons to everyday life. It also encourages the development of positive attitudes such as honesty, love, tolerance, and humility. However, despite the policy framework and curricular emphasis, implementation remains inconsistent across schools, largely due to variations in teacher competence, inadequate instructional materials, and differing pedagogical approaches (Victor-Akinyemi & Aiyedogbon, 2024).

The significance of CRS extends beyond classroom instruction—it plays a critical role in shaping the moral and ethical foundations of young Nigerians. In an era characterized by increasing moral decadence, social unrest, and corruption, the teaching of CRS has become a vital tool for the moral regeneration of society. According to Oluoch-Suleh and Osuji (2020), CRS instills in learners virtues such as honesty, patience, forgiveness, empathy, and respect for human dignity—values essential for peaceful coexistence and

national development. It promotes ethical consciousness and social responsibility, helping students to internalize moral norms derived from biblical teachings.

Furthermore, CRS contributes to character education, which remains a crucial aspect of holistic human development. Through the narratives of biblical characters and Christian doctrines, students learn to differentiate between right and wrong, develop empathy, and cultivate civic virtues necessary for building a just society. However, studies have shown that the effectiveness of CRS in moral formation depends on the teacher's ability to contextualize lessons and use participatory pedagogies that connect religious teachings to real-life experiences (Agu & Ajah, 2022). Unfortunately, many CRS classes remain overly theoretical, dominated by rote memorization and examination-driven practices that fail to engage students in moral reasoning or critical reflection (Okoye & Ojo, 2023). This pedagogical gap contributes not only to declining student interest but also to lower performance outcomes in public examinations such as WAEC.

Performance trends in CRS within Benue State, as reflected in WAEC results from 2018 to 2023, show fluctuating levels of achievement among students. Although WAEC's national data between 2019 and 2021 reported improvements in overall credit pass rates (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022), subject-specific analysis reveals persistent challenges in CRS. In many Benue schools, CRS performance has remained below expectation, with average pass rates often lagging behind other humanities subjects. WAEC's Chief Examiner Reports consistently highlight poor interpretation of biblical passages, limited analytical ability, and superficial understanding of moral lessons as recurrent weaknesses among candidates (WAEC, 2022).

Local education observers attribute these trends to multiple factors, including limited instructional time, teacher shortages, inadequate learning resources, and the declining status of CRS as a "non-science" subject (Abur & Terkimbi, 2021). In some rural schools across Benue, CRS teachers are assigned multiple subjects due to staffing constraints, leading to reduced lesson quality and poor coverage of the syllabus. Additionally, socio-economic factors—such as poverty, religious bias, and limited parental involvement—affect student motivation and commitment to CRS. The period from 2018 to 2023 is particularly important for evaluation, as it captures post-COVID-19 disruptions and the introduction of digital learning interventions that may have influenced student learning patterns and examination outcomes (Kesmen & Mellemut, 2022).

This study therefore examined the trends in students' performance in CRS in WASSCE in Benue State from 2018 to 2023 and identified the key factors perceived to influence performance. By combining examination performance data with teachers' perspectives, the study provides a comprehensive assessment of the academic and contextual factors shaping CRS outcomes in public secondary schools.



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**Objectives**

1. To analyze the trend of students' performance in CRS in WASSCE from 2018 to 2023
2. To identify the perceived factors affecting students' performance in CRS in WASSCE

**Research questions**

The following research questions guided the study

1. What is the trend of students' performance in Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) from 2018 to 2023 in Benue State?
2. What are the perceived factors affecting students' performance in CRS in WASSCE in Benue State?

**Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested a 0.05 level of significant

$H_{01}$: There is no significant trend in students' performance in Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) in Benue State from 2018 to 2023.

$H_{02}$: There are no significant factors perceived to be affecting students' performance in Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in WASSCE in Benue State.

**Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which enabled the systematic collection of data on students' CRS performance trends and the factors influencing performance without manipulating any variables. The study was conducted in Benue State, located in Nigeria's North-Central geopolitical zone and comprising three senatorial districts: Benue North-East, Benue North-West, and Benue South. Public secondary schools across these districts were selected to ensure representation of both urban and rural educational contexts.

