



# Strategising Children's Ministry Education in the Anglican Church of Kenya

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## Abstract

The primary goal of educational ministry with children, particularly in the Anglican Church of Kenya, is to guide them into adulthood through the church's Sunday school programme. The value of Sunday school is immeasurable. The church that has a growing, vibrant Sunday school has a Biblical foundation on which it can build. Churches without a good Sunday school will find themselves struggling to survive in the future. For children to be adequately nurtured in their faith, the church must develop a programme to aid in teaching and learning. Ministry Education recognises the spiritual and moral education of believers, particularly children. Knowledge of God and His works is highly valued in Biblical teachings. This study drew upon John Dewey's theory of experiential learning that focuses on the importance of grounding education in students' active experiences and interests. It utilized an explanatory research design that reviewed and analysed prior studies on Sunday school education and children's ministry. The findings reveal the strategies used by Sunday school educators to improve the educational process, with a focus on the Anglican Church of Kenya.

## Introduction

Wyckoff (1961) defined church programmes as "the activities and undertakings that constitute the church's total educational ministry for children, youth, adults, the family, and the congregation as a whole (p. 27)." Programming is critical to success, and a well-organised programme is essential. It allows children to develop an interest and participate in the educational ministry. The programme should be designed to meet the children's needs and interests. It must entice them to learn. Unless the programme speaks to their needs, questions them, and gives them meaning in life, it will be irrelevant to them. Choun and Choun (2001, p. 127) note that "Children's ministry programs are important because they reach children at the stage where most will make their decisions for Christ. As children, people form lifelong attitudes toward God and His church." Today's trend in the church ministry is to have fewer, more focused programs. It is much more effective to have one or two programs that advance the ministry's vision rather than a dozen that keep the children busy (Alley, 2002).

Powers (1981) explains that Christian education is not a goal but a means of achieving the church's goal. To carry out its mission, the church provides education. It takes time and effort to reach children through Sunday school. It requires careful and deliberate planning for all workers in the children's department. Committed workers who share a common concern for reaching and teaching boys and



girls must pay the price of careful planning and hard work if the objective of ministry education is to be met. Alley (2002, p. 148) states, "The programs you design must meet both the felt needs of the children and families in your community." Children matter to God and their parents, and they ought to matter more to the church.

This paper provides an overview of the strategies Christian educators can employ to develop effective programmes for Sunday school students and to manage the education ministry's work. The paper identifies the pastor, the superintendent, and the Christian education teacher as some of the leaders. The author then examines the grouping of the children and the schedule of the teaching and learning process of the Sunday school programme as additional essential educational strategies.

### **Ministry Education**

Ministry education refers to the overall process of instructing and nurturing people in the Christian faith, intending to foster spiritual growth and a deeper relationship with God (Choun & Choun, 2001). Within a church context, ministry education involves implementing intentional programmes and activities to teach the doctrines and practices of Christianity to congregants of all ages. When it comes to children's ministry specifically, the goal of ministry education is to provide age-appropriate Christian education to children. This involves teaching children the core beliefs and tenets of the faith in a way that connects with their developmental level. Lessons focus on foundational topics like God, Jesus, the Bible, salvation, and ethics. Ministry education for children also aims to evangelise young hearts, calling children to accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour early in life.

Additionally, children's ministry education nurtures the spiritual formation of children through practices like prayer, worship, scripture reading, and acts of service. It establishes spiritual disciplines and provides moral values education from a Biblical perspective. Ministry education further prepares children to actively participate in the church through programmes like Sunday school, youth group, Vacation Bible School, and mission trips. The goal is to equip children to grow in Christian maturity, share their faith, and live out their Christianity within their families, schools, and communities. Effective ministry education in childhood lays a solid spiritual foundation for the rest of their lives. In this way, children's ministry education serves as a primary channel for disciplining young hearts in the church.

### **Methodology**

This study utilised an explanatory research design. This involved reviewing and analysing prior studies on Sunday school education and children's ministry. Examining previous scholarly literature provides critical background information and reveals gaps that the study aims to address. Reviewing the quantitative studies involved a thorough review of existing research on Sunday school curriculum, teaching methods, programme organisation, and other aspects of children's Christian education. This review establishes what is already known in these areas and highlights where additional research is needed.

