#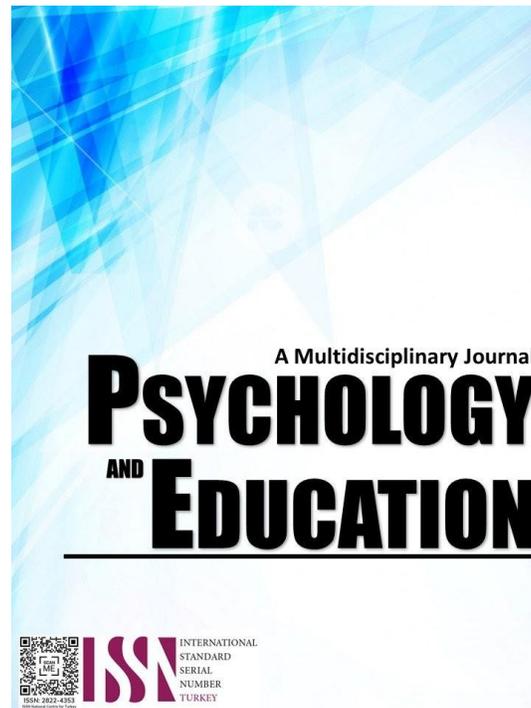 FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE DECLINING PARTICIPATION OF UCCP MEMBERS IN THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION PROGRAMS OF THE COTABATO ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Factors Associated with the Declining Participation of UCCP Members in the Christian Education Programs of the Cotabato Annual Conference

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Abstract

The study titled "Factors Associated with the Declining Participation of UCCP Members in the Christian Education Programs of the Cotabato Annual Conference" identifies key reasons for the waning involvement in these programs, emphasizing demographic changes, societal shifts, and the perceived irrelevance of the content. Members view the current methods as outdated and misaligned with their spiritual and practical needs, while work and family obligations further hinder participation. The research underscores the necessity of programs that resonate with congregants' daily lives and experiences. Recommendations include a multifaceted approach to revitalizing these programs, such as enhancing relevance, improving teacher training, and incorporating modern technology. Collaboration between parents and the church is crucial for supporting children's spiritual education. Fostering a participatory decision-making process within the church can increase members' ownership and commitment. The Program Plan of Action for the Christian Education Program aims to rejuvenate initiatives, making them more engaging and impactful. At the national level, the UCCP National Office should allocate resources for comprehensive training and develop standardized curriculum guidelines. Communication platforms to facilitate knowledge-sharing among conference offices and local churches are recommended. The Conference Office should organize workshops and seminars tailored to local needs, incentivize participation and innovation, and foster partnerships with educational institutions and community organizations. At the local church level, engaging congregants in decision-making processes, utilizing training materials and guidelines, and implementing outreach campaigns are essential. Local pastors should prioritize Christian Education, participate in ongoing training, and advocate for its importance within the congregation. Future research should employ both quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate long-term effects and improve strategies. Implementing these recommendations will strengthen the UCCP's Christian Education programs, addressing challenges and promoting lifelong learning and spiritual growth, ensuring the engagement and spiritual development of UCCP members within the Cotabato Annual Conference.

Keywords: *UCCP, Christian Education, Cotabato Annual Conference, declining participation, Program Plan of Action*

Introduction

The church, a group of individuals united by a shared faith, thrives through Christian education, continually nurturing faith. Christian education is integral to the church's overall life and ministry, playing a central role therein. Roehlkepartain (1993) concurred that every aspect of church ministry contains educational implications. For instance, worship fosters faith and educates by fostering a dynamic relationship with God. Similarly, social activities and service experiences are vital for deepening faith, as affirmed by Barbara (1994), who emphasized the need for faith to be lived out in the world. Cober (1968) further stressed that all individuals are called to this ministry, with the world serving as the ultimate field (Shekhar, 2017).