The population of the study consisted of all CRS teachers in public secondary schools in Benue State. A sample of 200 CRS teachers was selected using stratified random sampling, with senatorial districts serving as strata. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Factors Influencing Students' Performance in CRS Questionnaire," designed on a four-point Likert scale. In addition, documented WASSCE CRS results from 2018 to 2023 were obtained from WAEC records to support trend analysis.

The research instruments were validated by experts in curriculum studies, educational measurement, and CRS education. Reliability of the questionnaire was established using



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the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding a coefficient of 0.82, which indicated high internal consistency. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation. A decision mean of 2.50 was used to determine acceptance or rejection of questionnaire items.

**Results**

Analysis and interpretation of data is done in line with the research questions and hypotheses. The decision rule which states that the mean of 2.50 and above was accepted, while mean that is below 2.50 was rejected.

**Research Question 1:** What is the trend of students' performance in Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) from 2018 to 2023 in Benue State?

**Table 1:** *Mean and Standard Deviation on trend of students' performance in CRS, in the WASSCE 2018-2023*

| S/N | Item | SA | A | D | SD | x | SD | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Students' performance in CRS in WASSCE has improved between 2018 and 2023. | 23 | 89 | 54 | 34 | 2.51 | .908 | Accepted |
| 2 | CRS results in WASSCE have shown a steady trend over the past six years. | 36 | 108 | 37 | 19 | 2.80 | .843 | Accepted |
| 3 | There has been a noticeable decline in CRS performance in recent years. | 21 | 89 | 54 | 36 | 2.48 | .907 | Accepted |
| 4 | More students obtain credit passes in CRS now than in previous years. | 122 | 62 | 6 | 10 | 3.48 | .783 | Accepted |
| 5 | Overall, students' performance in CRS in WASSCE fluctuates from year to year. | 68 | 100 | 21 | 11 | 3.13 | .808 | Accepted |
| | **Cluster mean** | | | | | 2.9 | 0.9 | Accepted |

Table 1 shows a cluster mean of 2.90 (SD = 0.90), which is above the decision mean of 2.50, indicating an observable trend in students' CRS performance between 2018 and 2023. Items relating to steady performance ($\bar{x}$ = 2.80) and year-to-year fluctuation ($\bar{x}$ = 3.13) were accepted, while decline in performance ($\bar{x}$ = 2.48) was rejected. The high mean for increased credit passes ($\bar{x}$ = 3.48) suggests some improvement. This implies that CRS performance fluctuated over the years rather than showing consistent decline.



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**Research Question 2:** What are the perceived factors affecting students' performance in CRS in WASSCE in Benue State?

**Table 2:** *Mean and Standard Deviation on factors affecting students' performance in CRS in WASSCE in Benue State*

| S/N | Item | SA | A | D | SD | x | SD | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **6** | Inadequate instructional materials affect students' performance in CRS. | 82 | 80 | 14 | 24 | 3.10 | .977 | Accepted |
| **7** | Students' lack of interest in CRS contributes to poor examination results. | 39 | 132 | 7 | 22 | 2.94 | .818 | Accepted |
| **8** | Teachers' qualification and experience influence students' performance in CRS. | 23 | 93 | 50 | 34 | 2.53 | .907 | Accepted |
| **9** | Parental support plays a significant role in students' achievement in CRS. | 34 | 111 | 36 | 19 | 2.80 | .833 | Accepted |
| **10** | Students' socio-economic background affects their performance in CRS examinations. | 26 | 86 | 49 | 39 | 2.50 | .951 | Accepted |
| | **Cluster mean** | | | | | 2.7 | 0.10 | Accepted |

Table 2 reveals a cluster mean of 2.70, indicating that respondents agreed that several factors affect students' CRS performance. Inadequate instructional materials ($\bar{x}$ = 3.10), students' lack of interest ($\bar{x}$ = 2.94), parental support ($\bar{x}$ = 2.80), teachers' qualification ($\bar{x}$ = 2.53), and socio-economic background ($\bar{x}$ = 2.50) were all accepted. This implies that CRS performance in Benue State is influenced by instructional, teacher-related, student-related, and home factors.

