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# ENHANCING THE TEACHING OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES: THE SUPERVISORY ROLE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL HEADS IN BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper explored the critical role of secondary school heads in supervising and enhancing the teaching of Religious Studies (RS) in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Religious Studies, which contributes significantly to moral development, ethical reasoning, and civic education, is often marginalised in policy, pedagogy, and practice. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and clinical supervision, this study examines how secondary school principals can play a strategic role in strengthening RS instruction. The paper argues that effective supervision, grounded in collaboration, reflective practice, and teacher support, can significantly improve the quality of RS teaching and student engagement. It highlights key challenges undermining RS delivery, including the low status of the subject in the curriculum, inadequate pedagogical resources, insufficient teacher preparation, and weak supervisory structures. In particular, the neglect of RS in school-based professional development and administrative priority has deepened its marginalisation. The paper advocates for a revaluation of RS within Nigeria's secondary school curriculum and outlines practical strategies that school heads can adopt to supervise RS teachers more effectively. These include capacity building, curriculum monitoring, motivational leadership, and inclusive school policies. Overall, the paper provides actionable recommendations to enhance RS teaching through visionary and supportive educational leadership.*

**Keywords:** Religious Studies, Instructional Supervision, Educational Leadership, Secondary School Principals, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

## Introduction

Religious Studies (RS) serves as a foundational component of the Nigerian secondary school curriculum, particularly for inculcating moral values, promoting national cohesion, and fostering spiritual development among students in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic society (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2013). As a subject, RS aims not only to convey religious knowledge but also to shape attitudes and behaviours that reflect integrity, tolerance, and social responsibility. In regions such as Bayelsa State, where issues of youth delinquency, communal conflict, and moral decline are prevalent, the importance of effective RS

teaching cannot be overstated (Okonkwo, 2020; Nwagwu & Egbe, 2022).

However, the teaching of Religious Studies in many Nigerian public secondary schools remains suboptimal, often plagued by inadequate teacher preparation, poor curriculum implementation, insufficient teaching materials, and a general undervaluation of the subject compared to science and technical subjects (Adeyemi & Eze, 2020; Obasi & Amadi, 2021). These constraints are exacerbated by weak supervisory structures, particularly at the school level, where heads often lack the training or commitment to engage in meaningful instructional supervision (Fagbemi, 2023).

The role of school heads, typically referred to as principals or administrators, is critical in shaping the academic environment and ensuring effective curriculum delivery. As instructional leaders, they are positioned to influence teacher performance, promote professional development, and support pedagogical innovation (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Yusuf & Adepoju, 2023). Their supervisory role is especially significant in Religious Studies, a subject that requires contextual sensitivity, ethical grounding, and continuous teacher guidance.

Instructional supervision, when effectively conducted, goes beyond mere inspection; it involves collaborative dialogue, performance appraisal, lesson observation, and feedback mechanisms aimed at continuous improvement (Goldhammer, Anderson, & Krajewski, 1993). In the Nigerian context, where educational quality is often compromised by systemic inefficiencies and inadequate funding, the strategic intervention of principals through supervision becomes a vital instrument for enhancing subject-specific outcomes (Adebayo & Ogunyemi, 2021).

In Bayelsa State, a predominantly Christian region with high regard for spiritual values, one would expect that Religious Studies enjoys prominent attention. However, anecdotal evidence and preliminary studies suggest that RS is frequently relegated to a non-core status, thereby diminishing its instructional value and impact (Nwagwu & Egbe, 2022). This paper, therefore, seeks to explore the theoretical foundations and practical strategies through which secondary school heads can enhance the teaching of Religious Studies via purposeful supervision. By anchoring the discussion in instructional and transformational leadership theories, the paper argues that educational supervision, if effectively aligned with pedagogical goals, can elevate the quality and relevance of RS instruction in Bayelsa State secondary schools.

