



Exploring African Traditional Methods of Teaching Christian Education for Children: The Case of Three ELCT Dioceses

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Abstract: This study explored the importance of integrating African traditional teaching methods into Christian education and evaluated their use in Sunday school programmes across three dioceses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT): The Northern Diocese, Diocese of Meru, and North Central Diocese. A qualitative case study design was employed, using purposive, expert, and stratified sampling techniques. Data were collected through interviews, questionnaires, and direct observation. The findings revealed that Sunday school teaching is predominantly teacher-centred, relying heavily on narration, memorization, and limited learner interaction. In most observed classes, children were expected to listen quietly while teachers explained biblical stories, with few opportunities for discussion, questioning, reflection, or practical participation. This approach resulted in passive learning and restricted children's active engagement in developing their understanding of the Christian faith. In contrast, the study found that African traditional pedagogical methods emphasize participation, experience, community involvement, and age-appropriate learning. Although these methods have declined in contemporary practice, participants regarded them as valuable resources for strengthening Christian education. Storytelling, role-play, imitation, songs, riddles, age-group learning, and intergenerational mentorship were identified as culturally relevant and effective approaches for nurturing children's faith. Respondents emphasized that integrating these methods into Sunday school could enhance children's participation, understanding, and spiritual development. However, successful integration requires well-trained teachers, contextual adaptation of traditional practices, and stronger collaboration between churches and families. The study therefore argues that incorporating African pedagogical methods into Christian education can create more engaging, culturally meaningful, and holistic approaches to teaching the Christian faith among children in the selected ELCT dioceses.

Keywords: African Methods of Teaching, Contextualized teaching strategies, Child, Church, Methods

How to cite this work (APA):

Ndelekwa, K. P. (2026). Exploring African Traditional Methods of Teaching Christian education for Children: The Case of Three ELCT Dioceses. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 10(3), 769 – 780.

<https://doi.org/10.59765/vny53>

1. Introduction

The Holy Bible in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 talks about what God told the congregation of Israel to do in respect to children faith teaching. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to

your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise" This instruction is fundamental for the transmission of religious heritage (Luna, December 3-15, 2000). African Traditional Education refers to the indigenous educational systems that have been practiced in various African societies for centuries. It encompasses

the knowledge, skills, values, and cultural practices passed down from one generation to another within the community (Mgbeafulike, 2023). Education was primarily transmitted through oral traditions, storytelling, apprenticeships, and initiation rituals. Elders, community leaders, and specialized teachers played crucial roles in imparting knowledge and skills to younger members of the community (Olawale, 2025). In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the value of African traditional education and a desire to reintegrate its principles and practices into modern educational contexts (Mgbeafulike, 2023). The study is grounded in the recognition that Christian education is central to nurturing children's spiritual growth and sustaining the life of the Church across generations. Beyond the biblical foundation,

African traditional education systems also demonstrate a long-standing commitment to teaching the younger generation through oral traditions, storytelling, rites of passage, and communal instruction (Dickens, 2025). Similarly, during the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther emphasized structured Christian teaching, especially through the Small Catechism of 1529, which was designed to support family-based instruction and ensure accessible doctrinal teaching for all believers (McNair, 2017). These historical and cultural perspectives collectively affirm that the education of children in faith is a universal and enduring responsibility, essential for shaping moral values, spiritual identity, and continuity of belief across generations (Park et al., 2025).

Christian education in Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) congregations is often delivered without sufficient methodological grounding, raising concerns about the quality of faith formation among children (Johannes, 2018). Evidence suggests that many Sunday school teachers lack the necessary pedagogical skills because formal training has not been prioritized, which affects their ability to effectively impart religious knowledge to children under their care (Lyamuya, 1995). Many researchers have studied about pedagogy of Christian education, however little has been said on the integration of African ways in faith teaching among the children. For this reason, this study is investigating how African methods of teaching can be integrated in teaching Christian faith among the children in ELCT. This study intends to explore African traditional methods of teaching Christian education for Children.

2. Literature Review

2.1 African Ways of Teaching in Relation to Different Theories of Learning

Social Constructivist Theory

The Social Constructivist Theory was developed by Vygotsky (1978) asserts that learning is fundamentally a

social process that occurs through interaction with more knowledgeable individuals, such as teachers, parents, religious leaders, and peers. According to Vygotsky (1978) & Rogoff et al (2007), children construct knowledge and understanding through participation in social and cultural activities. Learning does not occur in isolation; rather, it is shaped by the environment and the relationships that learners experience within their communities (Moreno-Romero, 2025).

