

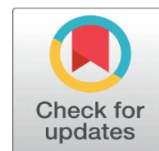


INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS' COMPETENCE ON SUCCESS OF SUNDAY-SCHOOL AS A MISSION FIELD AT AFRICAN INLAND CHURCH, BONDENI LOCAL CHURCH, KENYA



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ABSTRACT

Sunday-school is an important component of the church because it helps the church to produce healthy individuals that become active members. The objective of the study was to examine the influence on teachers' competence on the success of Sunday-school as a mission field at A.I.C Bondeni in Nakuru County, Kenya. Specifically, the study examined how budgetary allocation, competence of Sunday-school teachers and also how administrative support influence Sunday-school as a mission field in the aforementioned church. The population of 548 Sunday-school instructors, youth, parents of Sunday-school children, pastors, and administrators at the AIC Bondeni Local Church was studied using a descriptive survey design. Stratified random sampling was used to select 85 respondents from the research population. To obtain data, a detailed self-administered semi-structured questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was pilot tested before being used to collect data for the main study, in order to determine its validity and reliability. Prior to data collection, all necessary permits and consents were obtained. The collected data was analysed qualitatively and quantitatively with the aid of the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences software. Results revealed that teachers' competence have a positive and statistically significant influence on the success of Sunday-school as a mission field. From the discoveries, the study recommends that AIC Bondeni and other churches should create budgetary allocation for teachers' stipends, assess the theological understanding of Sunday-school teachers, and create continual teachers' training and development programmes.

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Keywords: Teachers' Competence, Sunday-School Success, Mission, African Inland Church

1. INTRODUCTION

The basis of Sunday-school programmes rests on the provisions of Matthew 28:18-20 in regard to divine command of Christ Jesus (Webb, 2005). According to Nale (2007), Sunday-school is the reaching, teaching, and winning arm of the church. Its main goal is to reach young person, teach them about Christ, build supportive relationships, and encourage them to serve Christ. According to Taylor (2009), Sunday-school is an important component of the church because it helps the church to produce healthy individuals that become active members. An effective Sunday-school ministry should excel at stirring passion toward the Great Commission among children and nurture relationship that the children need to become forthright members of the society.

In his study, Workman (2020) uncovered that one of the key components of successful Sunday-school mission is recruitment and training of teachers. The



author observed that recruiting adequate number of Sunday-school teachers and training them on how to deliver the Sunday-school curriculum effectively improved the experiences of children leading to improved attendance.

Kia et al. (2019) further argues that the Sunday-school is a learning establishment that seeks to enlighten children regarding Christian ways. Therefore, the most important components of these establishments are the teachers who are responsible for implementation learning activities. For the Sunday-school programme to be successful, it must have teachers who have a wide assortment of knowledge, skilled on how to deliver instructions, and experienced. The teachers must be in a position to inspire children, give advice, create new ideas, guide, and assign stories. They must also possess good judgement and be authoritative. They must also be capable of adjusting Biblical teaching to the level of understanding of the children. On the other hand, Woodger (2020) argues that teachers should always focus on developing the young minds of children. Consequently, they should engage in more than the subject matter in Christian teachings and go further into teaching the children how to think and study.

The role of teachers' competence in the success of Sunday-school programme is documented in the study by Frimpong (2019) that sought to examine reason for declining Sunday-school patronage in Assemblies of God Churches in Amakom District of Kumasi in Ghana. The author observed that the Sunday-school had some teachers who were not efficient and performed poorly due to inadequate training. Some teachers had difficulties understanding some of the content of the Sunday school manual and materials. The persons responsible for managing and supervising the teaching workforce were also not doing their work effectively.

