

Influence of Home Culture on Child Development in Church: The Case of Atonsu District Assemblies of God, Ghana in the Kumasi Metropolis.



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ABSTRACT

This paper sought to explore how the Assemblies of God Church in the Atonsu District is employing the home culture and its value system in its child development programmes. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and descriptive survey design. Data was collected from 50 purposively selected respondents using interviews. The data gathered was analysed using thematic content analysis. The study found that for the holistic development of the child, the church largely needs resources from the home culture and its value system. The study concludes that the home culture and its value system employed in child upbringing are not in conflict with Christian virtues of child education described in the Bible and as practiced by the Assemblies of God Church. This indicates that the indigenous system of child upbringing is in harmony with Christian child development programmes of the Assemblies of God Church. The study recommends that for any effective child development, the church must take into consideration the home culture and its value systems as this can help strengthen the collaborative influence of the church on the home value systems in total child development.

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INTRODUCTION

The primary source of child acceptance and belonging is the home. The home culture and value system of indigenous knowledge have been increasingly recognized in many fields, including early childhood development, as development agencies and institutions of higher learning come to appreciate its contributions. Parents are the first crucial 'others' with whom children build up bonds of trust and loyalty. The family provides the secure ground for venturing to build up relationships in the neighbourhood, school, and other wider areas of society.

Again, children are also surrounded by traditional cultural values and all of these go a long way to affect their development—negatively or positively. Another important issue relating to the authors interest in the examination of some Ghanaian traditional values and patterns of child development lies in the fact that the churches under this study are located in traditional communities. They are therefore required to incorporate the home culture and its values system in their day-to-day activities and training programmes in order to ensure the holistic development of the child.

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The deep social trends such as the radical questioning of traditional values, the weakening of the family system, and substance abuse, have created a social environment in which the growth and development of young people as Christians have become a tremendous challenge to themselves. This recent development in the overall effectiveness of the Church's ministry to children involves a complex, dynamic process dependent on many factors. These complexities have heightened the need for collaboration between the home and the church in child upbringing.

These objectives have not been fully achieved as a result of the negligence of the church to fully incorporate the home values cultural systems and methodologies in their day-to-day activities in ensuring the holistic development of the child. It also seeks to establish the foundation on which traditional society transmits knowledge and values to their children in the Ghanaian context.

By employing the qualitative modes of inquiry, this paper attempts to explore how the Atonsua Chapter of the Assemblies of God Church is employing the home culture and its value system in its child development programmes.

Value of Children in Ghanaian Society

According to Kagitcibasi, several studies on fertility suggest that fertility structure is based on individual decisions.¹ The general assumption is that this decision is also influenced by socio-economic and political conditions. Consequently, it is often assumed that high fertility is related to the economic value of children. Specifically, the assumption is that when children are important for the economic productivity of the household, and their economic utility is high, the number of children born should be higher than when children's economic utility is low. This assumption however, fails to explain certain demographic realities such as why children are born under circumstances of low economic utility.

Assimeng has described Ghanaians as conforming and blatantly eschewing individual speculations; unquestioning acquiescence; showing a lack of self-reliance owing to the pervading influence of the extended family system; engaging in fetish worship of authority and charismatic leaders, and possessing a hatred for arguments.² These characterizations of Ghanaians and in particular those pertaining to conformity, and the influence of the external family system, have several implications for the values assigned to children and possibly the way they are socialized.

In addition to the extended family system, Ghanaian ethnic groups are divided into clans of which individuals are members. Individual members of a family may belong to different clans. Members of the same clan are held to be relatives and bound by a common tie. Embodied in this tie is the belief that members of the same clan descended from one ancestor and are linked spiritually. Clan members are also bound by certain obligations towards one another. As part of the descent from one ancestor, is the belief in spirits, a belief that ensures conformity and strong adherence to obligations within the family and within the clan. However, belief in the clan system appears to be weakening as part of the country's westernization. The lineage in Ghana determines which side of one's parent one can inherit from. Traditionally, the Akan tribe in Ghana is matrilineal, such that in the absence of a testament, children inherit from their mother's side, as well as their uncles.