Furthermore, the theory was applicable to the objective of the study which was to explore how African methods of teaching can be integrated in teaching Christian faith among the children in ELCT. Since Vygotsky (1978) emphasized learner participation and social interaction, the theory encouraged the use of child-centred and collaborative teaching methods that were sensitive to local cultural contexts. Such pedagogical models could make Christian education more meaningful and effective in nurturing children's faith.

2.2 Importance of Integrating African Traditional Methods in Teaching Children

Learning provided according to age and gender

Contextualized teaching strategies has been defined as instructional approaches that relate learning to a specific environment, scenario, or application area to target relevant skills and aid students' learning (Pedroso, 2023)

Education in African context means the process of transforming a newborn baby into a mature, responsible member of the community (Mucherai & Mbogori, 2019; Ngesu, 2020). It has been stated that attitudes, beliefs, skills and motives that would enable him to perform his duties as growing member of the community (Kirima, 1976; Reid & Amanat, 2020).

It is said:

The first education of the infants was in the hands of mother where she should teach her children through blunt commands, proverbs and stories. Education was given according to gender, boys were passed to the father by the age of seven where they would learn how to take care for the family herds of cattle, sheep and goats. Girls remained with their mother, and learnt how prepare food and keep the homestead clean (Kirima, 1976; Chesley, 2024).

This indicated that division of labour was very clear; this division can be adopted when teaching Christian education for children for effective learning according to age and gender. During conducting this study children gathered in one room regardless of age and gender which was a challenge. Children learnt from peers and age mates (Chen, 2024). The round daily work and the seasonal and

life cycles were all observed and imitated by children (Grant, 2022). Children would see adults cooperate in building a hut, cultivating the gardens, then played at doing the same activities and practicing teamwork cooperation. These ways were the same used to impart religious knowledge among the children (Nimmo & Hallent, 2008).

The teachers were parents, grandparents and other distinguished members of the family (Vertel et al., 2024). Since this means were shared they were participatory because they were handled from one generation to another.

Moreover, a scholar writes:

Teaching in African traditional education is often informal and occurs through observation, imitation, and practical experiences. Elders and community members play a significant role in passing on knowledge and skills to younger generations. The emphasis is on hands-on learning, with apprenticeship models commonly used. Oral tradition, storytelling, and proverbs are utilized to convey important cultural and moral values (Mgbeafulike, 2023).

This shows that African traditional education methods involve learners in the learning process where participation was highly considered. It indicates learner has something to contribute in the learning process.

Teaching and learning involves assessment to see what learners' competence in performing certain duties in life. In African traditional education there was assessment system. This idea was supported by literature as follows-

Assessment in African traditional education often takes the form of practical demonstrations and performance-based evaluations. Students are assessed on their ability to apply acquired knowledge and skills in real-life situations. Evaluation is often done by community members or elders who have expertise in the particular domain. The emphasis is on holistic assessment, considering personal character, ethics, and social contributions alongside academic achievements (Mgbeafulike, 2023).

Better learning include that give priority to experiential context and holistic learning which is one characteristic of African traditional education. (Onwuatuegwu & Mgbeafulike, 2023). It is asserted that reintegrating traditional pedagogies into formal education can enhance students' engagement, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities (Bhutta et al., 2024). It has also been stated that teachers and educators can incorporate traditional pedagogies by incorporating storytelling, role-playing, and practical demonstrations into their lessons (Mgbeafulike, 2023).

Proponents of pragmatism theory such as John Dewey Jean Piaget Lev Vygotsky asserts that the learner is at the center of the educational stage. Knowledge cannot be handed down from one person to another but must be constructed by learners themselves (Espinor D.S., 2010).

This has the characteristics of traditional African traditional methods which is practical in nature. This way of teaching is proposed by pragmatism theory.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach Oranga & Metere (2023). Qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the meanings, experiences, and perspectives associated with a particular field (Ugwu & Eze, 2023), in this case, the African Traditional Methods of Teaching Christian education for Children Christian.

The study used a case study design to explore how integrating African traditional methods of faith teaching can enhance Christian education and promote children's faith growth in three dioceses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT): the Northern Diocese, Diocese of Meru, and North Central Diocese. Data were collected through interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and observation to capture participants' experiences and perspectives.