Sunday-schools in African churches play an important role in the growth of church ministry. In Manzini Christian Community in Swaziland, it was observed that the growth of protestant church was proportional to the investment made by the church on Sunday-school programmes and consequently the growth of the children service Nxumalo (2014). However, due to financial constraints or small allocation from the church, Sunday-schools often lack necessary learning materials such as writing materials, teachings aids and stationery. More so, teachers lack necessary training and therefore are deficient of competences to deliver to small children Mumo (2016). It is also asserted that support necessarily from the church administration is rare rendering the Sunday-school programmes inefficient (Matshiga, 2001).

Sunday-schools are a significant section of the Church in Kenya where the schools provide Christian teachings and values in accordance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to youth and children Mambo (2019). The Sunday-schools are widely recognized as institutions for enabling children to experience the reality of God. It is asserted that children need to be abreast of Christian beliefs and values at a young age. To bring the foregoing to fruition, Sunday-school teachers have to understand the learning needs of the children in order to effectively deliver and make Jesus Christ known to them Kiragu (2006).

However, in her article published in Standard Newspaper, Wakhisi (2014) expressed the concern that many children in Kenya begin going to Sunday-school at an early age but drop out of church before they reach teenage or adulthood. Many teenagers and young adults in their 20s and 30s are not going to church as it were in the previous generation. In his study, Juma (2015) also observed that there was a decline in the number of young people in the Methodist Church of Kenya. Wakhisi (2014) argues that the exodus of young Kenyans from Church is partly due to the inability of the church programmes to meet their needs and keep them anchored in religious ways.

The low vibrancy of the Sunday-school programme is also evident at the AIC in Kenya. Various branches of the AIC in Kenya have well-documented mission works in respect to the youth and the adults, but not in reference to Sunday-school. [Mumo \(2016\)](#) observed that Sunday-school teachers at the AIC lack the requisite capabilities and competences since most of them are volunteers who have not undergone training in teaching young children. Despite this trend, few systematic studies have been conducted to examine how the competence of Sunday school teachers influences the success of Sunday-school programmes in the context of Kenyan churches. This study sought to fill this gap.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The descriptive survey design was used to execute the inquiry (Orodho, 2005). In particular, study gathered the perspectives and opinions of people who have had direct encounters and experiences with the Sunday-school mission in the study region.

2.1. TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The study targeted 548 Sunday-school teachers, parents of Sunday-school children, youth, clergy, and administrators. From this population, a sample of 100 respondents was selected using the stratified random sampling method. Sunday-school teachers, parents, youth, and clergy/administrators were all placed into four groups for the study. The sample plan is summarized in [Table 1](#).

Strata	Population	Proportion (%)	Sample Size
Sunday-school teachers	9	1.6	2
Parents	339	61.9	62
Youth	166	30.3	30
Clergy/ administrators	34	6.2	6
Total	548	100	100

As [Table 1](#) illustrate, the number of respondents picked in each strata (sample size) was proportional to the total number of individual in the strata (population).

2.2. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Questionnaires were used to assemble data for this investigation. Both open-ended and closed-ended questions were included in the survey because the investigation aimed was to gather and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data. To avoid the need for detailed elaborations, the questions were kept simple and given face to face. Part A of the questionnaire contained questions on respondents' demographics, section B contained question that sought determine the success of Sunday-school mission within A.I.C Bondeni Local Church and while Part B contained questions to determine the competence of Sunday-school teachers.

Before being used to assemble data for the main study, the data collection tool (research questionnaire) was pilot-tested to establish its validity and reliability. The pilot study was conducted among randomly selected congregants from AIC Kaptembwa Local Church. The foregoing respondents had similar characteristics as the ones selected for the main study and were about 10% of the study sample size [Kothari \(2013\)](#).

The researcher sought to determine the content validity of the research questionnaire by consulting the allocated University supervisors in the current study. The Cronbach alpha method was utilized to measure the reliability of the research questionnaire in this study. Because the study variables were evaluated using Likert-scale questions that may be subjected to this reliability test, this test was appropriate. [Table 2](#) summarizes the findings.

