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**Impact of the Church on Society: A Case of Churches in Embakasi Sub-County of
Nairobi, Kenya**

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to evaluate the impact of churches in Embakasi Sub-County, Nairobi, on the local population. Specifically, it assesses church sizes relative to the population, effectiveness of evangelistic and discipleship programs, and the factors influencing church growth and health.

Methodology: A descriptive research design was used, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. A sample of 133 churches was selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and interviews, and analyzed through descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses.

Findings: The study found that churches in Embakasi Sub-County have a predominantly young and female congregation. Larger churches with well-developed discipleship programs demonstrated a greater community impact. Discipleship programs were found to be the most significant positive influencer of societal impact, while numerical growth showed a weaker correlation.

Unique contribution to theory, practice, and policy: This study highlights the importance of qualitative church growth through effective discipleship programs over numerical expansion. The findings offer practical insights for church leaders to enhance community engagement and spiritual development.

Keywords: *Church Growth, Discipleship Programs, Community Impact*

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INTRODUCTION

The central mandate of the Christian Church is the Great Commission, which Jesus Christ instructed before His ascension. The Great Commission involves making disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey His teachings. These tasks are fulfilled through evangelism and discipleship. Effective discipleship programs are critical for preparing believers to carry out this mandate by equipping them to be “salt” and “light” to the world, as described in biblical teachings (Holman Christian Standard Bible, 2010).

Since the Day of Pentecost, the Christian Church has experienced significant spiritual and numerical growth, even in times of persecution and testing. Church growth theories generally focus on either societal factors or internal church dynamics to identify what promotes or hinders growth (Bretherton & Dunbar, 2020). Theories such as the Church Growth Movement, pioneered by Donald McGavran in the 1950s, emphasize overcoming numerical plateaus, which are attendance thresholds that congregations struggle to surpass (McIntosh, 2009; Schaller, 1993).

According to Mann (1998), churches experience "plateau zones" at various stages of growth, where they encounter significant challenges in transitioning to the next size. This situation can create confusion and anxiety among church leaders. On the other hand, Warren (1995) argues that the key issue for churches in the 21st century is not growth, but health. A healthy church, he suggests, is one that transforms both its members and the surrounding community.

In his reflection on church health, Stott (1999) emphasized that the Church's mission extends beyond evangelism to social responsibility. A church survey conducted in Nairobi, Kenya, also indicated that church health—defined as fulfilling God's purpose and mission—should precede numerical growth (Wang'ombe, 2006). It is only when a church is spiritually healthy that it can effectively contribute to the Great Commission. This study aims to evaluate the transformational impact of churches in Embakasi Sub-County on both their congregants and the external community. The internal impact will focus on church programs and doctrinal teaching, while the external impact will measure outreach efforts and numerical growth, emphasizing that church health should be prioritized over size.

Problem Statement

Despite significant efforts in evangelistic and discipleship programs over the last two years, the NIBC Nairobi Church (Bethel Worship Centre) has faced stagnant numerical growth, with attendance fluctuating between 70 and 100 congregants. This stagnation persists despite the church's investment in outreach programs designed to expand the congregation and win souls for the Kingdom of God. The lack of substantial numerical growth raises questions about the overall effectiveness of these evangelistic and discipleship efforts, not only for NIBC Nairobi Church but potentially for other churches in Embakasi Sub-County as well. This study aims to evaluate whether the slow growth observed at NIBC Nairobi Church is an isolated issue or a widespread challenge among other churches in Embakasi.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing research on the impact of churches on society provides essential insights into factors influencing church growth, effectiveness, and overall health. Studies have explored the relationship between church size and ministry effectiveness, particularly regarding the resources available to larger churches that allow for more comprehensive discipleship and outreach programs (Vecchiarelli, 2018; Barna Group, 2015). Smaller churches, while limited

in resources, may offer more intimate, personalized ministry approaches that foster spiritual growth and community engagement.

Discipleship programs are central to church vitality. Well-structured programs, including small group ministries and mentorship initiatives, significantly contribute to spiritual growth, engagement, and member retention (Barna, 2019; Wilkins, 2010). Research emphasizes the importance of contextualizing discipleship to the needs of the congregation, combining biblical teachings with practical application (Putman & Harrington, 2013).

Numerical growth remains a critical focus in church research. While some churches in the U.S. experience declining memberships, others, particularly Pentecostal and charismatic churches in sub-Saharan Africa, have seen rapid growth due to their emphasis on personal transformation and spiritual empowerment (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2015). Internal factors like leadership and discipleship, and external factors like demographic and socio-economic changes, shape the growth trajectories of churches (Atkins, 2018).

