

## **Theological Education Curriculum for Transformative Children Ministry**

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### **Abstract**

Building children's curriculum into theological education is very important in this contemporary time to catch them young before they grow out of their parents' tutelage. Children are the future leaders in the Christianity. Nurturing them in the fear of the Lord is the best bet for any denomination. This paper employs a descriptive method of research that deals with critical analysis. In this work, the writer ascertained the dangers of lack of children's ministry curriculum in theological education, which results in poor performance in church activities, insufficient knowledge or understanding about the Christian religion, poor educators and children indoctrination which are some of the negative aspects of not having curriculum for children ministry. The work also discussed some necessities for building children's ministry curriculum in the theological education system, like discipline, interpersonal relationships, creativity, indoctrination, stabilizing Christian homes, and having proper Ideology. The paper, therefore, recommends, among others, that theological schools should design curriculum that will include children's ministry and how such curriculum can be administered in a way that the children can benefit from it in order to impart their world as well as the church and their family. It will enable them to understand their denomination and know more about their preferred religion.

## Introduction

The way children are neglected in the church motivates this writing. Pastors in most churches do not have plans for the spiritual and social development of the children that worship among them because they were not trained during their seminary days, all because their curriculum does not have children ministry inclusive. If they were prepared to teach their children, probably, their church would have known how to care for the children in their midst, who will in turn, be the leaders of those churches tomorrow. Transformative curriculum is a veritable tool for theological education in children's ministry. The ministry cannot be complete without children, just as it was in the era of Jesus when He stated, that anyone who desires to enter the kingdom of God must first be like the little children. According to Mary (2014, p. 59), "Jesus accepted children at their various stages of development for what they are. He saw their potential as full-grown creatures made in the image of God. He went about seeking to change the life-moulding environment of those children". Children are essential to God, parents, and society. As such, churches should not override or overlook them without giving them their place to learn and know how they can be a blessing to their parents, church, and the society in which they be long. In the church, the children are to be given the topmost priority because they are the future and hope of the church and nation. If they are not cared for, by designing a curriculum to minister to them from an early age, they will become a problem to the church and society.

Theological Education in this work, is a Christian religion-based education to the adherent of Him who have accepted Christ as their Lord and Saviour. They are ready to get His precept through teachings. Theological Education has to do with the rules and regulations that influence the way of life of Christ's followers. Theological education is transformative learning for children; thus the theological educational sector should create a curriculum to benefit children. Many churches do not have plans for the children in their midst thus leaving the children to unguided growth. The curriculum for transmitting the learning process to the children in churches is fundamental because, it will help their facilitators plan the contents, know how and when to teach the children because they are to be handled with care, as Christian educators bring the lessons to the level

of the children's cognitive and spiritual ability. It will help children understand Christian doctrines and principles as they grow holistically from their tender age to practicalize the teachings as they grow into adulthood. Ango (2016, p. 123) opines, "Children are special, therefore, they need special attention in all situations, especially teaching." Uga (1996, p. 10) says, "Curriculum is derived from a Latin word meaning 'a running course', race, running on a wager, race-ground, or a career. In its original Latin usage, it means a runway or a course which one runs to reach a goal". Supporting the view above, Flordeliza (2000, p. 1) recapped that "curriculum range from the narrow view of a listing of subject to the broad perspective of learning experiences to achieve an educational goal." According to (the Christian Education Department of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, p. 20), building a purposeful children's ministry requires more than just appearing in class. The first question to ask is what is children's ministry? This writer defines Children's ministry as partnering with parents to guide, train, groom, and lead children to grow in Christ. It can also be defined as all programmes and activities planned or unplanned for children to acknowledge Christ as their personal Lord and saviour towards growth in Christ Jesus.

### **Dangers of Lack of Children Ministry Curriculum in Theological Education**

Curriculum is like a road map to a traveller; hence dangers of lack of curriculum are discussed as follow:

#### ***1. Poor Performance of Children Participation in Church Programmes***

The church is a place of character modelling. This is achieved through the programmes planned and executed by Christian educators and the coordinators or church pastors who help to nurture the children's holistic growth from the early stage. However, some churches today do not adequately plan for children's programmes or their wellbeing, and most of the programmes initiated by the pastors for the generality of the members are primarily programmes for adults and others that can bring money to the church, without considering the children worshipping with them. This in adequate curriculum planning has created a lack of interest in most children of the churches. Some have

lost confidence in their potential and see church activities to be majorly for adults. To further make clear this issue of lack of proper performances of children in the church, there are structures where children are not cared for by children minders in the church, but are left on their own to find their bearing on Sundays, leaving them to wonder about like sheep without a shepherd in the church premises. This can be so frustrating to some of the children and their parents. Howard and Raymond (1969, p. 39) opine that performance means “congregational, organizational, and individual actions resulting from a programme plan under church guidance directed toward attaining a church’s objective.” Children are to be involved in church programmes to help them discover who they are in the church, home, and society. Such children programs should be what they can build upon to become great leaders tomorrow.