## Conceptual Clarification

### Religious Studies in the Nigerian Secondary School Curriculum

Religious Studies in Nigeria encompasses both Christian Religious Studies (CRS) and Islamic Religious Studies (IRS), tailored to local demographics. Its objectives include moral instruction, national integration, and the promotion of tolerance (Federal Ministry of Education, 2013).

**Supervision in Education**

Supervision refers to the systematic effort by school administrators to observe, support, and improve teaching and learning processes (Adebayo & Ogunyemi, 2021). Instructional supervision aims at ensuring the fidelity of curriculum delivery and enhancing teacher performance.

**Theoretical Framework**

Understanding the supervisory role of school heads in enhancing the teaching of Religious Studies (RS) requires an exploration of foundational theories in educational leadership and instructional supervision. This section draws on Instructional Leadership Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, and the Clinical Supervision Model. These frameworks are used to contextualise how school principals can shape classroom instruction, teacher development, and curriculum fidelity in Religious Studies.

**Instructional Leadership Theory**

Instructional Leadership Theory emphasises the central role of the school head in guiding the academic mission of the school (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). As instructional leaders, principals are expected to set clear academic goals, manage curriculum delivery, monitor teaching effectiveness, and create an environment conducive to learning (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Kelechi & Nwankwo, 2022).

This theory is especially relevant to the Nigerian educational context where the effectiveness of Religious Studies instruction often depends on the personal initiative of the school head to allocate time, resources, and training support to "non-core" subjects (Obasi & Amadi, 2021). Instructional leadership moves beyond mere administrative oversight to actively involve the principal in improving pedagogy and ensuring subject-specific outcomes (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2021).

Hallinger's model identifies three key dimensions: (1) defining the school mission, (2) managing the instructional programme, and (3) promoting a positive school learning climate (Hallinger, 2011). In Religious Studies, this would include integrating moral values into school-wide practices, ensuring teacher effectiveness in RS content delivery, and institutionalising classroom monitoring and appraisal mechanisms.

**Transformational Leadership Theory**

Transformational Leadership Theory, introduced by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1985), focuses on how leaders inspire, empower, and develop the capacities of their followers. In an educational setting, this translates to school heads motivating teachers to achieve beyond standard expectations by fostering commitment, innovation, and a shared sense of purpose (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

Transformational leaders demonstrate four main attributes: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Applied to Religious Studies supervision, this approach encourages principals to value RS as a moral and cultural tool, and to invest in the holistic development of RS teachers through mentorship, reflective teaching

practices, and ethical role modelling (Adeyemi & Eze, 2020).

This leadership style is particularly useful in Bayelsa State, where teachers may work in resource-constrained environments and require motivational leadership to remain committed to subjects like RS, which often receive less institutional priority ( Okwonkw & Adebayo, 2022).

**Clinical Supervision Model**

The Clinical Supervision Model, developed by Goldhammer, Anderson, and Krajewski (1993), offers a structured, formative approach to improving teacher performance through direct observation and collaborative feedback. The model typically follows five key steps: (1) pre-observation conference, (2) classroom observation, (3) analysis and interpretation, (4) post-observation conference, and (5) follow-up (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007).

In the context of Religious Studies, the clinical model allows principals to work closely with RS teachers, identifying specific instructional gaps and offering tailored strategies to improve delivery. This approach fosters a culture of continuous learning and reduces the perception of supervision as punitive. Rather, it becomes developmental and collegial ( Adeyemi and Ogunyemi, 2022).

Given that many RS teachers in Nigeria may lack specialised pedagogical training, especially in moral reasoning and doctrinal sensitivity, clinical supervision provides a useful mechanism for real-time feedback and instructional alignment (Okonkwo, 2020).

**Integrating the Theories: A Hybrid Supervisory Model**

While each of the above frameworks offers unique insights, the complexity of school leadership in Bayelsa State demands an integrated approach. A hybrid model combining instructional and transformational leadership with clinical supervision allows school heads to manage curriculum outcomes while also inspiring teacher commitment and providing tailored, evidence-based support.

