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https://doi.org/10.38140/4whj0e03

ISSN: 1015-8758 (Print)

ISSN: 2309-9089 (Online)

Acta Theologica 2026
46(1):38-59

Date received:
22 September 2025

Date accepted:
19 March 2026

Date published:
30 June 2026

y the UFS
http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/at
Published by the UFS
http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/at

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OPEN ACCESS

Investigating children's ministry in the Church of the Province of Uganda in the diocese of Kampala[1]

ABSTRACT

The article examines current approaches to children's ministry in the Church of the Province of Uganda, focusing on the Diocese of Kampala. Uganda has a predominantly young population, with 56.7 per cent below the age of 19 years (UBoS 2021), yet the church invests limited resources in children's ministry. Both clergy and volunteers often lack formal training for effective spiritual nurture. The article aims to explore how children's ministry within the church can be strengthened. It draws on documentary analysis and qualitative data from in-depth interviews with 28 respondents. Findings reveal significant challenges, including inadequate funding, a shortage of trained personnel, the marginalisation of children's programmes, and a lack of standardised ministry practices. These limitations hinder the church's capacity to provide holistic spiritual formation for children. The article highlights the need for intentional investment, structured training, standardisation, and strategic prioritisation to enhance effectiveness and sustainability.

1 This article enriches African child theology by bringing the voices of the local context into focus and by providing guidelines on practical innovations that lead to practical models of holistic children's ministry. It urges the church to break its traditions of exclusion and exploitation to invest deliberately in the raising of the next generation.

1. INTRODUCTION

A high number of children constitute the population in Uganda, of which 56.7 per cent is aged below 19 years (UBoS 2021). Due to this demographic fact, children grapple with several issues such as poverty, ill-health, conflict, neglect, sexual abuse, and drug abuse. Faced with such adversities, it is important that every establishment, including the church, should do something effective about their plight. However, children's ministry in the Church of the Province of Uganda seems to be undervalued. There are not many human and financial resources that could be allocated by the church to this ministry, and children are often regarded as passive participants and not full members who could take part in church life. This means that the church needs to review its theological and practical investments in children, in order to develop biblically, culturally, and missionally effective models of children's ministry.

Although different churches and organisations across the world have put forward highly developed children ministries frameworks, the vast majority of the writings and practices that have been guiding the frameworks are mainly based on Western contexts, and may not reflect the sociocultural, religious, and economic dynamics experienced within African contexts. In Africa, and in Uganda, children are now fragmented, under-financed, and under-theologised. The Diocese of Kampala is also urban and cosmopolitan in nature, with its own opportunities and challenges regarding children's ministry. Some of the congregations may be found in an environment where there is religious pluralism, shifting patterns of family dynamics, as well as growing availability of secular thinking. There is also a lack of scholarly studies and rubrics of practice that address the actual contexts of the lives of children and their caretakers in Uganda. Even in the academic sphere of knowledge, scholars such as Bunge (2011), White (2012), and Nel (2016) have expressed concerns regarding the theological perception of the church and action towards children and the need for a more biblically/contextually correct response. Bunge (2011:14) states that most of the theological thinking about children is abstract and divorced from the real lives of children within particular communities. White (2012:103) avers that churches still tend to define children as primarily the subjects of moral teaching, instead of being spiritual agents. Nel (2016:46) points to the importance of a contextualised theological training as a critical element of making professions that are not only biblically envisioned, but also socially relevant.

Against this perceived gap, this article aims to deal with the issue of children's ministry in the Church of the Province of Uganda, especially in the Diocese of Kampala. Based on empirical evidence, this article provides insight

into the existing knowledge and practice of children's ministry to suggest and introduce ways of developing a more holistic, inclusive, and sustainable approach to ministry among children.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The focus of the article is guided by the following research question: Based on the understanding and practice of children's ministry in the Anglican Church of the Province of Uganda, how can children's ministry in this church be promoted and/or improved?

