

Management Design of Practical Theological Education for Online-Based Elders: Efforts to Increase The Effectiveness of The Ministry of Church Elders

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Abstract

In fulfilling the duties of ministry by elders, adequate knowledge and skills are essential to ensure that the ministry is effective. Through effective ministry, the church will experience growth both spiritually and organizationally. Empirical observations indicate that the selection and appointment of elders often lack adequate knowledge and skills to carry out their ministry duties. This study aims to design an Online-Based Practical Theology Education Management for Elders. The development model used is the ADDIE model, which consists of five stages: 1) analysis, 2) design, 3) development, 4) implementation, and 5) evaluation. In the analysis stage, an analysis was conducted regarding the needs for designing practical theology education management for elders. Based on the analysis, the materials needed by elders to improve their effectiveness in ministry, particularly in preaching skills, pastoral counseling, and liturgy, were identified. In the design stage, three steps were carried out: collecting and selecting materials, drafting the guidebook framework, and designing the layout. The development stage aims to assess the feasibility of the designed learning module. After obtaining the feasibility assessment, the learning module is revised based on feedback and suggestions from validators. The implementation stage involves the actual execution of the program, which was attended by 31 elders and conducted over two sessions, each lasting three hours.

Keywords: Effectiveness, Ministry, Elder

INTRODUCTION

An elder is a church office elected by the congregation through established mechanisms based on church rules and regulations. They are then ordained by the pastor after completing all necessary steps. On one hand, elders act as the "extended hand" of the pastor in carrying out the church's mission at the local level, and on the other hand, they work as a team with the pastor at the broader regional level according to their respective duties and functions. Elders are granted the authority to lead, teach the congregation, serve the Word, shepherd,

govern, and perform many other duties. Through these responsibilities, elders are tasked with equipping the congregation for specific ministries. Furthermore, elders are expected to be exemplary figures who can model behavior for the congregation, as taught by Jesus Christ through the teachings of the Apostles. As leaders, elders must also possess a broad vision, dedication, agility, responsiveness, patience, friendliness, humility, and a love for God.

Empirical observations reveal that the selection and appointment of elders are often inadequately equipped with the necessary

knowledge and skills to effectively carry out their duties. Although there is a learning period provided for prospective elders before ordination, which involves active participation in various church programs to observe and learn empirically through worship, social visits, church meetings, and sermons, this training is often insufficient.

In the subsequent stage, they are trained to lead worship (*maragenda*), read church announcements, lead prayers in sectoral worship, and even practice preaching in sectoral services. Based on the researcher's observations of the learning activities conducted by the church under the pastor's supervision, there is a tendency for prospective elders to independently observe and train themselves. The pastor tends to give instructions and respond to questions from prospective elders only if issues arise. Conversely, if no questions or issues are raised, the learning process is limited to the one-year period allocated. Once this period is over, the prospective elders are simply appointed as ordained elders unless they withdraw and declare their unwillingness to be ordained based on their own considerations.

Another challenge often faced by branch churches is the absence of a resident

pastor living with the congregation, as these branch churches are extensions of the main church where the pastor resides. Typically, branch churches appoint and select a church teacher (*guru huria*) or a community teacher (*guru jemaat*) from within the church, and one of the elders who is willing and deemed suitable by the resort pastor is appointed as the church teacher. This church teacher acts as the pastor's representative in the branch church, and not all branch churches have a church teacher. Generally, church teachers do not differ much from regular elders in terms of knowledge and skills in ministry; they are appointed primarily based on seniority and willingness to serve as church teachers.

Consequently, the elders/church teachers (*guru huria*) in branch churches (*gereja pagaran*) generally have very limited knowledge and skills in practical theology. This is because the main church (*gereja resort*), at the district level (*pareses*), regional level, and even at the synod level, rarely conduct education and training to enhance the effectiveness of the elders' ministry. As a result, churches tend to remain stagnant and do not experience growth, either spiritually or organizationally, or in church management as they should. This often leads to congregation members becoming inactive in worship and participation in church development, feeling

that they do not receive adequate service from the elders.