Such an integrated model supports the holistic improvement of Religious Studies by addressing structural (e.g., resources and training), behavioural (e.g., motivation and reflection), and instructional (e.g., pedagogy and curriculum alignment) dimensions of teaching. The synergy of these theories is especially crucial in a region like Bayelsa State, where educational leadership must navigate socio-economic challenges while striving for moral, academic, and spiritual development among students.

**Challenges Facing Religious Studies Teaching in Bayelsa State**

Despite the inclusion of Religious Studies (RS) in Nigeria's secondary school curriculum, its effective teaching, especially in Bayelsa State, remains hampered by multiple interrelated challenges. These challenges range from systemic neglect and structural constraints to sociocultural perceptions and professional limitations. Understanding these barriers is essential for devising strategies to enhance RS teaching and learning.

**Low Academic Status and Policy Marginalisation**

One of the foremost challenges is the perceived low status of Religious Studies within the educational hierarchy. While the subject is expected to promote moral instruction, national unity, and religious tolerance, it is often treated as non-essential, especially when compared with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects (Nwagwu & Egbe, 2022). Education policy emphasis on economic productivity and technological advancement has inadvertently marginalised subjects like RS that are seen as "soft" or non-utilitarian (Adeyemi & Eze, 2020).

In some schools, RS is offered as an elective rather than a core subject, which affects students' willingness to take it seriously and school administrators' commitment to providing adequate instructional support (Obasi & Amadi, 2021). This policy ambiguity creates a situation where RS suffers from low enrolment, reduced timetable allocation, and inconsistent assessment practices.

**Inadequate Qualified Teachers**

The availability of qualified and specialised RS teachers remains a significant issue in Bayelsa State. Many secondary schools, particularly in rural areas, rely on teachers who may not possess formal training in religious pedagogy or doctrinal content (Okonkwo, 2020). Some teachers are deployed from related disciplines such as Social Studies or Civic Education, thereby compromising the doctrinal depth, theological accuracy, and ethical sensitivity required for RS teaching (Adeyemi and Ogunyemi, 2022).

The absence of regular in-service training, seminars, and pedagogical workshops for RS teachers further exacerbates this challenge. Without professional development opportunities, teachers often resort to outdated teaching methods and superficial content coverage, resulting in disengaged students and poor learning outcomes (Okwonkw & Adebayo, 2022).

**Shortage of Instructional Materials and Facilities**

Effective teaching of RS relies heavily on access to instructional materials such as textbooks, religious scriptures, visual aids, and audio-visual resources. However, in many secondary schools in Bayelsa State, these materials are either unavailable or outdated (Adeyemi & Eze, 2020). Where such resources exist, they are often insufficient in number or not contextualised to the cultural and religious realities of the learners.

Furthermore, some schools lack dedicated classrooms or spiritual education spaces conducive to the sensitive and reflective nature of RS. The absence of such an environment hampers the experiential and dialogic aspects of religious education, which are essential for moral reasoning and value clarification.

**Cultural and Denominational Biases**

In a state with a dominant Christian population but denominational diversity (e.g., Catholic, Pentecostal, Anglican),

Religious Studies teachers may consciously or unconsciously promote specific doctrinal views that alienate students from other backgrounds. This tendency undermines the inclusive, pluralistic spirit of RS and can foster resentment or indifference among learners (Obasi & Amadi, 2021).

Additionally, some parents and community members view RS as either too theological or irrelevant, particularly when compared with subjects that appear to offer direct economic benefits. These cultural perceptions influence students' attitudes and enrolment, further complicating efforts to position RS as a valued subject (Nwagwu & Egbe, 2022).

**Weak Instructional Supervision and Administrative Support**

The lack of regular and meaningful supervision of RS teaching is another core challenge. Many school heads, driven by performance targets in external examinations (e.g., WAEC, NECO), tend to focus supervisory efforts on science and language subjects, neglecting RS. When supervision occurs, it is often perfunctory, checklist-driven, or authoritarian rather than developmental and supportive (Adebayo & Ogunyemi, 2021).

