Challenges And Prospects of Youth′s involvement in the churches of Southwest Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
The twenty-first century that should present Nigerian youth with rewarding prospects turns such into a significant setbacks based on the different challenges they are facing in their environment such as the Southwest, Nigeria. Nevertheless, if prospects and rewards are to dominate the future landscape of the African nations, like Nigeria, Christian Community must come together in an unprecedented manner to ensure youths are hopeful of the future reality. It is also no doubt that the spiritual development of any youth must be the focus of the church by involving the Youth. However, not involving the youth has over time led to unpleasant behaviours of youths in the church and thereby resulting to negligence, lack of commitment, disinterestedness, secularity, and sometimes waywardness among others. These are evident in some churches in Southwest Nigeria. Consequently, this research sought to find out the challenges and prospects of youth involvement in the churches of Southwest, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of this research were to: Find out the features of youth, Identify challenges facing the youth, Assess the various ways in which youth are involved, and examine the prospects of youth' involvement in churches of Southwest, Nigeria. Descriptive research design was adopted and questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 3 churches each across seven denominations. A sample of 147 youths was randomly selected from the 21 churches within seven denominations. Data was analysed using simple percentages. Findings showed that South west youths are agile (66%) but are not critically minded (10.4%) amongst other features. Also, the leading challenge they face is lack of opportunity to participate in meaningful programmes (70%) and they are also involved in some of the units of the church with a great prospect being church leaders and sustenance of the good heritage of the church. It was recommended among others that Church curriculum need to take into cognizance relevant programmes that will enhance youth participation towards grooming them for future leadership, meeting their needs as well as training them to be Christ's ambassadors in the world.
Keywords: Challenges, Prospects, Youth, Youth's Involvement, Churches.

INTRODUCTION
There are several opinions with respect to the definition of youth across countries of the world. Jalata (2014) stated that the UN (United Nations) describes youth as a person aged between 15 to 24 years old. The African Union terms youth as individual aged between 15 to 35 years old. This paper adopts the UN definition of youth. The African population is estimated to be more than a billion people, among whom more than 65% are young under the age of 35, and the youth make up 40% of Africa's working age population. In Africa, young people aged 15-24 account for 20.2% of the population and "constitutes a fifth of the world's population. Youth face poverty, barriers to education, multiple forms of discrimination and limited employment prospects and opportunities" (UN, Youth Political Participation and Decision-Making, http://cbs.wondershare.co   m/go.php?pid=2990&m=db). In Nigeria, "the statistics are sobering. Sixty per cent of Nigeria's population is youth and youth unemployment in Nigeria is put at 60 per cent. This gives one an insight into the terrible circumstances in which young Nigerians have found themselves" (Umezulike, 2015).
"The church is full of opportunities for service. One exciting opportunity is the potential of engaging and encouraging the youth in our local churches to be involved in ministry "(Paul, 2012). There are many potential youths in Nigeria, that need to be brought up in an encouraging way, discovering their

characteristics through satisfactory involvement so as to meet the present societal demand and significantly, the youth being the future leaders. The youth demand a sense of relevance in the present- day Churches in Southwest Nigeria, which is a means of training them to be ambassadors of the church and the nation at large.

There are so many problems Nigerian youths are faced with, amongst which are societal challenges emanating from war, socio-displacement, economic crisis and health/medical plague, which had earlier brought them into a state of dilemma; a state of instability and a state of uncertainty (Ansell, 2005; Delgado, 2004; Morgan, 2013). These challenges and uncertainties, however, materialize in a variety of ways depending upon the nature of the environment. African Youth generally have numerous subsets depending upon age, documented status, level of acculturation, gender, family composition, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, physical and cognitive abilities, religious affiliation, rural-urban backgrounds that seeks serious attention in their various formations (Delgado, 2004).

The twenty-first century that should present Nigerian youth with rewarding opportunities turns such into a significant setbacks based on the different challenges they are facing in their hostile environment – an environment which is depriving them of the required competencies and abilities to flexibly take advantage of emerging fields of career and explore positively the nature of advancement and paradigm change in the global world (Abbott, 1995). Nevertheless, if prospects and rewards are to dominate the future landscape of the African nations, like Nigeria, Christian Community must come together in an unprecedented manner to ensure youths are hopeful of the future reality.

