

ROLE OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION ON THE PERFORMANCE OF ASSEMBLIES OF GOD CHURCH PASTORS IN NSUKKA DISTRICT

George C. Asadu, PhD
Department of Religion and Cultural Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
george.asadu@unn.edu.ng

Victor Chukwuebuka Omeke
Department of Religion and Cultural Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
victor.omeke.pg94580@unn.edu.com

Abstract

This study examines the roles of theological education on the performance of pastors in the Assemblies of God Church in Nsukka District. Pastors are expected to combine spiritual responsibilities with sound administration, counselling, teaching, and evangelism. However, many pastors encounter challenges in biblical interpretation, church leadership, conflict management, and doctrinal balance because of inadequate theological training. A phenomenological research methodology was adopted to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of pastors concerning the influence of theological education on their ministerial performance. Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized supplemented by interviews. The findings show that theological education enhanced pastoral effectiveness and contributed to church's growth within the Assemblies of God's Church in Nsukka District.

Keywords: Theological Education, Pastoral Performance, Assemblies of God Church, Ministerial Effectiveness, Christian Ministry.

Introduction

In Nigeria, Pentecostal and evangelical churches have experienced remarkable growth over the years, resulting in an increased demand for pastors and church leaders. While this expansion has contributed significantly to the spread of Christianity, it has also exposed challenges associated with inadequate ministerial training. Many pastors enter ministry with limited theological education, a situation that often affects the quality of preaching, leadership, counselling, and church administration. Consequently, doctrinal imbalance, weak leadership practices, and ineffective pastoral care have frequently been attributed to insufficient theological preparation (Kalu, 2008). This development has generated increasing concern among scholars and church leaders regarding the role of theological education in enhancing pastoral performance and sustaining healthy church growth within contemporary Christianity.

The Assemblies of God Church is one of the leading Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria, recognised for its strong commitment to evangelism, discipleship, and ministerial development. Pastors within the Nsukka District are entrusted with the responsibility of providing sound spiritual leadership, preserving doctrinal integrity, and promoting the spiritual and numerical growth of the church. Fulfilling these responsibilities requires more than spiritual commitment; it demands adequate theological knowledge and practical ministerial competence. Although theological education has received considerable scholarly attention, limited research has specifically examined its influence on the performance of pastors within the Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District. This gap underscores the need for an empirical investigation within the district.

Against this background, this study examined the role of theological education in the performance of pastors within the Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District. Specifically, it investigated the contribution of theological education to effective preaching, leadership development, pastoral counselling, evangelism, church administration, and overall ministerial competence. It also explored the lived experiences and perceptions of pastors regarding the influence of theological education on their ministerial performance. To achieve these objectives, the study adopted a phenomenological research methodology and relied on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were obtained through oral interviews and participant observation, while secondary data were drawn from books, journal articles, and other relevant theological literature. The data were critically analysed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the significance of theological education in enhancing pastoral performance within the Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District.

Conceptual Clarification

i. Theological Education

Theological education refers to the systematic process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and spiritual formation necessary for effective Christian ministry. It involves the study of biblical texts, Christian doctrines, church history, ethics, pastoral care, leadership, and other disciplines that prepare individuals for service within the church and society. The primary purpose of theological education is not merely to impart academic knowledge but also to develop spiritual maturity, ministerial competence, and a deeper understanding of God's mission. According to Banks (1999), theological education serves as a means of equipping ministers to engage faithfully and effectively with the challenges of ministry in a changing world. It enables pastors to interpret Scripture accurately, communicate biblical truths effectively, and provide sound spiritual leadership to their congregations.

ii. Pastoral Performance & Effectiveness

A pastor's efficiency in carrying out the duties and obligations of church ministry distinguishes him and advances the growth of the church. These responsibilities include

preach and teach the word of God, offering pastoral counselling and spiritual guidance, providing quality leadership, that has capacity to resolve conflicts, and lead congregational development. Effective pastoral performance is often reflected in the spiritual growth of church members, the stability of church administration, and the advancement of the church's mission. White (2006) argues that pastoral effectiveness is largely influenced by the quality of ministerial preparation and theological training received by church leaders. Consequently, pastoral performance may be evaluated through the pastor's capacity to fulfil biblical, spiritual, and organisational responsibilities in a manner that promotes the well-being of both the congregation and the wider community.

iii. Assemblies of God Church

The Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District, is one of the districts of Assemblies of God Nigeria, comprising several local churches across Enugu State's Nsukka cultural area. The district is committed to evangelism, discipleship, church growth, and leadership development. Pastors within the district are responsible for preaching, teaching, pastoral care, evangelism, church administration, and the spiritual development of members. Their effectiveness in carrying out these responsibilities is essential to the growth and stability of the church.

