

Church Growth Risk and Protective Factors: Perspectives from Leaders of Selected Pentecostal Churches in Kenya

Samwel Muguna Henry, Dr. Nguchie Gathogo, Dr. Solomon Mbula Munyao

Department of Leadership, Pan Africa Christian University

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90300158>

Received: 26 February 2025; Accepted: 05 March 2025; Published: 05 April 2025

ABSTRACT

The trajectory of Pentecostalism has been a subject of scholarly debate albeit without consensus. While some scholars report significant expansion, others document substantial barriers. To reconcile these perspectives, the present study aimed to conduct an in-depth analysis of the risk and protective factors affecting church growth with Pentecostal churches in Kenya in perspective. This study adopted a qualitative research design, utilizing in-depth interviews to explore church growth risk and protective factors. The target population consisted of Pentecostal church leaders, members, and theological scholars with direct experience in church governance and growth dynamics. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 20 members of the clergy with significant leadership experience and first-hand knowledge of church operations. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis. The study identified key factors influencing both numerical and spiritual church growth, including evangelism and outreach, record-keeping, training and discipleship, church expansion, ethical leadership, organizational commitment, and role specialization. Evangelism and outreach were central, with structured follow-up enhancing retention, while accurate record-keeping ensured accountability. Training programs fostered spiritual growth, and new branches improved accessibility. Ethical leadership-built trust, and a shared mission promoted unity and engagement. Operational specialization further increased efficiency. However, challenges such as weak leadership, internal conflicts, and financial constraints hindered progress, limiting ministry activities and infrastructure development. To sustain growth, church leaders should prioritize structured evangelism, follow-up mechanisms, and revival meetings. Given that most Pentecostal churches struggle to outgrow their smallness, a future study should specifically focus on how leadership affect financial growth, and to what extent financial constraint is attributable to the leadership of the church.

Keywords: Church Growth, Risk Factors, Protective Factors, Pentecostal Churches

INTRODUCTION

The trajectory of Pentecostalism has been a subject of scholarly debate. Pentecostals are characterized in the scholarly world as a Christian movement that is an offshoot of Protestantism whose distinctive feature is a personal experience with God through Holy Spirit baptism (Camacho, 2024; Kärkkäinen, 2018). The result of this experience is the manifestation of spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing, among others following the events of Pentecost documented in Acts (Castelo, 2017). This classical view of Pentecostalism is what is assumed in this write-up. Some studies indicate a rising trend in the growth of Pentecostal movement (Chua et al., 2017; Jennins, 2020; Ojo, 2018; Stolz & Fabre, 2019), while others highlight significant barriers to its expansion (Bohr & Hughes, 2021; Thiga et al., 2021). Church stagnation poses substantial risks, with some congregations reaching a plateau and others facing potential closure (Henard, 2018). Studies suggest that stagnation leads to declining membership, reduced spiritual influence, and organizational inefficiencies (Njiru & Warue, 2019; Randall, 2021). Across different global regions – including the United States, Canada, and South Korea – churches have experienced decline or stagnation (Longurst, 2022). Similarly, in parts of Africa, challenges such as Islamic influence, inadequate discipleship, and internal conflicts have impeded church expansion (Mock et al., 2018; Mwila, 2018).

Scholarly perspectives on organizational development highlight the importance of structured leadership and

strategic growth. Every organization undergoes phases of inception, expansion, maturity, revival, and potential decline (Jirasek & Bilek, 2018). Without effective navigation through these transitions, stagnation becomes inevitable. Campbell and Bickle (2012) propose that churches, akin to living organisms, should focus on both numerical and spiritual growth. Additionally, prior research has demonstrated that internal team dynamics significantly influence church growth (Nzeng'e et al., 2021).

Findings on Pentecostal church growth are not uniform. While some scholars report significant expansion, others document substantial barriers. To reconcile these perspectives, the present study aimed to conduct an in-depth analysis of the risk and protective factors affecting church growth with Pentecostal churches in Kenya in perspective. Previous studies have recommended further investigation into the drivers and barriers of Pentecostal church growth (Okendo, 2018; Keita, 2019). The purpose of this study is to undertake an in-depth analysis of the risk and protective factors to church growth in Kenya by drawing from the experiences and insights of leaders of selected Pentecostal churches in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Church growth has been widely studied across different contexts, with scholars identifying key factors that contribute to expansion or decline (Flatt et al., 2018; Vermeer & Scheepers, 2021; Lilleorg & Murakas, 2024; An, 2019; Budijanto, 2020; Ferreira & Chipenyu, 2021; Awuku-Gyampoh & Asare, 2019). This stream of literature offers broad insights concerning various drivers and inhibitors of church growth. However, they provide limited consensus with respect to the factors that are most salient across various cultural contexts. Thus, the manifestation of the factors in African Pentecostal churches owing to the unique socioeconomic context remains a question.