There are many things to consider in Christian education. Christian education should not continue with "business as usual" (Roehlkepartain, 1993). It must keep up with the change and develop new models or approaches for Christian education relevant to one's faith, tradition, and needs. The vitality of one's faith reflects, to a great extent, the church's educational ministry.

In discussing Christian education programs, the research by Sitanggang (2023) adds a crucial dimension by pointing out the shared responsibility of parents and the church in children's spiritual education. Sitanggang (2023) emphasizes that while parents are primarily responsible for nurturing their children's relationship with God, they cannot fulfill this role independently without the support of the church. The study found the importance of collaboration between parents and the church, advocating for training and resources to effectively equip parents to fulfill their parental responsibilities (Sitanggang, 2023). This collaborative effort between parents and the church, as Sitanggang (2023) suggests, is essential to ensure that children's spiritual education at home aligns with the teachings of the church, ultimately fostering their growth in faith and moral values.

The implications of Sitanggang's (2023) study and Roehlkepartain's (1993) are significant in discussing Christian education programs in local churches. They stress the need for a comprehensive approach that encompasses both formal education within the church setting and the nurturing environment of the home. By prioritizing collaboration and shared responsibility between parents and the church, there is the potential to cultivate a generation deeply rooted in faith and moral values, thereby enriching the fabric of the church both now and in the future.

The history of the Christian church began after Jesus Christ's death, marked by Peter leading a group of about 120 disciples (Acts 1:15). The church experienced rapid growth, with over 3,000 people converting after Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:41, 47) and the

number of believers soon surpassing 5,000 men (Acts 4:4). The early church's numerical growth was seen as a sign of ministry effectiveness, and new systems were developed to accommodate this expansion (Acts 6:1-7). However, church membership also emphasized spiritual pursuits such as fellowship, teaching, prayer, and resource sharing (Acts 2:42, 2:46, 4:32-34). Deception within the fellowship was condemned as lying to God (Acts 5:1-4).

In the Philippines, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) bases its Christian education on Old and New Testament teachings, continuing the tradition of Protestant missionaries who began their work through house-to-house worship, Bible studies, and prayer meetings. These missionaries aimed to formalize Christian education, leading to the establishment of institutions like Silliman University and Philippine Christian University. Today, the UCCP continues to emphasize Christian Education and Nurture (CEN) programs such as Sunday School, Bible studies, and prayer meetings to help members grow in their faith.

Malcor (2020) observed that education programs in local churches, especially in the Western world, were severely lacking. This reflects the deficient state of education programs within the UCCP, particularly at the Cotabato Annual Conference, where most churches did not have regular CEN programs, and attendance was poor. Regarding the declining participation of Christians, education programs have identified several factors. Changes in demographics significantly affect attendance rates in religious gatherings (Njoroge, 2019). Shifting age distributions and migratory patterns impact the church community's composition, affecting members' interest and engagement in educational programs (Njoroge, 2019). Societal shifts and evolving cultural norms, like increasing secularization and prioritizing individualistic values, decrease commitment to religious education activities (Malcor, 2020). Obedencia (2004) found that age, sex, and educational background influence participation in Christian education programs among young people in the CPBC in Sara, Iloilo. Educational background significantly affects involvement, while parents' religious background, especially mothers, plays a crucial role in motivating participation. The relevance and applicability of Christian Education Programs to members' daily lives have also been explored. Participants may feel disconnected from the content and pedagogical approaches, perceiving them as outdated or insufficient for addressing their spiritual and practical needs (Njoroge, 2019; Malcor, 2020). This disconnect can lead to decreased motivation and participation. Additionally, competing commitments, such as work or family obligations, significantly impact attendance, as the demands of modern life limit time and energy for church-related activities, including Christian education (BMC Women's Health, 2020).

Despite valuable insights from existing quantitative research on declining participation, there remains a research gap, as most studies focus on broader national or international contexts, neglecting the unique dynamics of the Cotabato Annual Conference of the UCCP. Therefore, localized quantitative research is essential to investigate the specific factors influencing the decline in participation in this conference. Conducting such research provides a more accurate understanding of the challenges and opportunities for promoting attendance in Christian Education Programs. This paper constitutes an empirical study that evaluated the results of the Christian education programs in local churches, identifying their strengths and weaknesses. This information is crucial for further improvement of the churches through relevant and effective Christian education programs.