## **2. *Poor Children’s Background in Christian Knowledge***

It is so pathetic that most children do not know the name of their church or what Christianity is all about. It is very confusing and disheartening that most of the children are not exposed to the religion of their parent. To worship in a church is one thing, and being able to have the knowledge or background of the lessons is very important to the children, as well as the children coordinators, Pastors/Guardians. Therefore, all stakeholders should inculcate Christianity as a way of life to their children and let them develop a sense of belonging to the church, and Christ. Children are brilliant young growing people; educating them about the faith they will participate in all through their lifetime is very important. It will help children become careful and respond according to the Christian faith principles and practices as they grow.

## **3. *Children Wrongly Indoctrinated***

Indoctrination is as severe as the crime of killing in a religious system. Many children today are widely and wrongly indoctrinated with strange religions, which have posed challenges to the body of Christ. It all happens because parents fail in their duty, while the churches do not take time to properly teach the children about the tenets of their faith. They risk the future of children by getting to practice mortgage wrong indoctrinating religions in and around them

without finding the root or sources of such religions. According to Charles (2020, p. 55), quoting (Bruce 1996, p. 5), indoctrination is devoted to instruction in fundamental beliefs and practices, and indoctrination is used to infuse learners with a partisan and distinctly sectarian point of view. It is necessary to maintain the premises passed from generation to generation and provide a foundation for the young and new Christians to grow into the congregation's mainstream effectively. Charles (2020) Quoting (Joseph 2002, p. 51) opines that Indoctrination was often used to refer to teaching generally; brainwashing a person was to get him to learn something compulsorily. It usually refers to particular types of instruction, distinguished by the different intentions some teachers have in mind.

#### **4. Poor Children Educators**

Church pastors are to rise to their responsibility of educating the children in their midst. The quality and qualification of an educator matters a lot in teaching children in the church; children learn by what they see and hear, and these are what churches are to consider before they can engage the services of children ministers. Not everybody can care for or handle children as they should. Some churches that claim to have children ministers do not engage qualified Christian educators who have formal theological training to be children educators. According to Ayo-Obiremi (2016, p. 46), "Christian educators need a change and revival of their mindset and expectations". Somebody whose mindset is not upright and irrational cannot lead children. Based on the lack of professionals handling the children, some are negatively influenced by their peers. According to Uga (1996, p. 158), every educator has to be concerned with the philosophy of education. "Only so can he have a comprehensive idea of these profession which is crucial in life. By studying the different schools or views, the educator gains a clearer picture of what education implies and understands himself."

#### **Necessities for Building Children's Ministry Curriculum in the Theological Education System**

There is always a necessity in everything as far as humans are concerned. In this session, the writer will discuss some necessary reasons why theological education curricula should include children.

### **1. *Building Children's Curriculum through Theological Education for Discipline***

Curriculum helps to build children in their places of learning. The church is one of the places where children learn and take instructions as they grow. The Church should plan curriculum to benefit children, just as the government builds school curricula for students from primary to university. Curriculum that includes how children should behave at home and in public, the curriculum that raises children to respect their elders, etc. are to be built into the children's ministry in today's churches. This will enable the children to escape from moral delinquency in the society. With this type of curriculum that includes discipline, whether with their parent or not, children in the organization will bring honour to their parents, church, and society. In general, crime rate will be reduced in the society. Religion has a strong influence on its followers. The children can be firmly influenced by their religious practices to become better members of their society. More so, theological education should have their curriculum built to include impactful children ministry curriculum; otherwise, the church of Christ would be incomplete.

### **2. *Building Children's Ministry Curriculum through Theological Education for Interpersonal Relationship***

Another area the curriculum will address in the children is that it will help them build interpersonal relationships within the churches they attend and also help to build a relationship with other fellow children whom they meet, outside their churches will be healthy for the society. The aspect of interpersonal relationship should be included in the theological education curriculum to help churches practice impactful children's ministry. It will also help their coordinator (s) and church pastors gain knowledge of how to handle children, discipline them, and get good results (the desired outcome). Interpersonal relationships should be included in the theological education curriculum because the children coming to church every Sunday and any other day in the week are not coming from the same home and do not have the same background. These children have different experiences from different home structures. While some are from broken and abusive homes others are from in-tact families. All come to church for various reasons. Theological education should

build a curriculum to help the children who are already wounded in their homes.

