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## ENGAGING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF OLDER CHILDREN

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### ABSTRACT

It is observed that older children are being exposed to different models with different characters due to the proliferation of channels of communication. Due to their peculiarities, older children find it easy to choose role models and pattern their lives in line with the character and way of lives of their models. This attitude makes it imperative for their worship leaders to be proactive and intentional in providing good leadership that will make them godly children. Older children are children between 10-12 years, otherwise called junior, preteens or late childhood children. At this age, children can develop personal values and moralities and one of the ways to achieve this is engaging transformational leadership style in their Christian religious education. Transformational leadership style is an approach that causes change in individual and social system. It creates valuable and positive change in the followers. This paper therefore argues that older children will be motivated to live uprightly when transformational leadership style is applied in their Christian religious education. The paper is also a wakeup call to all stakeholders in older children Christian religious education to make themselves exemplary leaders, role models and excellent motivators. They should provide the necessary education that will shift the attention of older children away from ungodly models. This will be advantageous for the future of these children, the body of Christ and the society at large.

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Older Children, Role Models, Christian Religious Education.

### Introduction

It is observed that older children love identifying themselves with different heroes and heroines most of whom they see as they watch television, surf the net, listening to news and relate with their peers. Hardly will you find any of these children declaring Jesus or any other Bible character as their heroes or heroine. Most of what older children are exposed to through these heroes and heroine negate the Christian faith, therefore their hearts then become a battle ground. Older children also refer to as junior are children between ages ten to twelve (Anthony 2020, 213) and (Ayandokun 2017, 107). They are sometime addressed as preteen; a name coined as replacement to boost their self-esteem as they dislike being addressed as children. In the light of this, Christian educators that have been called to minister to older children need to strategise, be more deliberate in providing the style of leadership that will shift the attention of older children away from ungodly models. Therefore, the thrust of this paper is to examine the possibilities of engaging transformational leadership in Christian Religious Education of older children.

### **Older Children and their Peculiarities**

It might be challenging to help older children see past their status and comprehend what God expects of them. Overcoming this challenge ultimately calls for a thorough comprehension of their unique characteristics. According to Ayo-Obiremi (2014, 20), children's workers must know their learners, their level of exposure, and their general and specific needs, they must sincerely care about their needs and recognise how through the Bible those needs can be met. Christian educators who have a solid understanding of the unique needs of older children will be able to plan ahead and develop strategies that will be adopted in providing a life-changing leadership that captures the characteristics of a transformational leader.

Due to the physical characteristics of humans, older children of all races and cultures have certain characteristics. Older children are those who have begun to show physical signs of puberty. According to Cunningman (2001, 123), girls experience the physical changes of puberty starting at age 10, whereas boys do not experience these changes until they are 12 or 14 years old. Preteens exhibit a great deal of energy and their fine motor skills as they adjust to these changes.

Mentally, older children are inclined to ask thought-provoking questions and to think about their future. According to Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, they are in the concrete operational stage, which is characterised by logical thinking about concrete situations. At this stage, children begin to show an emerging understanding of abstract concepts, increased cognitive capacity, improved academic skills, longer attention spans, and a clearer sense of time and place (Choun and Lawson 1993, 68; Pullman 2020, 69). They enjoy asking challenging questions and display a high level of curiosity. Therefore, older

children should be guided to apply what they have learned to real-life situations and to draw logical conclusions. When assigning tasks, it is important to consider their cognitive level and developmental abilities.

Socially, older children tend to identify strongly with their classmates and are more concerned with gaining peer approval than with receiving praise from adults. They often aspire to adulthood and do not hesitate to express dissatisfaction when they feel they are being treated like younger children. In addition, older children are inclined toward hero worship. They choose their heroes from individuals they encounter in everyday life, as well as from those they see on television or read about in books (Anthony 2020, 214). Such figures may include wrestlers, football players, musicians, dancers, preachers, and Bible teachers. Given their strong attachment to peers and their increasing exposure to the wider world, older children need Christian educators who can guide them in making discerning choices (Choun 2001, 127). Their strong desire for heroes and heroines can also be intentionally used as a motivational tool to encourage positive social behaviour.