Management of Practical Theology Education

The definition of educational management is the application of management principles in the development of education. Management science directly relates to organizations and encompasses the art of building strategies for decision-making. Management of Practical Theology means the art and science of managing the resources of Practical Theology Education to achieve effective and efficient educational objectives. To achieve these effective and efficient objectives, there must be an evaluation of the educational management implementation. Fadhli states that evaluating the educational process enhances the need to achieve and develop talents while simultaneously meeting the accountability standards set by stakeholders involved in the educational process or its outcomes.

Elders

Broadly speaking, elders are tasked with overseeing and maintaining the congregation of God (and ensuring that each church member, particularly the baptized members, lives according to the word of God). They are further tasked with reminding

the congregation of their duty, which is to proclaim the word of God in the world through words and actions. The word, preached to us within the congregation, can grow and bear fruit. Elders' duty is to walk around and observe whether this is evident in the lives of the congregation members. Besides the pastor, the congregation considers elders as the most important and honorable ecclesiastical office (Abineno, 1994).

Elders also play a crucial role in the church's quality growth by setting an example for the congregation they serve. Lack of communication and insufficient time to carry out their duties and responsibilities as elders is a fundamental issue that must be the church's primary concern, as elders are co-workers with the church leaders or shepherds. This section will discuss how elders can impact the church congregation.

The Role and Function of Elders in the Church

An exploration of leadership positions in the New Testament reveals additional insights when examining Acts 11. In verse 30, it is clearly mentioned that there is another group of officeholders in the early church: "This they did, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts

11:30). Elders were officials appointed by Paul and Barnabas in each church established during their first missionary journey (Acts 14:23).

Later, when Paul speaks to the elders in Ephesus (Acts 20:28), he gives them specific instructions: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood." Paul tells the elders that they are the overseers of the church. Similarly, in the letter to the Philippians, several groups of recipients are mentioned: the saints, along with the overseers and deacons (Phil. 1:1). Here, overseers are mentioned in the plural form, *episkopois*, indicating that they are referred to as elders elsewhere. The combination of "elders" and "overseers" clearly shows that overseeing is merely one of the tasks of the elders (Guthrie, 1993).

The New Testament texts suggest that there was no initial hierarchy regarding church offices. However, as the church developed, the position of elder became lower than that of overseer or bishop. In the first few centuries, the monarchical episcopate system emerged, where a congregation was led by a single bishop, surrounded by presbyters who initially functioned as a sort of "senate," and later

mainly assisted in minor roles (Abineno, 1993). Although the texts do not detail the duties of the elders, it is understood that they were the first to be appointed as church officials, aiding in the pastoral needs of the congregation, including praying for the sick (James 5:14) and performing necessary administrative tasks. Therefore, it can be inferred that the duties of an elder are:

1. As special servants, elders shepherd congregation members through home visits, ensuring members remain engaged in service while maintaining confidentiality of those they shepherd.
2. Provide care for congregation members and anyone in need of physical or psychological assistance.
3. Set a tangible example in deeds and words for the community, especially congregation members, guiding them to maintain a wholesome life socially, spiritually, and physically.
4. Lead in ministering to members under church discipline, offering testimony, shepherding, and oversight for all congregation members.
5. Sustain worship fellowship by gathering congregation members and fostering the church's confession of faith and religious teachings.

6. Serve as leaders and teachers for congregation members, enabling them to become role models for other members around them.
7. Contribute input or opinions on church teachings and education, particularly regarding faith, doctrine, and confession.
8. Ensure that worship conducted by the congregation falls under the responsibility of the special servants.
9. Collaborate in performing various church services for the congregation, including church discipline, shepherding, and oversight.
10. Act as planners and executors for all congregation members through church member development.