This question is answered by addressing it with a number of secondary questions, including:

- What is the Biblical understanding and perspective on children?
- What is the church's understanding of children and of its responsibility towards children?
- What is the practice of children's ministry – How is children's ministry practised in the Church of the Province of Uganda, Diocese of Kampala?
- How can the Church of the Province of Uganda, Diocese of Kampala, improve children's ministry?
- How can the church reach out to non-Christian children in the Diocese of Kampala?

In answering these questions, this article contributes to child theology within an African context and suggests strategic interventions for improving children's ministry in Uganda.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Children form over half of the population in Uganda. They thus form one of the biggest numbers of people that should be nurtured holistically. Despite their numbers and vulnerability, children are still largely outsiders in the life and ministry of the Church of the Province of Uganda. Turyahabwa (2023:1) notes how the vast majority of such children face various risks such as poverty, illness, abuse, drug addiction, and spiritual disorientation, to which the church does not respond satisfactorily. Such loss of touch symbolises greater disconnectedness in the church's cognisance of its position in the lives of children.

Despite scriptural support of the idea that children are an important part of God's redemptive plan, the theological attention of the church and its pastoral approaches towards the children are also at the lowest level. According to Brewster (2005:6), redemption by God through Christ does not exclude children, and such a fact requires practical realities in the ministry structures of the church. McConnell *et al.* (2007:35) argue that the role of the mission of God carried out by the church cannot be complete without a deliberate effort to minister to the children of the church. Sadly, though, in several churches in Uganda, where the adult ministry is the main focus of ministry, one aspect marginalises the spiritual formation of children and their involvement in the work and mission of the church. In the Diocese of Kampala, children's ministry is often limited to Sunday school sessions run by untrained volunteers, with hardly any theological knowledge of children.

This article contributes by examining the Diocese of Kampala's theological underpinnings and current approaches. It challenges the Church of the Province of Uganda to reimagine and realign its ministry priorities, in order to make children not only visible but rather known, nurtured, and discipled as members of Christ's church.

4. CONTEXTUALISATION: CHILDREN AT RISK

According to the Lausanne Consultation Paper on Children at Risk (Segura-April, Hayes Greener, Scott, Panotto & Wong, 2014:31), children at risk are defined as individuals under the age of 18 years, including unborn children, who face a combination of risk factors in the relational, environmental, or personal domains that interfere with their ability to pursue and realise their divine potential, or as individuals who experience an intense and/or chronic risk factors. Segura-April *et al.* (2014) argue that the purpose of this classification is to draw attention to circumstances and locations such as Uganda, where children face substantial challenges. As such, their definition is intended to encompass unfulfilled needs in all facets of the human experience, wherever they may exist (poor and non-poor; non-West and West).

According to the UNICEF Uganda Annual Report (2017:1), children and families are in distress, yet even basic answers are difficult to come by. The vast majority of children have been the victims of abuse or violence in some capacity. Research indicates that over eight million youngsters are at risk of abuse. Moreover, gender is a significant risk factor for sexual abuse, which is said to be the most prevalent type of violence. The report also emphasises the harm that child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) pose to females. Uganda is, therefore, one of the top 25 nations with the greatest rates of underage marriage.

For children who are exceptionally vulnerable, child labour is also a prevalent aspect of daily life. Of rural children in Uganda, 93 per cent are thought to be involved in commercial or subsistence agriculture, and millions of children work in abusive conditions (Turyahabwa 2023:6). Child- and gender-based violence are also sustained by deeply ingrained cultural and patriarchal views, attitudes, and practices toward women and children (UNICEF 2017:1). However, there are flaws in the church's ability to both combat and prevent child abuse and violence (Davids & Davids 2024:4). In order to identify stressors and circumstances that place children at higher risk for child abuse and neglect and to intervene and support them to reduce the risk, it is crucial to understand the risk factors that surround children.

The Lausanne Consultation Paper on Children at Risk (2014:32) lists several factors that impact children in Africa, namely starvation, disease, disability, suicide, abortion, sex, exploitation, rape and abuse, war, slavery, abusive child labour, drug and alcohol abuse, violence against women and children, as well as poverty. These burdens are placed on the children and then carried into communities, the church, and ministry, undermining efficacy and sharing the Gospel. Nonetheless, making a complete investment in children nowadays helps protect them from at least some of the pain and harm, preventing it from being carried forward into abusive cycles that occur across generations. Investing in a children's holistic mission can also increase the success of transformative ministry and the well-being of all God's people (Bamwesigye 2017:37).

