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## **Supervised Ministry as a Pedagogical Tool in Theological Training of Baptist Student Pastors in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Theological education is fundamental to the life of religious organizations. The ministry and service of any Christian denomination are a reflection of the quality of theological education given to its leaders. Pastors play significant roles in nurturing the faith and guiding their congregants which requires some special skills, and supervised ministry, a structured mentoring programme integrated into theological training of pastors to help them to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world ministry settings is central in acquiring these skills. This study explores the significance of supervised ministry as a pedagogical tool in the theological training of Baptist student pastors in Nigeria, emphasizing its indispensability in impacting requisite skills in intending church pastors. It highlights the components of supervised ministry that contributed to the overall ministerial developments of student pastors in the Nigeria Baptist Convention theological institutions. The study adopts a systematic literature review of scholarly articles, journals, books, and other academic resources to explore the indispensability of supervised ministry as a pedagogical tool. The findings reveal that pedagogy is broadly connected with the theory and practice of imparting knowledge and the science of teaching. Supervised ministry served as a pedagogical tool through its comprehensive frameworks like experiential learning, reflection and integration, skill development, formation, and identity



development, cultural competence and contextual awareness, professional accountability and ethics, pastoral care skills, feedback and evaluation, relationship skills, and spiritual and character formation. By using supervised ministry as a pedagogical tool in theological training, pastors in training are not only exposed to the practicals and complexities of pastoral ministry, it also allows them to develop a deeper understanding of their vocational ethics, enhance their commitment to serving their congregants within the contextual setting and with empathy and integrity. Supervised ministry should be seen as an extension of classwork in theological training of Baptist student pastors in Nigeria, and therefore should be awarded a course code and with reasonable course units every semester to emphasize its importance in ministerial training of pastors.

**Keywords:** Mentorship, Pastoral Education, Reflective Practice, Supervised Ministry and Theological Training

## **Introduction**

Theological Education is fundamental and central to the life of a living and growing Church. Since the Church is an organism, theology serves as its life to keep it growing, better and stronger. Phiri, & Werner, (2013) states that the ministry and service of any Church are a reflection of the quality of theological education given both to its leaders and members. Experience has shown throughout the history of the Christian Church that weakness or slackness in the life of any Church can be traced to its theological seminaries. Quality theological education that is accessible and relevant is not a strategic option for any Church – it is the only imperative choice”. This is the reason serious attention should be given to the theological education of any denomination. In an organized and structured denomination, theological institution produces the leaders of churches which constitute the denomination as a whole. In a situation whereby people in the name of divine call without proper theological training are allowed to lead churches in any denomination, there will be serious theological chaos at the end of the day.

Jesus Christ, before handling the affairs of his church to his disciples, his twelve apostles were with him for the space of three years or more. They



were properly groomed in the things of the kingdom and that was the reason they could succeed after Jesus ascended to heaven. While he (Jesus) was about to leave finally after his resurrection, he commanded the disciples to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. He did not stop there, he told them to teach their converts all that he had taught them after their public confession through baptism. It means passing on what they received to others. The early church continued in that trend.

In the early church, we see that theological instruction played a vital role. The disciples gathered together regularly for the purpose of exhorting one another and instructing new converts in the teachings of their Master, Jesus Christ (Acts 2: 42, 46; 5: 12; 6: 3 and 4). In the same vein, the apostle Paul expressly instructed Timothy, his beloved son in the Lord, to devote himself to the study of the Word, to teach, preach, and to commit the same to trustworthy men, who will in turn teach others (1 Tim 4: 1, 2, 13-16; 2 Tim 2: 1-2) (Olatoyan, 2014).

This goes on and on from generation to generation. In the Old Testament, this is the method the LORD commanded the Israelites to pass the knowledge of Yahweh, the God of their forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and God who redeemed them from the land of slavery in Egypt from generation to generation. By the age of 12, a Hebrew child already knows the Pentateuch.

The Old Testament is not only the first textbook of Church history, it is the oldest programme of theological education on record. Addressing originally a single Mesopotamian clan, the programme, which lasted many centuries, was extended to a group of related tribes and then to a whole nation. ... the Torah was understood as an instrument of education. Paul called it the *paidogogos*, the slave entrusted with the formation of God's children (Martin, 2010).