Purposive, expert, and stratified sampling techniques were used to select 158 participants, including clergy, Sunday school teachers, evangelists, diocesan leaders, parents, and children aged 6–9 years from rural, semi-urban, and urban parishes. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically by coding and organizing emerging themes according to the study objectives.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. This involved identifying, coding, and grouping data into themes and sub-themes based on patterns emerging from the field data. Findings are presented using thick thematic descriptions.

Ethical standards were observed through informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, researcher neutrality, and proper academic citation.

4. Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. This involved identifying, coding, and grouping data into themes and sub-themes based on patterns emerging from the field data. The process of coding was conducted systematically to ensure consistency and accuracy in interpretation. Findings are presented using thick thematic descriptions.

The Researcher used codes instead of people's names to consider ethical issues in presentation and discussion of findings. The codes were as follows: Bishop (Bs), Assistant to Bishop (Assit), Pastor (Pst), Parent (Prt), Sunday School Children (Ssch), Sunday School Teacher (Sst), Christian Education Expert (Cexp), Christian Education Secretary (Ces), Women and Children Secretary (Wcs).

Sunday school teachers' views on traditional methods of teaching children said that children learn from elders on moral issues such as respect, hardworking and greetings. Children learn also by imitating what brothers and sisters or elders were doing. Traditional methods of learning were practical not passive. Among the Maasai children learnt and worked according to age where age-set system was maintained. In age system learning and roles were provided according to their age. Elders had the responsibility to educate children ways of life. (Interview with Sst2, September 15, 2025).

One respondent added that recently traditional methods of teaching are not much insisted by the young generation or individuals. Children are not taken to their grandparents to learn because most of the time they go to school or reside in cities. Although traditional methods such as imitation and role play among the Meru and Chagga were good, they are not used much in the present. Moreover, few people among the young generation are competent in traditional methods (Interview with Pst2, February 9, 2025).

Questionnaires were also given to Sunday school teachers searching for their awareness of traditional methods of teaching good values. Sunday school teachers confessed awareness of traditional methods as follows: among the responses from the respondents, 54 (100%) and 36 (67%) said yes, meaning they were aware, 9 (17%) said no, and 5 (9%) were not sure. This indicates that the respondents understood traditional methods as a method to inculcate good values among the children in the community.

There were 54 Sunday school teachers and 48 evangelists making a total of 102 (100%). The respondents answered the question posed to them and brought the results as follows: 35 (34%) respondents said storytelling, 12 (12%) said dramas, 31 (30%) mentioned role play, 18 (17%) said instructing, and 4 (3%) said songs and poems. Storytelling (34%) and role play (31%) acquired the highest score.

Some pastors were also asked to explain how children learned good values in a traditional context. The following were the ways mentioned:

The respondent said children learn through imitation by looking at what was performed in the community and from there they start practicing the same work (Interview with Pst3 &4, March 29, 2025).

The general claim was that:

Among the Chagga and Meru communities, storytelling by elders was a commonly used method of teaching moral values. Children were encouraged to spend time with elders, who had the responsibility of narrating stories about life lessons such as the importance of hard work, respect, and faithfulness. In this traditional storytelling approach, children were also allowed to ask questions, which enhanced their understanding and deepened their learning. Traditionally, African storytelling was an interactive and participatory process rather than a passive form of learning (Interview with Pst3, February 29, 2025).

Today, people are often busy, and increased rural–urban migration has contributed to the gradual decline of some traditional practices. The rise of individualism has also reduced participation in African communal life, which has negatively affected traditional methods of teaching moral values. In addition, the role of grandparents in transmitting cultural knowledge has diminished due to limited time, the presence of early childhood education centres, and the influence of television in many households (Interview with Pst9, February 9, 2025). Despite the fact that traditional methods of teaching are not very much used today, the respondents were curious to see them applied in teaching children about good morals. Church leaders believed that traditional good values did not start in adulthood but in childhood.

Traditionally values and even the distribution of work considered the age of a person and gender. There were things allowed to be done by people of a certain age and not allowed at a certain age. Also, the work was divided according to particular age and sex groups. Values intended to prepare a sound adult person for a whole lifetime. During the interview, one respondent said; “The good thing with traditional education was given according to age as in the Maasai society they have age-set system. There was a need rethink about Sunday school classes where in many places children were gathering in one room without considering the age division for learning” (Interview with Ces1, March 7, 2025).