Charles (2020) examined key predictors of church growth in the Greater New York Conference, identifying leadership effectiveness, member engagement, and strategic evangelism as strong protective factors, while poor leadership, lack of community involvement, and inadequate discipleship programs emerged as risk factors. The study emphasized aligning church activities with contemporary social needs while maintaining doctrinal integrity. However, it was limited to North America. This contextual limitation presents a gap in making sense of whether similar protective and risk factors apply in regions like Kenya, where social needs and doctrinal priorities may differ remarkably. Thus, there is value in exploring how local leaders interpret and respond to these dynamics.

Similarly, Flatt, Haskell, and Burgoyne (2018) explored church growth and decline within North American mainline Protestant churches, finding that conservative theological beliefs, active evangelism, and strong leadership were associated with growth, while theological liberalism, lack of outreach, and societal secularization contributed to decline. Unlike Charles (2020), who emphasized internal church structures, Flatt et al. (2018) highlighted a divide in attribution, where growing churches credited internal agency, whereas declining churches blamed external secular pressures. However, this study was also confined to a specific denominational context, and did not include measurable growth patterns. This points to the need for studies that not only account for theological orientation but also examine how Pentecostal churches in Kenya balance internal agency with external societal pressures, particularly in a rapidly modernizing society.

Building on the theme of leadership, Keita (2019) examined leadership styles in Alexandria and Springfield, Virginia, demonstrating that transformational leadership fostered church expansion, while authoritarian and laissez-faire leadership styles led to disengagement and stagnation. While agreeing with Charles (2020) on the importance of leadership, Keita (2019) went further in highlighting the necessity of adaptive and relational leadership. However, the study was geographically limited and did not fully account for external sociocultural influences. In light of the intricate interplay of culture and leadership in Kenya, it is necessary to explore how church leaders adapt their leadership styles to local expectations while maintaining growth-oriented strategies.

Further expanding the discussion on leadership, Jordan (2019) studied leadership factors in North Carolina's Churches of God, identifying visionary leadership, strong pastoral care, and active community outreach as protective factors, whereas poor conflict management, lack of strategic planning, and resistance to change were risk factors. Unlike Keita (2019), who emphasized transformational leadership, Jordan (2019) underscored

adaptability in leadership responses to contemporary challenges. However, this study was contextually confined to a specific denomination. This suggests that while adaptability is universally acknowledged as vital, its application within the Kenyan Pentecostal context may require tailoring to address localized challenges such as ethnic diversity and economic limitations.

Shifting the focus to Europe, Vermeer and Scheepers (2021) investigated church growth in the Netherlands, emphasizing strong community bonds, dynamic worship experiences, and a clear moral framework as protective factors. They found that societal secularization, negative perceptions of institutionalized religion, and generational decline hindered growth. Compared to the American studies, Vermeer and Scheepers (2021) focused more on individual motivations rather than internal church structures. However, their reliance on self-reported motivations may have limited insights into deeper sociocultural drivers. On the other hand, studying Pentecostal churches in Kenya may reveal the extent to which collective community identity, rather than individual motivation, sustains church growth amid shifting societal values.

Similarly, Lilleorg and Murakas (2024) analyzed growing churches in Eastern Europe, identifying strong community engagement, effective leadership, and dynamic worship experiences as protective factors. Conversely, rigid traditionalism, weak pastoral leadership, and lack of youth involvement hindered expansion. Their findings aligned with Vermeer and Scheepers (2021) on the importance of community bonds but differed in their emphasis on measurable growth indicators rather than theological or cultural dynamics. However, their reliance on quantitative analysis may have overlooked nuanced qualitative factors. This underscores the need for a qualitative investigative in Kenya that draws insights from the lived experiences and perceptions of church leaders navigating growth within culturally diverse congregations.

Looking at church growth in Asia, an (2019) proposed an alternative mission paradigm centered on spiritual and structural renewal. The study identified contextualized evangelism, holistic discipleship, and community-oriented mission strategies as protective factors, while reliance on numerical growth alone, neglect of discipleship, and rigid traditionalism were risk factors. Unlike the European studies, which focused on sociocultural adaptation, an (2019) emphasized mission strategy and theological renewal. However, the study lacked empirical validation, limiting its practical applicability. For Kenyan Pentecostal churches, exploring how contextualized evangelism and discipleship intersect with local cultural practices could provide deeper insights into sustainable growth models.

In a similar vein, Budijanto (2020) explored discipleship's role in church growth in Indonesia, finding that intentional discipleship, strong biblical teaching, and active small groups fostered growth, while numerical expansion without spiritual depth, weak follow-up, and leadership disengagement in discipleship hindered it. Compared to an (2019), Budijanto (2020) provided a stronger empirical basis but remained contextually limited to Indonesia and did not account for broader sociocultural influences. This raises the question of how Kenyan churches balance discipleship with numerical growth pressures, particularly given their cultural orientation characterized communal lifestyles.