Likewise, the qualitative review was informed by examining prior interviews, surveys, and case studies focused on the perspectives of Sunday school teachers, leaders, and students. Based on previous investigations, this provided context on factors impacting the effectiveness of children's ministry education.

Combining both forms of data from examining previous scholarly literature provides a more complete understanding of this complex educational phenomenon. Explanatory design is a practical approach for comprehensively evaluating and improving the children's ministry education system.



### **Theoretical Framework**

This study drew upon John Dewey's theory of experiential learning. Dewey emphasised the importance of grounding education in students' active experiences and interests. Rather than rote memorisation, Dewey advocated for learning by doing, where students engage interactively with hands-on activities, experiments, and projects (Roberts, 2003). Learning by doing allows students to apply concepts and develop skills through real-world projects and activities. Dewey believed education should connect to students' interests, problems, and contexts. Subject matter is a resource, but the quality of the learning experience depends on students' engagement.

Key aspects of Dewey's experiential learning theory include problem-solving, inquiry, discourse, cooperation, and reflection. Teachers guide learning through hands-on investigations, group work, questions, and careful scaffolding. However, students play an active role through collaboration, discussion, presenting findings, and articulating new knowledge. The classroom functions as a miniature society focused on experiential growth. Ultimately, Dewey's philosophy emphasises education through supervised experience, experiments, and projects. Learning is active, interactive, relevant to students' lives, and geared towards developing thinking skills and social values. This provides an influential framework for designing engaging, democratic, student-driven instruction.

### **Leadership in Christian Education**

Any organisation lacking leadership will rapidly descend into chaos. Leadership provides everyone in a group with the stability and direction necessary to accomplish shared objectives and great accomplishments (Kamande et al., 2022). The church's shared mission is to fulfil the Great Commission while nurturing its members' developing relationship with Christ in daily life. The role of the Christian leader is to exemplify the biblical requirements for a Christian and to lead others to do the same. By exemplifying the Christian life, the Sunday school teacher plays a crucial role in the spiritual development of children.

Leaders are vital to any educational endeavour. According to Leal (2018), the education ministry aims to teach the truth about God so that the learner will accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour. In addition, the ministry should focus on selecting the right leaders tasked with guiding the children to live a Christian life. Leadership is one of the Spirit's gifts (I Corinthians 12), but that does not imply that a given leader is proficient in every aspect of Sunday school work. One individual may have a talent for teaching, another for evangelism, while few individuals possess all spiritual gifts (Townes, 1976). Effective leadership requires a willingness to follow directions and a cooperative spirit on the part of the group members. An effective leader spends much time motivating his staff to do what needs to be done. Carefully laid plans based on needs, clear-cut and realistic objectives, and efficient organisation to implement plans are required for effective leadership. The leader must control the situation to direct efforts toward desired goals (Clark, 1975).

Ineffective delegation of responsibility is one reason the Anglican Church in Kenya has failed to minister effectively to children through the Sunday school programme (Mambo, 2022). Most programme participants are not trained and thus do not know what, when, or how to conduct the educational ministry. Due to this lack of knowledge, duties are sometimes not as desired. To comprehend what is expected of them, this section considers the various roles leaders play in the educational ministry for children.



### ***Pastor***

Pastors' attitudes toward Sunday school will determine whether the Sunday school work expands. The pastor is a pacesetter, and programmes that receive personal attention will particularly interest the congregation. If Sunday school becomes the pastor's primary and most important objective for the local church, the dedication will spur growth and promote positivity among Sunday school children. The ultimate goal is to help young people develop a strong faith foundation and a sense of community within the church. In the Anglican Church, for instance, most pastors believe that their primary responsibility is to preach the Word of God. This emphasis may be appropriate, but the fact remains that pastors are responsible for all church departments and neglecting any of them would be a breach of duty (Mambo, 2022). The pastor should actively participate in the Sunday school programme, fostering and promoting the faithful leadership of Christian educators and leaders.