Realistically, the Christian church in Africa is faced with greater devastating challenges in the twenty first century. There is much of critical attack from the other prominent religion through direct and brutal confrontational attacks (such as terrorism, religious (Islam) and ethnic violence, e.t.c) which is affecting the church. The only church that seems to be able to stand the test of time and survive in this post-Christian time i.e the period of loss of the primacy of the Christian worldview in political/leadership affairs (Oosthuizen, 1968) is a dynamic church that is passionate about the word of God; exalt God in worship; must be a caring church (most especially to the youth); must be a growing church- spiritual growth and physical strength (Ryken, 2003); thoughtful with critical thinking; and creative in attending to the present situation. The youths are required to be empowered by the church to become a vital manpower for the church now and after that.

Youth are characterized by their strength; agility (McDowell & Hostetler, 1996) ; creative thinking which is a product of imaginative nature of an African; critical thinking that forms the basis of an African sense of judgment, perception of deeper and richer meanings, creating original art-facts; and possibly a host of other activities that constitute human endeavours in African society (Barlin, 2007). It is important to also make mention of some negative attitude that characterized the formation of young adults. They have the capability to negatively use all their characteristics by engaging in war, conflict, disrupt and establishing difficult situations. Many youths in the church have manipulative capability; they could be destructive and sometimes influenced by peers to act against their will. Mangal (2007) posited that peer group is of great importance to the youth. It plays a very crucial role in their lives. Sebald (1992) in valuing the importance of peer to the youths maintained that, "child development is primarily the focus of the family a child came from" so also, the spiritual development of any youth must be the focus of the church such child emanates from. He strongly sustained his position that, this is overtaken by peer group as youths relate and interact with friends and members of their peer groups (Naz, *et al*, 2014) mostly when they are not properly guided and nurtured.

There are some factors that determine youth's involvement in the Church as adapted from the works of Yount (1996). They include; the personality of the pastor; the behaviour of the pastor; the nature of the church curriculum and the style, techniques or methods adopted by the pastor to carryout leadership and ministerial assignment. Among others are persistent reasons why people act the way they do. Youths in like manner would definitely possess some reasons why they act unpleasantly in the church.

Lee (1999) gave a list of seven reasons why youths are disinterested in the programmes of a church. They include: Adults do not give them opportunity to participate in meaningful way in the church programmes; they are bored because of lack of relevant programmes for them; the adults present them as not having adequate knowledge and understanding required in the church; the lack of understanding of the adults that youths at their stage love to become independent, searching to test

things out themselves, so, adults do not need to think for them; the belief that they lack intellectual challenge by the pastor or the church adults; the lack of understanding of the adults that the youths have outgrown their childhood faith and belief and that they are becoming more matured; critical hypocrisy of the pastor and church leaders due to the problem of double-standard of living. All these have led to unpleasant behaviours of youths in the church and thereby resulting to negligence, lack of commitment, disinterestedness, secularity, and sometimes waywardness. These are evident in some churches Southwest Nigeria.

Consequently, the purpose of this research was to find out the challenges and prospects of youth involvement in the churches of Southwest, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of this research were to:

1. Find out the features of youth in churches of Southwest, Nigeria.
2. Identify challenges facing the youth in churches of Southwest, Nigeria.
3. Assess the various ways in which youth are involved in church activities and programmes, in southwest, Nigeria.
4. Examine the prospects of youth' involvement in churches of Southwest, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the features of Youth in churches of Southwest, Nigeria?
2. What challenges confronts youth in the churches of Southwest, Nigeria?
3. What are the various ways in which youth are involved in churches of Southwest, Nigeria?
4. What are some prospects of youth' involvement in churches of Southwest, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research design was adopted for this study. The area of study was Ogbomoso, one of the largest cities in the Southwest of Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was used to select churches across seven denominations: Baptist, Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Cherubim and Seraphim, Redeemed, and Christ Apostolic. Three local churches each (giving a total of 21 churches) and were selected from each denomination and seven youth were randomly selected from each of the churches (giving a total of 147 Youth). The instrument used to collate data was a self-designed questionnaire which benefitted from literature. The questionnaire had two parts. Part A was on demographic data while part B had four sections which covered these areas: features of youths; Challenges facing Youths in the Churches in Southwest, Nigeria; Involvement of Youths in the Church and an open ended section that gave room for the youth to state some prospects available for them in the churches as they participate in the activities and programmes. The open ended section also made provisions for respondents to state some challenges they face as a Youth in their local Church and the ways are they involved as a youth in their local Church. The instrument was validated by giving it to experts to check the contents. To ensure reliability, the questionnaire was trial-tested through a pilot study with 35 youths. Split-half method was applied and a reliability coefficient value of 0. 76 was obtained. This confirms the internal consistency of the instrument to achieve the set objectives of the study. The researcher through the help of some research assistants distributed the questionnaire. Out of the 147 questionnaire forms distributed 144 was returned. The data was analyzed using Simple percentages for descriptive and inferential statistics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
Findings are presented in tables below according to the research questions.
Research Question 1: "What are the features of Youth in churches of Southwest, Nigeria?"
Table I: Features of Youth