Overview of Theological Education

Theological education is a vital aspect of Christian ministry that equips individuals with biblical knowledge, theological understanding, spiritual formation, and practical ministerial skills for effective service in the church and society. It promotes intellectual development, spiritual maturity, and leadership competence. According to Naugle (2014), theological education is concerned with the development of the whole person—head, heart, and hands—for effective Christian ministry. This holistic approach integrates knowledge, character, spirituality, and practical ministry. Its roots can be traced to the ministry of Jesus Christ, who trained His disciples before commissioning them, a pattern continued by the early Church through its emphasis on sound doctrine, spiritual growth, and leadership development. Consequently, theological education has remained an essential means of preparing church leaders to teach, lead, and preserve the Christian faith (Banks, 1999).

A comprehensive theological education includes biblical studies, systematic theology, church history, practical theology, missions, and Christian ethics. It is offered through seminaries, Bible colleges, theological institutions, church-based training, ministerial apprenticeships, and theological education by extension (World Council of Churches, 2018). Walls (1996) argues that theology is not merely a collection of abstract ideas but a reflection on how faith is lived and expressed within particular cultural settings. Thus, theological education equips ministers to engage their communities faithfully while responding to contemporary social realities. Theological education also fosters personal and ministerial development. Caloca-Rivas (1997) maintains that it enables

individuals and faith communities to examine their beliefs, traditions, and practices critically in the light of Scripture. Likewise, Bridges (1997) describes theological education as a means of shaping believers into the likeness of Christ, thereby strengthening evangelism, discipleship, and social transformation. Although theological education faces challenges such as balancing academic rigour with practical ministry, accessibility, and societal relevance, Kelsey (2008) observes that effective theological education requires the integration of classroom learning with practical ministerial experience. Consequently, mentorship, field education, experiential learning, and continuous assessment have become essential elements of ministerial training.

Furthermore, theological education promotes church growth, doctrinal stability, effective leadership, and meaningful engagement with society. Kafang (2001) argues that theological understanding and ministerial effectiveness are inseparable, as the quality of Christian service is often influenced by the depth of theological reflection that informs it. Therefore, theological education remains a transformative process that integrates biblical knowledge, theological reflection, spiritual formation, and practical ministry to prepare spiritually mature, intellectually informed, and effective Christian leaders for contemporary ministry.

Theological Education in the Assemblies of God Church

Historically, ministerial training in the Assemblies of God emerged from the denomination's commitment to evangelism, discipleship, and biblical teaching. The early Pentecostal movement recognised the necessity of preparing ministers who could accurately interpret Scripture and effectively communicate the gospel. As the church expanded across Nigeria, the demand for trained pastors increased significantly, leading to the establishment of Bible schools, theological seminaries, and ministerial training centres. These institutions were created to provide structured theological education while nurturing spiritual discipline and ministerial competence. According to Menzies and Horton (1993), theological education within the Pentecostal tradition seeks to combine biblical scholarship with practical ministry and spiritual empowerment. This philosophy has largely shaped ministerial training within the Assemblies of God Church.

The curriculum of Assemblies of God theological institutions is designed to achieve a balance between academic learning, spiritual formation, and practical ministry experience. Core courses typically include Old and New Testament studies, Systematic Theology, Church History, Christian Ethics, Homiletics, Pastoral Theology, Leadership Studies, Evangelism, Missions, and Pastoral Counselling. In addition to classroom instruction, students participate in supervised ministry, evangelistic outreaches, field education, and church-based practical experiences. Anderson (2014) observes that Pentecostal theological education places considerable emphasis on integrating theological knowledge with practical ministry skills. Likewise, Clark (2004) notes that

theological training within Pentecostal institutions seeks to produce ministers who are intellectually informed, spiritually mature, and practically equipped for ministry.