The duties of elders are to keep watch over themselves and the flock of God entrusted to them spiritually (Acts 20:28). They are also entrusted with pastoral duties, visiting congregation members in their homes. Over time, the duties of these officials increasingly came to be seen as altar work; presbyters evolved into "priests." This development led to presbyters occupying a somewhat lower position in the expanding hierarchy of church offices.

The Church and the Challenges of Digitalization

The challenges the church faces in entering the digital era are increasingly complex and extensive. Technological advancements have created a significant shift in the way church services are conducted today compared to those in the early 20th century. Nowadays, congregants rarely bring a Bible to church, let alone a hymnbook, as all these elements have been encompassed by technological advancements that make church participation more convenient. This cannot be evaluated by the church-going patterns of the Reformation era or the emergence of the modern Pentecostal movement, where people were encouraged to be diligent in reading the Bible and always brought a conventional Bible. Today, they carry everything in a single sophisticated gadget. This shift aligns with the changing nuances of the times.

Some churches adopt an antagonistic stance, while others accept and even follow the evolving trends to attract visits from "congregants" with common preferences. This practice has become widespread in many churches, tailoring worship services to match market tastes. This is the world in which the church lives today, which cannot be directly measured against the patterns of

the apostolic era. David R. Ray, quoted by Yohanis Luni Tumanan in the *Jaffray Journal*, asserts that contextual worship must be balanced with authentic worship, reflecting the cultural identity of the congregation. Ultimately, the church must respect and value the issue of "taste" that follows the patterns of change and development of the times.

The challenge of digitalization should not be met with apathy, nor should technology become the master of life, even in church ministry. Addressing technological advancements must still align with the concept of ministry and its development biblically. Students, as part of the shift in life values, should not be swept away by the tide of secularization that erodes the essence of spiritual life. Ironically, however, many students fall into the trap of excessive technology use, becoming servants of technology rather than its masters.

Mapping Challenges and Needs

Challenges in Christian life are not a new phenomenon, and thus, Christians should not be averse to or avoid them. The notion of being "more than conquerors" is not a gift bestowed without the maturation process towards faith maturity. In fact, a conqueror is forged in the battleground of

challenges. The current challenges in church ministry should not be compared with those of the past or future, as each era has its own difficulties and uniqueness. The present challenges must be met with a contemporary mindset.

The digital era has placed the church at a crossroads: either to change and advance or to remain spectators, seemingly preserving sanctity through a detrimental conservatism. Churches have responded to these changes in various ways—some reactively, some proactively, and others apathetically. Each approach has its implications for their respective ministries. However, as an institution upholding the vision of Pentecostal excellence, the Intheos Theological Seminary will continue to respond positively to technological advancements to advance its ministry and the churches it serves.

The church must map out these challenges because within each challenge lies a need that can no longer be addressed by outdated means. The ministry of gifts during the apostolic era is not obsolete but requires a new response to new forms. Mapping these challenges will stimulate the church's needs, thus generating more relevant gifts in line with contemporary challenges.

Research Method

This study is a Research and Development (R&D) project aimed at producing a handbook for the spiritual mental development of congregants to enhance their awareness of tithing. The research and development are conducted using the ADDIE model, developed by Dick and Carey (1996). The researcher chose the ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate) because it is considered more rational and comprehensive compared to other models.

Sugiyono states that the research and development method is used to produce a specific product and test the effectiveness of that product. Therefore, to develop the necessary practical theological education management design, the product's effectiveness is tested.

This research was conducted in churches within the BKAG (Batak Christian Protestant Church) environment in North Tapanuli. The study took place from March to November 2022. The population encompasses the entire subject of the research as a data source for the researcher. Determining the population is crucial for the implementation of the

research, as having a defined population allows the research to be conducted effectively. Arikunto states, "The population is the entire subject that the researcher investigates, serving as a data source for the researcher." According to Sugiyono, "The population is a generalization area consisting of objects/subjects with certain qualities and characteristics determined by the researcher to be studied and then drawn to conclusions." Riduwan defines the population as "the entirety of the characteristics or measurement units that are the research object."