Table 2 Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test Results

Likert Scale	N. of Items	Cronbach alpha
Teaches competencies	5	0.812
Sunday-school success	5	0.824

[Table 2](#) shows that alphas for Likert scales evaluating the two primary variables of the study were more than 0.7. According to [Taber \(2018\)](#), the acceptable Cronbach alpha criterion is 0.7, which means that scales with an alpha equal to or greater than 0.7 are considered to be reliable. Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) software was used to conduct the analysis.

2.3. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Prior to beginning data collection, the researcher obtained the necessary permits and consents from the appropriate authorities. First, the Kenya Methodist University provided a consent letter. Following that, the NACOSTI issued both a research permit and an authorisation letter. The researcher then obtained permission from the AIC's management at both the Diocese and Local Church levels. The researcher personally distributed the research questionnaires to the 100 sampled respondents.

To promote anonymity and confidentiality, respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire privately and deposit it in the church's comment box. They were instructed not to write any information that could disclose their identity on the questionnaire. Most respondents completed the questionnaire and deposited it at the church comment box on the same day that they were issued. However, some respondents requested for more time and were given a period of 7 days to complete and return the questionnaire.

2.4. DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methodologies were used in this investigation. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data, and the results were presented in the form of illustrative quotes. Quantitative data analysis entailed both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis focused on determines the existing situation within AIC Bondeni in respect to the level of success of the Sunday-school mission at AIC Bodeni and the competence of Sunday-school teachers.

Inferential analysis was conducted to test whether there are significant relationships between teachers' competence and the success of the Sunday-school mission at AIC Bodeni. The analyses also sought to determine the direction of this relationship. The simple linear regression method was used to conduct this analysis. The following model was used to guide the analysis.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + e$$

Where,
 Y = Success of the Sunday-school mission,
 β_0 = constant,
 β_1 , = coefficients for the independent variables,
 X_1 = Teachers' competence,
 e = error term.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A hundred questionnaires were issued out to selected respondents for purposes of data collection out of which 83 were returned to the researcher having been duly completed. This figure marked a response rate of 83%, which is above the average response rate for in-person surveys that according to [Francavilla et al. \(2018\)](#) stands at 57%. The number of returned questions was thus deemed adequate to provide a representative view of the situation in the study area and minimize non-response bias. The non-responses are probably due to time constraints on the part of respondents to complete and return the questionnaires.

The majority of the respondents (60.2% [50]) were female while the rest (39.8% [33]) were male, which reflects the gender composition of the church membership. Most of the respondents (88.0% [73]) have been members of the church for more than 5 years and thus were in a position to give informed opinion regarding the success of the Sunday-school mission and associated factors. The data collected from these individuals was analysed using descriptive, inferential, and qualitative methods. This chapter presents and discusses the results.

Success of Sunday-School as a Mission Field at AIC Bondeni

The dependent variable of the study was success of Sunday-school as mission field. It was vital to determine how successful the Sunday-school mission in the study is before interrogating the factors that contribute to the success or lack of it. The success of Sunday-school mission was measured using seven Likert-type items to which respondents were asked to indicate their level agreement on five-point scale. Results are summarized in [Table 3](#).

Statement	N	Mean	S.D.
Our church has relatively many Sunday school children.	83	4.66	.476
The level of spiritual understanding among the Sunday school children is high.	83	3.98	.883
Children improve on their behaviour upon joining the Sunday school.	83	4.66	.476
The morality of children improves when they join Sunday school.	83	4.46	.611
The majority of the children who join Sunday school at AIC Bondeni graduate to become committed church members during their youth and adulthood.	83	4.13	.960
Sunday-school success aggregate score	83	4.38	.522

Table 4.1 illustrates that respondents on average strongly agreed (mean= 4.66) with the first statement, which alleged that their church has relatively many Sunday school children. This statement was founded on the rationale that when Sunday mission is success, it is bound to attract and retain many children. Reaching as many people as possible is the greatest commission of the church [Fanning \(2014\)](#) and thus the Sunday-school capability to reach many children is a strong indicator of its success. The standard deviation (SD= .476) shows that there was little dispersion in the respondent's views from the average position. This implies that there was a high level of consensus among respondents on this issue.