S/N	Statements	Options									
		SA		A		SD		D		U	
	Youth are …	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Visionary and Mission Minded	30	20.8	90	62.5	6	4.1	9	6.2	9	6.2
2	Agile in nature	96	66.7	39	27	6	4.1	3	2	0	0
3	Enthusiastic	39	27	102	70.8	3	2	0	0	0	0
4	Productive	33	22.9	93	64.6	3	2	3	2	12	8.3
5	Critically minded	15	10.4	90	62.5	12	8.3	18	12.5	9	6.2
6	Creative and innovative	60	41.7	72	50	3	2	3	2	6	4.1

 As shown in the table 1 above, 20 % strongly agreed, 62 % agreed, 4 % strongly disagreed, 6 % disagreed that African youths are visionary and mission-minded while 6 % did not decide. With this result, it could be inferred that the southwest youths are visionary and mission-minded. Since 93 % agreed and 6 % disagreed on the agile nature of youths, it is right to mention that Southwest youths possess the agile nature. The level of enthusiasm of Southwest youths is affirmed as 97 % agreed and 3 % disagreed. In determining the productivity of the youths, 86 % agreed with productivity and 6 % disagreed to show they are not productive. 8 % remained not deciding which raise a question no matter how low the percentage of indecision, this shows doubt in a way and this should be taken into consideration. 72 % of the respondents agreed that youths are critically minded while 20 % disagreed leaving 6 % in the state of indecision. This affirms that the youths have great thinking ability. Creativity of southwest youth is affirmed with 91 % agreeing that youths are creative and innovative; on the other hand, 6 % disagreed with the statement while 4 % did not decide.

This result shows that a high percentage only agreed with the statements and many did not strongly agree. This implies that it was only obvious that African youths are agile (66%) this is in consonance with the submission of McDowell & Hostetler (1996) who stated that strength/agility is a core feature of Youth. Nevertheless it was not obvious from the findings that they are Visionary and Mission Minded, enthusiastic, productive, critically minded and creative. The level at which people strongly agreed that youths are critically minded is the lowest (in the strongly agree rating) which calls for an explanation or stating the rationale behind this.

Research Question 2: "*What challenges confronts youth in the churches of Southwest, Nigeria?*"

Challenges of Youth

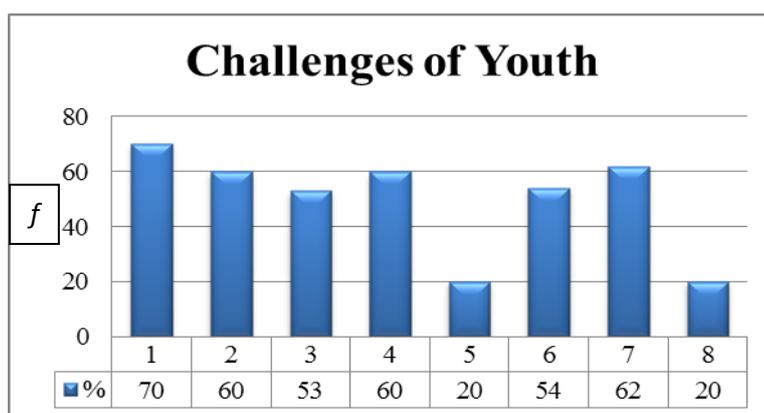|	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
%	70	60	53	60	20	54	62	20

Fig. 2: Respondents' Challenges as Youth in their local churches.

Key:
1. Lack of opportunity to participate in meaningful programmes of the church which has caused some youths to leave a particular church to the other. They are not allowed to participate because the adults feel they lack experience and are not well-versed in the word of God.
2. Envy and adults' lack of spiritual maturity which makes imitating them so difficult. The adults leave the youth to their fate even on matters of growth educationally, spiritually and financially.
3. Lack of recognition or they are neglect because some times, youths have no monetary contribution as a result of rampant unemployment.
4. Boredom as a result of lack of relevant programmes for them.
5. The lack of understanding of the adults that the youths have outgrown their childhood faith and belief. They are becoming more matured.
6. Critical hypocrisy of the pastor and church leaders due to the problem of double-standard living.
7. Some church doctrines choke youth's participation.
8. Founder's syndrome and lack of the knowledge of church history.