The primary goal of theological education in the Assemblies of God Church is to prepare ministers for effective pastoral and missionary service. This objective includes developing competence in preaching, teaching, leadership, counselling, evangelism, discipleship, and church administration. The church also seeks to preserve its Pentecostal identity by ensuring that ministers are grounded in biblical doctrine and Pentecostal theology. According to Sanders (2007), effective ministry requires both spiritual character and leadership competence, qualities that theological education seeks to cultivate in prospective ministers. Through theological training, pastors are equipped to address contemporary social, cultural, and spiritual challenges while remaining faithful to biblical principles.

To accomplish these goals, the Assemblies of God Nigeria has established several theological institutions dedicated to ministerial preparation and leadership development. Among the most prominent is the Assemblies of God Divinity School, which serves as the denomination's foremost institution for theological and ministerial training. Other Bible colleges and ministerial training centres have also been established across various regions of the country to provide certificate, diploma, degree, and postgraduate programmes. These institutions continue to play a significant role in producing pastors, missionaries, educators, and church leaders who contribute to the advancement of the church's mission in Nigeria and beyond.

The Selection and Training of Pastors in the Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District. The selection and training of pastors have remained central to the growth and sustainability of the Assemblies of God Church. In its early years, pastoral selection was primarily based on an individual's testimony of salvation, evidence of a divine calling, spiritual commitment, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, particularly as demonstrated through speaking in tongues and active Christian witness. According to Ugwuikpa (personal communication, November 10, 2023), the responsibility for assessing and selecting prospective pastors rested with senior ministers who had been influenced by the ministerial training practices introduced by Assemblies of God missionaries from the United States. Prospective Candidates were required to recount their conversion experience and demonstrate spiritual maturity before being admitted into a six-month Crash Training Programme, also known as the Basic Programme. This programme provided foundational ministerial preparation for individuals who had a genuine sense of calling but possessed limited formal education.

Although the programme helped address the immediate need for church workers, it had notable limitations. Many participants lacked the educational qualifications required for advanced theological studies, while some entered pastoral ministry without formal theological training. It also reinforced rigid ministerial practices, including strict

regulations on dress, personal appearance, and interactions between men and women (Godwin Chimezie, personal communication, July 5, 2024). As the church expanded, its leadership recognised that effective ministry required not only spiritual zeal but also sound theological knowledge, leadership ability, and practical ministerial competence (Ibemere, 2023). This led to the adoption of more structured and academically grounded standards for pastoral selection and training.

Today, prospective pastors are expected to demonstrate a clear call to ministry, a consistent record of church service, and evidence of both water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Applicants must also have maintained active church membership for at least three years, possess a minimum of the West African Senior School Certificate or its equivalent, and be recommended by the District Superintendent and District Secretary (Ugwuja Pius, personal communication, May 20, 2024). Successful candidates must pass an entrance examination before admission into an Assemblies of God Bible school or theological institution, where they undergo three to four years of training in biblical studies, theology, pastoral ministry, leadership, evangelism, counselling, and church administration. According to Anderson (2013), theological education enhances ministerial effectiveness by equipping pastors with the knowledge, skills, and spiritual formation required for contemporary ministry. This is evident in the Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District, where theological education has produced pastors known for sound biblical teaching, effective leadership, moral integrity, and dedicated Christian service. Many have also distinguished themselves as teachers in secondary schools and lecturers in higher institutions across Nigeria. Thus, theological education remains indispensable to pastoral effectiveness and the continued advancement of the church's mission within the district and beyond.

Misconceptions of Theological Education and Pastoral Performance in the Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District.