Despite valuable insights from existing quantitative research on declining participation, there is a gap in addressing the unique challenges faced by the Cotabato Annual Conference of the UCCP. The researchers deemed Localized quantitative research essential for understanding the factors influencing participation decline and promoting attendance in Christian Education Programs. This empirical study evaluated the results of local church programs, identifying strengths and weaknesses to improve Christian education by integrating cultural and spiritual insights. Cook's (1977) emphasis on ongoing discourse about curriculum and teaching methods aligns with these objectives, highlighting the importance of incorporating cultural values and spiritual teachings to empower individuals (Njoroge, 2019). By integrating these findings, UCCP leaders can ensure that Christian education remains relevant and impactful, addressing the evolving needs of their congregations and communities (BMC Women's Health, 2020; BMC Public Health, 2021).

Program-wise, the Cotabato Conference of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, since its founding, is committed to four fundamental aspects of church ministry: Christian Education, Christian Witness and Service, Evangelism and Church Growth, and Christian Steward and Resource Development. Below is the organizational structure of the CEN Ministry of the Local church:

The Christian Education and Nurture (CEN) Ministry within local churches of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) is significant in the church's overall mission. Structurally, it operates under the guidance of the local church's Council, a CEN Minister, and potentially an Executive Minister, as illustrated in Figure 1. The hierarchical and comprehensive organizational structure of the CEN Ministry includes various departments and roles that ensure strategic oversight and effective implementation of educational programs. At the top is the LC Congregation, followed by the LC Council and the Executive Minister. The CEN Minister, the SS Secretary/Superintendent, and the Board of Christian Education (BOCE) oversee the implementation and coordination of the ministry's activities, with teachers playing a crucial role in delivering educational programs.

The CEN Ministry is divided into specialized ministries, each catering to different age groups and spiritual needs. The Worship Ministry facilitates worship services, choir practices, midweek prayers, children's worship, and music workshops to ensure meaningful and spiritually enriching worship experiences. The Family Ministry provides family-oriented programs such as retreats, family prayers, Bible studies, family days, and Sunday schools, supporting the spiritual and relational growth of families within the congregation. The Children's Ministry is dedicated to the spiritual education of children through retreats, fellowships, Vacation Church Schools (VCS), children's camps, and Sunday schools, aiming to lay a strong faith foundation in the younger church members. The Youth Ministry

caters to the needs of the youth by offering retreats, fellowships, Bible studies, youth camps, and programs like TGIF (Thank God It's Friday) and Youth Week celebrations, focusing on nurturing young people's faith and leadership potential. Lastly, the Adult Ministry provides adults with opportunities for spiritual growth through retreats, fellowships, Bible studies, and Sunday schools, supporting lifelong faith development and community involvement.

Christian education is fundamental to the church's ministry, fostering spiritual growth, building community, and equipping members to live out their faith. The diverse programs offered by the CEN Ministry are designed to meet the unique spiritual needs of different age groups, promoting holistic faith formation and community engagement. However, within the Cotabato Annual Conference, a concerning trend has emerged—a decline in UCCP members' participation in Christian education programs. This research explored the factors associated with this decline, and it sought to understand the challenges and identify potential solutions to strengthen this vital aspect of church life.

Addressing the decline in participation is crucial for maintaining the vitality of the church's educational mission. By understanding the underlying causes and implementing targeted strategies, the CEN Ministry can revitalize its programs, ensuring they continue to nurture the spiritual growth of UCCP members of all ages.

Existing quantitative literature shows various factors associated with the declining participation of UCCP members in the Christian Education Programs of the Cotabato Annual Conference. These factors include changes in demographics, societal shifts, lack of perceived relevance, and competing commitments (Njoroge, 2019; Malcor, 2020; BMC Women's Health, 2020).