After critical examination of the responses in the open-ended section of the questionnaire, the respondents outlined several challenges out of which the leading ones are observed as depicted in fiq. 1 above. 70% of the respondents emphasized that youth are excluded from meaningful programmes of the church, 60% subscribed to the fact that the adults are envious and moreover they are not good examples to follow. 53% opined that youth are neglected, 60% acknowledged that relevant programmes for the youth are absent while 20% stated that the adults do not understand them and 62% also acknowledged that doctrines put in place by churches choke youth's participation. 54% established that critical hypocrisy of the pastor and church leaders due to the problem of double-standard living is a challenge. Also, 20% of the youths recognized founder's syndrome and lack of the knowledge of church history as one of the challenges. The challenge of participation in programmes and boredom as a result of relevant programme leads the chart which really calls for the attention of the church. The findings on the challenges of youths in the churches surveyed are not far-fetched from the yearnings of Yount (1996) in his work on some factors that determine youth' involvement in the Church include; the personality and behaviour of the pastor; the nature of the church curriculum and the style, techniques or methods adopted by the pastor to carryout leadership and ministerial assignment. Youth have expressed challenges bordering on who their pastor is. If Pastors as leaders are hypocritical and do not good examples to emulate then they also are contributory to the problem on ground. Pastors' leadership behaviour and style should be such that will accommodate the youth (as they are well understood) and reaching out to them in a holistic manner, to avoid neglect as expressed by the youth. The finding on neglect and lack of participation due to lack of relevant

programmes finds expression in Lee's (1999) submission on why youths are disinterested in the programmes of a church that when Youth are not given opportunity to participate in meaningful way in the church programmes they are bored. The nature of the curriculum is vital too.

Research Question 3: *"What are the various ways in which youth are involved in churches of Southwest, Nigeria?"*

Youth Involvement

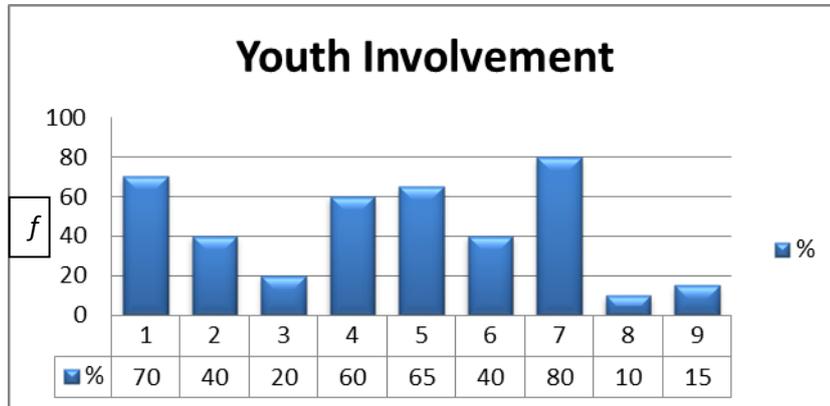| f	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
%	70	40	20	60	65	40	80	10	15

Fig. 2: Respondents' Personal Involvements as Youth in their Local Church

Key:
1. Involved in Sunday school teaching, Bible study and children evangelism
2. Media crew/organizing/instrumentalists
3. Youth movement and programme organization for the growth of people
4. Choir
5. Prayer unit
6. Ushering
7. Attendance of Sunday service and midweek activities including vigils
8. Opinion giving
9. Church secretariat and auditing

From the content analysis, respondents insinuated that more of the youth are involved in the education ministry of the church with 70% of them being involved in Sunday school and Bible study teachings alongside evangelizing to children in their churches respectively.80% of the youth also attend midweek activities which among them are still part of the 70% that are involved in the education department of the church and also part of the teachers are those that organize programmes for the spiritual and physical growth of youths. Other units they are involved in are; choir, prayer unit, ushering, church secretariat and auditing, opinion giving, media crew/organizing/instrumentalists. This shows there is a high level of involvement of youth in the church in Southwest Nigeria as they attend church activities and teach in the education department. This reveals the readiness of youth' participation and as the future of the church such involvement would help to prepare them for leadership in the future.