Despite the reduced use of African traditional methods today, respondents expressed interest in reintegrating them into the teaching of moral values among children. It was emphasized that the foundation of good values is not formed in adulthood but begins in childhood, highlighting the importance of early moral and spiritual formation. Traditionally, values and the division of labour were organized according to age and gender. Certain activities were permitted or restricted based on a person's age group, and work responsibilities were assigned according to both age and sex categories. These practices were

intended to prepare individuals to become responsible adults throughout their lives. One respondent noted that;

Traditional nurturing of children's moral values was a collective responsibility of the entire community, where the whole village participated in raising a child. However, this has changed in contemporary society, as child upbringing has increasingly become an individual responsibility. Many people are now reluctant to correct or guide other people's children on moral issues. This shift is further influenced by increased individual freedom among children, where they are able to make their own decisions, while some parents are also less able or less willing to provide close moral guidance and discipline (Interview with Assist1, March 7, 2025).

This highlights that traditional methods were participatory because they were communal in nature not individualistic.

It was further emphasized that traditional education also included spiritual dimensions, where children were taught to obey God or spirits within their cultural context. This spiritual instruction was likewise structured according to age, reinforcing the role of developmental stages in moral and spiritual formation (Interview with Pst2, February 9, 2025)

Learning Effective Practices from African Traditional Methods of Teaching

The respondents were required to answer a question from the Questionnaire: Do you think it is necessary to learn from good traditional practices of teaching children from your ethnic group to contextualize the knowledge in the Christian way of living? The results were as follows; 41 agreed that it was good idea, one respondent said no while 10 had no idea on the use of traditional methods. Talking about integration of traditional methods in faith teaching, it was said that storytelling was typically a good method that should be adapted to teach good morals. Integrating tradition story telling method in faith teaching would improve the pedagogy of Christian education for children.

Singing was also used in traditional times as a way of imparting good morals.

The precaution was the content of the traditional methods. It was insisted that reference should be made in the biblical stories. One respondent agreed that traditional methods need careful attention when used to teach children. The perceptions from the respondents shows that when African traditional methods careful used can improve the pedagogy due to its interactive nature.

Discussion of Findings

Integration of Traditional Methods of Teaching

The findings of this study indicate that integrating selected traditional African pedagogical methods into Christian education can significantly enhance children's faith learning. Traditional approaches are inherently participatory, culturally grounded, and experiential, making them highly relevant for improving contemporary Sunday school pedagogy. These methods encourage interaction, dialogue, reflection, and active participation, which are essential for meaningful faith formation among children.

One of the key traditional models identified is the *Maasai Olruru* system, in which children gather in the evening around the fireplace under the guidance of elders. In this setting, storytelling, moral instruction, and shared reflection take place in a participatory manner, allowing children to ask questions and relate teachings to their daily experiences. This model demonstrates the importance of intergenerational learning and guided dialogue in moral and spiritual formation. In a similar way, older and experienced Christians within the church can be intentionally engaged as mentors to share wisdom and guide children's faith development, thereby strengthening intergenerational transmission of Christian values.

The study further highlights the relevance of age-based learning structures reflected in traditional Maasai age-set systems. In this approach, responsibilities, discussions, and learning content are organized according to age categories. This model is particularly relevant for Sunday school contexts where children of different ages are often taught together. Adapting age-sensitive grouping can help address developmental differences among learners and improve the effectiveness of instruction.

In addition, traditional practices among the Meru and Chagga communities such as storytelling, riddles, poems, songs, dances, taboos, and role play were identified as effective pedagogical tools that promote critical thinking, creativity, and active engagement. These methods are naturally aligned with child-centred education because they stimulate participation and make learning meaningful within a cultural context. Therefore, they can complement modern Christian education methodologies by making faith learning more contextualized, interactive, and engaging.

However, the findings reveal that current Sunday school practices are largely dominated by teacher-centred approaches. In most observed classes, teaching was characterized by narration, memorization, and limited interaction. Children were often required to listen silently while teachers read or explained biblical stories. Opportunities for questioning, discussion, reflection, and practical engagement were minimal. As a result, learning tended to be passive and largely one-directional, limiting children's active involvement in constructing faith understanding.

Respondents confirmed that children's participation in lessons was generally limited to answering questions, repeating memory verses, and listening to Bible readings. This was further supported by interview data, which indicated that many Sunday school lessons resemble adult teaching methods rather than child-centred pedagogies. Such practices undermine the developmental needs of children, who learn more effectively through interaction, experience, and multisensory engagement.

The findings align with the argument that effective teaching requires experiential and participatory learning approaches. As Juengst (1994) observes, learners retain significantly more knowledge through active experience than through passive listening. Similarly, Mercer (2005) criticizes the "banking model" of education, in which learners are treated as passive recipients of information, arguing instead that learning should be transformative and interactive. The findings of this study confirm that many Sunday school practices still reflect this traditional, teacher-dominated model.