Ghanaians, like other Africans, have their core personality linked to their ancestors through the 'spiritual principle'.³ As such, children are seen as serving a spiritual function by way of strengthening the link between the living and the dead. Whereas pregnancy is seen as signifying divine blessing, the child is regarded as God's precious gift, given through the mediative approval of ancestral spirits.⁴ Consequently, Sackey indicates that fertility for girls is crucial as it ensures among other things that the society will not die out. Barrenness then is the greatest calamity that can befall a Ghanaian woman.⁵

¹ Cigdem Kagitcibasi, *Changing values of Children in Turkey*, (Honolulu, HI: East-West Centre, 1982).

² Max Assimeng, *Social Structure Of Ghana: A Study in Persistence and Change*, (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1981).

³ P. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974).

⁴ Bame Nsamenang, *Human Development in Cultural Context: A Third World Perspective*, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992).

⁵ B.M. Sackey, "Women and health seeking behaviour in religious contexts: Reproductive and ante-natal care in Ghanaian religious movements. A case study of the Twelve Apostles Church." *African Studies Research Review*, 15, (1999):65 – 92.

Home Culture and its Value System in Child Development

According to Oti-Ndubueze, the home has a greater influence on the child.⁶ Out of 168 hours in the week, the child spends 3 hours in the church on Sunday school, 25 hours at public school and 140 hours at home. Therefore the home is bound to have the greatest influence on his/her behaviour. As Gyekye puts it, Akan or African moral or cultural values are those kinds of patterns of conduct that are considered most valuable and thus cherished by the community or Africans as people.⁷ Gyekye further indicates that when one considers these moral values across the entire continent of Africa, there seem to be some commonalities. Therefore, many a time, they are referred to as African cultural values. Akan moral or cultural values could be used interchangeably with African moral and cultural values in this work since this study was carried out in an Akan community.⁸ In support of this, Opoku has pointed out that African cultural values are normally defined by religious considerations because as in Africa, religion and culture cannot be separated from one another.⁹ That is the reason why taboos, customs etc. have their compelling power from religion. However, Gyekye sees this, as a mistake since African moral values are also derived from the experience of people living together to ensure a harmonious and common life.¹⁰ Thus moral values of the Akan people are aimed toward successful communal living, not forgetting kindness, compassion, generosity, hospitality, faithfulness, concern for others, and the action that brings peace, justice, dignity, and happiness as some of the moral values. It is important to note that selfishness is totally rejected by the society because of its egoistic tendencies.

Cline and Fay have stated that “the home has been central to every theory of personality formation, socialization, and child-rearing that has been formulated within the behavioral science”.¹¹ It is the home that has always borne the major responsibility for teaching children the essentials of social order and culture and for guiding their personal development. Zuck and Clark also view the role of the home as an agent of change in the sense that parents advise ways of bringing up their children.¹² This view was reiterated by Cline and Fay that “parents should be careful about how they cuddle and pet their own children. Younger children are more likely to need this than those who are older, but it should never be refused by the parents whatever the age of the child”.¹³ This therefore implies that parents must always remember that physical contact is essential for children. They normally enjoy touching and being touched, and holding and held, and it is the responsibility of parents, and especially fathers, to distinguish between what is normal and what is sexual.

Considering the Akan cultural values, for example, it could be said that they are not in conflict with the Christian virtues of child upbringing described in the Bible. In this sense, indigenous child upbringing is in harmony with Christian child development. The most important question to ask is whether there is any justification to avoid or despise all cultural practices and old patterns of life as Akan Christians? Or do they need to bring the indigenous knowledge systems face to face with the Christian ideas so that there will be integrative interactions that would bring about a kind of fusion between them that will lead to a relevant indigenous Christian child development?

Some Ghanaian Traditional Patterns of Learning and Child Development

Traditional education can also be defined as a process by which an existing society transmitted learnt culture, skills and knowledge from one individual to another. In the view of Amankwaa, culture is a defining characteristic of society and country. Culture comprises all kinds of learned behaviour of a people.¹⁴ It is

⁶ O. Oti-Ndubueze, *The Role of the Church in Child Training*, (Aba: Assemblies of God Press, 2013), 16-19.