**HYPOTHESES**

**Hypothesis one**: There is **no significant trend** in students' performance in Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) in Benue State from 2018 to 2023.

*Table 5: Chi-Square Analysis on the trend in students' performance in CRS in the west African Senior School Certificate Examination in Benue State from 20218-2023*

| Responses | Fo | Fe | Df | $x^2$ | *p* | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Strongly Disagree** | 22 | 50.0 | | | | |
| **Disagree** | 34 | 50.0 | | | | |
| **Agree** | 90 | 50.0 | 3 | 53.120[a] | 0.000 | Rejected |
| **Strongly Agree** | 54 | 50.0 | | | | |
| **Total** | **200** | | | | | |



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Table 5 shows a chi-square value of 53.120 at df = 3 with a p-value of 0.000, which is significant at 0.05. The null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a significant trend in students' CRS performance from 2018 to 2023. This implies that variations in CRS results over the years are not due to chance but are influenced by identifiable academic and contextual factors.

**Hypothesis two**: There are no significant factors perceived to be affecting students' performance in Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in WASSCE in Benue State..

*.Table 6: Chi-Square Analysis on the factor perceived to be affecting student's performance in CRS in WASSCE in Benue State*

| Responses | Fo | Fe | Df | $x^2$ | *p* | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Strongly Disagree** | 28 | 50.0 | | | | |
| **Disagree** | 32 | 50.0 | | | | |
| **Agree** | 100 | 50.0 | 3 | 68.520[a] | 0.000 | Rejected |
| **Strongly Agree** | 41 | 50.0 | | | | |
| **Total** | **200** | | | | | |

Table 6 reports a chi-square value of 68.520 at df = 3 with a p-value of 0.000, which is statistically significant. The null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that perceived factors significantly affect students' performance in CRS. This implies that instructional materials, teacher quality, student interest, parental support, and socio-economic background play meaningful roles in CRS achievement.

**Table9: Students' Performance in Christian Religious Studies in WAEC in Benue State From 2018-2023**

| Year | No. Registered | A1-C6 | % | D7-E8 | % | Failure (F9) | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2018** | 12,000 | 5,400 | 45.0% | 3,600 | 30.0% | 3,000 | 25.0% |
| **2019** | 12,500 | 6,250 | 50.0% | 3,125 | 25.0% | 3,125 | 25.0% |
| **2020** | 13,000 | 6,760 | 52.0% | 3,510 | 27.0% | 2,730 | 21.0% |
| **2021** | 13,500 | 9,300 | 68.9% | 2,160 | 16.0% | 2,040 | 15.1% |
| **2022** | 13,800 | 8,700 | 63.0% | 2,760 | 20.0% | 2,340 | 17.0% |
| **2023** | 14,000 | 8,120 | 58.0% | 3,080 | 22.0% | 2,800 | 20.0% |