Overall, the findings implied that the integration of traditional African pedagogical methods into Christian education offers a valuable opportunity to improve children's faith learning. Such methods are consistent with child-centred and experiential learning principles and can enhance engagement, understanding, and spiritual formation. The study therefore concludes that rethinking Christian education pedagogy through the integration of culturally relevant and participatory methods is essential for strengthening children's faith development and ensuring the sustainability of faith formation within the church.

The findings revealed that respondents recognized the value of traditional African approaches to moral and religious education. Most participants were aware of indigenous methods traditionally used to nurture children, including storytelling, songs, drama, role play, proverbs, observation, imitation, and instruction from parents and elders. Storytelling and drama emerged as the most frequently mentioned approaches. These methods were regarded as effective because they are participatory, practical, culturally relevant, and capable of engaging children actively in the learning process. Traditionally, moral and spiritual education was integrated into daily life, with children learning through observation, participation, and interaction within the community. Such approaches contributed not only to moral formation but also to the development of values, identity, responsibility, and respect for both social and spiritual realities.

The findings suggest that traditional pedagogical approaches possess characteristics that closely align with contemporary learner-centred educational principles. Unlike teacher-dominated methods, traditional approaches encourage active participation, experiential learning, collaboration, and practical application of

knowledge. These characteristics make them particularly suitable for children's faith learning, as they allow learners to engage with religious concepts through meaningful experiences rather than passive reception of information. However, respondents noted that rapid social change, urbanization, formal schooling, and changing family structures have reduced opportunities for the effective transmission of traditional educational practices. As a result, many children no longer benefit from the communal learning experiences that historically contributed to moral and spiritual formation.

The findings are strongly supported by the Social Constructivist Theory, which indicates that knowledge is constructed through engagement with more knowledgeable members of society within meaningful social contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). Traditional educational methods such as storytelling, songs, drama, imitation, and communal participation provide precisely the type of interactive learning environment advocated by Social Constructivist Theory. Through these methods, children actively construct understanding, internalize values, and develop faith through interaction with teachers, peers, parents, and the wider community. The findings therefore suggest that faith development is enhanced when learning moves beyond information transmission and involves meaningful participation in faith-related experiences.

Similarly, the findings align with the Competency-Based Approach, which emphasizes learner-centred instruction and the development of observable knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and behaviours. Traditional methods are inherently competency-oriented because they focus on practical engagement rather than mere memorization. Through storytelling, role play, songs, and dramatization, children learn not only biblical content but also develop communication skills, moral reasoning, social responsibility, and Christian character. Such approaches facilitate the acquisition and demonstration of faith-related competencies that are central to effective Christian education.

Despite the recognized value of participatory methods, classroom observations revealed that their implementation within Sunday school programmes was limited. Most observed classes relied heavily on teacher-centred approaches, particularly the reading and explanation of biblical stories while children listened passively. Methods such as storytelling, group discussion, role play, songs, question-and-answer sessions, memory work, drama, and creative activities were used infrequently. Consequently, opportunities for active participation, critical reflection, and experiential learning were often limited. These findings suggest a gap between pedagogical approaches that are known to be effective for children's learning and the methods commonly employed in practice.

The findings are consistent with educational literature emphasizing the importance of active learning

methodologies. Griffin (1970) argues that effective teaching requires the use of diverse methods of communication and instruction that engage learners meaningfully in the learning process. Similarly, Christian education literature identifies storytelling, discussion, drama, songs, role play, creative expression, and interactive activities as effective approaches for nurturing children's faith. Such methods accommodate children's developmental characteristics and promote deeper understanding, retention, and application of learning. The limited use of these approaches observed in this study may therefore constrain children's faith development and reduce the effectiveness of Christian education programmes.

Overall, the findings implied that pedagogical practices significantly influence children's faith development. Approaches that encourage participation, interaction, creativity, and experiential learning appear to be more effective in fostering faith growth than approaches dominated by one-way communication. Children's faith development is strengthened when learners actively engage with Christian teachings through meaningful experiences and social interaction. The findings therefore underscore the need to strengthen learner-centred and participatory pedagogies within Sunday school programmes to enhance children's faith formation and spiritual maturity in the ELCT.