However, a clear research gap exists regarding localized quantitative studies focusing on the Cotabato Annual Conference. Addressing these research gaps through localized and varied quantitative research approaches would contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the conference and provide insights to inform targeted strategies aimed at reversing the decline in attendance and promoting active engagement in Christian Education Programs.

This research was anchored on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Solow Effect Theory. The Social Learning Theory emphasizes the importance of significant others, including parents, who serve as role models of behavior (Cherry, 2016). Bandura's theory highlights how people learn by observing, modeling, and imitating others, suggesting that the decline in participation in the UCCP-CAC's Christian Education programs may be due to the infrequent church attendance of family heads. Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs, which depicts a pyramid of human needs from basic survival to higher-level aspirations, is also a relevant theoretical lens. Physiological and safety needs must be met to motivate participation in church activities, while love, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization needs) highlight the importance of creating a supportive and respectful church environment.

Lastly, David Romer's (2001) Solow Effect Theory posits that participation in Christian Education is crucial for institutional success, linking attendance to faith development and social productivity (Ancheta et al., 2021). Bhattarai (2017) and Todd and Wolpin (2003) supported this by arguing that human capital and knowledge development are essential for innovation and growth, underscoring the role of educational and religious institutions in fostering social productivity (Ramirez & Boli, 1987).

After reviewing the related articles of the study, the researchers found that only a few studies discuss the present scenario of Christian Education and Nurture programs of the church. For this reason, the researchers were motivated to pursue this study to explore the current scenario of the CEN programs of the church, specifically the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

Research Questions

The declining participation of UCCP members in the Christian Education programs of the Cotabato Annual Conference may pose a significant challenge to the effectiveness and impact of these programs. Thus, this research aims to investigate the factors contributing to this decline and explore potential strategies for improving the condition of the Christian Education Program. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the respondents' demographic profiles in terms of local churches, age, gender, civil status, occupation, and educational attainment?
2. What are the perceptions and experiences of UCCP members on the objectives of Christian Education programs of the local churches within the Cotabato Annual Conference?
3. What are the existing Christian Education programs and attendance patterns among UCCP members at the Cotabato Annual Conference?
4. What are the common problems encountered in the Christian Education Programs of the local churches within the Cotabato Annual Conference?
5. What are the common perceptions among the members about who will be the decision-maker for the church's Christian Education program?
6. What strategies can be implemented to improve the Christian Education Program at the Cotabato Annual Conference?
7. What Christian education programs can be proposed that are appropriate to members' needs and the church's faith tradition?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design to investigate factors contributing to the declining participation of United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) members in Christian Education (CE) programs within the Cotabato Annual Conference. This design allowed for systematic data collection and analysis to describe phenomena and identify patterns among variables, suitable for exploring demographic profiles, participation patterns, perceptions, and challenges within CE programs.

Respondents

The study used stratified random sampling to ensure representation across various church congregations based on member numbers per local church, as recorded by the conference office. Pilot testing confirmed the questionnaire's reliability (Alpha Cronbach); three qualified researchers validated its accuracy and relevance.

Procedure

Data collection involved the following steps:

Survey Development. The researchers conducted a comprehensive survey based on research objectives and literature review. The survey included questions on demographics, CE program participation, perceptions, and challenges designed to gather quantitative data.

Pilot Testing. The survey instrument was tested with a small sample of UCCP members to refine clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness.

Distribution of Surveys. Finalized surveys were distributed through pastors to local church members within the Cotabato Annual Conference.