⁷ Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, (Accra: Sankofa Publishing House, 1996).

⁸ Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, 29-31.

⁹ Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, (Punjab, FEP International Private Limited, 1978).

¹⁰ Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, 29-31.

¹¹ Forster Cline and Jim Fay *Parenting with Love and Logic*, (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Pinon Press, 1990), 124.

¹² Roy Zuck, and Robert E. Clark, *Childhood Education in the Church*, (Eds). (Chicago: Moody Press), 45-47.

¹³ Cline and Fay, *Parenting with Love and Logic*, 126.

¹⁴ B.K. Amankwaa, *Indigenous Religion and Culture*, (Accra: Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 1980).

important to point out here that culturally the Ghanaian people had means of educating their generation in the past. This could be substantiated by what one learned from parents, relatives and peers before going to school. The teaching and learning process in the traditional sense was informal. It did not involve elaborate preparation similar to that of formal education. In the modern context, formal education is offered mainly in a specific place (school, colleges, universities, churches, etc) under specialized instructors.

Formation and development of indigenes in traditional values of Akan community life are considered important. Rattray sees the whole of the Asante life as educational and personal development oriented. He says that “one could not really find any systemic training process. There was no formal education but every minute was an educational moment because educational instructions were given to the younger generation by the elderly.”¹⁵

Akan indigenous formation and personal development sought to nature the young people for proper community participation. Children for instance were trained to know the acceptable social norms. Rattray observes further that the Akan children were trained to avoid those pitfalls which could cause those troubles in their adult life. Virtues like keeping oneself from fornication, respect for others and knowledge of all the taboos of the society were instilled in them. The young were taught to work with their hand to make a living as adults. Whereas the formation of the boys was the prerogative of fathers, the formation of the girls was also done by mothers.¹⁶

Traditional leadership formation was done by parents, family members, traditional leaders and the larger community. Rites of passage like naming ceremony, puberty rites, marriage and death were the main formation moments. Festivals, storytelling, proverbs, symbols and music provided personal development and formation of values. According to Rattray, even drum language was a means of communicating traditional values and messages.¹⁷

Although the traditional patterns of child development were informal, they had and continue to have some aims and objectives which are similar to that of the Bible. It aims at producing an informed and knowledgeable person, imparting skills for productive purposes in society as well as integrating the person into the society in order to preserve its identity.

Some Indigenous Educational Methods in Child Development

Methods have to do with the techniques in the child development process. It is dynamic, effective and inspirational as indicated by Aggarwal.¹⁸ Discussed below are some of the various methods employed in traditional Ghanaian society in training the child.

The first and foremost is the use of proverbs. Proverbs, for instance, stand tall from the rest of African folktales in terms of traditional education because of their educative and communicative powers that deal seriously with culture, politics and history.¹⁹ They are used in most Akan expressions and sometimes the ability to use them, gives the speaker more recognition of intelligence and wisdom. Among the Akan, proverbs are expressed not only in words but in the language of the drums and the sound of the horn blown by the attendants of chiefs. Even patterns woven in cloth by weavers express some proverbial sayings. One such pattern in the *Kente* cloth(a traditional Ghanaian cloth) is *Ti koro nkɔ agyina*, literally meaning “one head does not go into council”. The brain behind this is that it is better if decisions are taken by two or more people. Akan proverbs could be very useful in the holistic development of the child as some of the proverbs can be used by the church in the preparation of materials and programmes in child development.²⁰ Appiah-Kubi opined that proverbs constitute a veritable instrument for citizenship (child) development since they are used

¹⁵ Robert S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

¹⁶ Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*.

¹⁷ Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*.

¹⁸ J.C. Aggarwal, *Teacher and Education in a Developing Society*, (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 2003).

¹⁹ Felix Boateng, “African Traditional Education: A Method of disseminating Cultural Values,” *Journal of Black Studies*, 3, (1983): 321-336.