Turning to Africa, Ferreira and Chipenyu (2021) examined church decline from a structural and spiritual perspective, identifying weak discipleship, ineffective leadership, and diminishing scriptural authority as key risk factors. Protective factors included strong doctrinal teaching, intentional community engagement, and adaptive leadership. Unlike previous studies, Ferreira and Chipenyu (2021) emphasized that church vitality should be measured by both attendance and spiritual depth. This dual focus aligns closely with the concerns of Kenyan Pentecostal churches about spiritual depth alongside visible growth metrics.

Similarly, Awuku-Gyampoh and Asare (2019) analyzed church governance in Africa, finding that strong leadership accountability, transparent financial management, and structured administration fostered growth, while poor governance and financial mismanagement led to decline. Their study focused more on institutional frameworks than discipleship or community engagement, differing from both Ferreira and Chipenyu (2021) and Budijanto (2020). This points to a gap in understanding how governance, discipleship, and community outreach collectively influence church growth in Kenya, thus providing the impetus for the following study.

On a related note, Asamoah (2018) examined pastoral counseling's impact on church growth, emphasizing

emotional and spiritual support as key protective factors. Unlike Awuku-Gyampoh and Asare (2019), who focused on governance, Asamoah (2018) prioritized member well-being and retention. However, the study was a literature review without empirical validation. Thus, empirical inquiry into how pastoral care directly impacts growth in Kenyan contexts is essential.

In Kenya, multiple studies have examined church growth determinants and barriers. Ng'ang'a (2023) explored stakeholder influence in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), finding that active engagement and inclusive decision-making fostered growth, while poor communication and leadership conflicts hindered it. Similarly, Ouma (2024) studied strategic leadership in Evangelical Alliance of Kenya churches, identifying visionary leadership and mentorship as protective factors, while lack of planning and resistance to change were risk factors. Likewise, Juma (2019) investigated fellowship groups in Africa Gospel Churches, emphasizing peer support and structured discipleship as growth drivers, whereas weak leadership and internal conflicts hindered expansion. Additionally, Lairangi et al. (2024) examined economic sustainability in the Methodist Church, finding financial accountability and income-generating projects beneficial, while mismanagement and external funding dependence were detrimental. Collectively, these Kenyan studies align in highlighting leadership effectiveness and structured discipleship as critical to growth but differ in their focus on economic sustainability and stakeholder engagement. However, their reliance on case study approaches limits broader generalizability. This gap underscores the need for an in-depth qualitative study on church growth risk and protective factors using interviews to capture diverse perspectives and contextual nuances.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design, utilizing in-depth interviews to explore church growth risk and protective factors. This approach allowed for a detailed examination of leadership, governance, and structural challenges that influenced church expansion. Through open-ended discussions, participants provided rich insights into their lived experiences, facilitating a deeper understanding of the underlying issues affecting Pentecostal church growth (Bearman, 2019).

The target population consisted of 19 Pentecostal churches across five neighboring counties in Kenya: Meru, Tharaka-Nithi, Laikipia, Embu, and Nyeri. The 19 churches are: Africa Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (AIPCA), Deliverance Church, East Africa Pentecostal Churches (EAPC), Family Worship Church, Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK), Full Gospel Churches of Kenya (FGCK), Full Grace Church, Jesus House of Prayer, Kenya Assemblies of God (KAG), Miracle Revival Fellowship Pentecostal Church, Outreach Gospel Church, Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG), Pentecostal Church of East Africa, Pentecostal Evangelistic Fellowship of Africa (PEFA), Redeemed Gospel Church (RGC) Inc., Revival Christian Center, The Burning Bush Church, The Prophetic Prayer Worship Church, and Word of Faith Church. These churches were purposively selected as their historical roots trace to classical Pentecostalism.

Each church was represented by one interviewee. Thus, the total sample was 19 participants purposively selected due to their significant leadership experience and firsthand knowledge of church operations. This ensured that the data collected reflected diverse perspectives of those who contributed to shaping the church's growth trajectory. The participants comprised experienced church leaders. Their ages varied widely, with most falling within middle to late adulthood. In terms of ministry experience, the majority had served for over two decades, and the longest spanned more than five decades. They held diverse leadership roles, including general overseers, bishops, pastors, and reverends, with some overseeing numerous congregations. Most were affiliated with Pentecostal denominations and operated in various regions across Kenya. Many had actively participated in church planting, collectively establishing numerous churches, while others played a significant role in leadership training and capacity-building initiatives.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. By engaging participants in open-ended discussions, the study captured nuanced perspectives that might not have emerged in standardized survey-based research (Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2021). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed for probing deeper into emerging themes, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research problem. Research procedures included securing informed consent from participants. All interviews were recorded and

transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis. Data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2017) thematic analysis approach, involving familiarization with the data, coding, theme identification, and interpretation.