Moreover, administrative structures in some schools do not integrate RS into whole-school improvement plans. As a result, RS teachers may not be included in school-based professional learning communities or receive support for instructional innovation (Okwonkw & Adebayo, 2022)

**Student Disinterest and Value Shift**

The changing moral landscape and global cultural influences have contributed to a decline in student interest in RS. In the face of social media saturation, materialism, and peer-driven values, students often perceive RS as abstract, outdated, or irrelevant to their daily realities (Okonkwo, 2020). Without engaging teaching methods or relatable content, RS classes may appear monotonous or overly doctrinal.

In some cases, students select RS solely to meet subject quotas, without intrinsic motivation or appreciation for its moral and intellectual value. This attitude negatively affects classroom participation, learning outcomes, and the overall impact of the subject on student character formation.

**Enhancing Religious Studies (RS) Teaching through Effective Supervision**

In the face of declining student interest, systemic marginalisation, and instructional limitations, effective supervision by secondary school heads offers a crucial pathway for revitalising the teaching of Religious Studies (RS) in Bayelsa State. Supervision, when understood not as fault-finding but as developmental support, enables school leaders to engage teachers collaboratively, assess instructional practices, and foster professional growth (Goldhammer, Anderson, & Krajewski, 1993). This section outlines strategic mechanisms through which effective supervision can enhance RS teaching.

**Capacity Building and Continuous Professional Development**

One of the core strategies for improving RS instruction is through sustained teacher capacity building. Many RS teachers in Bayelsa State possess qualifications in Religious Studies or Theology but may lack training in effective pedagogy, classroom management, and learner-centred instruction (Okonkwo, 2020). Principals, through instructional supervision, can identify these gaps and facilitate continuous professional development (CPD) initiatives.

CPD can include workshops, seminars, peer learning sessions, and subject-specific refresher courses. These interventions can focus on modern teaching strategies such as inquiry-based learning, the use of religious texts in comparative interpretation, and integrating moral dilemmas for critical thinking. Studies show that when supervision promotes professional growth, teacher motivation and performance significantly improve (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; ( Adeyemi and Ogunyemi, 2022).

**Collaborative and Supportive Supervision**

Supervision in RS teaching must shift from a bureaucratic, inspection-oriented model to a collaborative and collegial approach. School heads who act as mentors rather than evaluators can create trust-based relationships that encourage teacher innovation and self-reflection (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). Using clinical supervision techniques, such as pre-observation conferencing and post-observation feedback, principals can help RS teachers improve lesson planning, delivery, and assessment.

This model also fosters teacher ownership of the instructional improvement process. For example, by co-developing lesson observation rubrics and engaging in reflective discussions, teachers are more likely to internalise feedback and apply it constructively (Goldhammer et al., 1993). In the context of RS, such supervisory support ensures that teachers are both doctrinally accurate and pedagogically effective.

**Monitoring Curriculum Implementation and Fidelity**

Effective supervision ensures that the RS curriculum is implemented as designed by educational authorities. Principals must verify that instructional content aligns with national curriculum objectives, such as promoting moral integrity, national cohesion, and interfaith understanding (Federal Ministry of Education, 2013). Through classroom visits, reviewing lesson plans, and analysing student work, supervisors can ensure curriculum fidelity and identify areas of improvement.

This is especially important in RS, where subjective interpretation and denominational leanings can sometimes lead to curriculum distortion. Effective supervision ensures that content remains inclusive, scripturally grounded, and contextually relevant, without promoting any particular sectarian ideology (Obasi & Amadi, 2021).

**Motivating and Recognising RS Teachers**

Motivation plays a pivotal role in enhancing teacher performance. Given that RS is often viewed as a marginalised subject, recognition and motivation by school heads can significantly uplift teacher morale. Principals should publicly acknowledge exemplary RS teaching, include RS teachers in decision-making bodies, and recommend them for awards or further studies where possible (Adeyemi & Eze, 2020).

