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Analysis of Challenges and Solutions to Christian Education of Children in Anglican Churches in Kenya

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Abstract

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Let the little children come to me. . ." (Mark 10: 14). These words provide the charter of the Church's ministry to children. This study analysed the challenges and solutions to children's Christian education in Anglican Churches in Kenya. The objectives that guided the study were to determine whether the efficacy of a new curriculum can improve Christian education, examine the challenges of Christian education of children in Anglican Churches in Kenya, and proffer solutions to challenges of Christian education of children in Anglican Churches in Kenya. This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The target population was 101, comprising Sunday school teachers and parents of the two Anglican Churches in Kirinyaga County. Using the stratified sampling technique, the sample size used in the study was 50, which is 50% of the target population. The study revealed that 84% of the respondents are unaware of any documents for teaching Sunday school children, 60% said that an appropriate Sunday school service should depend on the content, and 40 respondents said there is a need for enhanced church management's support to Christian education. The study recommends that each local congregation in the Anglican Church should seek to have its church education committee directing the Sunday school department.

Introduction

The term "children" is used in this paper to refer to all five stages of childhood years, covering ages zero to eleven (0-11) years. This is the period of nursery and primary school in Kenya. The childhood stage is the most formative period in a person's life because their experiences determine their future in all aspects, such as physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual (Tse, 2016). Children's ministry is vital to contemporary society because Jesus acknowledged the importance of children and how relevant they are in the kingdom of God.

His numerous references to a child in His teachings indicate the innocence of children. For instance, Jesus says that "Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18: 4). Among Jesus' most severe warnings are those against causing the children to stumble in their fragile faith or causing them to go astray (Matthew 18: 5-6). In another instance, Jesus said in Mark 10: 14, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as this. "Even though the disciples wanted to hinder them, He reminded them that children are equally important as adults.

Christianity has permeated Kenyan Society, and today Kenya is predominantly a Christian nation. The Christian population is 83% of the estimated 52.21 million people (World Population Review, 2019). The prevalence of Christianity does not mean that Christians have been well nurtured in the faith. In the Anglican Church, the Sunday school represents the largest and the most popular educational department in the church program (Turpin, 2017). However, there is inadequate education for the younger generation in the Christian faith in many churches, particularly those in rural areas. This study discusses some of the challenges hindering the Christian education of the young generation.

The Sunday school seeks to provide Christian education, one of the greatest needs in the twenty-first-century Church. Contemporary

society is marred with deteriorating moral, social, and spiritual characters. The Sunday school must continue demonstrating the fundamental truths in Scripture and bring children to understand the gospel.

The Church is morally and duty-bound to guide children and commission them as the custodians of its values, beliefs, and lifestyles. They should not be idolised, but they should be given a chance to be heard and participate in the community of faith. When the Church neglects its role of teaching the ministry to children, it seriously destroys the societal moral fabric. Educating the entire humanity is part of spreading the gospel of Christ. Therefore, in the total sense of the word, the Church must become a teaching church, which can be done effectively when an adequately formulated and influential children's curriculum is adopted.

The paper attempts to examine some of the problems that have hindered the effectiveness of the Christian education of children concerning (1) the Church and the Sunday school, (2) the family, (3) the public school, and (4) culture and society. This is because the child spends their entire childhood in these four surroundings. If one fails to fulfil its responsibility in nurturing the child, that child will misunderstand the importance of morality in decision-making. By exposing this problem, Christian church educators should be more devoted to correcting this deficiency.

Statement of the Problem

To teach Bible and theology is difficult enough, but to make it relevant to people's lives is perhaps a more significant challenge. Sadly, many teachers do not know basic human development theory, how adults learn, or how to structure a curriculum and plan a meaningful learning experience. They teach the way they were taught, standing in front of the class and delivering knowledge with no practical aspect. While there is a place for a clear lecture, teaching is more than that. More information over and above the students' heads can be easily mistaken for learning. In the Christian context,

to teach is to provide meaningful encounters with Christ and his word so that people are challenged and transformed to impact their world.