Theological education has been in existence for a very long time. According to Marbaniang (2023), in the apostolic age, there is no evidence of formal theological education, in the form of schools or



seminaries like today. However, this does not mean that there was no theological training of any form whatsoever. Among the Jews, we read about the schools of Hillel and Shammai. Gamaliel I, a grandson of Hillel, was the teacher of Paul (before his conversion) in his pharisaic training.

Historically, there is no formal theological institution as it is being practiced virtually all over the world in those days. Sometimes later, there is a formal theological school believed to belong to Mark the Evangelist.

Some historians believe that the first theological school (known as the Catechetical School) was founded by Mark the evangelist at Alexandria. Jerome (347-420) in his *De Viris Illustribus* (On Illustrious Men), Letters 8 and 11, wrote that Mark was the first who preached Christ at Alexandria and formed a church so admirable in doctrine and continence of living that he constrained all followers of Christ to his example (Marbaniang, 2023).

The quest to know God and understand biblical text for better interpretation and development of the right doctrine for the church would have led to embracing and establishment of theological schools for proper reflection of biblical teachings. Martin, (2010) states that Origen's work opened new pathways in Christian theology. As a teacher, first in Alexandria and then in Caesarea, he explored the relations between the Bible and Greek thought, developed the biblical commentary, worked out an intellectual framework for Christian use of the Old Testament, and carried out the first exercises in biblical textual criticism". Martin (2010) further stressed that during the Romans' political dominance, theological education, then, was instrumental to the Church's functioning in the Roman Empire in the days of persecution. It was directed equally to self-acknowledged Christians and interested outsiders – the kind of people who would frequently attend philosophical schools or take part in philosophical discussions.

Over the years, the gospel spread to our contemporary time. The Western world embraced the gospel and embarked on serious



missionary works to many parts of the world and Africa inclusive. There was a need to train missionaries for mission work and raise theologically inclined labourers to spread the good news of the kingdom. Therefore, there was an increase in founding of the theological institutions within and outside the western world. For the Western Church, Catholic or Protestant, national or denominational, the formation of the clerical class became the key to the Church's welfare. And theological education became the teaching of the Church's teachers – the training of the ministry" (Martin, 2010).

The tradition continues to this day. Theological education is the lifeline of Christianity and the church. It is through it that church leaders are trained and equipped for effective ministry and pass the same to the coming generation. The truth and doctrine of Christian faith are preserved through theological education. "Theological education is the process of enabling the practice of theological and biblical wisdom in leadership events so that contemporary faith communities fulfill their mission to be salt and light in our world and maintain the repository of truth for the next generation" (Easley, 2014). The case is not different in Nigeria as prominent denominations invest heavily in theological education to preserve the beliefs and traditions of their faith.

Previous researchers explore the relevance of supervised ministry in shaping pastoral leadership skills and competencies, but there is a paucity of research specifically addressing it as a pedagogical tool and its impact within the Nigerian Baptist Convention context. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the significance of supervised ministry as a pedagogical tool in the theological education of Baptist pastors in training in the Nigerian Baptist Convention theological institutions.

### **Concept of Supervised Ministry**

Supervised ministry is a structured learning approach within theological or pastoral training programmes where students engage in practical ministry experience under the guidance and supervision of experienced pastors or mentors; they are referred to by the seminary as field supervisors. These pastors in training are prepared and involved in the



work of the ministry in preparation for the likely encounter in the ministry. The purpose of supervised ministry is to integrate academic learning with practical ministry skills, providing students with opportunities for practical engagement, reflection, growth, and development as future leaders in their respective religious communities. “Preparation for Christian ministry cannot be completed solely in the academic context of a theological seminary. In the contemporary ministry context, practitioners must develop capacity for ongoing learning and creative adaptation to a changing world of church and community, all while staying rooted in the soil of sufficient theological and biblical depth” (Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2022). Supervised ministry is an integral part of theological education. The theoretical framework for the study is Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory. Kolb’s experiential learning theory sees experience as the source of learning and development. The theory emphasizes that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transformation experience. The essence of the theory is to explain the role experience plays in the learning process. Experiential learning involves learning by doing or actively participating in the learning process. The model was published by David Kolb in 1984. He is an American psychologist, professor, and education theorist. “Kolb’s experiential learning theory was influenced by the work of other education theorists, including Jean Piaget, John Dewey, and Kurt Lewin” (Practera, 2021). David Kolb submits that learning is a cyclic process comprising concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. For effective learning to take place, the whole process must be completed by the learner.