Data Analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data, examining participation patterns, demographic trends, and common challenges in CE programs.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the demographic profile of the respondents. The table reveals a split between respondents from "Big" and "Small" churches, with 58% and 42%, respectively, potentially indicating differing challenges and resources for Christian Education Network (CEN) programs. In this context, big churches are those with 201 or more individual members, while small churches are those with 200 or fewer individual members. Adults were the majority age group (42%), followed by young adults (30%) and youth (28%), suggesting a need for targeted outreach to younger members. Females comprised 71% of respondents, revealing potential gender-specific participation barriers. Most respondents were married (56%), and prominent occupations included teachers and farmers, reflecting socioeconomic factors that may affect participation. A significant portion were college graduates (50%), implying the need for programs tailored to an educated audience. These results affirm what Obedencia (2004) found: young people at the CPBC in Sara, Iloilo, participate in Christian education programs differently depending on their age, sex, and educational background. Although this result's context is based only on one age group, it is undeniable that other demographic profiles have something to do with declining church attendance, such as sex and educational background. Generally, these corroborate the statement of Njoroge (2019) that changes in demographics significantly affect attendance rates in religious gatherings.

Table 1. *Frequency and percentage distribution of the demographic profile of the respondents*

Profile		Frequency	Percent
Local Church	Big (201 above individual members)	145	58
	Small (199	105	42
Age	Adult (CWA & UCM)	104	42
	Young Adult (CYAF)	75	30
	Youth (CYF)	71	28
Gender	Female	177	71
	Male	71	28
	Did not indicate	2	1
Civil Status	Married	140	56
	Single	76	30
	Widow/Widower	34	14

Occupation	Teacher/Retired Teacher	67	27
	Housekeeper & Unemployed	53	21
	Farmer	39	16
	Private employee	39	16
	Student	22	9
	Retired	15	6
	Government Employee	16	6
	(Private/Government)	12	5
	Businessperson	12	5
	Medical Field	7	3
	Pastor	5	2
	Politician (SK)	2	1
Educational	College Graduate	125	50
Attainment	College Level	42	17
	High School Level	35	14
	High School Graduate	30	12
	Post Graduate	9	4
	Elementary Level	5	2
	Did not indicate	2	1
	Elementary Graduate	2	1

N=25

Objectives of Christian Education Programs

The primary objectives of Christian Education programs, such as faith growth (94%) and communal faith journeys (76%), were highly valued by respondents. However, declining participation suggests external factors like time constraints and a lack of relevance to daily life. Practical application of faith (81%) and theological understanding (82%) are crucial for engagement, indicating a need for programs that are flexible and integrated into members' lives. Addressing these factors can enhance participation and spiritual growth. According to Osmer (2008), the practical application of faith must be emphasized, and theological understanding must be developed for Christian education to be effective. This explains why faith growth remains the most valued objective despite the decline in participation and attendance.

Table 2. *Frequency and percentage distribution of the responses on the objectives of Christian Education by the respondents*

Objectives	Frequency	Percent
Christian Education programs aim to help people grow in their faith.	235	94
Christian Education programs help individuals grow as children of God rooted in faith.	223	89
Christian Education programs guide individuals to live in the Spirit of God in every relationship.	213	85
Christian Education programs aim for all persons to be aware of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.	204	82
Christian Education programs strengthen understanding in demonstrating one's faith in the world.	202	81
Christian Education programs assist people in becoming loyal and active participants in the church.	194	78
Christian Education programs help individuals fulfill discipleship in the world.	192	77
Christian Education programs help individuals claim a life of faith.	190	76
Christian Education programs deepen personal and community's journeys of faith.	190	76
Christian Education programs focus on spiritual formation.	162	65
Christian Education programs teach and reflect critically upon faith tradition.	161	64

Christian Education Programs and Attendance Patterns

Table 3 presents the mean, verbal description, and interpretation of the Christian Education programs/activities being attended by the respondents.

Table 3. *Mean, verbal description and interpretation of the Christian Education programs/activities being attended by the respondents*

Programs/Activities	N	Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1. Worship	221	4.55	Always	Every Week
2. Sunday School	230	3.95	Often	Thrice a Month
3. Bible Study	191	2.97	Sometimes	Twice a Month
4. Music Ministry	119	2.51	Rarely	Once a Month
5. Midweek Prayer Meeting	127	2.46	Rarely	Once a Month

6. Family Ministry	204	2.24	Rarely	Once a Month
7. Outreach and Extension Programs	124	2.06	Rarely	Once a Month

It further shows that Worship Services had the highest attendance (mean score of 4.55), reflecting their centrality in spiritual practices. Sunday School (mean score of 3.95) also saw high engagement. However, other programs like Bible Study (2.97), Music Ministry (2.51), Midweek Prayer Meetings (2.46), Family Ministry (2.24), and Outreach Programs (2.06) experienced lower participation.