A common complaint in Sunday school is that the teachers keep covering the same material. A key is to have a structured curriculum to nurture believers from when they encounter the gospel to maturity in Christ (Col. 1: 28). There needs to be a clear understanding of the gospel, the fundamental creeds of the Church, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. Christians gravitate toward learning about the meaning of worship and prayer as they grow older in the Church. There is a wealth of knowledge of Christian education in the Anglican Church, but it is not transferred sufficiently to the young population. This study sets out to analyse the challenges facing Christian education for young children within the Anglican Churches in Kenya and suggest a solution for a progressive, comprehensive curriculum focused on the spiritual needs of young people.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To identify the nature of the current curriculum in terms of content for young children in the Anglican Church.
- ii. To determine whether the efficacy of a new curriculum can improve Christian education for children.
- iii. To examine the challenges of Christian education of children in Anglican Churches in Kenya.
- iv. To proffer solutions to challenges of Christian education of children in Anglican Churches in Kenya.

Significance of the Study

The outcome of this study is to benefit the Anglican Church of Kenya in this regard:

- i. Identify and proffer solutions to negative attitudes towards Christian education.
- ii. The result of this study can help call the attention of the leadership and congregation to how Christian education should be managed.

- iii. The solution can motivate the church leadership of the Anglican Church of Kenya to support Christian education.

Literature Review

General Background of the Anglican Church

The history of the Anglican Church of Kenya dates to 1844, when the first missionary from the Church Missionary Society (CMS), Dr Johann Ludwig Krapf, arrived in Mombasa (Kapinde & Higgs, 2021). He was joined two years later by Rev. Johannes Rebmann. The two missionaries simultaneously intended to link a CMS station established at Rabai in the coastal region. The missionaries had to study and learn African languages to communicate and spread Christianity. This resulted in Krapf's translation of the book of Genesis chapters 1-3 in Kiswahili in 1847. Today the Anglican Church of Kenya has grown tremendously from a few members scattered around the coastal region to over 5 million across the country. The above history of the Anglican Church in Kenya suggests that the Church's mission is to unite Christians in spreading the gospel of Christ.

Importance of Christian Education

Christian education seeks to teach children about the world God created, how their faith is woven into each learning area, and how to find purpose and meaning through God's Will for their life (Kamundi, 2021). It involves the Christian community's efforts to guide young and adult persons toward an ever-richer possession of the Christian fellowship. Christian education aims to connect the past and the present religious heritage to make religion an integral component in every response to life. It also defines the Christian future because it nurtures wisdom, stature, and favour with God and man (Luetz et al., 2018).

Christian education is part of the Christian heritage where the historical doctrines of Christianity play an essential role in determining the contemporary way of life. When children are educated about the Christian faith, they are expected to assimilate, react, and use the knowledge to find the meaning of life (Ariawan

et al., 2020). Christian education is about learning about the Bible and integrating religious worldview into decision-making.

Based on these ideas, the three reasons why churches support Christian schools include:

1. The Church needs educated leaders because it has more trust in the leaders that they teach.
2. The Church must educate its members to be more effective witnesses to the world (Matt. 28: 18-20).
3. The Church discipled the nations through Christian schools.

Challenges of Christian Education

Many leaders want to teach but do not feel confident because they lack biblical and theological knowledge to help them interpret the Bible correctly. Teachers encounter difficult passages and need to learn how to access good resources or refer to a curriculum. Teaching Sunday school is now characterised by Bible stories to children and asking questions to test their memorisation ability. They do not assess whether the relayed knowledge has been understood and applies to the lives of the children. This inadequate approach weakens the children's faith development since childhood and lays the foundations for all future learning. Choun (2001) states that:

Biblical principles for childhood education are unchanging. Learning must begin in early childhood. Timothy's exposure to the Scriptures began in infancy. Lessons must relate to everyday life. Moses' directives to the Israelites ordered them to teach their children about God in the context of shared experiences and the advice to train up a child. At the same time, he is young, referring to the lifelong retention of lessons learned in childhood. (p. 128)

Teachers need a curriculum to refer to and to prepare their instruction items. They are limited in their teaching materials and end up teaching from those few portions of the Bible most

familiar to them and the children (Bachrach, 2021). For example, Bible stories like Noah and the Ark, David and Goliath in the Old Testament, and parables like the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan in the New Testament, are repeatedly taught. Therefore, children need more comprehensive exposure to various biblical passages and principles.

Teachers in most churches teach voluntarily, resulting in a constant turnover. With the Bible as the only resource book available, incoming teachers encounter difficulties knowing where to begin in their teaching program. In most cases, they teach the same Bible passages as previous teachers, even though they may use a different methodology. This prevents growth in Bible knowledge among children and leads to a lack of sequence in Bible teaching in the Church (Francis et al., 2019).