### ***Sunday School Superintendent***

The Sunday school superintendent is one of the most critical lay leaders in the church. One must be of Christian faith and character. Aside from that, the superintendent should be someone who understands and is committed to the mission of the Sunday school, not just superficially but fundamentally. The Sunday school superintendent serves as the general administrative leader of a church's Sunday school ministry. This person is responsible for coordinating the work of all Sunday school classes towards the overarching objective of Sunday school.

More than any other staff member, the superintendent must understand the church's goals for Christian education and keep the objectives in mind in everything one does to avoid succumbing to the superficial practices common in Sunday schools. One should have a growing knowledge of the job, as described by Vieth (1930):

...the three great words in the Superintendent's vocabulary: organization (building a machine), administration (seeing that the machine is moving) and supervision (making the machine go forward more effectively). He must have the faculty of getting along with other people, so that his various relationships are pleasant and without friction (Vieth, 1930, p. 12).

Pickering (2019) suggests that the Sunday school superintendent also ensures that financial plans are in place to assist in running children's ministry. Besides, one needs to possess the ability to handle human resources and appropriate negotiation skills when the church needs to enhance its Sunday school ministry by incorporating external parties. The Anglican Church must fulfil this crucial leadership position in its Sunday school programme, as most churches enlist only teachers. According to Hannam et al. (2020), if they can find a Sunday school superintendent aware of the required responsibilities, the church can guide the children in the way of Christ most effectively.

### ***Sunday School Teacher***

Sunday school teachers have responded to the call to teach a Sunday school class. They are privileged and responsible for interpreting God's scripture to mould Christian characters and impart spiritual knowledge (Sanders, 2018).

Teachers should serve as shepherds for their students. They can grow closer to their Sunday school class members if they are willing to engage with them in various learning contexts. Teachers are crucial for the continued existence of the church and the Christian faith. They have the same obligation to their class as pastors do to their congregation. Thus, a Sunday school teacher extends pastoral



ministry into the class. As a Christian, the instructor must sincerely desire to save souls and utilise the means of grace, such as prayer and fellowship. One must thoroughly understand the Bible and be committed to the truth in every aspect of life, work, and everyday conduct. Sunday school teachers' devotion to the history and governance of their church requires vigilance. Hence, the qualities of a Sunday school teacher can be summed up as having a heart for God, a love for people, a passion for God's word, a habit of praying, a commitment to personal growth, an ability to teach, a willingness to prepare and a dedication to the people they teach (Baird, 2015).

The highest privilege of a Sunday school teacher is to introduce children to the knowledge of Christ. This involves character formation that leads students to complete transformation in Christ and the ability to live a new life of Salvation as they continue to progress toward the Christ-like ideal of the ideal man (Eph. 4:13). The teacher must strive for excellence, genuinely love the students, seek their highest welfare, and submit entirely to the most outstanding teacher, Jesus Christ.

It is important to note that Sunday school teachers' knowledge is focused wholly on biblical virtues. Their beliefs about God and life, their likes and dislikes, their biases, and even how they talk, and dress are as much a part of what they teach as any technical skills or methods (Edge, 1956). When the teachers' lives exemplify the truths they strive to teach, the outcomes will be as desired (Perryman & Calvert, 2019).

### **Grouping of Children in Sunday School**

The organisation is a significant issue in the Anglican Church of Kenya's Sunday school structure. Due to the lack of qualified leaders, teachers, and space, all children of different ages are taught together in some churches. This results in an interrupted Sunday class session, either because the material is too difficult for the younger children to comprehend or because it is too straightforward for the older children to be interested in. Coordinators, administrators, leaders, and educators should be concerned with how children encounter the church and are nurtured in the Christian faith whenever they are in the congregation. Children must have opportunities to learn alongside peers of the same age. They also require opportunities to share experiences with individuals of a wider age than their own. According to Wabukala (2012), ages 0 - 14 is a critical period for a child's spiritual formation because the ideals and convictions they embrace during this time will primarily serve as the foundation upon which the rest of their lives stand. This means that as the Anglican Church of Kenya, we must double our efforts in developing effective ministry to ensure our children come to church and get the best instruction in the Christian faith.