²⁰ Kofi Appiah-Kubi, *The Akan of Ghana, West Africa: A handbook for Reference*, (Bloomfield, CT: Cowhide Press, 1999).

to educate, encourage, reprimand and advise.²¹ The following are a few Akan proverbs that address some concepts of responsible citizenship:

- i. **Truth:** the idea of truth is expressed in a number of proverbs. One example is *pae mu ka eye den, nanso ema ahota*. To wit, an honest confession is difficult to make but it brings peace of mind. This proverb teaches children that it is important to admit truth openly as it will free one's conscience.²²
- ii. **Obedience and respect:** Respect and obedience to the elderly and to authority and spiritual leaders, are observed and instilled in every Akan family.²³ This attitude is expressed in the proverbial saying: *se wo sen wagya tenten a wone no tipen nnye pe*. To wit "if you are taller than your father, it does not follow that he is your equal." This means that however well off a child is in life, it is his duty to give respect to those who are superior to him in age. This proverb will be very much useful to a Christian child development facilitator in teaching the child to respect the elderly. The proverb can be used in collaboration with a Bible text like "honour your father and mother..." (Exodus 20: 12, RSV) to make teaching easier.
- iii. **Patience:** The Akan proverb that demonstrates this virtue is: *se ekwan ware a ewie [pono ano]*. This proverb literally means that however long the distance is, it ends at the door. In other words, if there are some difficulties a child is going through in the course of a good life, they are bound to come to an end sooner or later, and it is up to the person who is going through such difficulties to wait patiently to the end.

The second method that cannot be lost sight of is nurturing children to identify with societal norms that bring honour and dignity to one's family. Much as a child is prepared for his own achievement in African traditional education, he is also prepared for harmonious participation in community life. This means that one is not to be selfish.²⁴ It also shows that African society places a great emphasis on communal values and Gyekye cites examples as sharing, mutual aid, caring for others, interdependence, solidarity, reciprocal obligation, and social harmony.²⁵ These and many others are learnt through nurturing. Refusing to demonstrate these values means one has not learnt. Nurturing plays an important role in child development. In every good nurturing process, there is an atmosphere of love, peace, cordiality, sharing, caring, kindness, and compassion. Therefore, child development without nurturing is never complete. The implication of this to child development is that parents and elderly people in the Church and in the various homes should live exemplary lives and create an atmosphere characterized by love, peace, cordiality, and kindness which are tenets of good nurturing. Much education takes place unconsciously as children interact with parents and elders in the church and in their communities. Mentoring is a method of teaching in which the learner learns by observing the educator as a role model. Normally the mentor is a person who has a good name in society and sets a good example for others to emulate.

The third method used to train the child in the home is the use of traditional symbols. This is one of the means by which learning takes place. For example, anytime there is an occasion when the *Akyeame* (linguists) come out with their *Akyeamepoma* portraying some symbols on it, then the atmosphere is set for learning. In this instance, no one tells any child who sees these symbols to learn. Whoever observes them and becomes inquisitive learns through questioning the elderly who explain the history behind every symbol. It is interesting to note that all the traditional symbols have good lessons to teach children.

According to Akrong, the mission with the idea of *sankofa* is trying to move away from the inherited missionary negative attitude towards African culture and religion to come to terms with traditional religion and culture that will produce an authentic African Christianity. In dealing with the challenge of educational

²¹ Appiah-Kubi, *The Akan of Ghana, West Africa: A handbook for Reference*, 59.

²² Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, 14.

²³ Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, 14.

²⁴ Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, 17.

²⁵ Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, 17.

ministries, Christians can, in fact, discern lessons from the past that provide insights into current and future needs.²⁶

Closely linked to the traditional symbols are the folk tales, games and apprenticeships. The folk tales are stories that are formulated from Ghanaian or Akan traditional point of view in which the spider (Ananse) is the principal character exhibiting wisdom and prudence in order to survive in dangerous conditions. Though it is not a formal role, it can be seen as a means for education, socialization and the inculcation of morality into the younger generation. In the traditional system, the elderly continue to be productive, especially in the area of storytelling to children and youth.²⁷ In telling Ananse stories, the Akan language, customs, cultural values and traditional beliefs are taught and learnt. Ananse stories can be relevant to a Christian child's development. They are stories that really address real life situations.