Some church leaders' idea of Sunday school equates to children's worship without any service order. Therefore, they believe that anyone can teach Sunday school regardless of their knowledge, moral standards, or even academic qualifications. The recruitment of teachers in Christian education could be better and more present (Fears, 2017). Because of this mistake, the Church is facing three problems in utilising people to serve Christ through a Sunday school ministry, namely (1) misuse, which refers to unqualified Sunday school teachers, (2) disuse, which refers to Christians who only sit in the church pews and are not involved in any particular ministry in the Church, and (3) abuse, which refers to the problem of the overburdened Sunday school teachers and pastors with excess children to teach (Gangel, 1997).

More problems arise from inadequate facilities, insufficient classroom space, inadequate classroom assistance, and inadequate supplies and equipment (Nixon, 2016). This is caused by the fact that pastors are unaware of what goes on in Sunday school classrooms in their Church. The Church fails to function as a community of faith that communicates its Christian faith to its members (Everist, 2002). Parents have equally

ignored or relaxed in nurturing children in the Christian faith. They have handed over this teaching responsibility to the church and the schools. As a result, the teaching of the Christian faith in the family setting has weakened.

In addition, Christian Religious Education (CRE) has failed to attain its objective in public and private schools of helping students gain insights into the unfolding of God's self-revelation to humankind. Teachers are only interested in transmitting religious knowledge to the pupils without practical application in their personal lives (Casson & Cooling, 2019). Their grades in the examination measure the pupils' success in learning the subject. Most teachers believe the Church is wholly responsible for nurturing children's faith.

Having ignored or relaxed on its duty to nurture children, the Church has left them at the mercy of society, a society polluted by various social ills brought about by secularism, mass media, rapid cultural change, a generation gap, and lifestyle change (Prior, 2018). So, children are left hanging with no one to care about their needs for growth and guidance in life.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The study utilised a descriptive survey design because it is regarded as suitable for providing an accurate, descriptive analysis of the characteristics of the sample from the population (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2008). Consequently, the study design was consequential because the data collected from the large group involved a description of their attitude and actual experiences in the Christian education of children. The design was expected to deepen the understanding of challenges and solutions to the Christian education of children in Anglican Churches in Kenya.

Study Population and Study Sample

The study population involved the Sunday school teachers, parents, and church leaders of two Anglican Churches based in Kirinyaga County, Kenya. The two churches include; ACK

St. Paul's Kibingoti Church and ACK Kibirigwi Church. ACK St. Paul's Kibingoti Church had 10 Sunday school teachers, eight church management members, and 50 parents. ACK Kibirigwi Church comprises 5 Sunday school teachers, eight church management members, and 20 parents. The total population of Sunday school teachers, Parish council members, and parents at the two churches is 101, as shown in Table 1. The study used stratified simple random sampling to select 50 respondents from the churches representing 50% of the total population. The use of a questionnaire collected data. The data collected was edited, coded thematically, and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences SPSS to generate descriptive statistics. The data collected was presented using tables, pie charts, and bar graphs to summarise the data for ease of understanding.

Summary of the Study Population

Table 1: Sample Size (created by the author of the study)

Category	Population size	Sample size
Sunday School Teachers	15	8
Council Members	16	7
Parents	70	35
Total	101	50

(Source: field data)

Results and Discussion

Experience in being taught Christian Education

Figure 1 shows parents' and Sunday school teachers' prior Christian education experience. The finding indicated that 50 church members had had experience in Christian education in the youth and their adult life, translating to 100% of the sample population. No church members reported having no Christian education, translating to 0% of the sample population.

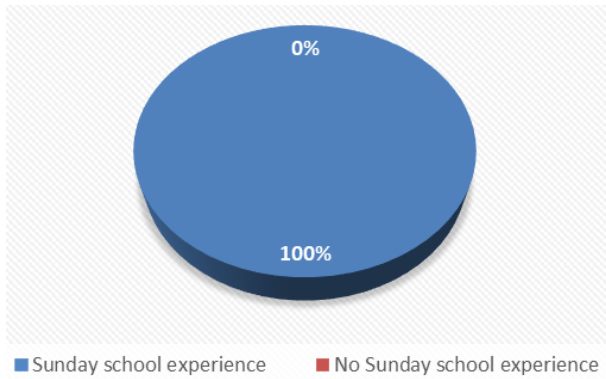


Figure 1: Experience in being taught Christian Education

Adequacy of Christian Teachings

The study sought to establish whether Anglican Church teaches Sunday school children to acquire life skills and Christian values. Two percent agreed that the teachings in Sunday School are sufficient in equipping children with Christian teachings, 2% strongly agreed, 7% disagreed that the content is not adequate, and 89% of the respondents strongly disagreed that the Sunday School content is adequate, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Sunday School Content is Adequate in Instilling Christian Values