According to Towns (1976), one of the most significant benefits of the closely graded system is that all of the finest teaching methods can be implemented in Sunday school, and the students can be taught the entire Bible systematically and with the highest level of comprehension. Sunday schools are in desperate need of organisation. The organisation is grouping people to enable individuals and groups to achieve their objectives. In organisation, individuals and groups are assigned activities and responsibilities (Powers, 1981, p. 129). Even Jesus' teaching was affected by the number of students He was instructing. He provided more individualised instruction to the twelve disciples than to the vast crowds that followed Him (Brown & Reed, 1974, p. 51).

The following is a suggested plan for dividing the Sunday school (S.S.) into various departments according to the ages and grades of the children.



*Table 1: Division of Sunday School (S.S) into various Departments*

Age	Grade	S. S. Department
2-3	Nil	Nursery
4-5	Nil	Beginners
6-8	Grade 1, 2, 3	Primary
9-11	Grade 4, 5, 6	Primary

In a huge church, the department can have several classes depending on the number of children. The smaller the class, the more influential the teaching.

**Proper Use of the Sunday School Hour**

Time is of the essence during a Sunday school session. One hour per week is insufficient for so much communication that is available. Furthermore, many educators have less than an hour of genuine teaching time. Ineffective teaching is frequently hampered by the limited time allocated to Sunday school and the failure to maximise its use. When developing a teaching philosophy that necessitates time-intensive learner involvement activities, making the most of the limited time is vital. Teachers should first maintain an appropriate emphasis on both Scripture and student participation. Second, they should plan methods to achieve the teaching and learning objectives. Thirdly, they should retain continuity throughout the class period. Fourth, they should clearly understand their priorities, and fifth, they should select the most pertinent learning activities for the session (Simanjuntak et al., 2022).

**Developing the Programme for Children's Education**

The importance of children's ministry in the church is that it creates and provides space for children to learn about God, develop good morals, and fellowship with people who follow the Lord. Our children's ministry programs should be scheduled to meet their needs and accomplish biblical goals. These programs can be encompassed in worship and children's Bible studies.

**(i) Worship**

Worship can be a means of fostering the spiritual development of children. "Worship is a communion with God, in which the worshiper experiences God's response to the human creature; it actively seeks the presence of God as well as response to him (Vieth, 1963, p. 106)." When Christians speak of worship in the context of our church, they primarily envision adults participating in the church service. This should not be the case, as the fundamental factors in children's capacity to worship are who they are and their life experiences. Their world is expanding to include peer groups, playgroups, relationships with adults outside the family, and a growing sense of belonging and participation in the Christian fellowship of the church.

Therefore, the participation of boys and girls in the congregation's liturgy can be a source of enrichment, insight, idea reinforcement, and experience expansion. Thus, Christians must recognise that children must be perpetually assisted and encouraged to develop a sense of belonging within the church. Parents should bring their children to the regular church service, including the Holy Communion. In addition, children should be sincerely welcomed at the regular services, even if their presence can sometimes be somewhat distracting. In this situation, the pastor is essential in fostering a sense of belonging within the worshipping community. This could be accomplished by acknowledging their presence and appreciating their small contributions. Vieth (1963) has additionally underscored the significance of worship by stating:



The desire for communion with God is as basic and real as the desire for food and drink and any other value which gives life meaning. This is true for the young child as well as for the mature man or woman (Vieth, 1963, p. 105).

A worship service should include the following components to be effective and meaningful:

- a) *The Message* may be a story, sermon, guided conversation, or visual presentation.
- b) *The Hymns, Songs, and Music* greatly contribute to worshipful joy.
- c) *The Bible*: The meaning of the Bible passages must be concise and readily understood (Permana et al., 2019).
- d) *Prayers*: People primarily learn to convey their relationship with God through prayer. The leader of the service prayer should engage in extensive, prayerful preparation, and the children should be permitted and encouraged to contribute their thoughts to group prayer.
- e) *The Offering* becomes increasingly significant as a response to God during childhood. Boys and girls can collect and take the offering to the chancel for dedication. They will value this opportunity to participate and perform the service with dignity if instructed.
- f) *Children Participation*: Worship should be conducted with children, not for them. Children may assist with service planning and setting up the venue.