Games and plays are also important. While they are more popular with the young, the adults also participate in them. They help in shaping desirable social values and enhancing the physical fitness of the individual. Such games include 'Ampe', 'pilolo', 'As' etc. More elaborate apprenticeship is also used to expose the learner to specialized knowledge, skills and values. The instructor trains the person for a relatively long period. Such instructors had special skills e.g. in Crafts, Arts, Medicine, among others.

Organization of Traditional Patterns of Learning and Child Development

With the organization of traditional patterns of learning and child development, the research paper looked at the people who conducted the traditional patterns of learning and child development as well as where it was conducted. It was discovered that it was carried out in the homestead or wherever traditional ceremonial activities occurred. For example, teaching took place in the garden, on grazing grounds, in communal places, and sometimes far away from home. In the olden days, the fireplace was especially used in Africa to pass on knowledge, skills and values.

According to Ssekamwa, some teachers gave basic knowledge and skills to those who were more specialized and resourceful.²⁸ The parents played a major role in teaching their children. They were supplemented by elders, peers and those who were considered resourceful.

Content of Delivery in Indigenous Education

The content here refers to the values that were learnt. It is worth pointing out that in the traditional society, what was learnt depended on what was available and desirable and the learning situation was never the same.²⁹ Though the societies varied in their social, economic and political settings, they shared some similarities such as environmental education covering the physical features of the area; names of plant and animals and their functions; skills especially of a manual nature that enabled the leaders to perform certain tasks for their own good and that of the community in which they lived; and social values such as respect, love, unity and cooperation.

The rest included gentility and humility which required exhibiting manners of civilized conduct and behavior, leadership skills that shaped a person's role in society, based on sex, age or status. Religion also featured in the curriculum and was vital for the spiritual and moral fiber of the learner and the whole community. The history of the group was told where the learner was expected to know and appreciate the ancestry of the group, and the past fortunes or misfortunes among others.

²⁶ Abraham Akrong, "Traditional Religion and Christianity: Friends and Foes?" *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* Vol. X (2000): 48.

²⁷ Samuel Ayete-Nyampong, *Pastoral Care of the Elderly in Africa*, (Accra: Steps Publisher, 2008), 45.

²⁸ J.C. Ssekamwa, *History and development of Education in Uganda*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1997).

²⁹ J.P. Ocitti, "An Introduction to indigenous Education in East Africa: A supplement to Adult Education and development." *School of Education, Makerere University*, No. 42 (1993).

Children's Ministry of the Assemblies of God, Ghana

The Assemblies of God Church has established a children's ministry to steer the affairs of children and is based on the scripture in Proverbs 22:6 which states: "Train up a child, the way he should go so that when he grows he may not depart from it". In view of this, it is the responsibility of the church ministry to see to the spiritual and physical needs of the children. The goal of the ministry is "to reach the unreached children with the saving knowledge of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and to prepare by training up these children in the fear of God to become responsible and faithful adult Christians in future for the Lord Almighty, the church and the nation as a whole."³⁰ The core mission of the church is, therefore, to train, encourage, motivate and network all who minister unto children for Christ; "to seek and find the lost children, and prepare them for heaven".³¹ The above mentioned mandate of the Children's Ministry is carried out by working to meet the spiritual and physical needs of all children through evangelism and discipleship. They also organize vacation Bible classes, children camps, rallies, picnics, etc as a means to nurture the children for a better future. Other activities include leadership training, workshops, retreat and seminars for children teachers and children workers. The ministry also seeks to reach children through children's annual camp meetings, Bible quiz competitions, rallies, games, excursions and visitations actions and special songs, annual children get-togethers as well as contribution and advice on children's growth structure in Assemblies of God Church, Ghana.³²