The population used by the researcher consists of the elders in the churches of the Sipoholon District, aimed at completing a questionnaire instrument to gather information for the needs analysis in creating an online-based practical theology education management design for elders conceptualized by the researcher. Subsequently, the design product for online-based practical theology education management for elders will be validated by relevant experts.

Thus, the population in this research includes the elders serving in various churches within the BKAG environment in North Tapanuli. Riduwan, quoting Arikunto, states that the sample is a part of the

population (a portion or representative of the researched population). Similarly, Sugiyono states that the sample is a portion of the quantity and characteristics possessed by the population. The reasons for taking a sample include saving time, effort, funds, and thought.

The sample must be representative, meaning the sample taken represents the entire existing population, ensuring that conclusions drawn from the sample align with the population. For the research sample needs, the researcher employs Purposive Sampling, which involves selecting samples based on the consideration of experienced individuals. Elders serving in churches in North Tapanuli are used to test the instrument, while three experts are chosen as validators for the instrument's validity testing.

The development procedure used in this research follows the ADDIE model developed by Dick & Carey. The ADDIE model is a systematically organized program with sequential activities aimed at solving problems according to the research needs. The steps or procedures of the research include:

Needs analysis is conducted to identify the need for drama script

development. This involves analyzing the potential and problems related to the development research. Needs analysis is carried out using a questionnaire instrument. According to Sugiyono, a questionnaire is a data collection technique conducted by providing a set of written questions or statements to respondents for them to answer. Therefore, the questionnaire distribution aims to identify facts and expectations related to the design of an online-based practical theology education management for elders: an effort to enhance the effectiveness of elders' service in the BKAG environment in North Tapanuli.

The Development stage in the ADDIE model involves activities to evaluate the product design. Product validation is the process of assessing whether the newly designed system will be more effective than the old one, from a rational perspective. It is termed rational because validation here is still based on rational assessment, not field facts, and relies on the expertise of experienced professionals to evaluate the designed product.

In this stage, the developed product design is implemented in a real situation. This involves the creation of an online-based practical theology education management

design for elders, with the elders using the developed design. Implementation is carried out using observation instruments. Observation sheets are given to elders serving in churches within the BKAG environment in North Tapanuli.

1.

After the implementation stage, an evaluation is conducted. The evaluation involves improving the product using feedback and suggestions from several validating lecturers and pastors who have assessed the online-based practical theology education management design for elders.

Results

This research was conducted within the BKAG environment in North Tapanuli. The development was carried out using the ADDIE development model, which consists of five stages: 1) Analysis, 2) Design, 3) Development, 4) Implementation, and 5) Evaluation.

The first stage of this research is Analysis. This stage involves needs analysis and material analysis. The results obtained in this stage are as follows: The needs analysis stage aims to assess the extent of the skill training for elders within the BKAG environment in North Tapanuli. In this stage, the researcher

conducted interviews with elders and pastors on June 25, 2022. Based on the interviews, it was found that many elders are not effective in their service, particularly in preaching, leading liturgy, and providing pastoral counseling. Consequently, their service is less than optimal. Several respondents identified factors contributing to these issues. One factor is that many elders do not have a theological education background. Additionally, the elders do not receive training or education to meet these needs. For preaching, elders often rely on impromptu notes or sermon materials provided by the pastor.

Given these findings, there is a need to develop a training guide to better equip church elders to fulfill their responsibilities effectively. Based on this, the researcher developed a practical training guide to enhance the effectiveness of elders in their service.

b. Material Analysis Results

In the material analysis stage, the researcher analyzed the various needs of the elders. This analysis aims to formulate learning materials and objectives based on the elders' needs. Based on the material needs analysis required by the elders to enhance their service

effectiveness, particularly in preaching, pastoral counseling, and liturgy, the following training objectives were formulated:

1. Understand the meaning of Pastoral Counseling
2. Understand the attitudes necessary for an effective counselor
3. Understand the duties and responsibilities in special pastoral cases
4. Understand practical steps to structure the elements of a sermon
5. Be able to prepare sermon material
6. Be able to deliver sermons effectively according to homiletics principles
7. Understand the elements of church liturgy
8. Understand the role of a leader in creating engaging and participatory liturgy

The second stage of the ADDIE development model is the design stage. In this stage, the researcher begins to design the training guide to be developed. There are three steps in this design stage: the collection and selection of materials, the structuring of the guidebook framework, and the design preparation.