Despite the growing recognition of theological education within the Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District, certain misconceptions still exist regarding its relevance to pastoral ministry. Some pastors and church members perceive theological education as primarily academic and therefore less important than spiritual gifts, prayer, and practical ministerial experience. This perception has influenced attitudes towards formal ministerial training within some sections of the district. According to Cleopas Chukwudi (Personal Communication, March 15, 2024), some pastors believe that a divine calling and spiritual empowerment alone are sufficient qualifications for ministry. Consequently, they regard theological education as an unnecessary expenditure of time and resources. Such views are often supported by references to the apostles of Jesus Christ, who are sometimes described as ordinary men without formal theological training. However, this perspective overlooks the fact that the apostles received intensive instruction and mentoring directly from Jesus Christ over several years before being commissioned for ministry. Another misconception is the belief that theological education diminishes spirituality or weakens dependence on the Holy

Spirit. Some respondents observed that pastors who hold this view tend to place greater emphasis on spiritual experiences while undervaluing systematic biblical and theological study (Onoja Christopher, Personal Communication, February 6, 2025). As a result, theological education is occasionally viewed with suspicion rather than as a complementary tool for effective ministry.

Furthermore, misconceptions surrounding theological education have sometimes contributed to misunderstandings between trained and untrained pastors. In certain instances, formally trained ministers may be perceived as overly academic, while untrained ministers may be viewed as lacking adequate ministerial preparation. Such perceptions can create unnecessary divisions within the pastoral community and hinder collaborative ministry. Nevertheless, both theological education and practical ministry experience are essential for effective pastoral service (Eugene, n.d.). While spiritual gifts, prayer, and divine calling remain indispensable elements of ministry, theological education provides the knowledge, skills, and critical understanding necessary for sound biblical interpretation, effective leadership, and responsible pastoral practice. Addressing these misconceptions is therefore important for promoting a balanced understanding of ministerial preparation and enhancing pastoral performance within the Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District. The study therefore seeks to address the misconceptions surrounding theological education among pastors and church members within the Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District. It demonstrates that theological education complements divine calling, spiritual gifts, and practical ministry experience by equipping ministers with the knowledge, skills, and spiritual formation necessary for effective pastoral service.

Impact of Theological Education on Pastoral Performance in Nsukka District

Theological education has made a significant contribution to the effectiveness of pastoral ministry within the Assemblies of God Church. As the responsibilities of pastors continue to expand in response to the spiritual and social needs of the church, theological training has become increasingly important in preparing ministers for competent service. Through formal theological education, pastors acquire biblical knowledge, ministerial skills, leadership competence, and spiritual formation necessary for fulfilling their calling. Consequently, the quality of pastoral performance in the district is closely linked to the level of theological preparation received by ministers.

One of the most noticeable areas of impact is in preaching and teaching. Theological education equips pastors with the ability to interpret Scripture accurately and communicate biblical truths in a manner that is both relevant and transformative. Training in biblical studies, hermeneutics, exegesis, and homiletics enables ministers to develop sermons that are doctrinally sound and contextually meaningful. White (2006) notes that theological education strengthens a minister's capacity to engage biblical texts responsibly while addressing contemporary challenges. Within the Nsukka District, pastors who have undergone formal theological training demonstrate greater

confidence in sermon delivery, doctrinal instruction, and Bible teaching. According to Micheal Oha (Personal Communication, November 2, 2023), such pastors are often better equipped to address theological questions, defend biblical doctrines, and provide scriptural guidance to their congregations. This has contributed to deeper biblical understanding and spiritual growth among church members.

Theological education has also enhanced the quality of pastoral care and counselling within the district. Pastoral ministry frequently involves responding to issues relating to marriage, family life, bereavement, personal crises, and interpersonal conflicts. Effective counselling therefore requires both spiritual sensitivity and practical knowledge. Through courses in pastoral theology, counselling, ethics, and human relations, ministers are equipped to provide informed and compassionate guidance. Tidball (2008) observes that pastoral ministry is fundamentally a ministry of care, requiring wisdom, understanding, and a genuine concern for the well-being of others. Evidence from the district suggests that pastors with theological training are more capable of handling sensitive pastoral matters with maturity and balance. Raymond Godwin (Personal Communication, December 5, 2024) maintains that trained pastors tend to approach counselling situations with greater confidence and a stronger biblical foundation, thereby fostering healthier relationships within the church community.