Non-monetary incentives, such as commendation letters, extra responsibilities, or nomination for leadership workshops, can go a long way in affirming the value of RS and encouraging teacher commitment. Motivation also involves giving RS teachers autonomy to design creative, experiential learning experiences such as interfaith forums, drama presentations, and moral debates.

**Integrating Technology and Local Contexts**

School heads can guide RS teachers to adopt technology-enhanced instruction such as multimedia tools, online religious archives, and virtual excursions to holy sites. While technology use in RS remains limited in rural Bayelsa schools due to infrastructure deficits, principals can champion the procurement of relevant digital resources and provide basic ICT training for teachers (Fagbemi, 2023).

Moreover, supervision should encourage the integration of local cultural and religious contexts into RS teaching. By contextualising content, e.g., relating scriptural lessons to local festivals, community norms, or conflict resolution practices, teachers can make RS more engaging and meaningful to learners (Nwagwu & Egbe, 2022).

**Supervision-Driven Student Engagement Strategies**

Effective supervision should also assess how well RS instruction engages students emotionally, cognitively, and socially. School heads can evaluate student participation, critical thinking, and moral reasoning as indicators of effective RS teaching. Encouraging the use of interactive teaching strategies, such as storytelling, role play, group discussions, and ethical case studies, can significantly improve student interest in RS (Okonkwo, 2020).

Principals can also supervise the establishment of RS clubs, debate societies, or interfaith discussion groups within schools to sustain interest beyond the classroom. Such co-curricular approaches, when supervised and supported by school leadership, contribute to holistic religious education.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings and theoretical arguments presented in this paper underscore the pivotal role of effective instructional supervision in enhancing the teaching and impact of Religious Studies (RS) within the secondary school system. In an era marked by increased youth restiveness, moral decay, and communal tensions, particularly in the Niger Delta region, the role of RS in cultivating ethical consciousness, civic responsibility, and peaceful coexistence is more urgent than ever. Effective school-level supervision led by competent principals and

administrators can serve as a transformative strategy in repositioning RS as a key tool for both academic and national development.

**Elevating Religious Studies in Curriculum Policy**

One of the most pressing implications for policy is the need to re-evaluate the status of Religious Studies within Nigeria's secondary school curriculum. Currently, RS is often marginalised in national examinations and policy implementation guidelines, being treated as an elective or peripheral subject (Nwagwu & Egbe, 2022). This marginalisation sends a negative signal to students, teachers, and administrators about the subject's importance.

Policymakers at both the federal and state levels, especially in Bayelsa State, should revise the curriculum to elevate RS as a core component of basic and secondary education. This should include clear benchmarks for content mastery, mandatory curriculum time, and integration with character education programmes. Such elevation will enhance student engagement and foster a more values-driven educational environment.

**Institutionalising Supervision-Focused Leadership Training**

Another critical implication relates to training and capacity development for school heads and instructional supervisors. Many principals are trained in general administration but lack formal grounding in instructional leadership or subject-specific supervision, particularly in the humanities and religious education (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2021).

State ministries of education and school boards should introduce structured training modules on how to supervise and support Religious Studies teachers. These could be embedded in ongoing professional development programmes or offered as part of induction and certification schemes for newly appointed principals. Modules should focus on inclusive supervision, ethical content monitoring, and the promotion of dialogical and reflective teaching practices in RS classrooms.

**Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation Systems**

There is a need to develop more robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems for RS instruction within schools. Currently, most M&E frameworks disproportionately focus on science and mathematics, ignoring important humanistic subjects like RS ( (Okwonkw & Adebayo, 2022)

Educational inspectors and quality assurance officers should be equipped with tools and protocols for evaluating RS curriculum delivery, including lesson observation templates, teacher self-assessment instruments, and student moral development indicators. These tools can help ensure consistent, high-quality RS instruction across schools, particularly in underserved areas.