A key limitation of the study – in retrospect – is that while the study identifies both poor leadership and financial constraints as risk factors for church growth, it does not explicitly demonstrate how they interact. Poor leadership may result in mismanagement of church funds, lack of financial transparency, or failure to implement sustainable financial strategies, thereby exacerbating financial constraints. Furthermore, congregants may be less inclined to contribute financially if they perceive leadership as lacking integrity or misusing resources. Given that most Pentecostal churches struggle to outgrow their smallness, a future study should specifically focus on how leadership affect financial growth, and to what extent financial constraint is attributable to the leadership of the church.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the key findings on factors influencing church growth, categorized into protective and risk factors. The results are based on qualitative responses from church leaders and members, providing insights into both enablers and barriers to church expansion.

Church Growth Protective Factors

The analysis identified evangelism and outreach, record-keeping, training and discipleship programs, church expansion through new branches, integrity in leadership, unified organizational commitment, and work specialization as critical contributors to numerical and spiritual church growth. Evangelism and outreach emerged as fundamental, with structured follow-up mechanisms enhancing member retention. Additionally, record-keeping and tracking systems ensured accountability in membership trends. Training and discipleship programs strengthened spiritual development, while opening new branches improved accessibility. Integrity among leaders fostered trust, and a shared sense of mission among members facilitated unity and participation. Furthermore, specialization in church operations enhanced efficiency and effectiveness. Each of these themes are presented and discussed in turn as follows:

Theme #1: Evangelism and Outreach

Evangelism and outreach emerged as fundamental contributors to numerical church growth. Respondents underscored the necessity of well-organized evangelistic campaigns, structured follow-up mechanisms, and deliberate teaching of Scripture to ensure sustainable expansion. This is illustrated in the following direct statements:

Respondent #1: "Any time you focus on evangelism growth, increase in number is certain. We have a follow-up department... This has helped us to know how many people have joined the church."

Respondent #10: "One of the things I have done is evangelism and teaching the church. Growing the church in terms of the word."

Respondent #13: "We have a system, a departmental system called follow-up and outreach. Its work is evangelism, outreach, and follow-up."

Respondent #20: "The church is growing through revival and evangelism meetings. We praise God for that."

It can be surmised from the foregoing results that church growth is a function of structured evangelism – where systematic follow up of the evangelized constitutes a core strategy for numerical increase. These findings align with Church Fuel (2023), which highlights evangelism as a pivotal factor in increasing church membership. The emphasis on structured outreach and follow-up systems supports Mbugua's (2013) argument that these efforts are essential for sustained church growth. Furthermore, the role of evangelism in attracting new

members corresponds with Earls (2023), who stressed the importance of outreach initiatives in expanding church membership. Additionally, the significance of revival meetings, as highlighted by respondents, reinforces Paas' (2018) assertion that such gatherings play a crucial role in fostering growth.

Theme #2: Record Keeping and Tracking Membership

The ability to track numerical growth was linked to effective record-keeping practices, including visitor logs, membership registries, and systems for monitoring new and departing members. This theme is reflected in the following verbatim responses:

Respondent #1: "We are able to tell when one has left the church so that we can follow that person... By so doing, we are able to reach those people."

Respondent #2: "We keep record. I have a visitor's book... We also welcome them for a brief fellowship after the service."

Respondent #6: "Every time we receive new members, we have a record."

Respondent #13: "We register them and keep record... We keep checking the rate of entry and the rate of exit."

Respondent #20: "We keep a record because of those who are getting saved, and we have seen God's hand working."

It can be inferred from the qualitative insights that documentation and membership tracking constitute a key approach to processing and ramping up increase in church membership and participation. These findings support Paas (2018), who identified record-keeping as an essential tool for tracking and sustaining church growth. The respondents' practices align with Mbugua's (2013) emphasis on administrative efficiency as a critical factor in church expansion. Additionally, systematic monitoring of church attendance and membership aligns with Paas and Vos (2016), who stressed that structured tracking enhances a church's ability to maintain steady growth. The emphasis on organization and data management reflects best practices in church administration, as outlined in church growth literature.

Theme #3: Training and Discipleship Programs

Respondents emphasized that structured teaching, discipleship initiatives, and leadership training are instrumental in both retaining members and fostering numerical growth. These programs were specifically designed for new believers and leadership teams to ensure spiritual development and long-term commitment. The following statements illustrate this theme:

Respondent #10: "I so much believe that one of the ways of growing the church is in terms of teaching... I study a lot. I have also a degree in bachelor of theology."

Respondent #13: "We put them into what we call new believers program so that we train them for 13 weeks... After this, they are put into the membership register."