For this reason, Zimmerman (2019:23) argues that God designed that every child be surrounded by a loving family, that every family would be surrounded by a community of faith that would nurture both children and their families, and that both family and the community of faith would be part of a broader society that would be just and protect God's law for children.

5. THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN PROTECTING AND NURTURING CHILDREN

Whereas God intended that the home, the church, and the community would be places of nurture and protection for children, there is evidence of exploitation and abuse of all forms in the Church of the Province of Uganda (*Daily Monitor* 2018). While Brewster (2011:135) notes that the great majority of individuals, with whom the church interacts, have the same fundamental beliefs on child protection, he warns that the church cannot be naive, as some people may have distorted motivations for participating in church-based child programmes

(Brewster 2011:135). This means that children are not always safe, even in the church of Christ. This may deter them from forming meaningful relationships, due to lack of trust (Van Niekerk & Breed 2018:4).

For this reason, Brewster (2011:60) recommends that churches and organisations implement policies to ensure that volunteers, workers, donors, and others are not engaged in any form of child exploitation. The church is challenged to create training programmes to ensure that all those involved in children's ministry are aware of the seriousness of this issue and how to prevent it (Van Niekerk & Breed 2018:5). At the same time, the church must offer pastoral care to children, especially those in crisis, as a way of protecting them (Thatcher 2007:141).

6. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Nyende (2015:1) notes that some people, including church leaders, have claimed that the Bible mentions hardly anything about children and childhood. However, Grobbelaar (2016a:135) observes that, despite extensive biblical material on children, many scholars have not given sustained attention to this subject (see Bunge 2001:3; 2004:43; 2006:551). Similarly, Bunge *et al.* (2008:xv) argue that biblical scholarship has often neglected passages relating to children and childhood.

A closer examination of Scripture shows that children are frequently mentioned and are significant in the biblical message. Children are protected and loved by God, and are fully human, created in God's image (Bunge 2011:6). They are moral beings, gifts from God, and growing individuals who require guidance and direction (Dt. 6:5-7; Pr. 22:6 ESV). For this reason, they need to be prepared through teaching, as they are both the present and the future church (Weber & De Beer 2016:7). At the same time, some children are vulnerable and in need of justice and compassion (Bunge 2011:5).

Therefore, those involved in scholarly work about children from a Christian viewpoint as well as those involved in children's ministry must let the Bible inform, to a good extent, their perspectives, attitudes, knowledge, and understanding of matters to do with children (Nyende 2015:2). Indeed, for the Church of the Province of Uganda and those involved with children's ministries of whatever kind, the Bible must, consistently, be brought to bear on their studies on or about children.

7. METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative investigations about children's ministry practices in the Diocese of Kampala. Using a qualitative methodology, the research pertained to the interpretivist paradigm that studies social phenomena, by understanding them from the point of view of those who experience them (Creswell & Creswell 2018:231). This methodology was preferred because it enables a comprehensive exploration of theological aspects, structural and experiential viewpoints from active children's ministry participants.

To achieve an inclusive set of perspectives, 28 key informants were chosen in a strategic and purposeful manner. The research included ten ordained clergy members and 18 non-ordained participants, consisting of five Mothers' Union members, five parents, and five Sunday school teachers, along with three staff members working at compassion-assisted projects. Statistical representation was 14 males and 14 females, according to Creswell and Creswell's (2018:234) approach for diversity and White's (2006:15) principles regarding equal significance of each participant in child theology.

As the main research method, in-depth interviews were recorded using a recorder and transcribed by a trained research assistant. Open-ended questions were asked to help explore participants' perspectives and experiences in-depth, in order to generate answers to the Ugandan context research question on children's ministry. Ethical clearance was granted by the University of Pretoria, Faculty of Theology and Religion's Research and Ethics Committee.