Below are the design results for the training guide for church elders:

Based on the material needs analysis, the necessary materials to equip the elders for effective service are Pastoral Counseling, Homiletics, and Liturgics. The researcher selected the following materials as references for developing this guide: Part 1: Pastoral Counseling (Pastoral Counseling and Success and Failure in Special Case Counseling), Part 2: Homiletics (Practical Steps to Structure Elements in a Sermon Framework, Techniques for Preparing Sermon Material, and Techniques for Delivering a Sermon), Part 3: Liturgics (Elements of Church Liturgy, The Role of a Leader in Creating Engaging and Participatory Liturgy)

The structuring of the guidebook framework is based on the needs of church elders. The guide to be developed consists of three main parts: the beginning, the content, and the end. The beginning includes the cover and table of contents. The content section contains the necessary materials for the elders. The end section includes an evaluation format for the elders' practice. The structured guidebook framework is as follows:

The cover of the practical guide consists of two types: the front cover and the back cover. The front cover features the title "Practical Guide," with an illustration of hands holding

a church building. The color design on the cover is full color but not overly bright, with a harmonious blend of colors. The back cover design matches the front cover and is predominantly orange. An attractive cover design is expected to capture interest and encourage elders to study the materials presented in the practical guide. Below is the cover design of the practical guide.



Fig. 1 The Book Cover

The table of contents contains a list of the sections of the learning module along with their page numbers. The inclusion of a table of contents is expected to help users find the desired sections of the learning module based on their titles and page numbers.

The material description in the module corresponds to the material needs analysis. Each topic is presented in sentences

that are easy for the elders to understand, and it is simplified to help the elders grasp and practice the content more easily.

The third stage of the ADDIE development model is the development stage. This stage aims to assess the feasibility of the designed learning module. After obtaining feasibility evaluations, the learning module is revised according to the feedback and suggestions from validators. The validators consist of two expert lecturers in teaching materials, Dr. Roma Sihombing, M.Th, and Dr. Iwan Setiawan Tarigan, M.Th, and two pastors, Pdt. Berlin Maston Berutu, M.Div., and Pdt. Brian Aston Gea, M.Th.

The fourth stage of the ADDIE development model is the implementation stage. After being deemed feasible by the validators, the learning module is implemented in the church. This stage involved 31 elders and was conducted over two sessions, each lasting three hours. Below is an account of the implementation results of the developed learning module: In the first session, the elders were very enthusiastic about participating in the training. The researchers trained the elders using the material outlined in the module. After the material presentation, the elders were given the opportunity to practice the material they

had received. During this session, some elders faced difficulties in understanding the material, indicating that some parts of the module needed revision. In the second session, the elders remained enthusiastic about the training, although the researchers still had to work hard to convey the module material effectively. The issues faced during the first session were managed, and the training proceeded as planned.

The fifth stage of the ADDIE development model is the evaluation stage. After the implementation stage, the next step is to evaluate the learning module. At this stage, the practicality of the module is assessed through the elders' feedback collected via questionnaires.

Conclusion

Based on the research conducted, which includes Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation, it can be concluded that 31 elders in the BAKG Tapanuli Utara area strongly agree with the use of the training module to enhance their service effectiveness.

According to the validation results, the designed module to equip the elders has good quality in terms of Content Feasibility,

Language Feasibility, Presentation Feasibility, and Independent Learning Feasibility. Based on the elders' feedback, it can be concluded that the training module is effective. The material in the module is suitable for use in the training of church elders.

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