Respondent #15: "We are trying to bring people together through Bible teachings, through fellowships, and home fellowship."

As revealed in the verbatim responses, it is reasonable to argue that the churches are alive to the fact that evangelism alone is not adequate, that for holistic church growth is to be realized, a program of discipleship through onboarding and equipping of new believers is essential. These findings resonate with Earls (2023), who underscored the importance of discipleship and leadership development in ensuring both spiritual and numerical growth. The focus on structured teaching and discipleship aligns with Paas (2018), who advocated for a combination of evangelism and mentorship as essential components of church expansion. Additionally, respondents' emphasis on equipping believers through organized training programs supports Mbugua's (2013)

assertion that leadership development plays a crucial role in church sustainability. This perspective highlights the importance of spiritual formation as a foundation for long-term growth, as emphasized in church growth literature.

Theme #4: New Branches and Congregations

The establishment of new branches and smaller congregations closer to members' residences was identified as a strategy for increasing accessibility and expanding church membership. The qualitative responses below illustrate this approach:

Respondent #6: "Recently, I have opened a new church – I saw there was a need because some people (my members) were coming from very far."

Respondent #13: "In the process of my study, I was able to open 5 branches... Apart from the assemblies that meet here at the headquarters, branches in the outskirts are also growing."

Respondent #19: "We have congregations in Rongata Rongai, Kitengela, Juja, Nyeri, Narumoro, and Laikipia."

The foregoing insights points the notion of new assembly creation and development as a way of expanding outreach and deepening access. These findings align with Paas and Vos (2016), who identified church planting and expansion as effective methods for increasing church membership. The respondents' accounts of opening new branches to reach distant members reflect Paas (2018), who emphasized the importance of establishing new congregations to broaden a church's impact. Additionally, the approach of creating multiple locations for accessibility aligns with Burke (2020), who asserted that church expansion is a key strategy for fostering membership growth, particularly in geographically diverse regions. This perspective reinforces the idea that church planting is a practical method for extending influence and driving numerical increase.

Theme #5: Integrity

Participants emphasized that integrity is fundamental to effective leadership, fostering trust, credibility, and adherence to spiritual values. Leaders who embody integrity demonstrate accountability both to God and to their congregation, serving as exemplary figures of faith-based leadership. This virtue cultivates confidence and loyalty among church members, forming a solid foundation for continued growth and stability. Furthermore, integrity acts as a safeguard against ethical and moral lapses, ensuring leaders remain committed to their divine calling. The following verbatim statements illustrate this perspective:

"If a leader lacks integrity, people lose faith in the vision." (Respondent #6)

"The goal is to please God who gave you the work." (Respondent #8)

"Accountability to God is critical as He is the ultimate judge of one's ministry." (Respondent #10)

"Leaders must maintain a 'different spirit' from the world, serving wholeheartedly." (Respondent #11)

"Your actions as a leader speak louder than your words." (Respondent #17)

That integrity was identified by respondents as a protective factor to church growth is an indication that the conduct and ethics of the church leader plays a salient role in the church growth equation. As highlighted in the findings, integrity fosters trust, accountability, and adherence to spiritual values, all of which are pivotal for church expansion. This aligns with Shambaugh (2019), who argues that integrity is essential for trust-building in leadership. Additionally, Huberts (2017) defines integrity as the alignment of actions with principles,

reinforcing the respondents' perspectives. Similarly, Fuerst & Luetge (2021) assert that integrity bolsters credibility and ensures organizational stability and ethical coherence.

Theme #6: Unified Organizational Commitment

A shared dedication to the church's mission, grounded in biblical teachings, emerged as a recurring theme. Respondents underscored the significance of fostering a sense of belonging and responsibility among members. Unified participation in evangelism, pastoral care, and leadership facilitated steady growth, while challenges such as economic constraints were addressed collectively through innovative approaches. This was reflected in the following verbatim remarks:

"When members know that their pastor knows them by their names, it encourages them."
(Respondent #2)

"The administration is well, so there is also great unity." (Respondent #11)

"We keep checking the rate of entry and the rate of exit to see how they are comparing because if the rate of exit is higher than the rate of joining, then the church is in danger of going down or even closing up." (Respondent #13)

"As leaders, we should do all that is possible to reach [children] and retain them in the church so that they can grow up in the way they shall be taught in the church." (Respondent #14)

"We see that everybody is feeling that he or she owns the church." (Respondent #15)

"The church is growing through revival and evangelism meetings. We praise God for that."
(Respondent #20)

It can be inferred from the foregoing that viewpoints that pastoral role of the clergy takes center-stage as one of the hallmarks that foster emotional attachment and commitment in growth-oriented churches. The respondents' views align with Bhat (2023) and Mueller & Straatmann (2014), who highlight that organizational commitment arises from deep psychological attachment. The emphasis on fostering belonging and ownership mirrors the concept of affective commitment (Bhat, 2023). Additionally, the sense of unity expressed by respondents reflects the collective organizational commitment described by Chilliah et al. (2015), wherein members collaborate towards a shared vision. Further, Herrera & Heras-Rosas (2021) affirm that commitment significantly influences organizational success.