This article is guided by a child theology perspective, which understands children as full participants in God's mission rather than passive recipients of ministry (Bunge 2011:6; Grobbelaar 2012:11-15). This framework emphasises the holistic – spiritual, social, and physical – nature of children's development and provides a lens for analysing how children's ministry is understood and practised in the Diocese of Kampala. It informs the interpretation of the findings, particularly in assessing whether ministry practices affirm the dignity, agency, and inclusion of children within the life of the church.

8. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The empirical investigation revealed several important themes, as identified by the interviewees. These include biblical understanding and perspective on children; approaches to children's ministry; the current state of children's ministry; improving children's ministry, and outreach to non-Christian children.

8.1 Biblical understanding and perspective on children

The biblical perspective on children is crucial in helping the church value, nurture, and engage children. Participants consistently affirmed the formative role of Scripture in shaping children's moral, spiritual, and social development. One respondent remarked that

> Proverbs 22 talks about training a child in a way they should behave and when they grow up, they will not depart from it (Participant 1, male).

From a child theology perspective, this emphasises the long-term impact of early spiritual guidance, while affirming children as active participants in their own spiritual formation which, according to Stonehouse (1998:14), is a provision of guidance that lasts a lifetime. Similarly, another participant emphasised that "[c]hildren's ministry, we are basically looking at nourishing children to adopt Christ-like characters" (Participant 2, male). This testimony is a manifestation of the wider theological belief that children need to be mentored in order to become Christ-like in wisdom, humility, and character (Grobbelaar 2012:11-15).

These views affirm the theological understanding that Scripture provides the foundation for children's ministry, guiding its mission, goals, and methods (Grobbelaar 2016a:22; Magezi & Madimutsa 2023:2). Nevertheless, the respondents also emphasised that being a good disciple involves doing more than reading the Bible. Weber and Sonnenberg (2023:2) argue, and participants affirmed that modelling of Christ-like behaviour makes a deeper impression than repetitive instruction. One respondent echoed this practical emphasis:

> Helping children know more about God and His ways, teaching them to obey parents, honour your father and mother, so that you may live long, breaking down such commandments for children to know and understand (Participant 4, female).

Another respondent reflected on Deuteronomy 6, stressing that

> the children of Israel were instructed to ensure that the law is passed on, to ensure that God is known right from infancy in the home (Participant 5, male).

According to these views, children are not merely loved by God, but they are active participants in his mission (Mt. 28:16-20). The church must invest in holistic strategies that involve teaching, modelling, and meaningful engagement.

8.1.1 Holistic children's ministry

Children's ministry within the Church of the Province of Uganda is understood as holistic, as it seeks to address the spiritual, physical, mental, and social well-being of children. This was emphasised by one participant who explained:

> We are mainly to equip them to know how to read, and then they know how to read the Bible. So here, the schools are not mainly for academics to begin with. It is mainly to help a child learn to read and then be able to read the Bible. So, children's ministry is actually covering the entire life of a child, holistically. It is in spiritual life, physical life, academic life, and all life rounds (Participant 7, male).

This reflects a child theology emphasis on holistic development, where children are understood as whole persons rather than purely spiritual subjects.

This holistic view also aligns with the arguments of Bell *et al.* (2005:64) and Chiroma (2017:51), who affirm that effective ministry must go beyond the spiritual dimension to embrace the whole life of a child. Through integration of education, discipleship, and practical life skills into ministry, the church mirrors a theology of wholeness that recognises children as complete beings created in God's image. Such an approach not only nurtures faith, but also equips children to thrive in society, ensuring that children's ministry becomes a channel for both spiritual transformation and social empowerment.

8.1.2 Evangelism and discipleship

Evangelism and discipleship emerged as core priorities in the children's ministry of the Church of the Province of Uganda. One participant stressed the twofold process of reaching children with the Gospel and nurturing them in faith:

> We ensure that these children are evangelised to, but after being evangelised to, we disciple them. We disciple them because you do not only end up teaching them or preaching to them, but if they get born again, you now begin discipling them, teaching them a number of things (Participant 2, male).