Study area and Research Design

The study was conducted in Assemblies of God Church in the Atons District of the Ashanti Region. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and descriptive survey design. This design was appropriate since it measures or estimates the variables attribute of the target population at a particular point in time. The choice for the descriptive cross-sectional design was informed by the aim to explore how the Assemblies of God Church is employing the home value system in its child development programmes in the Atons District using qualitative data. The study population comprised pastors, instructors' children's ministry, and women leaders of the Assemblies of God Church within the Atons District. The rest included some selected members of the church who have passed through the children's ministry. The sample size of the study was 50 and made up of pastors, women leaders, and children's ministry instructors. The proportional distribution of the sample size from the various categories of church authorities is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Proportional Distribution of the Sample Size from the Various Categories of Church

Eligible Population Of The Church	Sample Size	Percentage Sample Size
Pastors	7	14
Women's Leaders	7	14
Children's Ministry Instructors	14	28
Local assemblies Members	7	14
District Children's Instructors' representatives	7	14
Ashanti Regional Children Ministry Representative	8	16
Total	50	100

This sample was recruited using the purposive sampling technique. This sampling technique was appropriate because some specific people (both in the lay and ordained ministry) were needed to provide information for the study. According to Black, the main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest which will best enable one to gather relevant data to answer research

³⁰ "Children's Ministry" Available at [http://www.assembliesofgodghana.org/children's ministry](http://www.assembliesofgodghana.org/children's%20ministry).

³¹ "Children's Ministry" Available at [http://www.assembliesofgodghana.org/children's ministry](http://www.assembliesofgodghana.org/children's%20ministry).

³² "Children's Ministry" Available at [http://www.assembliesofgodghana.org/children's ministry](http://www.assembliesofgodghana.org/children's%20ministry).

questions.³³ In view of this, the researcher considered the above personalities as respondents with the requisite knowledge and experience needed to provide the data required by the study. Pastors and children ministry teachers were chosen because they are with the children, and in one way or the other, the stakeholders in the development of the children. The Regional Director together with the district representatives were selected to give the administrative sides of the church's child development drive. Finally, the past members of the children's ministry were chosen to give feedback on the effectiveness of the child development activities of the church. The presentation has been done mainly along the lines of the branches in the district as a whole. However, when the need arose, names of individual respondents and their respective local assemblies or capacities have been mentioned.

Data Collection Instrument and Data Gathering Procedures

The main instrument used to gather data from the respondents was personal interviews. A small-scale pilot study on non-selected respondents, who were later excluded from the main study (N = 11) led to minor modifications regarding syntax and grammar by assisting the researcher to finalize the interview guide for the actual field research and to ensure face validity.

The data gathering commenced on 9th December 2019 and ended on 18th January 2020. The interview session was conducted on a one-on-one basis and in the convenient locations decided on by each interviewee. The English language was used during each interview session. The interviewees were briefed about the objectives of the study. The questions on the interview guide were asked and participants provided answers to them. In some cases, further probing questions were asked to elicit further explanations for responses provided by the interviewees.

The interview sections were audiotaped using digital audio recorders. Each interview session lasted between 20-30 minutes for the pastors and 15-20 minutes for the other interviewees (Women Leaders, Children Ministry Instructors, Local Assemblies members, the Regional Ministerial Director, District Children's Instructors' representatives, District representatives, and Ashanti Regional Children Ministry representative of the church). The presentation has been done mainly along the lines of the branches in the district as a whole. However, when the need arose, names of individual respondents and their respective local assemblies or capacities have been mentioned. Ethical issues in the recording of participants' voices were strictly adhered to throughout the interview process. In all, 50 recruited respondents' participated in the study.

Data Analysis Method

LeCompte and Schensul define data analysis as the process a researcher uses to reduce data to a story and its interpretation.³⁴ The data collected using the interviews were analysed using thematic content analysis techniques described in Bernard and Miles *et al.*, and described in detail using manifest and interpretive procedures.³⁵ During the manifest analysis, a descriptive account of the data was outlined dwelling most on what respondents actually said, documented or observed with nothing read into it and nothing assumed about it and during the interpretive phase, descriptive analysis was carried out extensively dwelling on what was meant by the responses. Quotations from interviewees were identified and used to support their viewpoints regarding the data they provided. Presented below are the interview results collated from the interview respondents.