Another important area of influence is leadership and church administration. Beyond their spiritual responsibilities, pastors serve as leaders, planners, and administrators of church activities. Effective leadership requires vision, organisational ability, sound decision-making, and the capacity to manage people and resources. Theological institutions expose students to principles of leadership, administration, conflict management, and strategic planning, all of which are essential for successful ministry. Sanders (2007) argues that leadership effectiveness is a vital component of ministerial success. In the Nsukka District, theological education has enhanced the ability of pastors to coordinate church programmes, supervise ministry departments, manage church resources, and provide direction for congregational growth. Ugwu Paul (Personal Communication, December 12, 2024) notes that many pastors who have received formal theological training have demonstrated notable effectiveness in church administration and leadership development, contributing to the expansion and stability of churches within the district.

Furthermore, theological education has promoted doctrinal stability, ethical conduct, and professional competence among pastors. It has enabled ministers to engage contemporary issues from a biblical perspective while maintaining fidelity to the teachings of Scripture (Sean, 2018). The growing number of pastors from the Nsukka District who have pursued advanced theological studies and served in educational, ecclesiastical, and leadership capacities provides further evidence of the positive influence of theological education on ministerial effectiveness. From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that theological education has substantially improved pastoral performance within the Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District. Its influence is

reflected in the quality of preaching and teaching, the effectiveness of pastoral care and counselling, and the efficiency of leadership and administration. These contributions highlight the indispensable role of theological education in preparing pastors for meaningful and impactful ministry in the church and society.

Challenges Facing Theological Education Among Pastors in Nsukka District

Despite the growing recognition of theological education as an indispensable component of effective pastoral ministry, several challenges continue to affect pastors' access to and participation in theological training within the Assemblies of God Church. These challenges influence the quality of ministerial preparation and, consequently, the effectiveness of pastoral service. Scholars have consistently argued that while theological education is essential for ministerial competence, various economic, educational, institutional, and personal factors often hinder ministers from fully benefiting from it (Banks, 1999; Farley, 1983).

One of the most significant challenges is financial constraint. The pursuit of theological education often requires substantial financial commitment for tuition, accommodation, transportation, books, and other academic expenses. Many pastors, particularly those serving in rural congregations with limited financial support, find it difficult to meet these costs. As a result, some are unable to enroll in theological institutions, while others discontinue their studies before completion. According to Banks (1999), financial limitations remain one of the major barriers to theological education in many developing contexts, where churches often lack sufficient resources to sponsor ministerial training.

Another challenge is the demanding nature of pastoral ministry itself. Pastors are expected to fulfil numerous responsibilities, including preaching, teaching, counselling, evangelism, visitation, administration, and leadership of church programmes. These commitments often leave little time for academic study. Kelsey (1992) observes that the tension between ministry practice and theological education has remained a persistent challenge for many clergy, particularly those already serving in active pastoral roles. Within the Nsukka District, some pastors find it difficult to balance theological studies with the daily demands of ministry, especially when serving large congregations or multiple church assemblies.

Educational background also poses a challenge for some ministers. Although contemporary ministerial requirements within the Assemblies of God emphasise formal education, some pastors entered ministry during periods when academic qualifications were not strictly enforced. Consequently, adapting to the rigours of theological study, research, and academic writing may prove difficult for such individuals. Peter Okeh (Personal Communication, November 13, 2024) notes that while many pastors possess considerable ministerial experience, some encounter difficulties when engaging with advanced theological concepts and scholarly research.

Institutional and geographical factors further affect access to theological education. Although the Assemblies of God Nigeria has established several theological institutions, not all pastors reside near these centres. Travelling long distances to attend classes can be both expensive and time-consuming. In addition, limited institutional capacity, inadequate learning facilities, and insufficient access to modern educational technologies may restrict opportunities for effective theological formation. According to Naidoo (2012), the quality of theological education is often influenced by the availability of academic resources, qualified lecturers, and conducive learning environments.

Another challenge is the persistence of certain attitudes towards theological education. Some ministers and church members continue to hold the view that spiritual calling, practical experience, and divine inspiration alone are sufficient qualifications for ministry. Such perceptions may discourage pastors from pursuing formal theological training. However, Menzies and Horton (1993) argue that effective ministry requires a harmonious integration of spiritual experience, biblical knowledge, and theological reflection. Similarly, White (2006) maintains that theological education enhances a minister's ability to engage responsibly with Scripture and address contemporary challenges facing the church. Family and personal responsibilities also affect participation in theological education. Many pastors are married and must balance ministerial duties with family obligations. The demands of raising children, caring for dependants, and meeting household needs can limit the time and resources available for academic pursuits. This challenge is particularly evident among pastors enrolled in full-time theological programmes while simultaneously serving local congregations.