### **Supervised Ministry as a Pedagogical Tool**

For a better understanding of the subject matter and why supervised ministry can be a pedagogical tool, there is a need for a definition of pedagogy. “Pedagogy is derived from *paidagogos*, a Greek word meaning teacher of children... Educationally pedagogy has been viewed



as a combination of knowledge and skills required for effective teaching” (Chiroma, & Cloete, 2015). Pedagogy is largely connected with the theory and practice of imparting knowledge, most especially concentrating on the methods, and strategies used in teaching. It has to do with the principles, techniques, and approaches employed by educators to facilitate the learning process and foster intellectual, social, and emotional development in students. According to Twomey et al (1999), Pedagogy refers to the theory and practice of education, specifically focusing on how knowledge and skills are imparted, transmitted, and acquired by learners. It encompasses various methods, strategies, and approaches used by teachers or educators to facilitate learning. Pedagogy is not only concerned with what is taught but also how it is taught and how learners engage with the material. Another scholar quoting an author said, “Pedagogy is defined as the science of teaching”; he continues “pedagogy as a way of being with people. It involves: joining with them to bring flourishing and relationship to life (animation) being concerned about their, and others’ needs and wellbeing, and taking practical steps to help (caring); and encouraging reflection, commitment and change (education)” (Matthew, 2020).

Judging by these two definitions, and most especially the last one which described pedagogy as being with people, joining with them to bring flourishing and relationship to life... and taking practical steps to help and encourage reflection. Therefore, supervised ministry fits into this context. Supervised ministry, also known as supervised pastoral education (SPE) or theological field education, is a pedagogical tool commonly used in theological institutions or seminaries, mission schools, and other religious education institutions to train future clergies or religious leaders. It provides students with hands-on experience and mentorship in real-world ministry settings under the guidance of experienced supervisors. These are some of how supervised ministry serves as a pedagogical tool:

- (a) *Experiential Learning*: “Experiences gained in the practical arena of the local church are considered a vital and integral part of the ministry formation” (House, & Robertson, 2010).





Supervised ministry offers theological or seminary students the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge learned in the classroom to practical ministry situations. By engaging or participating in real-life pastoral care, counselling, preaching, teaching, visitation, and other ministry activities with experienced pastoral leaders, students will gain invaluable experiential learning.

- (b) *Reflection and Integration*: “A key pedagogical strategy for transformational learning is the utilization of reflection. The practice of reflective learning is widely accepted in educational circles as a means to cultivate deep and lifelong learning, as well as professional practices” (Ayers, 2020). House, & Robertson, (2010) think that through reflective practices such as journaling, group discussions with fellow students, and a faculty adviser as moderator during the discussion, and supervision sessions, students are motivated to process their experiences, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and integrate their theological learning with their practical ministry experiences acquired on the field. Reflective practices are seen as a means to foster awareness, empathy, collaboration, deep listening, engagement with diverse perspectives, and improved and creative responses toward sustainability. As opined by Blodgett & Floding (2014), ministerial reflection forms students’ thoughtful. by slowing down the explanatory process, letting the affective dimensions of experience become revealing, and hindering untimely inferences. It “integrates the knowledge gained from the classic disciplines of theological study with whole-person knowledge” (Blodgett & Floding, 2014). It also allows insights emerge and wisdom accumulate in the process. Reflection gives theological learning meaning and is practicable with exposure to practical learning. “Theological reflection is a cornerstone of all field education programs, where it is a pedagogical practice leveraging the experiences of students to form them as ministers” (Ayers, 2020). The end goal of supervised ministry is achieved through





theological reflection. The researcher concludes his thoughts on the subject of ministerial reflection this way. “In the end, ministerial reflection also shapes students’ sense of identity, their very being as ministers. Pastoral imagination becomes stretched and invigorated by the discipline of ministerial reflection” (Ayers, 2020).