³³ Thomas R. Black, *Doing Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences: An Integrated Approach to Research Design, Measurement and Statistics*, (London: SAGE Publication Ltd, 1999).

³⁴ Margaret D. LeCompte and J.J. Schensul, *Ethnographer's Toolkit* (Eds.). (Walnut Creek, CA: Sage Publications, 1999).

³⁵ Harvey R. Bernard, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000); M.B. Miles and A.M. Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This session presents the results and discussion of the viewpoints of the respondents. In the course of conducting this study, four issues came up for discussion. These issues emerged from the review of the works of literature, observations as well as various responses from the respondents. Though not exhaustive, they include issues such as (i) the new role of the church as a partner in child development as well as (ii) the collaborative role of the church and the family in child development. These have been discussed below:

The New Role of the Church as Partner in Child Development

Even though the primary responsibility for the upbringing of young people rests with the parents, the Church, too, has always had an important helping role in the spiritual, personal, and social growth of children. This role is all the more urgent, albeit all the more difficult, in the society because of the nature of the secular and pluralistic society experienced in Ghana. From the study, it can be posited that the leadership of the Assemblies of God Church is in the best position to overcome human inertia through inspired messages and unceasing instruction to the adult membership. The adult faithful, especially parents, need to become actively interested in and supportive of a comprehensive children's ministry. Nevertheless, some of the leaders and parents in the selected branches studied show a lukewarm attitude towards the welfare and development of the children. Some of the branches have devoted little resources to the children. Inadequate human resource base, poor remuneration for the teachers, and poor infrastructure are widespread in the district. Only widespread education and interest across the Church in the Atonsua district and for that matter, Ghana, in general, can bring about a serious commitment of the Church's human and material resources to meet this great challenge. The ordained leaders of the Church must themselves become genuinely involved in the child development agenda and actively encourage the cultivation of the gifts of the laity in this area.

Another task for the church in child development identified in this study is the significant further development of the church's professional personnel and administrative structures. Such development entails not merely expansion but also ongoing evaluation of competence of persons and efficiency of structures pertaining to child development. The strength and effectiveness of the Church's child developers in terms of personal gifts and professional training will ultimately determine the degree of impact of children's ministry on the whole Church. Inspired professionals are the main source for virtually all aspects of a purposeful, systematic children's ministry including, philosophy, strategy, research and development of appropriate educational material, training of volunteers, coordination of efforts, and implementation of programs. The Assemblies of God church and for that matter, all Christian bodies dedicated to the development of children must take the above into consideration.

The need to involve children themselves in designing programmes for their development constitutes another task for the church. From the study, the researchers identified that almost all the programmes and activities for the children were solely designed by the adults with least or no involvement of the children. None of the structures designed for children in the church had the views of the children considered. By 'involvement' the researchers mean not only participation in prepared programs but also participation in the development and carrying out of those programs. Nothing less than the full engagement of children in the whole process of child development and children's ministry will insure their genuine interest, serious involvement, and consequent benefit. Because they have valuable contributions to make, programs should be characterized by a strong component of service in organized ways within the Church as well as the larger society.

Of special concern is the establishment of a well-defined process of evaluation and accountability at the church's administrative levels. From the study of the selected branches of the Assemblies of God Church, it was noticed that too often child development programs do not go as far as they could because they are not carefully formulated, or fully carried out, or properly followed up. Therefore, appropriate standards of evaluation will help correct deficiencies in such programs and improve their effectiveness. Clear lines of communication and accountability will encourage fuller implementation of programs toward achieving their

maximum benefit. Thus a process of evaluation and accountability (for example, through written reports) is crucial to effective children's ministry and must involve all stakeholders.