Research Question 4: *"What are some Prospects of Youth' Involvement in Churches of Southwest, Nigeria?"*
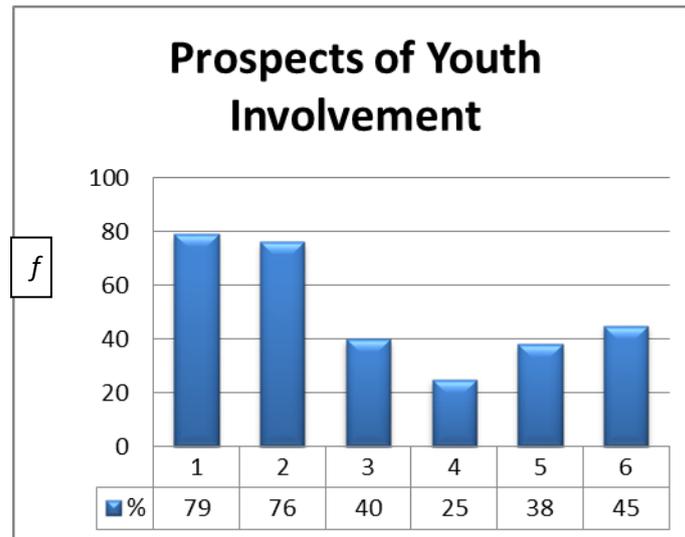

Fig. 3: Prospects of Youth' Involvement in Churches of Southwest, Nigeria?"

Key:
  1. Pastoring opportunities in the future after being well-trained, by this can be part of church leadership that will modernize the church and use resources available wisely.
  2. Evangelizing opportunities
  3. Teaching and doing other lucrative things such as singing, decorating and dramatizing
  4. Leadership in government parastatals from which they can change the world.
  5. They could become goods examples for the contemporary world just as Joseph, Daniel and David were in their days. Being vessels of honour unto God.
  6. They are advanced than some adults and could bring in great innovations that will bring about growth in the church.

Respondents itemized some prospects of their involvement in church activities along these lines: Pastoring and evangelizing opportunities having 79% and 76 % respectively. While 40% stated that teaching and doing other lucrative things such as singing, decorating and dramatizing is also some prospects. 45% of the respondents expressed that they are advanced, meaning being more contemporary than some adults and could bring in great innovations that will bring about growth in the church. Quite far below average were two other prospects observed. These were leadership in government parastatals from which they can change the world, having 28% and the possibility of them becoming goods examples for the contemporary world just as Joseph, Daniel and David were in their days- being vessels of honour unto God having 38%.

Interestingly, the findings seem to have similarity of results. The first are the 70% and above result on pastoring and evangelizing prospects. Youth participation in church activities is an avenue for grooming them for leadership in the future. The youth are the future of the church. The second similarities in the results are those just below average in the margin of 40% and above that established opportunities in performance arts and innovations. These depict areas/programmes that are relevant and are quite good motivators for youth involvement.

A prominent finding though with a lower percentage (28%) is the prospect of leadership in government parastatals from which they can change the world. This finding prompts having re-think about stewardship. The youth sees it as an all-encompassing responsibility; hence they are both responsible to God, to others in and outside the local church/ fellowship, and even at the government workplaces. This seem to corroborate the ideas of Bakke, Smith, and Hendricks (2005) in their book

titled, *Joy at Work: Bible Study Companion* that stewardship has a global responsibility (the whole world), we are created to be God's representative (ambassador) and created to do significant things. Often time emphasis of Christian service has always been on the four walls of the church and for church work alone. The youth portrays a very good idea of integrating their faith with work such as there could be spiritual transformation in government parastatals. Youth are thinking outside the box. Moreover, the prospect of being good examples of biblical youths like Joseph, Daniel, David and many more transforming their world quite apt.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth are confronted with some challenges. However in the midst of the challenges they are grossly involved in some activities in the church. Many prospects of their involvement have been identified. The church being a place full of prospects for youth involvement needs to as much as possible combat the identified challenges. To this end the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Church curriculum need to take into cognizance relevant programmes which will enhance youth participation and adequate involvement. Such curriculum should recognize their needs and the meeting of such needs. It will also help to tackle the challenge of boredom because of monotony.
2. Church leadership should give recognition to youths and acknowledge their contributions in whatever form.
3. Adults need to understand that youths have outgrown their childhood faith and belief and have matured and should be treated with some level of respect.
4. Pastors and church leaders should be good examples such that it could be emulated by the youth.
5. Well-designed discipleship programme towards weaving theology of work into church curriculum for the workplaces towards grooming youth as ambassadors of Christ for societal transformation should be embarked upon by church pastors/leaders.

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