Another participant affirmed this biblical mandate, remarking:

> My understanding of children's ministry is our biblical mandate to reach out to the children as a church, in terms of evangelism and discipleship, making them know Christ, getting to love Christ, and the reason for His death and resurrection (Participant 11, female).

These perspectives are indicative of the notion that children are full participants in the Gospel mission, not passive recipients. They resonate with Oberholzer's (2024:109) view that attending to children's needs, whether physical or spiritual, opens avenues for holistic ministry and Gospel witness. Through emphasis on both proclamation and discipleship, participants highlighted a process of spiritual formation that extends beyond conversion to cultivating lifelong faith. This demonstrates a theology of ministry where evangelism and discipleship are inseparably linked, ensuring that children grow not only in knowledge of Christ, but also in love, obedience, and active participation in the life of the church.

8.1.3 Bible reading

An ongoing theme in children's ministry is the centrality of the Bible, both as an authoritative text and as a practical tool for spiritual formation. Tan (2007:16-17) affirms its authority but stresses the need to read it through the lens of children, ensuring it speaks meaningfully to their context. Two participants underscored the importance of children acquiring the skill to read Scripture for themselves, with one ministry leader remarking: "If a child doesn't know how to read a Bible, there's no need to give them a Bible" (Participant 12, female). This emphasis indicates that the church is committed to nurturing biblical literacy from an early age, thereby grounding children in faith and safeguarding the future of the church. Scholars affirm this stance. Weber and Sonnenberg (2023:5-6) argue that reading Scripture equips children to live godly lives, while Stonehouse (1998:199) calls for creating opportunities for children to engage the Bible independently. Together, these views indicate that, beyond merely possessing a Bible, children must be enabled to interact with it in transformative ways, shaping their values and protecting them from societal corruption.

8.1.4 Integration of family and community

Participants viewed children's ministry as extending beyond the confines of the church to include families and neighbourhoods, a perspective echoed by Crozier (2008:342). One participant captured this vividly, stating:

> I think the first Bibles are us, the parents, then the church leaders, then their teachers in Sunday school or wherever they are in camps, those are the Bibles they read first (Participant 13, female).

This accentuates the critical role of parents and community as the primary spiritual models for children before formal teaching takes place. Thatcher (2007:188) supports this view, noting that, when parenting involves both the family and the broader community, the returns in a child's spiritual formation

are substantial. Such perspectives emphasise that effective children's ministry requires a collaborative, holistic approach where parents, church leaders, and the community jointly nurture faith and values in children.

8.1.5 Recognition of children's potential

Both participants and scholars described children as valuable members of the church who make meaningful contributions to the community of faith. Tan (2007:7-8) stresses that children serve as models of humility, citizens of God's kingdom, and instruments through whom divine truth is communicated. They should, therefore, be regarded as significant members of the body of Christ. This perspective was echoed by a ministry leader:

> It should be done according to what God has called us to do, to love children, to respect them, to take care of them as members of the body of Christ (Participant 14, female).

Another participant emphasised the practical outworking of this conviction through evangelism and discipleship:

> We ensure that these children are evangelised to, but after being evangelised to, we disciple them. We disciple them because you do not only end up teaching them or preaching to them, but if they get born again, you now begin discipling them, teaching them a number of things (Participant 3, male).

Together, these views affirm that children are not only recipients of care, but also active participants in God's mission, requiring both recognition of their dignity and intentional discipleship within the church.

8.2 Approaches to children's ministry

8.2.1 Approaches in parishes

The findings indicate that the Church of the Province of Uganda employs diverse methods for children's ministry across parishes, all centred on spiritual formation, community engagement, and holistic support. These practices extend beyond Sunday services into home-based gatherings, small groups, retreats, and organised programmes, which nurture both spiritual and social growth. For instance, one participant noted that "they also have children's cells … in different homes" (Participant 6, female), while another added, "we would go to different homes … after having tea" (Participant 3, male). Such initiatives align with Grobbelaar's (2016b:184-185) emphasis on intergenerational interaction, where children learn from adult role models, while adults also learn from the faith of children (Bunge 2006:49; Gundry-Volf 2001:60). Camps and special programmes, particularly during school holidays,

were also mentioned as avenues for nurturing faith: "some churches have special programmes, they do camps for children of different ages" (Participant 16, male). These allow children to socialise and develop academically and spiritually (Grobbelaar 2012:49-50). In addition, games are used as a tool to attract children and strengthen relationships within the community of faith (Nyota & Mapara 2008:189-202).