Respondents also on average agreed (mean=3.98) with the assertion that the level of spiritual understanding among the Sunday-school children is high. This item sought to assess the level of spiritual growth of the Sunday-school children at AIC Bondeni. As [Hackley \(2016\)](#) asserted, it is not enough for the Sunday-school programmes to attract and retain children. Once the children have enrolled, the programmes should promote the growth of their spiritual faith and turn them into committed Christians. Current findings suggest that the Sunday-school mission at AIC Bondeni has been successful in realizing this end. There was also a relatively high level of consensus among respondents on these issues as indicated by the standard deviation value, which was less than one (SD= .883).

Similarly, respondents strongly agreed (mean=4.66) that children improve on their behaviour upon joining Sunday school. According to [Mumo \(2016\)](#), the primary goal of Sunday-school is to instil discipline, character, and sense of purpose among the children as well as socialize children to adopt Christian ways. This implies that behaviour change is a major indicator of successful Sunday-school missions. The importance of behavioural change as an outcome of Sunday-school mission is also emphasized in several biblical scriptures including Luke 6:44; “for each tree is known by its own fruit. Indeed, people do not gather figs from thornbushes, or grapes from brambles.” Current findings not only indicate that children who join Sunday-school at AIC Bondeni experience a behavioural transformation but also showed that there was a high level of consensus among respondents on this subject (SD=.476).

In addition, respondents agreed (mean=4.46) with the assertion that the morality of children improves when they join Sunday school. This item also sought to determine the effectiveness of the Sunday-school programme at AIC Bondeni in transforming the behaviour of children. This finding reinforces the previous finding, which shows that the Sunday-school programme at the church has performed relatively well in terms of effecting behavioural change among the children.

Lastly, respondents on average agreed (mean=4.13) the majority of the children who join Sunday school at AIC Bondeni graduate to become committed church members during their youth and adulthood. This item aimed at determining the capacity of the Sunday-school to retain children who enrol and usher them to the youth and finally the adult ministries. For the Sunday-school ministry to drive church growth, the transition from Sunday-school to youth to adult ministries must be smooth and efficient [Nale \(2007\)](#). Current findings indicate that the Sunday-school ministry at AIC Bondeni is efficient in assisting children to transition to the next stages in the church’s ministry. There was a relatively high level of consensus among respondents on this issue as indicated by the standard deviation (SD=.960).

The average Sunday-school success score is 4.38 out of a possible maximum of 5. This mean-score amounts to an 87.6 percent percentage score. This indicates that AIC Bondeni has met 87.6 percent of the measures used in the study to assess the success of the Sunday-school as a mission field, according to the respondents. This suggests that the church's Sunday-school program is fairly successful.

The qualitative data acquired through the open-ended inquiry supports these conclusions. In this section, the open-ended question prompted respondents to elaborate how the Sunday-school mission has been successful. About 94% of the respondents gave positive responses with some mentioning that the Sunday-school has helped spread the gospel to the children, helped to grow the membership of the church, and other saying that the programme has attracted even children whose parents are not members of the church. One respondent narrated that she was one of the grandaunts from the Church Sunday-school and thus she is a living testimony of the effectiveness of the Sunday-school mission at the church. Another respondent

reported that most leaders at the church have gone through the church's Sunday-school program, which shows that effectiveness of the programme in preparing individuals to serve in the church.

Competence of Sunday-school Teachers and Success of Sunday-school

The second factor that the study interrogated was the competence of Sunday-school teachers. Respondents were presented with a set of five statements related to teachers' competence and asked to indicate their level of agreement on a five-point scale. Table 4 presents the results.