One of the key traditional method identified is the *Maasai Olruru system*, in which children gather in the evening around the fireplace under the guidance of elders. In this setting, storytelling, moral instruction, and shared reflection take place in a participatory manner, allowing children to ask questions and relate teachings to their daily experiences. This model demonstrates the importance of intergenerational learning and guided dialogue in moral and spiritual formation. In a similar way, older and experienced Christians within the church can be intentionally engaged as mentors to share wisdom and guide children's faith development, thereby strengthening intergenerational transmission of Christian values.

The study further highlights the relevance of age-based learning structures reflected in traditional Maasai age-set systems. In this approach, responsibilities, discussions, and learning content are organized according to age categories. This model is particularly relevant for Sunday school contexts where children of different ages are often taught together. Adapting age-sensitive grouping can help address developmental differences among learners and improve the effectiveness of instruction.

In addition, traditional practices among the Meru and Chagga communities such as storytelling, riddles, poems, songs, dances, taboos, and role play were identified as effective pedagogical tools that promote critical thinking, creativity, and active engagement. These methods are

naturally aligned with child-centred education because they stimulate participation and make learning meaningful within a cultural context. Therefore, they can complement modern Christian education methodologies by making faith learning more contextualized, interactive, and engaging.

The findings align with the argument that effective teaching requires experiential and participatory learning approaches. As Juengst (1994) observes, learners retain significantly more knowledge through active experience than through passive listening. Similarly, Mercer (2005) criticizes the "banking model" of education, in which learners are treated as passive recipients of information, arguing instead that learning should be transformative and interactive. The findings of this study confirm that many Sunday school practices still reflect this traditional, teacher-dominated model.

Quantitative findings from questionnaires further demonstrate the dominance of limited pedagogical variation. While storytelling was reported as the most commonly used method, observation revealed that it was often delivered in a lecture-like manner with minimal interaction. Other participatory methods such as drama, role play, and poetry were rarely used in practice. This discrepancy indicates a gap between reported practices and actual classroom implementation, suggesting limited pedagogical competence among some Sunday school teachers.

Interviews with Christian education practitioners further revealed that despite participation in occasional training seminars, many teachers continue to rely on familiar, traditional teaching methods. A lack of continuous professional development contributes to the persistence of teacher-centred approaches. Additionally, weaknesses in questioning techniques were observed, where teachers primarily used factual recall questions that do not promote reflection or deeper faith understanding. As a result, children often leave lessons with limited engagement and superficial comprehension of biblical teachings.

The study also found that large class sizes and mixed-age groupings contribute significantly to the reliance on lecture-based instruction. With approximately 90% of observed classes containing children of different ages in the same room, teachers often resort to teacher-centred approaches to manage time and maintain order. This structural challenge limits opportunities for participatory learning and reduces the effectiveness of faith education.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the integration of traditional African pedagogical methods into Christian education offers a valuable opportunity to improve children's faith learning. Such methods are consistent with child-centred and experiential learning principles and can enhance engagement, understanding, and spiritual formation. The study therefore concludes that rethinking Christian education pedagogy through the integration of

culturally relevant and participatory methods is essential for strengthening children's faith development and ensuring the sustainability of faith formation within the church.

Similarly, Kirima (1976) highlights that traditional African education was highly structured, participatory, and context-based. Children were educated through observation, imitation, participation in daily activities, storytelling, proverbs, songs, rituals, and role modelling. Learning was organized around social roles, age groups, and life experiences, with parents, grandparents, and community elders serving as primary educators. These methods ensured that knowledge was transmitted across generations in a holistic and experiential manner. Importantly, these approaches closely resemble learner-centred and experiential pedagogical principles that are widely advocated in contemporary education. While traditional African educational methods such as storytelling, songs, drama, role modelling, and communal learning were recognized as valuable and effective, their application within Sunday school programmes was limited. Most classes relied heavily on teacher-centred approaches that provided few opportunities for interaction, creativity, critical reflection, and experiential learning. Consistent with Social Constructivist Theory and the Competency-Based Approach, the study found that children's faith development is enhanced when learning is participatory, learner-centred, and connected to real-life experiences.

Parental Role

It was believed that in African traditional setting it was the responsibility of parents and elders to teach good morals among the children. Children learnt from elders on moral issues such as respect, hardworking and greetings. The same strategy can be adopted to improve Christian faith teaching among the children.

Children learn also through imitation

Children imitate what brothers and sisters or elders were doing and do the same. It was found that traditional methods were more practical and inclusive. Later on children practiced what they imitated from adults. This approach can be used only that children need to be instructed what to imitate and what not to imitate especially when it comes outside the family.