### **3. *Building Children's Ministry Curriculum through Theological Education for Creativity***

Children are a gift from God. Samson (2018, p. 54) states, "Children are a gift from God for the blessings of their parents, but this also depends on how parents have carried out their assignment of moulding their children to be resourceful and productive." The theological education is to help children bring out those potentials God has deposited in them to use in the church, home, and society. Children are naturally born with the spirit of creativity. They demonstrate to us consciously and unconsciously that some parents do not pay attention in the creative development of their children. Theological education curriculum should be designed for church pastors and coordinator(s) who teach week by week in churches. Robert (1992, p. 110) expresses, "Creativity includes the ability to invent or innovate, the ability to evaluate critically, and aesthetic sensitivity and flexibility." Newton (2012, 129-130) says, "While some students learn best by memorizing an organized plan of action related to a subject, others want to speculate, dream, imagine, or hypothesize plans related to a dilemma on their own. Creative, right-brain thinkers often want to express themselves vocally or in writing first." Supporting the view above, Ayo-Obiremi (2016, p. 19) opines that "Creativity comes not in the command or the content, but in the context and method." She further observed that Creativity is often described as a person's quality. However, creativity is more a quality of ideas, behaviours, or products and it can be developed" (p. 22). Oya-Obiremi concluded thus: "Encourage and develop creativity by teaching students to find a balance among synthetic, analytic, and practical thinking. A creative attitude is at least as important as creative thinking skill" (p. 59).

### **4. *Building Children's Ministry Curriculum through Theological Education for Proper Indoctrination***

Doctrine is an important aspect of religions that religious leaders in society cannot overlook. The doctrines of the faith determine how people will value that religion because doctrine is what that religious

group believes and practices that makes her unique from other religions. Since the separation of church and state, churches have sprung up with different doctrines for different purposes worldwide, which best reason is known by the founders of such religious movement. “*Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it.*” (Prov. 22:6). Many parents and churches are not doing this. Theological education should plan or have a curriculum that deals with issues like doctrine to help balance children’s belief systems and create an enabling environment for them to serve God faithfully as they grow.

##### **5. *Building Children’s Ministry Curriculum through Theological Education as a Stabilizer to Christian Home***

Homes are breaking up today due to a need for genuine Christian knowledge about spiritual matters on who to follow and who not to follow. Children are not left out of it because they follow their parents to church for worship without seeking their opinion if they like the church or want to be member. Some families have different doctrines since different members of families worship in different places with different teachers and founders. This may lead to some misunderstanding at home. Home is the centre of every faithful Christian and church. An unsettled home is a challenge to a healthy Christian church. The help of theological education in building a curriculum for children’s ministry will stabilize the home enough to allow children to serve God and humanity effectively. According to Collins (2007, p. 237), “Stabilizers describe one-fifth of adolescents. They are marked by consistency, loyalty, thoroughness, and predictability, but they also can be rigid and lack in creativity.” Building a curriculum for children’s ministry will stabilize them and assist them in having good knowledge about Christianity and dedicating their totality to the duties of Christianity as Christ demands.

##### **6. *Building Children Ministry Curriculum through Theological Education for Proper Ideology***

Children lack Ideology in making decisions about themselves, not to talk about religious matters. Collins (2007, p. 238), opines that what one believes in includes but goes beyond questions about religion.



Spirituality is a popular topic among this generation, nevertheless, many who grow from childhood into adolescents have a widespread distrust for religion, especially highly organized, denominational religions that appear rigid and controlling. The adult may not be willing or able to give answers, but young people need not struggle with religious issues on their own. It is the reality of life says Collins, concerning children's attitudes. Children are who they are and cannot choose like adults who can easily differentiate between good and evil. Children are not likely to make good choices in their personal life without the help of someone guiding them. Through theological education, the knowledge to assist these children will be learned by the coordinator(s) and pastors as well. Leaving the children in the hands of confused coordinators and pastors will further destroy their religious beliefs and careers because faith and career work together.

### **Recommendations**

Due to the essential nature of this work, the researcher, therefore, recommends, among others that:

Theological schools should design curricula that will include children's ministry and their various methods of applications in ways that the children can benefit to impart their world, the church and the family from which they came. This will enable them understand their denomination and know more about their preferred religion.

1. The church pastors are to take courses concerning children ministries of different categories, such as children from Christian backgrounds, non-Christians, and even Muslims living in the same community. The pastors, and other church leaders, should carry the children along in planning their programmes. This will create a balanced worship centre among the congregation for both children and adults.
2. Children coordinators should be trained in order to know how to handle children with special care. They are to note that adults and children are not the same; the relationship and methods applied in reaching out to them determine how the children will hold to that religion to

which their parents or guardians introduce them. The attitude of the educators or coordinators will decide if the children will like or dislike Christianity; that is why they are to be trained majorly for children's ministry.

### Conclusion

Building children's curriculum into theological education is very important in this contemporary time to cache them young before they get out of their parents' tutelage. Children's ministry is a calling, and many who will take up that assignment as ministers should have been called and subjected themselves to proper training for ministering to children. Children in churches are to be given attention. Theological institutions should plan, design and implement curriculum on how churches/Christian educators can teach children to be properly groomed in the Christian religion of their parents. This would come to reality through the help of quality theological education. The pastors and Christian educators in various churches should be taught with the curriculum the pastors from theological institution were taught. Curriculum, 'a running course', race, running on a wager, a race-ground, or a career, can help to develop children if properly used by pastors and children coordinators, to mould and build children to serve God and be committed to their denomination in a godly manner.

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