Table 4 Respondents' view on Competence of Sunday-school Teachers

Statement	N	Mean	S.D.
The church has set the minimum conventional education threshold for Sunday-school teachers.	83	4.01	.506
The church assesses the theological understanding of the Sunday-school teachers before appointing them to their positions.	83	3.11	1.297
The church trains selected congregants in readiness for Sunday-school teaching.	83	3.67	.843
The Sunday-school teachers are continuously developed by the church.	83	3.36	1.077
Sunday-school teachers are expected to have showcased serious commitment to children issues for them to be appointed by the church.	83	3.53	1.337
Teachers' Competence aggregate score	83	4.04	.802

Results in Table 4 illustrate that respondents on average (mean= 4.01) agreed with the claim that the church has set the minimum conventional education threshold for Sunday-school teachers. There was little dispersion of respondents' view of the average position as indicated by the standard deviation value (SD= .506). These results imply that most respondents were in agreement that AIC Bondeni has set minimum education requirement for individuals who would like to become teachers in the Sunday-school mission. The findings are consistent with the study by Purba et al. (2020), who found that the Batak Protestant Church in Jakarta Indonesia had minimum education requirements for Sunday-school teachers. They noted that Sunday-school teachers play have similar roles and responsibilities as teachers in formal education and should therefore possess certain minimum qualifications.

However, respondents were on average not certain (mean= 3.11) with the assertion that the church assesses the theological understanding of Sunday-school teachers before appointing them to their positions. This finding raises questions regarding whether any assessment is conducted. The relatively high standard deviation (SD= 1.297) indicate that respondents held divergent views on this issue. The findings are consistent with Whitehead (2010) who found that Mambo (2019) noted that besides theological understanding, Sunday-school teachers must understand the cognitive development process of children including the characteristics and thought processes of these children at each stage of the development cycle. Their instructions should correspond to the development stage of the children.

On the other hand, respondents on average agreed (mean= 3.67) with the statement that AIC Bondeni trains selected congregants in readiness for Sunday-school teaching. The finding implies that the church provides trainings to individuals who are willing to serve in the Sunday-school ministry. The standard deviation is less than 1 (SD= .843) indicate that there were no major dispersion in the respondents views from the average position. This implies that there was a high level of consensus among respondents on this issue. The findings are also consistent with the studies by Whitehead (2010) and Mambo (2019) that emphasize the need

to train Sunday-school teachers to ensure that they have the requisite competences to help children to grow spiritually.

In contrast, respondents were on average no certain (mean=3.36) with the claim that Sunday-school teachers are continuous developed by the church. This finding raises questions on whether AIC Bondeni has an elaborate development programme for ensuring that Sunday-school teachers improve their skills on a continual basis. The standard deviation is greater than 1 (SD= 1.077) suggesting that respondents held diverse views on this issue. The study is consistent with [Mumo \(2016\)](#) who found that Sunday-school teachers at AIC Machakos had no adequate training. It is probable that the lack of continuous development programmes for Sunday-schools at the church could be hampering the training levels of teachers.

Lastly, respondents on average agreed (mean= 3.53) with the statement that Sunday-school teachers are expected to have showcased serious commitment to children issues for them to be appointed by the church. This implies that AIC Bondeni scrutinizes the commitment of individuals to children issues before appointing them to teach in the Sunday-school. However, there was a major dispersion of respondents' views from the average position as indicated by the large standard deviation (SD= 1.337). The standard deviation indicates that respondents held diverse views on this issue. The finding is in line with [Whitehead \(2010\)](#) who observed that one of the characteristics that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the USA look for when selecting Sunday-school teachers is the commitment and love of individuals towards the children and the gospel of Christ. This implies that commitment is an important competence not just at the AIC Church but also in churches in developed countries.

The teacher competence aggregate mean score was 4.04, which translates to a percentage score of 80.8%. This score implies that from the respondents' perspective, AIC Bondeni meets 80.8% of the indicators that the study used to assess the competence of Sunday-school teachers. This implies that the Sunday-school teachers at the church have high competence levels. The standard deviation (SD= .802) indicate that respondents aggregate rating of teachers' competence did deviate a lot from the average score. This finding is supported by the qualitative data from the open-ended questions.