Sunday School content is adequate in instilling Christian Values	Number of Respondents	Percent
Agreed	1	2%
Strongly agreed	1	2%
Disagreed	4	7%
Strongly disagreed	44	89%
Total	50	100%

Church Documents for Teaching Sunday School Children

Respondents were asked if any documents or teaching materials could be used by the Sunday school children as a reference point when they are taught. Figure 2 shows that 84% of the respondents said that they are unaware of any documents for Sunday school children, while 16% said there are documents that Sunday

School Children can use for reference. The 16% include all the 8 Sunday school teachers that were respondents in the study.

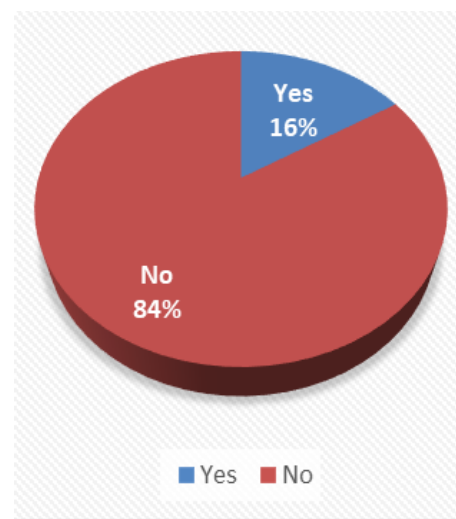


Figure 2: Church Documents for Teaching Sunday School Children

Preferred Period of Sunday School Service

The study wanted to determine the appropriate length of the Sunday school service. Four per cent of the respondents suggested 30 minutes, 14% suggested 1 hour 30 minutes, 22% recommended one hour, and 60% said that appropriate Sunday school service should last according to the day's content, as shown in Figure 3.

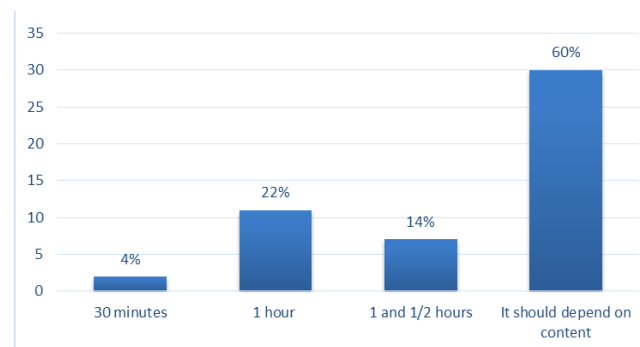


Figure 3: Preferred Sunday School Service

The Challenges of Christian Education

Figure 4 shows that respondents were allowed to select challenges of Christian education from the seven options on the questionnaire. Of the 50 respondents, 28 suggested that the challenges to

Christian education are due to insufficient educators, 42 said that Christian Religious Education (CRE) had not promoted the importance of Christian education, 33 believed that there is inadequate support from church management, 16 respondents felt that uncooperative parents are a threat to Christian education, 39 respondents highlighted a lack of curriculum, and 47 pointed that Sunday school teachers lacked insufficient knowledge of Christian education. Lastly, 40 respondents revealed that Sunday school programmes have insufficient facilities.