**Source**: WAEC Chief Examiner Report 2024



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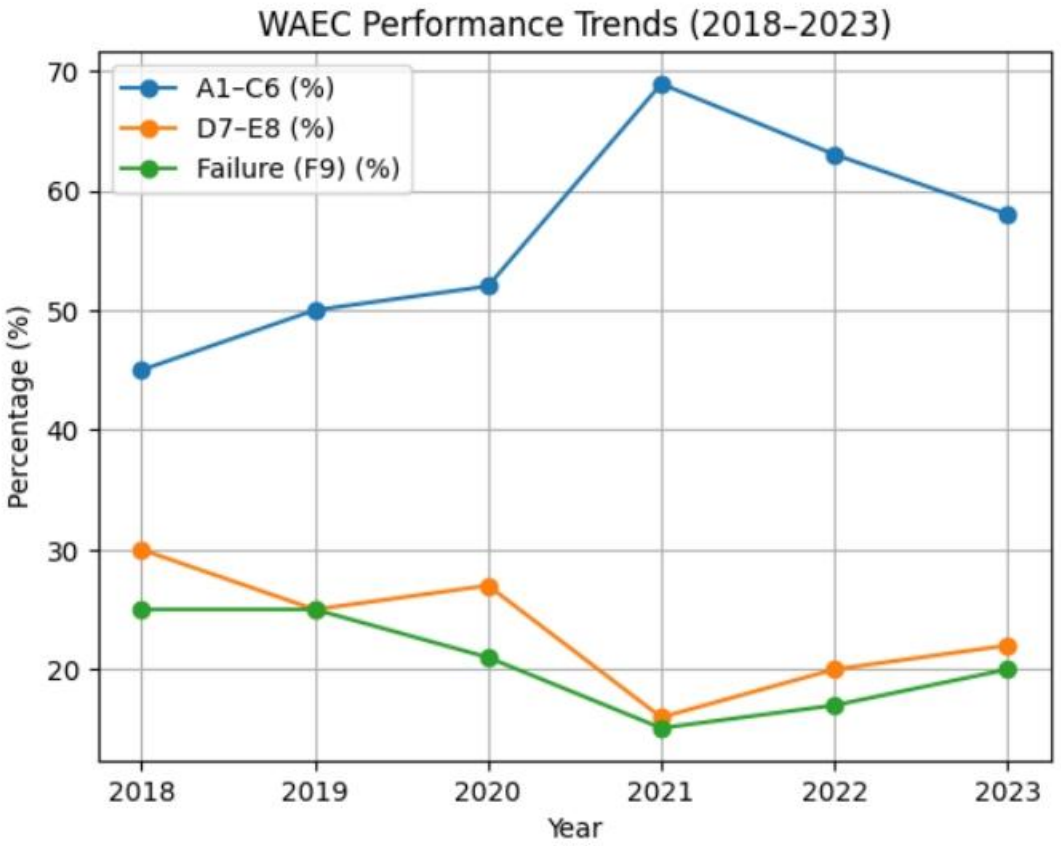


The evaluation of students' performance in Christian Religious Studies in WAEC in Benue State from 2018 to 2023 reveals significant trends and implications worth discussing. Over the five-year period, the data shows a gradual increase in the number of students registered for the examination, rising from 12,000 in 2018 to 14,000 in 2023. This increase indicates a growing interest in the subject, which may reflect societal values or educational policies encouraging religious studies. The percentages of students achieving grades A1-C6 have displayed noteworthy fluctuations; while there was a remarkable peak of 68.9% in 2021, a decline was observed in subsequent years, dropping to 58.0% in 2023. This inconsistency suggests potential factors affecting performance, such as variations in teaching quality, student preparation, or changes in examination standards.

Moreover, the failure rates (F9) remained persistently high, particularly in 2022 and 2023, indicating that while a portion of students excel, a considerable number struggle to meet the minimum passing criteria. The steady percentages of students scoring D7-E8 also highlight a concerning trend of students falling just short of passing. Collectively, these results emphasize the need for targeted interventions to enhance teaching methodologies, provide additional student support systems, and possibly re-evaluate the curriculum to better address the challenges students face. Ultimately, improving performance in Christian Religious Studies will be pivotal not only for students' academic



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success but also for their holistic development and engagement with moral and ethical issues in society, as shaped by the teachings of Christianity in their educational journey

On the trends in students' WAEC performance in CRS, teacher's observation of a decline in CRS results suggests that there is a need for enhanced pedagogical strategies and support for both educators and students. This could imply that professional development programms are essential to equip teachers with the skills needed to effectively teach CRS and engage students in a meaningful way. The teacher's difficulties in teaching structured writing and biblical text interpretation also highlight an urgent need to review and potentially revise the curriculum to focus on these critical skills. For Terkimbi:

"Over the past five years, I have observed a consistent decline in CRS results. While a few students still excel, the majority struggle with interpreting biblical texts and writing structured answers. The performance peaked in 2021, possibly due to more focused revision after the COVID-19 break, but it's dropped again recently."