The respondents had a challenge because although traditional methods were good but not much insisted in the new generation. There was no time for children to stay with grandparents because most of them goes to school at young age; not only that but also many young parents are residing in towns and cities where traditional education cannot apply because of individual kind of life. The good traditional methods for inculcating good morals among the children are not used enough in present time.

Awareness of traditional method for children teaching was surveyed where 53 respondents were aware, 9 responses were not aware while 5 were not sure. It implies that most people know about the traditional methods in their ethnic groups but it was not easy to use them.

The respondents were required to mention traditional methods used for children teaching where storytelling, drama, role play, instructing, songs and poems were mentioned. Out of 100 responses, 35 responses said story telling while 31 said drama. Drama and storytelling were the leading traditional methods mentioned.

Moral and ethical teaching in African context did not start with adulthood but childhood so that children would grow following appropriate way of life which echoes Psalm 22: 6. Traditional education respected the age of a person and gender sensitivity. There were things which taught to children, youths and adult. There were also matters taught to girls and boys separately. Practical methods of teaching were not only modern but rooted in the culture of the people.

In traditional education the study shows that not only physical world education was insisted but also spiritual sphere of life such as respecting god, offering and respecting holy sites. Children grew in the matter of understanding and comprehending the availability of supernatural being right from their traditions.

Since traditional education depend on the community around it was not easy to practice them effectively for children's faith learning during the time of this study because most of the time children spend time in school even on Saturday. It was said that there was shift from communal life to individual life; children also demand freedom to decide on their own in contemporary time. This is contrary to African philosophy which says it takes the whole village to raise a child. Having Sunday school is an opportunity. However, the respondents were of the opinion that the church should find a way to incorporate them in the children process since they are interactive by nature.

Traditional education methods can bring positive effect when used with children because children are not passive but active hence prefer some activities different from what was observed where children most of the time sat in the class listening from the teacher. Traditional methods challenge some modern methods such as lecturer which make learner to be a recipient of the materials from the teacher.

The mentioned suitable methods for teaching children in the book *Tutege Masikio* and a book titled how teach include storytelling, questions and answers, discussion, memory verse, drama, songs, reading, poem, bulletin board, screen, role play and creativity (*Tutege Masikio*, 1985, p. 24). The study found out that little of this method

were used by Sunday school teachers in the area of study. It should be known that man has developed a wide variety of methods for communicating and teaching (Griffin, 1970, p. 7). Very few classes used participatory approach while most others used one-way traffic such as reading a story for children to listen.

Through this observation children's faith learning pedagogy was weak, so integrating participatory African teaching methods is important which goes on the same page as the aim of this study.

Identifying Traditional Methods that can be integrated in Christian Teaching for children

The study found that there was importance of integrating traditional methods in learning for pedagogical reason. Suggested methods among the Maasai include:

'Olruru' from the Maasai ethnic group:

As already explained, among the Maasai the term 'Olruru' means a group. It was a tradition for children to sit together around the fireplace in the evening after bringing the flock home. Around the fireplace, the grandfather was there talking to children, narrating to them stories of good morals. The children also can share their day like what they had found dangerous or what they enjoyed during their day. Children had an opportunity to ask questions as well.

Old people who have been Christians for a long time are to be used to give out their wisdom to the young generation. The same method can be borrowed to be used in Christian education with children, for faith growth and stability.

Age-set system

Among the Maasai, age-set system can be borrowed for improving pedagogical methods used in Sunday school. In this method, matters to be discussed and roles were offered according to the age of a person. At places where children are mixed in one room, regardless of age, this can be applied to alleviate the challenge. In the congregations it was found out that 90% of the classes children of different ages assembled in one room something which attracted lecture method due to large number of children. Integrating age set system in Christian education pedagogy can improve faith teaching among the children for faith growth. Comparing, literatures, interviews and Questionnaire's response it indicates there was a challenge facing Christian education pedagogy for children something which attract church's attention to rescue today and tomorrow's church members.

It was found that faith teaching methods were narration most of the time. Teachers had to read or tell the story and children had to sit silently, it was one-way traffic most of

the time. There was limited interaction between teachers, children and materials. This made learning to be passive.

The respondents were given opportunity to express their feeling about faith teaching methods in Sunday school. Children explained that they respond questions asked by the teachers, they read text and memorize Bible verses. They listen when teachers read from the bible, they don't do activities (Interview with Ssch1&4, March 2, 2025). This was complemented by Machenje's statement that Sunday school children in many congregations are being taught like adults (Machenje, 2001, p. 20). Educators suggest the best way to teach is to involve students in experiential learning model since we remember 10% of what we hear, but we remember 90% of what we experience (Juengst, 1994, p. 16).