Parental involvement and capacity-building in parishes are vital to children's ministry. Parents are encouraged to take an active role, with one participant observing that "mothers are trained to become teachers … because they go back home and teach the children" (Participant 17, female). This confirms Thatcher's (2007:68) view that parental commitment supports holistic growth and Turyahabwa's (2023:181) call for parents to instil godliness in children. Some parishes also integrate children into diocesan work plans, appoint coordinators, and provide training for volunteers, in line with Beckwith's (2010:19) emphasis on nonformal education that equips children with life skills. Nonetheless, challenges remain, as observed by one participant:

> a number of churches do not have any focal person for children's work … many of them don't even have time to prepare (Participant 5, male).

Despite these difficulties, strategic planning, training, and community engagement reveal the church's ongoing commitment to nurturing both the present and the future church in reverence for God.

8.2.2 Compassion International-assisted projects

The findings reveal that the Church of the Province of Uganda, through Compassion International-assisted projects, adopts a holistic approach to children's ministry, in order to address children's needs. Participants emphasised the structured nature of these initiatives, with one noting that

> [c]ompassion has curriculums because compassion presents its ministry in a holistic way, so they have curriculums, edge-graded curriculums actually, for the spiritual outcomes, for the social-emotional outcomes, for the physical outcomes, and the cognitive outcomes (Participant 12, female).

Another participant noted the cognitive and educational focus: "Then the cognitive, we take them to school" (Participant 2, male). Social-emotional development is supported through interpersonal skill-building, while spiritual growth is nurtured in discipleship classes. Physical well-being is also prioritised, as Participant 2 observed:

> We also think that these children need to be physically devoted, because a physically devout person is appealing even to people who look at him or her.

These perspectives align with Oberholzer (2024:109), who stresses that child support must address the holistic needs of children.

9. THE CURRENT STATE OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

The findings reveal a persistent disparity between adult and children's ministries within the Diocese of Kampala. While significant investments are made in adult facilities, children's spaces are often inadequate, as one participant lamented:

> Kampala diocese has built churches, my God. Adult churches, well built. But if you go to the children's church, you find a small, small building, very old, very old. And it has been left for the children to study in (Participant 2, male).

Funding for children's ministry remains minimal, leading to limited resources, insufficient teaching materials, and underdeveloped infrastructure. One participant noted: "Children's ministry remains much more underfunded, much more uncoordinated, much more uncared for" (Participant 12, female). In addition, the shortage of skilled Sunday school teachers compromises the quality and reach of ministry programmes, as another participant observed:

> I don't see quite deliberate programmes that are maybe meant to increase, for example, the number of teachers … we are really struggling to get enough teachers to support the ministry (Participant 9, male).

These findings are consistent with Bunge (2016:94) and Grobbelaar (2016a:182), who argue that children are often marginalised within the church despite their spiritual significance.

The findings emphasise the implications of this neglect, particularly in terms of holistic child development and inclusion. Parental involvement is often low, with some parents preferring to keep their children in adult services:

> Some parents end up going with their children to the adult church. They don't want them to go to the children's ministry because it has been neglected (Participant 2, male).

Cultural perceptions that regard children as secondary participants further limit the church's capacity to nurture them effectively, as another participant noted: "Churches tolerate children …, keep them busy, look at them as those who have come and escorted their parents" (Participant 21, male). Despite these challenges, targeted initiatives such as paying school fees for children in slum areas have produced tangible results, with some beneficiaries becoming medical doctors and engineers:

> The children ministry has gone to another level…we are paying school fees for 280, or even 300, but the need is still great (Participant 7, male).