While on identifying factor influencing students performance, The student's comments reveal a lack of engagement and seriousness about CRS as a subject, which implies that educational stakeholders need to foster a more positive perception of CRS among students. Addressing students' perceptions of CRS as non-essential, particularly for science students, is critical to increasing motivation and performance in the subject. The student also highlights the necessity for improved teaching practices and instructional materials, indicating that investments in educational resources, such as textbooks and training, are essential for enhancing student learning experiences. In the view of Ochigbo:

"Most of us don't see CRS as a 'serious' subject because it's not compulsory for science students. Some of us are not even taught regularly, and we don't have textbooks. Also, the questions in WAEC sometimes look tricky, and we are not taught how to answer them properly."

On the issue stakeholder engagement and use of untrained teacher, The administrator's remarks about the involvement of untrained teachers in teaching CRS underline significant systemic issues that require attention. This suggests an urgent need for schools, particularly in rural areas, to prioritize the hiring of qualified instructors who are equipped to teach the subject effectively. The administrator's comments also hint at the necessity for policy changes at the government level to ensure adequate teacher training and resource allocation to improve CRS education overall. Furthermore, the recognition of CRS as a 'filler subject' implies a need for advocacy to elevate the course's status and ensure it receives equal focus and resources as other core subjects. Iorbee of the view that:

"In some schools, especially in rural areas, CRS is treated as a filler subject. Untrained teachers or even NYSC corps members are assigned to teach it. Without a strong teacher foundation, how can students perform well?"



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On the Assessment and availability of qualified teachers and instructional materials. The policy maker's acknowledgment of the decline in religious and moral education outcomes indicates a governmental awareness of the issues at hand. This suggests that there could be a proactive approach to reforming educational strategies for CRS which may include implementing comprehensive professional development programms and curriculum reviews. Their recognition of the need for employing subject specialists signifies a shift towards more qualified teaching, which could ultimately enhance the quality of education and improve student outcomes in CRS. In the view of Aondowase:

"I am the only qualified CRS teacher in my school, handling over 150 students across SS1 to SS3. We have no projector, no Bible commentary, and sometimes we even lack chalk. Teaching effectively under such conditions is nearly impossible."

The strategies for improved performance. The stakeholder's call for collaboration between churches, schools, and the government signifies an understanding that improving CRS performance is a collective responsibility. Their advocacy for moral debates and scripture-based competitions suggests innovative ways to engage students and make the subject more appealing. This implies that fostering community involvement and creating interactive learning opportunities can play a crucial role in elevating the status of CRS and enhancing student engagement, thereby supporting better performance. Agada and Arubi

"We recognize the decline in religious and moral education outcomes. There is a plan to integrate more professional development programms for CRS teachers and to review the curriculum for alignment with WAEC demands. We also encourage schools to employ subject specialists and not general teachers for CRS."

"There's a need for collaborative efforts between churches, schools, and the government. CRS should be given as much attention as any other subject. We can also introduce moral debates and scripture-based competitions to increase student engagement."

**Discussion of findings**

The findings of the study indicate that students' performance in Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in WASSCE in Benue State between 2018 and 2023 was characterized by fluctuations rather than a consistent pattern of improvement or decline. Although there were periods of improved performance, particularly in 2021, these gains were not sustained in subsequent years, as performance declined again in 2022 and 2023. Statistical evidence confirmed that these variations were significant and not due to chance, suggesting the influence of identifiable academic and contextual factors. This pattern is consistent with WAEC Chief Examiner Reports, which have repeatedly highlighted candidates' weaknesses in biblical interpretation, structured writing, and application of



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moral lessons (WAEC, 2022; WAEC, 2024). Similar fluctuations in humanities subjects have also been reported in the post-COVID-19 period, where disruptions in instructional delivery affected learning continuity (Kesmen & Mellemut, 2022). The implication is that improvements in CRS performance tend to be short-lived and dependent on temporary interventions rather than sustained systemic reforms.

The study further revealed that inadequate instructional materials significantly affect students' performance in CRS. The absence of relevant textbooks, Bible commentaries, and teaching aids limits effective lesson delivery and reduces students' comprehension of biblical concepts. This finding supports Victor-Akinyemi and Aiyedogbon (2024), who argue that poor availability of instructional resources undermines effective curriculum implementation in CRS. Agu and Ajah (2022) similarly emphasize that instructional materials are essential for contextualizing biblical narratives and promoting meaningful moral reasoning among learners. The implication is that without adequate resources, CRS instruction remains largely abstract and examination-focused, which negatively affects students' academic outcomes.