Furthermore, limited access to current theological literature and research materials remains a concern. Contemporary ministry requires pastors to engage with emerging theological discussions, ethical issues, and societal developments. However, inadequate library facilities, poor internet access, and limited availability of scholarly publications can hinder intellectual growth and theological development. Farley (1983) emphasises that theological education is most effective when ministers have access to robust academic resources that encourage critical reflection and lifelong learning. Despite these challenges, many pastors within the Nsukka District continue to pursue theological education through Bible colleges, seminaries, extension programmes, distance learning platforms, conferences, and ministerial seminars. Their commitment reflects an increasing awareness that theological education is essential for effective pastoral leadership, doctrinal soundness, and sustainable church growth. Addressing the challenges confronting theological education will therefore contribute significantly to the development of competent pastors and the advancement of ministry within the district.

Practical Effects of Lack of Theological Education Among Pastors in Nsukka

District

Theological education is widely regarded as a fundamental component of effective pastoral ministry. It equips ministers with biblical knowledge, theological understanding, leadership competence, and pastoral skills necessary for serving the church in a rapidly changing society. Consequently, the absence of adequate theological training can adversely affect ministerial effectiveness and the overall development of the church. Within the Assemblies of God Church, the growing emphasis on formal theological education reflects an awareness of its importance in preparing pastors for the diverse demands of contemporary ministry.

One of the most significant effects of inadequate theological education is weakness in biblical interpretation and preaching. Effective preaching requires a sound understanding of Scripture, biblical theology, and principles of interpretation. Pastors without formal theological training may struggle to engage biblical texts critically and contextually, thereby increasing the likelihood of doctrinal inaccuracies and superficial teaching. Banks (1999) argues that theological education provides ministers with the intellectual and spiritual tools necessary for responsible engagement with Scripture. Similarly, Stott (2006) maintains that sound preaching depends upon a proper understanding of the biblical message and its application to contemporary life. Where such training is lacking, congregations may be deprived of balanced biblical instruction and doctrinal depth.

Another practical effect is reduced effectiveness in pastoral care and counselling. Pastors are frequently called upon to address issues relating to marriage, family relationships, bereavement, emotional distress, and spiritual crises. Effective pastoral care requires both theological insight and practical counselling skills. According to Clinebell (1984), pastoral counselling is most effective when ministers possess a combination of spiritual sensitivity, theological understanding, and knowledge of human behaviour. Without adequate training, pastors may find it difficult to provide appropriate guidance in complex situations, thereby limiting their ability to meet the pastoral needs of their congregations. The absence of theological education may also affect leadership and church administration. Contemporary pastoral ministry extends beyond spiritual responsibilities to include organisational leadership, strategic planning, conflict management, and resource administration. Theological institutions often provide training in these areas, enabling ministers to lead churches effectively. Sanders (2007) observes that successful ministry requires both spiritual character and leadership competence. Consequently, pastors who lack formal preparation may encounter difficulties in managing church programmes, resolving conflicts, and providing visionary leadership, which can hinder church growth and organisational stability.

Doctrinal instability is another challenge associated with inadequate theological training. In an age characterised by competing religious ideologies, prosperity

teachings, and diverse interpretations of Scripture, pastors require a solid theological foundation to preserve the integrity of Christian doctrine. Menzies and Horton (1993) contend that theological education strengthens doctrinal understanding and equips ministers to defend biblical truth. Without such grounding, pastors may be vulnerable to theological errors and unable to guide their congregations effectively through doctrinal controversies. Evidence from the Nsukka District indicates that some early ministers entered pastoral ministry with limited formal training and relied primarily on personal experience and inherited traditions (Emmanuel Onah, Personal Communication, December 14, 2024). Although many of these ministers demonstrated remarkable commitment and spiritual devotion, their limited exposure to systematic theological education sometimes restricted their ability to engage emerging theological, ethical, and social issues. This reality contributed significantly to the denomination's decision to strengthen ministerial training requirements and encourage formal theological education for prospective pastors.