Table 4 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the occasional programs/activities being attended by the respondents/conducted by the church.

Table 4. *Frequency and percentage distribution of the occasional programs/ activities being attended by the respondents/conducted by the church*

	Frequency of Attendance					
Occasional/Activities	Sometimes	%	Always	%	Total	%
1. Visitation	73	44	92	56	165	66
2. Counselling (Marriage/Baptismal)	93	56	73	44	166	66
3. Vacation Church School (VCS)	79	49	83	51	162	65
4. Seminars and Training	73	61	46	39	119	48
5. Retreat	41	55	34	45	75	30
6. Field Trip/Rest and Recreation	32	39	51	61	83	33

It further presents that the most attended occasional activities were Counseling (66%) and Visitation (66%), indicating intense pastoral care. Vacation Church School (65%) was also popular. The varied attendance patterns tell the need for better scheduling, content adjustment, and promotional efforts to boost engagement. The decline in church attendance, as observed in the context of this study, is also actual to the findings of Lawton (2022), which found that this concern can be attributed to four recurring themes, including (a) the importance of a church's internal and external factors, (b) a church's resistance to change, (c) the importance of youth ministries, and (d) the church's use of evangelism. While this study was conducted overseas, the similarity in challenges regarding the decline in church attendance suggests that this is also a global phenomenon experienced by different churches.

Common Problems in Christian Education Programs

Table 5 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the responses on the Common Problems in Christian Education Program by the Cotabato Annual Conference church members.

Table 5. *Frequency and percentage distribution of the responses on the Common Problems in Christian Education Program by the respondents*

Common Problems in Christian Education Program	Frequency	Percent
1. Busy schedules	159	64
2. Irregular attendance	157	63
3. Member's commitment	151	60
4. Lack of motivation to learn	102	41
5. Parents' involvement	98	39
6. Techers' commitment	94	38
7. Lack of teachers' training	87	35
8. Limited budget	86	34
9. Scarcity of educational guides/resources	85	34
10. Competent teachers but not willing to teach	84	34
11. Coordinated study in Sunday School (Children, CYF, CYAF and Adult)	81	32
12. Lack of facilities	77	31
13. Difficulty in adapting to technological advancements and utilizing digital tools for learning	66	26
14. Methods/strategies in teaching	65	26
15. Lack of church's moral support	37	15
16. BOCE is not functional	36	14
17. Pastor less time working with CE ministry	24	10
18. Others: Limited members, misunderstanding among members, some can't walk, and some can't see	4	2

The table further shows that the key issues included busy schedules (64%), irregular attendance (63%), and lack of commitment (60%). Low motivation (41%), insufficient parent involvement (39%), and teacher commitment (38%) were also significant problems.

Financial constraints (34%) and inadequate facilities (31%) further hindered program effectiveness. Adapting to technological advancements (26%) and improving teaching methods (26%) are necessary to address these challenges. These findings align with the study by Wuthnow (2007), emphasizing the need for comprehensive approaches to enhance member engagement, teacher training, resource allocation, and technology integration.

Decision-Maker for the Church's Christian Education Program

Table 6 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of those responsible for making decisions and policies in the educational ministry of the local churches.