The Collaborative Role of the Church and the Family in Child Development

There is currently a regeneration of interest in indigenous values, after a long period of neglect and disdain by Western scientific and academic establishments. Consequently, most child-centred interventions and programs in the church similarly tend to be based on an accepted body of psychological theories and knowledge built on Western experience and practice. Scientists, child development practitioners, conservationists, political advocates, and profit-seekers have different motivations for pursuing home culture and its values, although they may often overlap in their methods. Within the child development paradigm, which is of primary interest for this study, incorporation of home culture and its value systems by the church and other partners is seen as a more effective way of attaining child development goals. Knowledge of child development practices and beliefs in the field of early childhood care and development is important to understand, support, and improve the child-rearing process, to respond to diversity and respect cultural values. The researchers are of the opinion that direct child development interventions will be more successful when built on local home culture and its value system.

Many development agencies are now articulating the importance of understanding local knowledge and practices and, consequently, designing culturally appropriate interventions and the church should not be an exception. One method that cannot be lost sight of is nurturing children to identify with societal norms that bring honour and dignity to one's family. Much as a child is prepared for his own achievement in African traditional education, he is also prepared for harmonious participation in community life. This means that one is not to be selfish. According to Gyekye, African society places a great emphasis on communal values and he cites examples as sharing, mutual aid, caring for others, interdependence, solidarity, reciprocal obligation, and social harmony. These and many others are learnt through nurturing. Refusing to demonstrate these values means one has not learnt.³⁶

The influence of the home is virtually incalculable in the formation of the identity and the expressions of conduct of children. To be sure, during the teenage years, children also need to establish relationships beyond the home and such groups may exercise greater influence on them, especially if the family environment is not strong. The Church needs to address concerns and strengthen its pastoral care pertaining to marriage, family life, and parenting. The Church as a community always has tremendous potential for providing a sense of acceptance and belonging to children. One way is through the fostering of effective peer groups of various kinds under the auspices and spiritual guidance of the Church in order to satisfy their need for friendships and social interaction. To belong to a Church group signals important implications for the identity and developmental direction of a child. An effective Church group can often influence a child in instances and areas where parental advice or intervention might only bring resistance and reaction. Parents, while clearly and firmly holding to their spiritual ideals and truth standards, must at the same time show Christ-like love, forgiveness, understanding, and openness towards their children. For example, their flexibility can be shown not by merely handing down "official instructions and punishment", but by being willing to discuss vital issues in the context of the dignity of personal freedom and accountability. Teenage children may disagree or even rebel against parental instruction and sometimes the teachings of the Bible, but they grow in respect and trust for the Church when the Church shows love and understanding towards them while maintaining its spiritual standards.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the home culture and its value system adopted in nurturing the child, it is evident that they are not in conflict with the Christian virtues of child upbringing described in the Biblical point of view. This indicates that the indigenous child upbringing is in harmony with Christian child development programmes of the

³⁶ Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, 45.

Assemblies of God Church. It is therefore important that in the training of the child, the church needs to bring the home value system ingrained in the indigenous knowledge systems and training of the child face to face with the Christian ideas so that there will be integrative interaction that would bring about holistic training and development of the child. Any attempt by one to segregate them in the course of training the child would lead to partial development of the child's inert potential.

The Church should be an important source of support, guidance, inspiration, and meaningful challenge for the children in these changing times and must blend the home culture and the church value systems to promote the holistic development of the child. Child development facilitators should begin to deal with the theological significance of the symbols so that they can be integrated with child development lessons to enhance the teaching and learning process of the church.

Christian child educators should begin to retrieve such stories and in the cause of teaching Christian moral values, they can modify them to serve as an introduction to their lessons. The church as a dynamic community with considerable human and financial resources can effectively carry out a critically needed ministry to children. A community focused on children's ministry with a sense of urgency and permanent commitment, supported by appropriate structures and programs, and above all supervised and guided by inspired and trained leaders and personnel, will not only bring about essential benefits in the holistic development of the children but will also beckon the Church to a more secure future in the fulfilment of its mission. The study recommends that for any effective child development, the church must take into consideration the home culture and its value systems as this can help strengthen the collaborative influence of the church on the home value systems in total child development.

CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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