**Promoting Ethical Citizenship and Peacebuilding through RS**

From a national development perspective, RS holds considerable potential for peacebuilding, interreligious tolerance, and ethical citizenship. When well-taught and properly supervised, RS can cultivate values such as empathy, respect, and integrity—qualities that are essential in a pluralistic society like Nigeria (Federal Ministry of Education, 2013; Okonkwo, 2020).

Thus, policymakers should support initiatives that link RS to national peacebuilding frameworks, civic education programmes, and community-based dialogue platforms. For instance, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and religious bodies can partner with schools to sponsor RS-themed competitions, festivals, or workshops that promote unity across faiths and tribes.

**Addressing Resource and Infrastructure Gaps**

Effective supervision can only yield meaningful results if RS teachers have access to the necessary instructional materials, facilities, and incentives. Policymakers and education planners should prioritise the provision of RS textbooks, religious scriptures, teaching guides, and digital resources that reflect Nigeria's cultural and religious diversity (Adeyemi & Eze, 2020).

At the same time, school management boards should incorporate RS needs into their budgeting processes, ensuring that RS teachers receive the same level of support as colleagues in other disciplines. This will not only enhance equity but also demonstrate institutional respect for religious and moral education.

**Fostering Whole-School Approaches to Moral Education**

Finally, supervision of RS teaching should be viewed as part of a whole-school strategy for moral and character education. This requires collaboration among all staff, the integration of RS into co-curricular activities, and alignment with the school's vision and disciplinary policies. School principals should lead efforts to ensure that the values taught in RS classrooms are reinforced in assemblies, student leadership structures, and disciplinary processes.

By positioning RS as a core component of the school's moral ecology, supervision moves from a technical function to a transformative leadership practice, with long-term benefits for school culture and student outcomes.

**Conclusion**

The teaching of Religious Studies (RS) in Bayelsa State holds immense potential not only for academic enrichment but also for moral development, peacebuilding, and social transformation. Yet, this potential remains underutilised due to a confluence of structural, pedagogical, and administrative challenges. This paper has argued that the role of secondary school heads, particularly through visionary and collaborative instructional supervision, is central to revitalising RS instruction in both urban and rural schools.

Supervision, when viewed as a transformative and developmental endeavour rather than a bureaucratic task, can enhance the pedagogical capacity of RS teachers, improve curriculum delivery, and foster student engagement. By applying instructional leadership principles, school heads can create enabling environments that prioritise moral education and religious literacy alongside academic performance. When these leadership practices are informed by transformational leadership theory, they inspire shared purpose and motivation among teachers, while the clinical supervision model offers practical tools for structured feedback and continuous improvement.

Furthermore, the paper has shown that the marginalisation of Religious Studies in policy, resource allocation, and school management must be urgently addressed. A systemic revaluation of the subject is necessary, not only to align with national goals of peace and civic responsibility, but also to counter the growing moral and ethical void among youth. This revaluation must include increased curriculum visibility, improved training and support for RS teachers, and deliberate integration of RS objectives into school-wide strategies for moral and character education.

Crucially, the success of any intervention to enhance RS teaching depends on the attitudinal shift of school heads. Principals must move beyond tokenistic support and embrace their roles as instructional leaders, moral exemplars, and agents of ethical transformation. In Bayelsa State, where educational challenges are compounded by socio-economic disparities, cultural complexity, and developmental deficits, the principal's supervisory role must be strategic, inclusive, and rooted in the broader vision of education as a tool for societal renewal.

In conclusion, effective supervision is not a luxury but a necessity for restoring the relevance and impact of Religious Studies in Nigerian secondary schools. It offers a practical, context-sensitive, and sustainable approach to bridging the gap between curriculum intent and classroom reality. With the right leadership, policies, and resources in place, RS can serve as a powerful vehicle for nurturing the next generation of morally grounded, tolerant, and responsible citizens.

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