#### **(ii) Children's Bible Studies**

The importance of teaching the Bible to children is paramount. Teaching the Bible in Sunday school gives children a solid religious grounding at a young age that can mature into a deeper faith commitment later in life. Even though adults wrote the Bible for adults, it also contains a message for children. To effectively communicate this message to children, Christian educators must systematically organise Bible studies, that is, in a series. The term "series" refers to a collection of curriculum materials related to a specific goal-attainment strategy (Heckman & Ferren, 1976, p. 51).

The Bible study series helps provide opportunities for children and the adults who live and work with them to experience the stories and messages of the Bible in a Christian community in a manner suited to their developing maturity. The special features to be included in the children's Bible study series during Sunday School are as follows:

1. The basic framework for developing the series should be the six major seasons of the Christian year.
2. In addition to Christmas and Easter, days for special emphasis should include observances such as Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Pentecost, and All Saints' Day.
3. Each year's cycle should include the following:
  - i. Study of some major events in Jesus' life.
  - ii. There are opportunities to grow in understanding of and responding to Jesus's life and teachings.
  - iii. Study of both the Old and New Testament heritage.
  - iv. Opportunities to participate in the life of the Christian community as it expresses this heritage.
4. Unit themes should recur at appropriate points throughout the cycles, with selected stories and passages repeated and new material added each time the theme recurs. Treatment is varied and intensified to keep up with the child's increasing maturity.



5. Repetition from quarter to quarter should be planned to achieve desired reinforcement, and certain themes and Scripture passages should not be overworked.
6. Units should be developed so that the biblical stories, passages, and their message may be examined and applied in the light of specific ethnic and cultural needs.
7. The church's concerns, such as teaching, mission, evangelism, social concern, and others, should be incorporated as appropriate.

Studying the Bible helps our children learn important life lessons. The biblical content lays the foundational truths that help children understand who Jesus is and why they need a personal Saviour. This enables them not only to show the love of Jesus but also to share the truth of the gospel. Children can learn so much from the Bible from an early age, and the weekly memory verses help reinforce those truths and build a solid foundation in faith.

### **Development of Curriculum Materials**

For a successful children's ministry in the church, it is necessary to develop curriculum materials that help learners achieve their purposes, objectives, and aspirations (White, 2017). Developing curriculum materials is an intensive task. In the first phase, Christian educators should provide curriculum-related recommendations. The educator's ideas should be thoroughly considered and chosen based on utility. In the context of our church, the curriculum should be denominational. In addition, the curriculum should be adaptable so churches can tailor it to their particular requirements, regardless of location.

The second phase involves long-term planning and organisation. The curriculum design should be comprehensive, progressive, and unified by a theme or principle. For instance, a curriculum could be titled "At Work in God's Kingdom." Qualified personnel must write curriculum materials, particularly those with a solid theological education. The same should then be edited and thoroughly examined for errors (Simanjuntak et al., 2022). The materials should be chosen based on their utility within the church. The curriculum must then be printed and distributed. At this point, the overall design of the used materials, the quality of the paper, the final cost, and their appeal are of utmost importance. If the denominational headquarters office cannot cover the expense, they should choose less expensive materials. Distribution of the curriculum must not be taken for granted, as this is a significant obstacle for many publishers and can result in a squandering of resources. In Kenya, it would be preferable to disseminate curriculum materials through the Diocesan Board of Education headquarters, ensuring that the materials reach the local churches on time.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Sunday school programmes are vital in nurturing children's spiritual growth within the Anglican Church of Kenya. As discussed, effective leadership is critical, with pastors, superintendents, and teachers each having specific responsibilities. Proper organisation of students by age, as well as efficient use of limited classroom time, are also key strategies. Most importantly, developing engaging worship experiences, Bible study curricula, and learning materials tailored to children's developmental levels allows for impactful Christian education. When implemented well, these recommendations can transform Sunday school from a peripheral programme into one that lays a solid faith foundation in the church's youngest members. Moving forward, continued teacher training, parent involvement, and administrative support will be needed to maximise the potential of Sunday school. With proper commitment and vision, educating children through Sunday school can serve as a channel for fulfilling Christ's Great Commission within the Anglican Church of Kenya.



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