Considering their spiritual development, older children are capable of understanding spiritual matters. They can think abstractly and are therefore ready to receive spiritual instruction, guidance, and answers to questions of faith. This indicates that older children can comprehend Christian doctrine when it is properly taught and can grasp the truths found in the Word of God. Taiwo (2015, 49) affirms that during late childhood, children begin to reflect on how their faith relates to everyday life and start to evaluate the authenticity of what they have been taught. To support them in making appropriate spiritual decisions, they should be guided to understand God's provision of salvation and how faith is applied practically in real-life situations. Ayanrinola (2013, 99) further emphasises that older children should be encouraged to develop personal devotional habits, such as daily Bible study and prayer. Although they naturally desire heroes, they can be guided to recognise Jesus as their ultimate hero.

### **Christian Religious Education**

Christian Religious Education is an educational process intended for Christians of all age groups. Abegunde (2021, 62) defines Christian education as a training process designed to lead a person to salvation in Christ Jesus and to nurture a personal, lifelong relationship with God. Similarly, Ilori (2013, 15) describes it as the process of training and developing the learner's knowledge, mental skills, life, and character whether in sacred or secular matters in an environment and manner that are truly Christ-centred. Christian Religious Education goes beyond the mere study of the Bible; it addresses salvation, which God graciously provided for humanity through Jesus Christ (Ogunsola 2021, 134).

As the truth of God is brought to bear upon every aspect of daily living (Ige 2020, 99), the recipients of this education are expected to portray the life of Christ anywhere they are. Like other forms of education, Christian education is carried out according to the content of the curriculum. According to Moronkola, Akinsola, Abe & Onuka (2019, 4) curriculum is seen as all experiences learners are expected to be exposed to for an all-round development that will make them better equipped for all life challenges at their level of development. In this regard, the religious instruction of older children, should seek their all-round development and be grounded in biblical commands aligned with the needs and peculiarities of learners.

Ultimately, the task of Christian education passing on the Christian faith and lifestyle to both the young and the old requires expertise and competence. This task can be carried out effectively only when it is entrusted to individuals who understand its nature, have received appropriate training, and are willing to serve faithfully and sacrificially. Those entrusted with this responsibility are known as Christian educators. Ayandokun (2013, 232) describes Christian educators as individuals who are committed to the spiritual nurture of others. In the context of this paper, a Christian educator is viewed as a transformational leader who is dedicated to the spiritual development of older children in the church, home, school, and the wider community in which they live. Such an educator understands the expectations of transformational leadership and is prepared to apply these principles in the Christian education of older children.

### **Transformational Leadership Style**

Leadership is work and the growth of any organisation lies in the hand of the leader. This researcher agrees with the saying that leaders are made not born, so becoming an effective leader does not come by chance. Good leaders develop through a never ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience. There are different views about what leadership entails. Weems in Adetunji (2010, 2) defines leadership as the development and articulation of a shared vision, motivation of those key people without whom that vision cannot become a reality and gaining the cooperation of most people involved. (Agbarakwe, Amah & Okocha, 2021, 265), corroborates that leadership is defined as a process that encourages others to give their all in order to achieve a specific goal. A leader without a vision cannot make a head way; likewise a leader with a vision without followers who believe in his vision is a failure.

(Opajobi 2021, 168), also define leadership as a process where an individual (the leader) influences group of individuals (the followers) to work toward the achievement of a common goal which they consider desirable. Dettoni (1993, 119) describes leadership as a role to be filled, not a position or station to be maintained. The expectation from leaders is to put in their best while the position last so that those

coming after them will have something to build on. It is the legacy left behind by a leader that will continue to speak for him after he or she has relinquished the position.

Abounds are several leadership style leaders have adopted in the past, still adopting and will adopt in the future. These include transformational leadership, authentic leadership, responsible leadership, Taoism leadership, servant leadership style and the like. This paper centres on transformational leadership. Transformational leadership evolved through the work of James MacGregor Burns, Bernard M. Bass, Bruce J. Avolio, and Kenneth Leithwood (Stewart 2006, 1). It is an approach that causes change in individual and social system. It creates valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders (Ishola 2021, 113). According to Ishola-Esan (2016, 181), transformational leadership style inspires and motivates followers to demonstrate commitment to a shared vision.