Nevertheless, the findings indicate a need for more intentional, creative, and well-resourced programming, including the use of technology and media, to ensure that children are fully integrated into the church's vision and holistic mission. These observations affirm Mercer's (2005:x) call for deliberate strategies that celebrate and nurture children, addressing both spiritual and socio-economic needs, while advocating for their well-being.

10. IMPROVING CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Children's ministry in the Diocese of Kampala faces a range of opportunities and challenges, as it seeks to nurture children's faith and holistic development. Recognising the central role of children in the church's present and future, it is essential to enhance and refine the ministry. Findings indicate that financial resources are a persistent constraint affecting both outreach and in-church activities. Participants highlighted the need for tangible support to create engaging learning environments. One respondent noted: "We need more money to be able to reach out to the slums" (Participant 6, female), while another explained:

> Children's ministry needs finances. You need to buy dolls for the younger ones, and you need to buy mats. You need a screen to watch and dance. I think the diocese can come in to support such churches. Where they cannot train their own teachers, the diocese should come in and help them train (Participant 18, female).

These views uphold the *Ubuntu* world view, which promotes communal support, cultivating values of sharing, relationship-building, and mutual care, according to Grobbelaar (2012:49-50).

Teacher training and leadership emerged as crucial for overcoming challenges. Participants emphasised the need for specialised skills and recognition of children's ministry as a distinct field. One participant stated:

"We need to change our criteria through which we are recruiting children's workers" (Participant 3, male). Leadership development was also highlighted:

> To equip the church for the children's ministry. And here, equipping, I mean both the clergy and the lay people…they are not equipped enough to deal with children's ministry (Participant 10, female).

Grobbelaar (2012:85) observes that the lack of capable leadership in Africa often inhibits sustainable transformation, while Bourg (2004:10) encourages the church to exercise servant leadership to nurture children in God's way. The involvement of parents, particularly fathers, was also considered vital, with one participant noting that

> [w]e should also interest the parents to love their children, to talk to their children after school, after Sunday services (Participant 7, male).

Parental engagement contributes significantly to children's holistic development (Thatcher 2007:250), supporting both spiritual and socio-emotional growth.

Collaboration with families, communities, and non-profit organisations was viewed as essential for sustainable impact. One participant stressed that

> [w]e have to meet them where they are … We are meant to be part of the community. That's where we'll find children (Participant 25, female).

Furthermore, attention to inclusivity was emphasised, particularly for children with special needs: "We should support families with special needs children in bringing them to church" (Participant 21, male). Grobbelaar (2016a:184) emphasises that God desires all children to know him, and thus the church's ministry should portray a missional heart, extending practical support to vulnerable children in line with Jesus' approach (Ngoda 2016:130; Van Aarde 2004:127; Turyahabwa 2023:25-26). Effective outreach, therefore, requires careful preparation, creative engagement, and strategic partnerships that prioritise inclusivity, sustainability, and continuity. Therefore, the Diocese of Kampala can adopt these approaches to significantly enhance its capacity to nurture children spiritually and holistically, extending hope and support to children across diverse settings.

11. OUTREACH TO NON-CHRISTIAN CHILDREN

The outreach of the Diocese of Kampala to non-Christian children stresses the necessity of engaging children who have not yet encountered the Christian faith. A key strategy emphasises empowering children within the church to evangelise their peers. One respondent noted:

> The best disciples that we can have who can disciple non-Christian children are the children themselves. That calls to make the children's ministry a bigger pillar in the church, give it more focus (Participant 16, male).

Grobbelaar (2012:74) supports this, observing that children naturally interact with peers in schools, communities, and families, making them effective Gospel ambassadors, provided they are guided to uphold Christian values. Another participant emphasised this point: "It is important to train the children to be gospel ambassadors" (Participant 16, male). Tan (2007:11) further asserts that children are active contributors to ministry within families and communities, rather than passive recipients.

Meeting children's material needs was emphasised as essential before spiritual engagement.

> Supporting programmes that meet the children's needs … Once they know that the basis is the Church, there is a way they will be influenced to know God (Participant 9, male).

Another participant stated:

> We must attend to children's needs before trying to evangelise, since practical acts of service can foster their understanding of God's love (Participant 24, male).