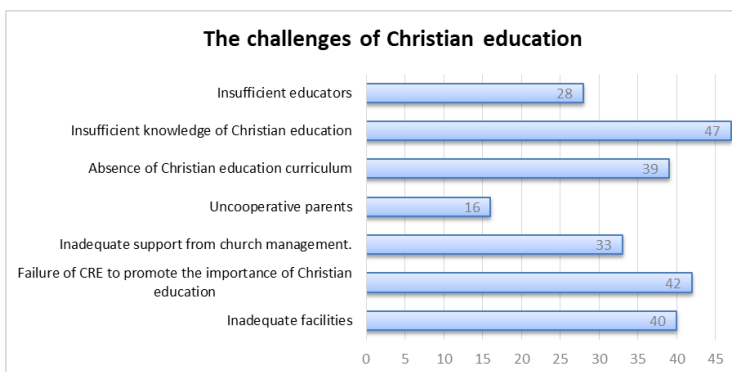


Figure 4: The Challenges of Christian Education

Solutions to the Challenges of Christian Education

Figure 5 shows the ranking of the solutions to the challenges of Christian Education. The 50 respondents were allowed to select the solutions according to their relevance. Forty-nine respondents suggested that Sunday school teachers need training. Forty respondents said there is a need for enhanced church management's support of Christian education. The third solution was selected by 31 respondents who said there is a need to develop a Christian education curriculum. Twenty-five respondents suggested that there should be training programmes for trainers of Christian education. Sixteen respondents have proposed the recruitment of experienced and qualified tutors. Eleven respondents pointed out that parents should encourage their children to attend Sunday school. Lastly, seven respondents suggested that there should be a review of the Christian Religious Education (CRE) curriculum in schools.

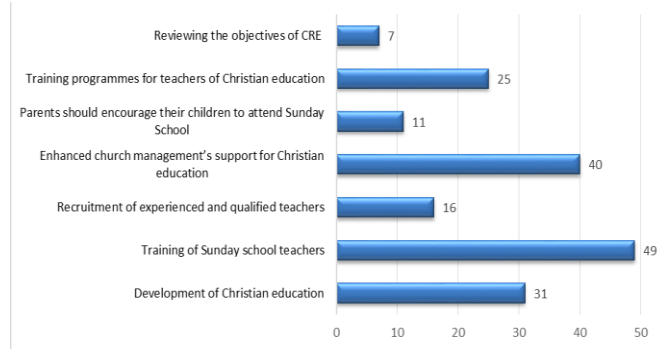


Figure 5: Solutions to the Challenges of Christian Education

Conclusions

Sunday school in Kenya is the most crucial service session in the Church. Its main objective is to train children in the knowledge and fear of God and shape and strengthen their moral character. This objective has yet to be achieved because the findings indicate that most Anglican Sunday schools lack written curriculum materials to be followed by the teachers and children to follow. This leads to teachers adopting poor teaching methods and ignoring or leaving out meaningful and valuable learning activities for children. For example, much teaching revolves around reciting Bible verses with few critical teachings about interpreting the Bible to practical life.

Another challenge identified is the need for more trained teachers and a well-developed curriculum for Sunday school teaching. This is due to the church management's inadequate funds allocated to the Children's ministry. Most Sunday school teachers in the churches are young adults who volunteer to serve the Church by teaching children. Since they do not have training in Sunday school teaching, they have the prerogative to teach what they deem fit. Most of them resort to telling Bible stories that serve as their teaching.

Inadequate teaching facilities such as space, equipment, and learning materials result in children of different age groups being taught together in one setting. This makes teachers need help bringing order in their sessions and spend insignificant time teaching. Besides the

failure to group the children according to similar age, the teachings need to be tailored to the appropriate experiences of the children. In addition, the pastors' attitude toward their Sunday school departments is the key to the ministry's success. Tragically, most pastors do not know what happens in the Sunday school classes and are unaware of what is being taught, how it is being taught, and who is teaching it.

Lastly, the education indicates that the possible solutions to the challenges and solutions to the Christian education of children in Anglican Churches in Kenya include the development of a Christian education curriculum, training of current Sunday school teachers, recruitment of experienced and qualified tutors, enhanced church management's support to Christian education, parents should encourage their children to attend Sunday school, training programs for tutors of Christian education, and reviewing the objectives of Christian Religious Education.

This study sought to analyse the challenges of Christian education in the Anglican Churches in Kenya, specifically the absence of a comprehensive Sunday school curriculum. Sunday school teachers employ strategies such as explaining Bible verses to young Christians, composing songs, and using quizzes. While such methods are critical in Christian education, a curriculum is needed to that effect because it can influence the direction of the Church. Besides, Sunday school is the most comprehensive Bible teaching ministry in the Anglican Churches in Kenya, which makes it essential to give special attention to its curriculum. A Sunday school curriculum is important because it can be structured to meet the relevant topics, appropriate language, and proper age groups, which are critical elements to the success of Christian education.

Recommendations

Each local congregation in the Anglican Church should seek to have its committee of church education, which should oversee directing the Sunday school department and other

departments of youth and adults. The committee must plan and maintain a comprehensive Christian education program in the Church.

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