Theme #7: Work Specialization

Specialized roles and tasks were evident in church operations, with designated responsibilities such as evangelism, teaching, record-keeping, and visitor management assigned according to individual skills and callings. This structured approach ensured essential aspects of church administration were efficiently managed, facilitating growth. Some verbatim statements include:

"We have a structure that has been working in this church. We have a follow-up department. In the follow-up departments, there are data." (Respondent #1)

"One of the things I have done is evangelism and teaching the church. Growing the church in terms of the word." (Respondent #10)

"Those who get saved here in the church collaborate with another department called public relations and visitors' welfare...We also keep record of those who have been baptized. Then after that, we put them into what we call new believers program so that we train them for 13 weeks." (Respondent #13)

"We keep a record because of those who are getting saved, and we have seen God's hand working." (Respondent #20)

The notion of work specialization, as established in the qualitative analysis spotlights the role of organization structure. It is clear from the verbatim comments that structure, as reflected in departmentalization promotes work specialization that enhances efficiency in the advancement of the Great Commission. The findings support Adeyoyin & Isau (2013), who advocate for division of labor to improve efficiency. The focus on specialized functions, such as evangelism and record-keeping, mirrors the benefits of task specialization in optimizing operations (Adeyoyin & Isau, 2013). Moreover, Madieto et al. (2019) argue that specialized roles foster skill development and enhance organizational performance.

Church Growth Risk Factors

Despite the identified growth enablers, challenges such as poor leadership and financial constraints emerged as significant obstacles. Leadership issues – including lack of discipline, teamwork, and integrity – hindered progress, while conflicts among pastors weakened cohesion. Financial limitations constrained ministry activities, infrastructure development, and outreach efforts, requiring innovative solutions to sustain church operations. These two themes of poor leadership and financial constraints are analyzed and discussed thus:

Theme #1: Poor Leadership

Deficiencies in leadership emerged as a major impediment, encompassing issues such as lack of discipline, integrity, humility, and teamwork among church leaders. Respondents emphasized that leaders' behavior significantly influences church growth, with conflicts, absenteeism, and isolated leadership styles hampering progress. Additionally, disputes among pastors and denominational competition created distrust and division, undermining the church's mission. The following verbatim statements illustrate this concern:

"Mostly what makes the church not to grow can be blamed on the pastor. The pastor needs to be disciplined and to have integrity. Another hindrance to growth is lack of finances. Also, the lifestyle of a pastor can cause stagnation of the church, especially how he relates with members." (Respondent #2)

"Leaders working in solitary is a big obstacle to the growth of the church. When they are united, the church grows." (Respondent #4)

"No humility, pride from leaders are great obstacles. Also, lack of being a team member." (Respondent #19)

"Sometimes it is because some may feel like their opinions are neglected, also failing to work with other leaders." (Respondent #7)

"Pastors fighting over members, transfer of members from the church of pastor A to the church of Pastor B, this is a hindrance for it brings animosity among pastors." (Respondent #17)

The findings suggests that accountability for stunted church growth, or its deterioration rests on the pastor in charge. This underscores the importance of competence and integrity in leadership. These findings resonate with Thiga et al. (2021) and Gathuki (2015), who identified leadership conflicts as a hindrance to church growth. The concerns regarding discipline, humility, and teamwork reflect challenges noted by Dreyer (2012) and Matisi (2020). Furthermore, Irawati (2021) underscores that leadership style significantly influences church expansion. The detrimental impact of competition and mistrust among leaders aligns with Nyakundi & Ayako (2020), who reported that such disputes negatively affect membership retention.

Theme #2: Financial Constraints

Limited financial resources were repeatedly mentioned as a barrier to fulfilling ministry objectives. Respondents pointed out that financial constraints restricted outreach initiatives, infrastructure development, and the acquisition of essential equipment. Despite congregants' tithes and offerings, economic hardships and shifting priorities hindered financial sustainability. Leaders advocated for innovative approaches such as self-sustaining initiatives and increased faith in divine provision. Notable verbatim statements include:

"Like now there are a lot of places I want to reach, a lot of things I want to do, but you find there are limitations of finances." (Respondent #2)

"Money is never enough... we rely on fundraisers to do some major projects." (Respondent #5)

"It has come a time when Pentecostals should think outside the box and think about self-financing. Also, think about divine provision and supply." (Respondent #13)