The open-ended question required respondents to give their views regarding the competence of Sunday-school teachers in their church. About 59.7% used positive adjectives to describe the teachers such as competent, fair, committed, and best. This implies according to the majority of the respondents; the teachers have acceptable competence level. However, 32.8% of the respondents used negative adjectives such as not competent, not serious, and wanting to describe the teachers. This implies that there is section of the congregation that feels that there are deficiencies in teachers' competence that the church needs to work on.

Influence of Teacher Competence on Sunday-school Success

The direction and significance of the relationship between the competence of Sunday-school teachers and the success of Sunday-school as mission field was tested using the regression beta coefficients. [Table 5](#) summarizes the results.

Table 5 Teacher Competence Beta Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1					
(Constant)	1.782	.387		4.602	.000
Teachers' Competence	.313	.090	.481	3.467	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Sunday school success

Results in [Table 5](#) further illustrate that beta coefficient for teachers' competence is 0.313, which indicates that the relationship between teachers' competence and Sunday-school success is positive. Specifically, this coefficient suggests that increasing teachers' competence score by 1 unit would increase the Sunday-school success score by 0.313 units. The t-statistics ($t=3.467$, sig. =.001) gave a significance value that is less than 0.01, which indicate that the relationship between teachers' competence and success of the Sunday-school mission is also significant at the 0.01 level of significance. The findings lead to the conclusion that teachers' competence has a significant and positive influence on the success of Sunday-school as a mission field.

The findings are congruent with the study by [Baggerman \(2014\)](#), who established that Sunday-school teachers training and follow-up are effective ways to increase their competence in a Sunday-school classroom. Teacher competence in-turn leads to more effective delivery of instructions to the children. The findings are also consistent with the study by [Mambo \(2019\)](#), who noted that children are more likely to learn, when Sunday-school teachers understand the cognitive development process of children including the characteristics and thought processes of these children at each stage of the development cycle.

It is advised that this section be written in past tense. It is a good idea to rely on charts, graphs, and tables to present the information. This way, the author is not tempted to discuss any conclusions derived from the study. The charts, graphs, and table should be clearly labeled and should include captions that outline the results without drawing any conclusions. A description of statistical tests as it relates to the results should be included.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study concludes that AIC Bondeni has Sunday school teachers with high competence levels. The study also concludes that the level of competence of Sunday-school teachers has a positive and significant influence on the success of Sunday-school as a mission field. It also concludes that teacher competence has the greatest influence on Sunday-school success among the three factors as it had the highest beta coefficient. However, the contribution of teachers towards the success of the Sunday school mission is hampered by the absence of a continuous training and development program. This aspect also needs to be addressed.

Based on the conclusions, the study recommends that to enhance the success of the Sunday school as mission field, leaders at AIC Bondeni and other churches should focus on assessing theological understanding of Sunday-school teachers. Current findings suggest that this may not be happening in most churches. This assessment will help churches identify gaps among teachers and consequently assist them to prepare training programmes that will effectively improve the theological understanding of these teachers.

Leaders at AIC Bondeni and other Churches should also develop continual training and development programmes. Findings indicate that these programmes may not exist at the AIC Bondeni based on the low mean score. Just like formal education, Sunday-school education must evolve in line with social, technological, and other forms of changes. Continuous training and development programmes ensure that Sunday schools teachers keep updating the skills and knowledge in line with changes in the society.

The current study focused on the influence of teachers' competence on Sunday-school success. Future studies should explore other factors that have the potential

of affecting Sunday-school success. In addition, this study was confined to a single church namely AIC Bondeni, which has limited the generalizability of findings. To support the generalization of these findings, future researchers should explore how teacher competence influences Sunday school success in other churches. Since AIC is one of the mainstream churches, future studies should prioritize examining the influence of these factors in the upcoming evangelical churches to facilitate comparison.

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