Transformational leaders hold their relationships with followers in high esteem and demonstrate individualised consideration in meeting the followers' needs for empowerment, achievement, enhanced self-efficacy and personal growth (Khan, Nawaz & Khan 2016, 4). A transformational leader is a person who stimulates and inspires (transform) followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes (Robbins and Coulter, 2007) as cited by (Odumeru & Ogbonna 2013, 356). In essence, a leader is not in the best position to declare himself or herself as a transformational leader, it is the follower that can determine having weighed the leader's character, composure, relationship, utterances and style of leadership.

(Bass and Avolio, 1993) as cited by (Craig 2018, 302) describes succinctly the attributes that characterised a transformational leader, these are:

**Idealised Influence:** Transformational leaders are exemplary leaders, role models, leaders that can be emulated by followers who admire, respect, and trust them. They put followers' needs above their own, and their behaviour is consistent with the values and principles of the group. Their followers believe in them because their way of life portrays the code of conduct of the group. Idealised influence is inspirational in nature (Khan, Nawaz & Khan 2016, 4). It also refers to how much the subordinates admire the leader's actions, which causes them to identify with him (Agbarakwe, Amah & Okocha 2021, 265).

**Inspirational Motivation:** Transformational leaders are excellent motivators because they desire the best for both the organisation and their followers. They motivate by providing meaning and challenge to the tasks of followers. They seek for unity among their followers and accomplish this by arousing team spirit

among them. Transformational leaders are enthusiastic and optimistic, and help followers develop desirable visions for the future. They are always hopeful and do not give room for distraction.

**Intellectual Stimulation:** Intellectual stimulation is an ability to intellectually stimulate the workers and a propensity to get involved actively in the work (Khan, Nawaz & Khan 2016, 4).

Transformational leaders stimulate innovation and creativity. They do so by encouraging followers to question assumptions, reframe situations, and approach old problems from new perspectives. In transformational leadership style, followers are allowed to contribute and lend their own voice in decision making. Transforming leaders do not look down on their followers and criticise mistakes but instead solicit solutions from followers.

**Individualised Consideration:** Transformational leaders seek after the wellbeing of their followers. Understanding that there are individual differences, they act as coaches or mentors who foster personal development. They provide learning opportunities and a supportive climate for growth. Their followers have the opportunity to showcase and develop their God given abilities. Their coaching and mentoring are tailored to the individual needs and desires of each follower. Through these, the growth of the organisation is also enhanced as followers return to appropriate the skill and knowledge they have acquired. Individualised consideration is concerned with the basic transformational leadership behaviours of regarding individuals as fundamental contributors to the work place (Khan, Nawaz & Khan 2016, 4).

Christians are called to grow continually toward the likeness of Christ and this requires understanding and practicing a style of leadership consistent with the teachings of Jesus, caring for and serving others (Powers & Robertson 2008, 9). A good Christian leader will not see himself as a boss but a servant that has been called to serve those that are under him with humility. Jesus Christ laid the example while he washed the feet of the disciple in John 13:5. Jesus made it clear that he as the master washed the feet of his disciples for them to know that leaders are called to serve. He charged the disciples that they should go and do likewise. Dettoni (1993, 119) affirms this when he says Christian leaders are servant ministers. They are not to lord things over their followers but to follow the example of Jesus. This happens through deeper reflection on the personality of Jesus Christ and making him one's model of a leader (Kolawole 2021, 89). In addition, a good Christian leader will not see himself as all knowledgeable but as one that is given the privilege to coordinate and bring out the best in the life of those that he is leading.

### **Applying Transformational Leadership in Christian Religious Education of Older Children**

Transformational leadership in the picture of Christian leadership makes it imperative that the attributes expected of a transformational leader should be displayed to portray Christlikeness. As reiterated by

Powers & Robertson (2008, 9) Christian are called to grow continually towards the likeness of Christ and it is a servant leader practicing a style of leadership consistent with the teaching of Christ that can help in making this happen. Engaging transformational leadership in Christian Religious Education of older children entails adopting the characteristics of transformational leadership in the teaching and nurturing of older children. This paper discusses some steps that can be taken in engaging transformational leadership in Christian religious education of older children.