It can be deduced from the financial constraint theme that external forces such as economic conditions temper the rate and prospect of church growth. The respondents' concerns align with Longhurst et al. (2022) and Worancha (2018), who identified financial limitations as a significant barrier to church expansion. Additionally, Chua et al. (2017) and Bohr & Hughes (2021) highlight poverty as a factor that affects congregational contributions, further reinforcing these findings.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study highlights several key protective and risk factors influencing church growth. Among the protective factors, evangelism and outreach were identified as key drivers of increasing church membership, emphasizing structured follow-up mechanisms and revival meetings. Additionally, effective record-keeping and tracking of membership ensure sustained growth by facilitating targeted engagement with both new and departing members. Training and discipleship programs further reinforce retention and spiritual development, creating a solid foundation for leadership and community cohesion. The establishment of new branches and congregations enhances accessibility and broadens the church's reach, aligning with strategic church expansion models. Moreover, integrity in leadership fosters trust and credibility, while unified organizational commitment strengthens member participation. Work specialization within the church ensures efficiency in administration, evangelism, and pastoral care, contributing to overall growth and stability.

Conversely, weaknesses in leadership were identified as a stumbling block to church growth. Leadership deficiencies – including lack of discipline, teamwork, and humility – were identified as major impediments, leading to conflicts, diminished trust, and stagnation. Furthermore, denominational competition and disputes among pastors weaken unity, negatively impacting membership retention. Financial constraints limit evangelistic efforts, infrastructure development, and essential church programs, making it challenging to sustain long-term expansion. Despite these challenges, innovative self-sustaining financial models and faith-based financial management strategies were suggested as potential solutions. The findings emphasize the importance of strong leadership, structured administrative practices, and sustainable financial strategies to ensure continuous church growth and resilience against risks.

Church leaders should prioritize structured evangelism and outreach efforts by implementing organized follow-up systems and revival meetings to sustain church growth. Leadership integrity, teamwork, and accountability must be upheld to foster trust and unity among members. Additionally, financial sustainability should be enhanced through innovative self-sustaining initiatives and prudent financial management to overcome resource constraints. Expanding through strategic church planting and fostering work specialization will further strengthen administrative efficiency and spiritual impact. Church members should actively participate in evangelism, discipleship programs, and church activities to contribute to both numerical and spiritual growth. Upholding unity and commitment to the church's mission will enhance collective ownership and organizational stability. Members should also support church financial sustainability through faithful tithing, offerings, and engaging in income-generating initiatives that reduce dependence on external fundraising efforts. Research on innovative financial models for churches, including self-sustaining initiatives and digital giving platforms, would provide valuable insights for addressing financial constraints in ministry.

REFERENCES

1. An, P. S. O. (2019). An alternative mission paradigm for healthy church growth. *Great Commission Research Journal*, 10(2), 8-29.
2. Asamoah, G. (2018). Impact of Pastoral Counseling and Care on Church Growth: A Literature Review and Conceptual Framework Development. *Interdisciplinary Research Journal of Theology, Apologetics, Natural & Social Sciences*, 1(1), 1-33.
3. Awuku-Gyampoh, R. K., & Asare, A. O. (2019). Assessing the impact of good governance, church management and structure on the growth and development of the church. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 14(4), 99.
4. Bearman, M. (2019). Eliciting rich data: A practical approach to writing semi-structured interview schedules. *Focus on Health Professional Education: A Multi-Professional Journal*, 20(3), 1-11.
5. Bohr, M., & Hughes, P. (2021). Why Gen Y are leaving Hillsong and other Pentecostal churches. *Journal of Contemporary Ministry*, (5), 10-30.
6. Camacho, T. (2024). The spirit of change: Pentecostals and political engagement in the post-dictatorial Southern Cone in South America (Sociology senior capstone, Taylor University). Pillars at Taylor University.
7. Campbel, I., & Bickle, B. (2012). Natural church development: An Introduction. Christoph Schalk. <https://www.ncd.international.org/>
8. Castelo, D. (2017). Pentecostalism as a Christian mystical tradition. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
9. Charles, R. J. M. (2020). Key Predictors of Church Growth in Greater New York Conference (Doctoral dissertation, Universidad de Montemorelos (Mexico)).
10. Chua, L. L., Mirafuentea, J. K. A., & Etcuban, J. O. (2017). Socio-historical study on the rise and growth of Pentecostal churches. *Journal of Asian Development*, 3(2), 120-145.
11. Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. *The journal of positive psychology*, 12(3), 297-298.
12. Ferreira, I. W., & Chipenyu, W. (2021). Church decline: A comparative investigation assessing more than numbers. In *die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi*, 55(1), 2645.
13. Flatt, K. N., Haskell, D. M., & Burgoyne, S. (2018). Secularization and attribution: How mainline Protestant clergy and congregants explain church growth and decline. *Sociology of Religion*, 79(1), 78-107.
14. Giffard, P. A. (2019). Leadership and church growth: The case of chuck smith. *Great Commission Research Journal*, 11(1), 76-93.
15. Henard, B. (2018). A surviving church is a dying church. *Lifeway Christian Resources*, 1-6 <https://research.lifeway.com/>
16. Jennings, M. A. C. (2020). Great risk for the kingdom: Pentecostal-Charismatic growth churches, pastorpreneurs, and neoliberalism. In *Religion and Theology: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice* (pp. 160-172). IGI Global.
17. Jirasek, M., & Bilek, J. (2018). The organizational life cycle: Review and future agenda. *Quality Innovation Prosperity*, 22(3), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.12776/QIP.V22I3.1177>
18. Jordan, H. (2019). Leadership factors that influence church growth for Western North Carolina Churches of God (Doctoral thesis, Liberty University).
19. Juma, D. K. (2019). The role of Fellowship Groups in Church development in Kenya: a case of Africa Gospel Churches in Ainamoi Sub-County, Kericho County, Kenya (Doctoral dissertation, St Paul's University).
20. Kärkkäinen, V. M. (2018). Mission in Pentecostal theology. *International Review of Mission*, 107(1), 5-22.
21. Kay, W. K. (2023). Pentecostals, Church Growth, and Church Planting. *Anglicans and Pentecostals in Dialogue*, 255.
22. Keita, Y. (2019). Leadership styles and their impact on church growth in Alexandria and Springfield, Virginia. Walden Dissertation and Doctoral Collection. <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertaions>
23. Keita, Y. (2019). Leadership styles and their impact on church growth in Alexandria and Springfield, Virginia. Walden University.