- (c) *Skill Development*: There are many skills a pastor needs to possess for him/her to function effectively in the discharge of his/her duties. Supervised ministry helps students to develop a wide range of pastoral skills including listening, communication, care and counselling, preaching, prayer, baptism, leading worship services, conducting ceremonies (e.g., naming, weddings, funerals, etc), and managing conflicts. They receive constructive feedback from supervisors and peers to enhance their skills. These enhance their effectiveness in ministry. “Pedagogically speaking, the heart of most field education programs is the time students spend actually practicing ministry in the field. The accumulated and assorted experiences from that practice become the “assigned text” within this area of the theological curriculum” (Ayers, 2020).
- (d) *Formation and Identity Development*: Beyond acquiring technical skills, supervised ministry facilitates the formation of students’ professional and personal identities as religious leaders. They begin to know who they are and what it calls for. They explore their theological beliefs, practices, values, ethics, and pastoral styles, while also gaining insights into their strengths and areas for growth along the line. Being involved in supervised field education in a congregation offers trainees firsthand opportunities to assess their aptitude for ministry. Taking on leadership and pastoral responsibilities in their church assists them in acquiring valuable self-understanding and dependence upon God for success in future ministry. Trainees become aware of the strengths they bring to ministry in terms of their calling, spiritual giftedness, commitment, spiritual formation, character, personality, temperament, leadership ability, and experience. By contrast, they



also become aware of those areas of their lives that need particular attention and nurture if, in the future, they are to become fully effective, transformational leaders in a local church (Matthew, 2020).

- (e) *Cultural Competence and Contextual Awareness*: Working in diverse ministry contexts different from what they are used to expose students to different cultural, social, and religious realities. They learn to appreciate and traverse cultural differences sensitively, develop cultural competence, and adapt their ministry approaches to effectively serve diverse ethnic groups and communities. Bush Jr., (2017) maintains that field education was structured to keep students on the move through multiple contexts. Each student is required to have five kinds of placements: a congregation representing their own culture, a cross-cultural placement in a congregation, and a social services agency to have a taste of different cultures. This will help the students to minister effectively within any cultural context. “The aim of a field education programme is not just competence, but capacity. Field education programme helps students to develop as a reflective practitioner so that they can develop theologically informed and contextually relevant ministry practice in whatever context they are called to minister” (Trist, 2023).
- (f) *Professional Accountability and Ethics*: Every profession has its ways and manners in which professionals in that field conduct themselves in a professional way that is consonant with the ethics of their profession. The same applies to pastoral ministry. “Ministry practitioners should meet the standards of professional, safe, and ethical practice. Most denominations will have their codes of ethics for ministers” (Bush Jr., 2017). Supervised ministry provides a structured setting where students are held accountable for their actions and decisions. They are aware of the rules guiding their profession. They learn about professional ethics, boundaries, confidentiality, and ethical quandaries commonly encountered in pastoral ministry.



- (g) *Pastoral Care Skill*: Matthew (2020) is of the opinion that pastoral attitude, pastoral visitation, caring for new members, caring for non-attendees, caring for the hurting, caring for the unchurched, crisis intervention, and mentoring are all parts of supervised ministry. During their studies in the seminary and as part of their supervised ministry experience, students are also given the assignment to visit hospitals, homeless homes, and other places relating to offering care and counselling. Students engage in pastoral care activities during this exercise, offering emotional support to those who are down psychologically, rendering spiritual guidance, and practical assistance to individuals and communities facing various life challenges. Through these encounters, they deepen their understanding of human experience, suffering, resilience, and spirituality.
- (h) *Feedback and Evaluation*: One of the reasons students are not just allowed to grow on their own and are placed under the supervision of a faculty adviser and field supervisor in the course of their seminary training is for proper growth, control, and feedback. “Feedback, combined with effective instruction, can have a powerful influence on accelerating students’ learning, and a critical determinant of whether feedback is effective is how students engage in feedback processes” (Vathey, 2020). Supervisors offer regular feedback and evaluations by having discussions with the students from time to time to help them assess their progress, set learning goals, and identify areas for improvement. “The capacity to monitor the quality of one’s own work throughout the learning process has been acknowledged as a central driver of effective feedback processes” (Trist, 2023). This ongoing assessment contributes to the students’ professional growth and leadership development.
- (i) *Relationship Skills*: pastors deal with people every day and therefore need to develop a good relationship with them. Pastoral ministry is built on relationships and there are different kinds of people in the church with different characters. Pastors should be