Furthermore, inadequate theological education may restrict intellectual growth and ministerial development. Contemporary pastors are expected to engage issues such as secularisation, technological advancement, moral change, interfaith relations, and social transformation from a biblical perspective. Farley (1983) argues that theological education cultivates critical reflection and equips ministers to respond thoughtfully to contemporary challenges. Without such preparation, pastors may struggle to maintain relevance in an increasingly educated and dynamic society. Finally, the lack of theological education can have far-reaching consequences for pastoral ministry within the Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District. Its effects are evident in weaknesses in preaching and teaching, limitations in pastoral care, challenges in leadership and administration, doctrinal uncertainty, and reduced ministerial development. These realities underscore the indispensable role of theological education in preparing pastors for effective, responsible, and sustainable ministry.

The Relevance of Theological Education to Pastoral Performance in Nsukka District

Theological education remains a fundamental factor in enhancing pastoral performance in contemporary Christian ministry. As pastoral responsibilities extend beyond preaching to leadership, counselling, administration, discipleship, and community engagement, sound theological training has become increasingly essential. Within the Assemblies of God Church, theological education equips pastors with biblical knowledge, theological understanding, practical ministry skills, and spiritual formation necessary for effective service. It prepares ministers to interpret Scripture faithfully, lead responsibly, and respond to the changing needs of the church and society.

A major contribution of theological education is the development of biblical and theological competence. Through the study of biblical studies, hermeneutics, systematic theology, church history, and Christian ethics, pastors acquire the ability to interpret and apply Scripture accurately. According to Banks (1999), theological

education equips ministers with the intellectual and spiritual resources necessary for effective service, while Stott (2006) argues that sound theological training is indispensable for faithful preaching and teaching. Consequently, pastors within the Nsukka District who have received formal theological education are generally better equipped to provide sound biblical instruction and promote spiritual maturity.

Theological education also strengthens leadership effectiveness by equipping pastors with skills in decision-making, communication, conflict resolution, and church administration. Leroy (n.d.) notes that pastors occupy strategic leadership positions within the church, while Kelsey (2008) emphasises that effective leadership requires competence beyond spiritual enthusiasm. Similarly, Sanders (2007) observes that spiritual leadership is strengthened when ministers combine godly character with practical competence. These qualities enable pastors in the Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District, to provide effective leadership and oversee church ministries responsibly.

Another important area is pastoral care and counselling. Training in pastoral theology, counselling, and human relations enables pastors to provide informed guidance to individuals and families facing spiritual, emotional, and social challenges. Clinebell (1984) emphasises that effective pastoral care requires both theological understanding and practical counselling skills. This has enhanced the ability of pastors in the Nsukka District to minister effectively in areas such as marriage, family life, bereavement, conflict resolution, and spiritual growth. Theological education also promotes doctrinal soundness and ministerial integrity. Farley (1983) maintains that theological education cultivates critical reflection and theological discernment, enabling ministers to engage contemporary issues without compromising biblical convictions. As a result, pastors are better prepared to address doctrinal controversies, ethical issues, and emerging societal challenges from a biblical perspective.