24. Lairangi, J. K., Kinoti, M., & Njoroge, J. (2024). Influence of Sustainability of Spiritual-Economic Projects on Growth of Methodist Church in Kaaga Synod, Kenya. *International Journal of Professional Practice*, 12(4), 29-40.
25. Lilleorg, A., & Murakas, R. (2024). Characteristics of Growing Churches. *Quantitative Analysis. Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, 44(7), 2.
26. Longhurst, J. (2022). Evangelical decline may be down to categorization. *The Free Press Newsletter*. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/>
27. Mock, P., Dies, M., Joslin, J., & Dettmann, J. (Eds.) (2018). Algeria steps up restrictions against Christians: The Pneuma Review. *Journal of Ministry Resources and Theology for Pentecostal and Charismatic Ministries & Leaders*. <https://pneumareview.com/>
28. Mwila, V. (2018). The case for discipleship: Parameters and standards of measuring church growth and church establishment in the city of Kabwe-Zambia. (Publication No. 43215261)
29. Ng'ang'a, R. W. K. (2023). The influence of stakeholders' on church growth in Kenya: A case of Presbyterian Church of East Africa in Milimani South Presbytery, Nairobi (Doctoral dissertation, Africa Nazarene University).
30. Njiru, S., & Warue, B. (2019). Factors affecting numerical growth of Pentecostal churches in Embu West sub-county. *The University Journal*, 1(3), 189-210. <https://daea.or.ke/>
31. Nzenge, D. M., Gathogo, N., & Kamunyu, R. (2021). The effect of internal team environment on church growth in Pentecostal churches in Kenya. *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies*, 9(6), 158–167. <https://doi.org/10.24940/theijhss/2021/v9/i6/HS2106-050>
32. Ojo, M. A. (2018). Pentecostalism and charismatic movements in Nigeria: Factors of growth and inherent challenges. *The WATS Journal: An Online Journal from West Africa Theological Seminary*, 3(1), 5.
33. Okendo, F. O. (2018). Role of organizational structure in firm growth among Pentecostal churches in Nairobi County, Kenya. (Master's Thesis: Daystar University).
34. Osborne, N., & Grant-Smith, D. (2021). In-depth interviewing. In *Methods in urban analysis* (pp. 105-125). Singapore: Springer Singapore.
35. Ouma, E. O. (2024). Strategic Leadership Elements and Growth of Selected Churches Affiliated with Evangelical Alliance of Kenya in Nairobi City County, Kenya (Doctoral dissertation, Kenyatta University).
36. Percy, M. (2020). "Your Church Can Grow!"—A Contextual Theological Critique of Megachurches. In *Handbook of Megachurches* (pp. 103-127). Brill.
37. Randall, R. (2021). Pentecostals lead the world in conversions, but not in US missions. *Christianity Today*, 1-8 <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/>
38. Stolz, J., & Favre, O. (2019). Growth and decline of evangelicals, fundamentalists, Pentecostals, and charismatics in Switzerland 1970–2013. *Journal for the scientific study of religion*, 58(3), 604-625.
39. Vermeer, P., & Scheepers, P. (2021). Church growth in times of secularization: A case study of people joining evangelical congregations in the Netherlands. *Review of Religious Research*, 63(1), 43-66.