Likewise, Grobbelaar (2012:70) and Turyahabwa (2023:25-26) emphasise that addressing poverty, exclusion, and trauma builds trust, making children more receptive to the Gospel. Family involvement was also noted: "The church must work with parents and guardians to ensure sustained evangelism within the family structure" (Participant 22, female). Tan (2007:12) argues that children thrive spiritually when situated within a "God-context" at home, in church, and in the community.

Contemporary media and school-based outreach were identified as additional avenues for engagement.

> We have now radios … social media … programmes on TV … the message they are watching is bringing them to Christ … that should also be intentional (Participant 20, male).

Allen (2008:14) notes the dual potential of media to nurture or harm, emphasising the role of adults in guiding children's media engagement. Schools were also considered critical: "Going out to the schools … they are from different faiths … but we impact them" (Participant 27, male). Similarly, Oberholzer (2024:107-108) recommends that church outreach extend beyond

familiar settings to equip children's pastors to engage effectively in schools and other community spaces.

Intentional discipleship and relational ministry emerged as central strategies. "The role of Sunday school children and youth groups is to become disciple-makers" (Participant 27, male), and "Discipleship should be both transformational and applicable to children's lives" (Participant 28, female). Grobbelaar (2012:73) emphasises holistic nurture of development, beginning within the family. Pastoral care and communal activities such as sports and community visits were also mentioned as effective tools for relational ministry (Mitton 1996:86; Zimmerman 2019:117-121). Parents were viewed as critical partners: "The church needs to equip parents to actively participate in their children's spiritual development" (Participant 26, female). This stresses Grobbelaar's (2012:67) view that families should share in the church's pastoral responsibility for children spiritually.

Finally, sustained engagement was identified as essential for lasting impact. "Regular visits, follow-ups, and continued pastoral care are necessary to ensure lasting impact" (Participant 16, male). This is in agreement with Zimmerman's (2019:41) and Grobbelaar's (2012:73-74) view that children's ministry is a process rather than an event, encompassing holistic growth. Overall, the findings indicate that the Diocese of Kampala should adopt a holistic outreach strategy combining evangelism, material support, media engagement, intentional discipleship, family collaboration, and sustained relational care to create meaningful opportunities for non-Christian children to encounter Christ.

12. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

According to the findings of the study, the Church of the Province of Uganda, Diocese of Kampala, needs to reinforce its children's ministry through a holistic, long-term, and strategically organised approach. This will involve the incorporation of children's theology into the education of clergy and lay leaders to stress their inherent value in the kingdom of God, the structured and age-oriented training of teachers and leaders and the intensified diocesan backing through financing, training, and resource centres.

This research emphasised that parents should be brought on board to be active collaborators in the spiritual development of their own children, and cross-diocesan and cross-parish cooperation should be encouraged for mutual learning and innovation.

Furthermore, there should be deliberate strategies, including coherent curricula, child-friendly environments, and active engagement of children

in worship and community life, combined with attempts to take ministry beyond church walls through community outreach, school collaborations, and cultural activities.

Findings also suggest that non-Christian children can also be reached by using the media to create engaging and child-friendly content. Regular appraisal and feedback systems are essential to monitor effectiveness and help set strategic improvements.

All these actions are an effective guideline to develop a holistic, transformative, inclusive, and sustainable children's ministry.

This article, with theological, empirical, and contextual evidence, has brought out the role of children's ministry in the work of the Diocese of Kampala within the church mission to help ensure that the church's faith is brought up in its entirety. The article explains some of the key elements necessary for a fruitful children's ministry, including the spiritual, physical, social, mental, and cultural aspects and improving the life and testimony of the church. The connection between theory and practice provides a practical guide on how to empower children to become active members of the kingdom of God. Further study will be necessary to enable even a more comprehensive understanding and to facilitate the sustainable development of the children's ministry in different ecclesial settings.

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Keywords	*Trefwoorde*
Children's ministry	Kinderbediening
Diocese of Kampala	Bisdom van Kampala
Church of the Province of Uganda	Kerk van die Provinsie van Uganda
Holistic approach	Holistiese benadering