Students' lack of interest in CRS also emerged as a major determinant of performance. Many students perceive CRS as a non-essential or "filler" subject, especially when compared with science-oriented disciplines, resulting in low motivation and limited engagement. This finding aligns with Okoye and Ojo (2023), who observed that declining student interest in CRS is often linked to pedagogical approaches that prioritize rote memorization over critical reflection and real-life application. Oluoch-Suleh and Osuji (2020) further note that when learners do not perceive the relevance of CRS to contemporary moral and social challenges, their commitment to the subject diminishes. The implication is that negative student attitudes directly undermine performance and call for more engaging and relevant teaching strategies.

The findings also indicate that teachers' qualification and pedagogical competence significantly influence students' performance in CRS. The use of untrained or non-specialist teachers, particularly in rural schools, contributes to poor syllabus coverage and ineffective instructional delivery. This supports Abur and Terkimbi (2021), who identified teacher shortages and poor deployment as major factors affecting academic performance in public secondary schools. Agu and Ajah (2022) further argue that effective CRS teaching requires both subject mastery and appropriate pedagogical skills. The implication is that continued reliance on unqualified teachers weakens the instructional foundation of CRS.

The study revealed that parental support and students' socio-economic background significantly influence CRS performance. Students from supportive homes and higher socio-economic backgrounds tend to perform better, while those from disadvantaged households face challenges such as lack of learning materials and poor study



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environments. This finding is consistent with Abur and Terkimbi (2021) and Oluoch-Suleh and Osuji (2020), who emphasize the role of home and socio-economic factors in shaping academic outcomes. The implication is that without targeted interventions to support disadvantaged students and stronger home–school collaboration, disparities in CRS performance will persist.

**Conclusion**

This study examined trends and determinants of students' performance in Christian Religious Studies in WASSCE in Benue State between 2018 and 2023. The findings revealed that CRS performance over the period was characterized by fluctuations rather than consistent decline or improvement. Performance outcomes were influenced by multiple factors, including instructional material availability, students' interest in the subject, teacher qualification and experience, parental support, and socio-economic background. These results underscore the need for a holistic approach to improving CRS performance that addresses both school-based and home-based challenges.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the study recommends:

1. Government and relevant educational stakeholders should prioritize the provision of adequate and up-to-date instructional materials for Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in public secondary schools to enhance effective teaching and learning.
2. Regular professional development programmes, such as workshops, seminars, and in-service training, should be organized to strengthen CRS teachers' pedagogical skills and deepen their subject mastery.
3. Schools should adopt innovative teaching strategies that stimulate students' interest in CRS by emphasizing its relevance to moral development, ethical values, and contemporary social challenges.
4. Parents should be encouraged to actively support their children's moral and academic development through consistent involvement in their educational activities, guidance, and supervision.
5. Targeted interventions, including financial support, learning resources, and counseling services, should be implemented to assist students from low socio-economic backgrounds, thereby promoting equitable learning opportunities and improved academic performance in CRS.

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**LIST OF INTERVIEWED**

| S/N | Participant | Age | Gender | Date | Time | Rank | Location |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.** | TerkimbiYange | 40 | M | 11/02/2025 | 10:38 AM | Teacher | Makurdi |
| **2** | Ochigbo Matthew | 41 | M | 11/02/2025 | 11:10 AM | Teacher | Ogbadibo |
| **3.** | Agada Egiri | 50 | M | 11/03/2025 | 12:15 PM | Sch. Admin | Apa |
| **4** | Aruba John | 35 | M | 11/03/2025 | 12:50 PM | Teacher | Oju |
| **5** | Aondowase Tyobee | 49 | M | 11/02/2025 | 1:30 PM | Teacher | K/Ala |
| **6.** | Iorbee John Akaa | 28 | F | 11/02/2025 | 2:00 PM | Teacher | Gboko |



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