able to relate well with all of them. Right from the seminary through supervised ministry, seminary students are exposed to likely people they may deal with in the future assignment. “Supervisors and mentors exploring with students the importance of relating to people effectively; showing how we either facilitate or inhibit ministry by our attitude to others” (Hillman Jr., 2008). Students are helped on the best way to deal with congregants for impactful and impeccable ministry.

- (j) *Spiritual and Character Formation*: recently, theological schools have proved amplified attention in educational models that not only convey knowledge and skill to learners but also make them to have the character needed to effectively navigate the moral challenges that they may face in their future ministry (Wang et al, 2023). Supervised ministry is a tool in the development of spiritual and character formation of seminary students. Students are advised to participate in the spiritual activities of the church they are posted to regardless of the volume of their academic work to help them improve on their spiritual life. “Christian spirituality is experienced through personal prayer, devotions, and sitting under the preaching of the Word of God” (Hillman Jr., 2008).

Proper disciplinary measures are also meted out to students who go against the ethics of the profession for them not to put pastoral ministry into disrepute. Students are under close monitoring and supervision to tutor them in the proper character befits one who is called by God. “Spiritual formation is growth and development of the person into the likeness of the humanity of Christ—the true human in attitude, character, and action” (Hillman Jr., 2008).

Blodget (2008), while comparing field education (supervised ministry) and critical pedagogy, revealed the assumption of educators regarding critical pedagogy in relation to his discussion on field education. “Critical pedagogues, or critical theorists, see the purpose of education as not only preparing students for the world as it is but also empowering them to create the world as it should be. They are concerned about the kind of leaders and change agents schools are producing” (Blodget,



2008). This can be said of supervised ministry as a pedagogical tool in shaping the ministerial leadership skills in student pastors and instilling the ability to adapt to changing situations and environments and change or put things in proper perspective in the course of doing ministry. Summarily, supervised ministry serves as a transformative pedagogical tool that prepares students for the complex and multifaceted responsibilities of religious leadership by combining academic study with practical experience, reflection, and mentorship.

## **Conclusion**

Theological institutions are set up to achieve particular goals, if these will be accomplished, supervised ministry must be given its rightful place in theological training. “To fully accomplish the aim of theological education, classroom experience may not be enough; hence the call to incorporate mentoring (supervised ministry) as a supportive pedagogy that will promote the integration of classroom experience with the spiritual formation of theology students” (Practera, 2021). To produce well-baked theologians and pastors, the supervised ministry should be seen as a pedagogical tool in shaping and molding the next generation of pastors. By using supervised ministry as a pedagogical tool in theological training, pastors in training are not only be exposed to the practical and complexities of pastoral ministry, it also gives them the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of their vocational ethics, enhanced their commitment to serving their congregants within contextual setting and with empathy and integrity.

## **Recommendations**

1. Supervised ministry in the Nigerian Baptist Convention theological institutions should be seen as an extension of classwork in theological training of pastors, and therefore should be awarded a course code and with reasonable course units every semester to emphasize its importance in ministerial training of pastors.



2. Baptist theological institutions and theological educators must pay due attention to supervised ministry and emphasize its indispensability in forming well-rounded Baptist pastors who are adequately equipped to meet the demands of contemporary pastoral ministry.
3. There should be a periodic meeting between the theological institution authorities, field supervisors and student pastors for proper feedback and evaluation of the supervised ministry programme.
4. Baptist student pastors should pay more attention to supervised ministry and be committed to it. They must also be ready to be molded by field supervisors in the course of their theological training rather than seeing it as a means to get financial support, as it may determine their success or failure in ministry.

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