Table 6. *Frequency and percentage distribution of those responsible for making decisions and policies in the educational ministry of the local churches*

Person	Frequency	Percent
Whole Church (Congregation)	134	54
Local Church Council	111	44
Pastor	82	33
BOCE	51	20

The table further shows that the majority of respondents, 134 (54%), believe that the whole church congregation should be involved in decision-making. This preference underscores a strong inclination towards democratic participation and collective responsibility within the church community. According to Barna (2015), involving the entire congregation in decision-making processes fosters a sense of ownership and community among church members, aligning with the principle of the priesthood of all believers. Following closely, 111 (44%) support the Local Church Council as the primary decision-making body. This reflects a trust in a more structured and representative form of governance within the church, where elected or appointed leaders can make informed decisions on behalf of the congregation. Dever and Alexander (2016) highlight the effectiveness of church councils in maintaining doctrinal integrity and providing mature oversight. The pastor was identified as a key decision-maker by 82 respondents (33%). This result signifies the traditional view of the pastor as a central spiritual leader whose guidance and vision are crucial for the church's educational direction. Wagner (2010) emphasizes the pastor's significant influence in guiding church activities, including education, which can profoundly shape the church's theological and educational orientation. Lastly, the Board of Christian Education (BOCE) received support from 51 respondents (20%). This indicates a recognition of the value of a specialized committee overseeing Christian education. Seymour (2014) noted that having a dedicated board for education can lead to more effective and targeted educational programs, benefiting from the expertise and focused attention of its members.

Strategies to Improve Christian Education Programs

Table 7 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the strategies to improve the Christian Education Program.

Table 7. *Frequency and percentage distribution of the strategies to improve the Christian Education Program*

Strategies	Frequency	Percent
Enhancing/Developing the CE program to make it more engaging and relevant to the needs and interests of UCCP members.	203	81
Providing additional training and resources for teachers and facilitators.	179	72
Conducting information-dissemination drives to promote the importance and benefits of participating in the Christian Education Program.	161	64
Continuing pastors' training specifically on the importance of Christian Education ministry.	160	64
Encouraging active involvement and participation of BOCE and members in decision-making processes.	159	64
Sufficient Budget for Christian Education Programs	148	59
Consider Christian Education as an integral part of the mission of the church.	148	59
Utilizing modern technology (TV, projectors, mobile games, etc.) to supplement traditional teaching methods.	141	56
Adequate Facilities and Equipment.	125	50
Using digital platforms like social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) to reach a wider audience.	98	39

The table further shows that enhancing program relevance (81%) and providing training and resources for teachers (72%) were the most endorsed strategies. Involving more stakeholders in decision-making (64%), promoting program benefits (64%), and continuing pastors' training (64%) were also important. Utilizing modern technology (56%) and ensuring sufficient budget (59%) were seen as essential. Additional strategies included recognizing Christian Education as integral to the church's mission (59%) and improving facilities (50%). These strategies can address current challenges and foster a vibrant and effective Christian Education Program.

Overall Implication

The data and discussions reveal critical areas for improvement in the Christian Education programs within the Cotabato Annual

Conference. The emphasis on demographic diversity suggests tailored approaches for different age groups and genders. The high value placed on faith growth and community engagement highlights the need for relevant, practical programs that integrate into daily life. Addressing the common problems through comprehensive strategies, including enhancing relevance, improving training, and utilizing technology, can significantly boost participation and program effectiveness. The participatory decision-making model supports inclusive governance, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment among members. By implementing these insights and strategies, the Christian Education programs can become more engaging, effective, and aligned with the needs and interests of the UCCP members.

The findings are theoretically anchored on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and the Solow Effect Theory. Bandura's theory emphasizes that individuals learn by observing and imitating significant others, such as parents. Infrequent church attendance by family heads can result in lower participation in Christian Education programs, as younger members might not have strong role models for religious involvement (Cherry, 2016). Maslow's pyramid depicts the progression from basic physiological needs to higher-level aspirations. For effective participation in church activities, basic needs (physiological and safety) must be met. Higher-level needs (love, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization) highlight the importance of creating a supportive and respectful church environment (Maslow, 1970). The Solow Effect Theory posits that active participation in educational programs is essential for the institutional success of the church. Participation not only aids in faith development but also enhances social productivity, contributing to the overall growth and innovation within the community (Ancheta et al., 2021; Bhattarai, 2017; Todd & Wolpin, 2003).