**Lead by Example:** It takes a transformational leader who is ready to go extra mile both in words and deeds to get these children rooted in God's word. One of the ways older children worship leaders can identify with these children is to lead by example. Agbarakwe, Amah & Okocha (2021, 267) posits that transformational leaders set an example by living by the ideals they preach in order to attain their goals. Leadership is about persuading and living exemplary life to make people to follow you (Bamgbose 2021, 22).

As reiterated earlier, older children desire adult status and do not like being referred to as children. For Christian educators working with older children to impact them positively, they must be good role models, leading by example with the understanding that older children are good imitators. Likewise, they should give these children sense of belonging and be sensitive to their feelings. There are lots of distractions calling for attention of older children. This include television, games, social media, browsing, playing with their peers and the like.

**Be a Motivator:** Part of the characteristics of a transformational leader is to arouse team spirit, be enthusiastic and optimistic, and help followers develop desirable visions for the future. Older children love exploration and they are always ready for innovations when allowed. The fact that they prefer the company of their peers is a good ground to motivate and arouse team spirit in them. These children will accomplish a lot for Christ with a transformational leader that considers it necessary to encourage them to work together in unity. They can pull their resources together to visit and bless the less privilege. Likewise they can pray, share, and make out together as members of one family.

Another good way to arouse team spirit in older children is to allow them to participate actively during worship experience. As servant leaders, ministers should provide an enabling environment in which people can learn and grow as they work and share (Ishola 2012, 201). Odebunmi (2013, 25) encourages that during children worship, children should have the opportunity to observe individual silent prayer, to lead public prayers, to sing solos or to sing in the choir, to read or recite scripture verses, to invite or welcome visitors and to serve one another at fellowship.

**Allow Older Children to Exercise their Intellectual Prowess:** Engaging transformational leadership in the religious instruction of older children involves allowing these children to think and come up with possible solutions to some challenging issues. Methods with older children should be tailored to the needs, characteristics and their developmental stage. It should be methods that will not do for them what they can do by themselves.

Discovery learning theory as proposed by Bruner says facts and relationships children discover through their explorations are more usable and tend to be better retained than the material they have merely committed to memory (Yount 1996, 196). The language used, activities provided and instructional materials must be friendly, making it possible for the children to relate to the lesson (Ogundapo 2016, 72). Opportunity to express their mind will help the teachers to know the level of exposure of these children, their thought, their beliefs and stand on matters of faith. .

**Being Sensitive to Older Children Feelings and Aspiration:** Typical of a transformational leader is to demonstrate how concerned he or she is about each subordinate's well-being and how he behaves as a mentor or coach to him. (Agbarakwe, Amah & Okocha 2021, 267). Choun & Lawson (1993, 328) declare that every child should be applauded for their efforts, praised for their achievements and treated in a way that reveals a sympathetic understanding of the child's unique characteristics and needs.

One of the ways to bring out the virtue in older children is to listen to them and make their opinion count. Relatively, the place of discipline must not be jeopardized as a transformational leader must not condone indiscipline. As posited by Agbarakwe, Amah & Okocha (2021, 268), transformational leaders have a high reputation for being dependable, honest, and fair, but they are firm in their decisions. Older children should be made to realise their error whenever they have erred and every corrective measure should be out of love.

## Conclusion

This paper has expanded what is required to apply transformational leadership in Christian Religious Education of older children. The paper also delved into some distinctive that are peculiar to older children, Christian religious instruction of older children and transformational leadership style. Christian educators with older children should live and work with the consciousness that they are leaders with a difference who also has the responsibility to instill love, team spirit and honesty in these children. Older children will make a difference in their world and will grow up to become responsible youth and adults when they are helped to develop right attitude towards Christian leadership. Consequently, the future of the church will be guaranteed and the society will be transformed. Engaging transformational leadership

in the religious education of older children is a task that can be accomplished and all the suggestions in this paper can contribute to the accomplishment.

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