Furthermore, theological education contributes to church growth and sustainable ministry. Well-trained pastors are more capable of implementing effective discipleship programmes, providing sound administration, and exercising visionary leadership (Emmanuel Nwangwu, personal communication, February 12, 2024). Naidoo (2012) similarly argues that theological education enhances ministerial effectiveness by fostering intellectual growth and spiritual maturity. Evidence from the Nsukka District indicates that formally trained pastors have contributed significantly to church expansion, leadership development, and the strengthening of Christian education. Finally, theological education promotes lifelong learning, critical thinking, and continuous ministerial development, enabling pastors to remain effective in addressing contemporary challenges. Therefore, theological education remains indispensable to pastoral performance and the overall growth and effectiveness of the Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the strategic importance of theological education to pastoral effectiveness, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District, should continue to prioritise theological education by providing adequate financial, moral, and institutional support for pastors and prospective ministers to pursue quality theological training. Such investment will strengthen pastoral competence, enhance church leadership, and contribute to the overall growth of the church.
- ii. The district leadership should consider establishing a ministerial training centre or extension programme in affiliation with recognised theological institutions. This initiative would provide accessible opportunities for theological education, spiritual formation, leadership development, and continuing ministerial training for pastors within the district.
- iii. Efforts should be made to encourage and facilitate theological education for all serving pastors, particularly those who entered ministry without formal theological training. Flexible learning opportunities, scholarship schemes, and continuing education programmes should be introduced to ensure that every pastor has access to theological and ministerial development.
- iv. Theological institutions affiliated with the Assemblies of God Church should place greater emphasis on leadership development, pastoral counselling, church administration, conflict management, and practical ministry. Since effective leadership is central to church growth and stability, pastors should be equipped with the skills necessary to lead with wisdom, integrity, and vision.
- v. The church should promote a culture of lifelong learning among pastors by encouraging participation in seminars, workshops, conferences, refresher courses, and advanced theological studies. Continuous ministerial development will enable pastors to remain relevant and effective in addressing contemporary challenges.
- vi. The Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District, should maintain a rigorous and transparent process for pastoral selection and ordination. Candidates should demonstrate evidence of divine calling, spiritual maturity, ministerial competence, and satisfactory theological training before being admitted into pastoral ministry.
- vii. Theological institutions should adopt inclusive admission policies that provide opportunities for ministers from different backgrounds and denominations to benefit from quality theological education. In addition, churches, Christian organisations, and theological institutions should collaborate in providing scholarships and financial assistance to reduce the burden of educational costs on prospective ministers.
- viii. The Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District, should continue to uphold theological education as a vital instrument for improving pastoral performance, strengthening doctrinal integrity, enhancing leadership

effectiveness, and advancing the mission of the church in contemporary society.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that theological education plays a vital role in enhancing the performance of pastors in the Assemblies of God Church, Nsukka District. It equips ministers with sound biblical knowledge, theological understanding, practical ministerial skills, and spiritual maturity necessary for effective preaching, pastoral care, leadership, church administration, and doctrinal integrity. The findings show that formally trained pastors are better prepared to interpret Scripture accurately, provide effective pastoral guidance, and address contemporary ministry challenges from a biblical perspective. The study also identified challenges to accessing theological education, including financial constraints, ministerial commitments, educational limitations, and inadequate learning resources. Despite these obstacles, the evidence confirms that theological education significantly improves pastoral effectiveness and contributes to sustainable church growth. The study therefore concludes that continued investment in theological education is essential for developing competent, ethical, and effective pastors. Future research may examine additional factors influencing pastoral performance beyond theological education.

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list of interviewed persons

Names	Status	District	Location	Date/Year
Agaba Livinus	District Superintendent	Nsukka district headquarters	Isi Uja	2023, December 5th Personal Communication
Uchechukwu Elias	Sectional leader	Eha-Amufu	Isu	2023, December 4th Personal Communication
Ugwuikpa Chimaobi	Clergy/ Engineer	Enugu	Iva- Valley	2023, November 10th Personal Communication
Oha Micheal	Clergy/ Farmer	Enugu	Ugwuaji	2023, November 2nd Personal Communication

Edith Godwin	Trader	Abuja	Kubwa	2024, July 13th Personal Communication
Ugwu Pius	Retired Clergy	Nsukka district headquarters	Isi Uja	2024, May 20th Personal Communication
Chimezie Godwin	Clergy	Nsukka	Okpuje	2024, July 5 th Personal Communication
Cleopas Chukwudi Paul	Clergy	Nsukka	Ibagwa Road	2024, March 15th Personal Communication
Onoja Christopher	Clergy	Nsukka	Ngwuru	2024, February 6th Personal Communication
Raymond Godwin	Clergy	Nsukka	Amagbo	2024, December 5 th Personal Communication
Ugwu Paul	Clergy	Nsukka	Nsukka	2024, December 12th Personal Communication
Nwangwu Emmanuel	Clergy	Nsukka	Orba	2024, February 12th, Personal Communication
Okeh Peter	Clergy	District headquarters	Isi Uja	2024, November 13th, Personal Communication
Onah Emmanuel	Clergy	Nsukka	Nsukka	2024, December 14th, Personal Communication