Integrating these theoretical perspectives provides a robust framework for understanding the challenges and opportunities within the Christian Education programs of the UCCP-CAC. By addressing the identified needs and leveraging the insights from these theories, the programs can be transformed to better meet the community's needs and foster a deeper, more engaged spiritual life.

Conclusions

The research study on the declining participation of UCCP members in Christian Education Programs within the Cotabato Annual Conference uncovers several key factors. Changes in demographics, societal shifts, and the perceived relevance of these programs play a significant role. Many members feel the current content and methods are outdated and fail to address their contemporary spiritual and practical needs. Additionally, work and family commitments further limit participation. This study highlights the importance of localized research in understanding these issues better, emphasizing the need for programs that resonate more closely with the daily lives and experiences of the congregation.

In addressing these challenges, the study suggests a multifaceted approach. Enhancing the relevance of educational programs, improving teacher training, and incorporating modern technology are essential steps. Encouraging collaboration between parents and the church is also vital for effectively supporting children's spiritual education. Members will feel a greater sense of ownership and commitment by fostering a participatory decision-making process within the church. Implementing the Program Plan of Action for the Christian Education Program aims to revitalize these initiatives, making them more engaging and impactful. This comprehensive strategy is designed to align with the evolving needs of UCCP members, ensuring the sustainable growth of faith and community within the church. By putting these insights and strategies into practice, we can foster a vibrant and effective Christian Education Program that truly meets the needs of its members.

Based on the study findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the Christian Education programs within the UCCP.

At the national level, the UCCP National Office, led by the General Secretary, may allocate resources and funding towards comprehensive training programs for teachers and facilitators. Developing standardized curriculum guidelines and resources to be distributed to all conference offices and local churches will ensure consistency and quality across different regions. Additionally, establishing communication channels and platforms to facilitate knowledge-sharing and best practices among conference offices and local churches will promote collaboration and synergy in CE initiatives nationwide.

For the Conference Office, the Conference Minister may organize conference-wide workshops and seminars focused on enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of CE programs tailored to local churches' specific needs and contexts within the conference. Creating incentives or recognition programs can encourage local churches to engage in active participation and innovation in CE initiatives within local churches. Furthermore, fostering partnerships with local educational institutions, community organizations, and other stakeholders can expand resources and support for CE programs at the conference level. Implementing the suggested Program Plan of Action for Christian Education is also crucial.

At the local church level, engaging congregants in decision-making processes related to CE program planning and implementation can foster a sense of ownership and commitment within the community. Utilizing resources such as training materials and curriculum guidelines provided by the national and conference offices will enhance the quality and variety of CE offerings. Creating incentives or recognition programs can encourage members to participate actively and innovate in CE initiatives. Also, implementing outreach and awareness campaigns within the local community to promote the importance and benefits of participating in CE programs, leveraging both traditional and digital communication channels, is essential.

Local church pastors may prioritize CE ministry as an integral component of their pastoral responsibilities, allocating time and

Limos et al.

resources towards its planning and execution. Participating in ongoing training programs and workshops organized by the conference and national offices will help them stay updated on best practices and emerging trends in CE. Acting as champions for CE within the local congregation, pastors should advocate for its importance and facilitate dialogue and collaboration among church members, educators, and other stakeholders.

Through engagement and awareness campaigns that encourage a greater comprehension and appreciation of CE programs, church members can encourage active involvement. Future studies may use both quantitative and qualitative research methods to examine the long-term effects of measures put into practice, spot new trends, and improve methods for enhancing CE inside the UCCP.

By implementing these recommendations at each level of authority, the UCCP can strengthen its Christian Education programs, address the identified challenges, and cultivate a culture of lifelong learning and spiritual growth within its congregations nationwide. This comprehensive approach will ensure the spiritual growth and engagement of UCCP members across all ages, fostering a more vibrant and effective Christian Education Program within the Cotabato Annual Conference.

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