Children learn differently according to their age and psychological growth something which demands active methods of learning for understanding and faith growth. Teachers who use to lecture in Sunday school will earn very little success due to the truth that only 10% will understand and remember. While teachers who use experiential model will earn more and their audience grows in faith because they remember 90% of what they learnt due to use of participatory approach.

Many teachers in Sunday school used non-participatory approach known as teacher centered which is not recommended as best in teaching children. It has been observed that teachers in Sunday school most of the time use banking model of education which treats learners as receptacles waiting to be filled with informational knowledge that could then be drawn at another time like a bank deposit. Learning is much more than cognitive recall; learning is transformation (Mercer, 2005, p. 168).

The respondents who answered the Questionnaires brought the results where 51 said they use storytelling as a teaching method among the children, 28 said drama, 9 said instructing, 5 said poems, and 11 said lectures. Storytelling scored the highest 51, during observation it was not real story telling but lecturing children without any interaction in between. Drama, instructing and poems were not used at all. This draws attention that most Sunday school teachers use lecture method which does to favour children's faith growth.

Interviewee agreed that although many Sunday school teachers have attended seminars, experience shows that they need assistance in the area of faith teaching methods. Teachers use the same methods as used in previous years (Interview with Psst6, September 8, 2024).

Experts of Christian education gave opinion on their experience regarding children's faith teaching. Most Sunday school teachers lack proper understanding of the teaching methods. Participatory methods involve asking questions where most teachers asked 'W' questions which result the children to leave class with answers related to

names of some places, or people; questions of this kind do not contribute enough for faith growth.

Lack of knowledge on methods of teaching children results to poor questions and less achievement. It was also found that because lack of knowledge, children were led to sing chorus not related to the topic, improper teaching of memory verse just by parroting. For children to learn memory verse the better way was they have to hear, see, read and talk about memory verse but thing was done differently. The study shows teacher read the memory verse and children had to listen and repeat. During observation only one teacher led children to read and see the memory verse but they didn't talk about it. Poems, dancing style of singing and riddles can solve the chorus challenges.

Teachers used methods which don't relate to the lesson, not participatory, no dialogue and there was no relation between the lessons to the daily life; this discourages children's faith growth (Interview with Cexp2, April 9, 2025).

Integrating gender education

It was observed that African traditional education was given according to gender. This is important because gender roles differ in the human being life. The first education of the infants was in the hands of mother where she should teach her children through blunt commands, proverbs and stories. Education was given according to gender, boys were passed to the father by the age of seven where they would learn how to the family herds of cattle, sheep and goats. Girls remained with their mother, and learnt how prepare food and keep home the homestead clean.

Traditional African educational methods such as storytelling, songs, drama, role play, riddles, proverbs, age-set learning, and the Maasai Oloruru model were found to possess significant pedagogical value because they are participatory, culturally meaningful, and learner-centred. The study concludes that integrating such contextual approaches into Christian education can make faith learning more relevant, engaging, and effective for children.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Generally, the findings indicate that traditional African pedagogical methods were participatory, experiential, communal, and developmentally responsive. Although their use has declined in contemporary society, respondents viewed these methods as valuable resources that could inform and enrich contemporary approaches to Christian education for children.

To sum up, the findings indicate that traditional African pedagogical approaches possess significant potential for enriching Christian education for children. Methods such as storytelling, role-play, imitation, songs, riddles, age-group learning, and intergenerational mentorship were widely perceived as culturally relevant, participatory, and effective for faith formation. However, their successful integration into Sunday school programmes requires adequate teacher preparation, contextual adaptation, and stronger collaboration between families and the church. These findings suggest that contextualized pedagogical methods rooted in local cultural traditions may provide valuable opportunities for strengthening children's faith learning and spiritual growth within the church.

5.2 Recommendations

It is recommended that

1. There is a need for systematic capacity building for Sunday school teachers. The study revealed that many teachers are dedicated lay volunteers who have limited training in children's pedagogy. The Church should therefore establish regular training programmes focusing on child-centred teaching methodologies, lesson preparation, classroom management, faith assessment, and the use of instructional resources.
2. A training of trainers model could be adopted to ensure sustainability and wider coverage across dioceses and congregations. The study also established that traditional African educational methods possess significant potential for strengthening children's faith formation because they are participatory, contextual, and culturally meaningful.

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