The health and growth of churches are also influenced by leadership quality, community engagement, and the ability to adapt to societal trends (Roozen & Nieman, 2005). In growing churches, factors such as strong preaching, lay participation, and social outreach initiatives play a significant role in sustaining long-term vitality (Thumma & Travis, 2007; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a descriptive research design to assess the impact of churches in Embakasi Sub-County, Nairobi. A mixed-method approach was employed, with quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires targeting 133 churches, selected using stratified random sampling from a population of 200. The questionnaire gathered information on church size, growth trends, discipleship programs, and community engagement. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses to identify key factors influencing church growth and health. Qualitative insights from interviews and observations were used to enrich the findings. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, with participants' confidentiality ensured, and informed consent obtained prior to data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptives

Table 1: Sizes of Churches and Their Effectiveness

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Moderately Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
Our church has a strong and active presence in the Embakasi Sub-County community	5.71%	2.86%	24.29%	40.00%	27.14%	3.8	1.06
Our church's evangelistic and outreach programs are effective in reaching the local community	0.00%	4.29%	25.71%	45.71%	24.29%	3.9	0.82
Our church's discipleship programs are well-attended and successful in nurturing the spiritual growth of our members	2.86%	2.86%	24.29%	40.00%	30.00%	3.91	0.96
The size of our church enables us to have a greater impact on the local community compared to smaller churches	8.57%	14.29%	31.43%	30.00%	15.71%	3.3	1.16
Our church's resources and capacity allow us to offer a wider range of discipleship programs and initiatives	5.71%	18.57%	27.14%	27.14%	21.43%	3.4	1.18
Mean of Means						3.66	1.04

The majority of respondents (67.5%) agreed that their churches have a strong and active presence in the Embakasi Sub-County community, with a mean score of 3.80 and a standard deviation of 1.06, indicating a generally positive consensus. Evangelistic and outreach programs were also well-regarded, with 70.0% of participants affirming their effectiveness, reflected in a mean score of 3.90 and a low standard deviation of 0.82. Discipleship programs were similarly appreciated, with 70.0% of respondents agreeing they effectively nurture spiritual growth, resulting in a mean score of 3.91. However, opinions on church size and its impact on community influence were more divided, with only 45.71% agreeing that larger churches have a greater impact, giving a mean score of 3.30. Finally, 48.57% of respondents agreed that their church has sufficient resources to support a range of discipleship initiatives, though the mean score of 3.40 suggests more variability in perceptions regarding resource adequacy.

Table 2: Assessing Discipleship Programs

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Moderately Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std Dev
Our church has a well-developed and structured discipleship program	2.86%	8.57%	37.14%	22.86%	28.57%	3.66	1.08
Our discipleship programs are effective in helping our members grow in their faith and commitment to the church	0.00%	4.29%	20.00%	35.71%	40.00%	4.11	0.88
Our discipleship programs are tailored to the specific needs and cultural context of our congregation	7.14%	8.57%	40.00%	28.57%	15.71%	3.37	1.08
Our church prioritizes personal mentorship and small group ministries as part of our discipleship approach	1.43%	5.71%	30.00%	20.00%	42.86%	3.97	1.05
Our discipleship programs have contributed to a high level of engagement and spiritual maturity among our members	1.43%	1.43%	17.14%	42.86%	37.14%	4.13	0.85
Mean of Means						3.85	0.99

A majority of 51.43% of respondents agreed that their church has a well-structured discipleship program, but there was some variation in responses, reflected by a mean score of 3.66 and a standard deviation of 1.08. When it came to the effectiveness of these programs in fostering faith and commitment, 75.71% agreed, with a high mean score of 4.11. Tailoring discipleship programs to cultural and congregational needs received moderate agreement (44.28%), with a mean of 3.37, highlighting potential areas for improvement. Personal mentorship and small group ministries were also valued, as 62.86% of participants supported this approach, with a mean score of 3.97. Overall, 77.14% agreed that these discipleship programs contribute significantly to spiritual engagement and maturity, reflected by a strong mean score of 4.13.

Table 3: Assessing the Rate of Numerical Growth

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Moderately Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
Our church has experienced a steady and consistent numerical growth over the past 5-10 years	8.57%	12.86%	35.71%	24.29%	18.57%	3.31	1.17
The growth rate of our church is higher than the average growth rate of other churches in Embakasi Sub-County	8.57%	22.86%	38.57%	14.29%	15.71%	3.06	1.17
Our church's ability to attract and retain new members is a key factor in our numerical growth	2.86%	7.14%	31.43%	34.29%	24.29%	3.7	1.01
The demographic and socio-economic changes in Embakasi Sub-County have positively influenced the growth of our church	2.86%	18.57%	27.14%	31.43%	20.00%	3.47	1.1
Our church's focus on addressing the practical needs of the local community has contributed to our numerical growth	1.43%	12.86%	34.29%	28.57%	22.86%	3.59	1.03
Mean of Means						3.43	1.10

Regarding numerical growth, 43.86% of respondents agreed their church has experienced steady growth over the past 5-10 years, with a mean score of 3.31, reflecting moderate consensus. A slightly larger majority (52.86%) felt their church's growth rate was higher than the average for other churches in the region, giving a mean score of 3.06. Attracting and retaining members was seen as a key factor in growth, with 58.86% agreeing and a strong mean score of 3.70. Respondents also highlighted the impact of demographic and socio-economic changes, with 58.57% agreeing these factors have positively influenced church growth, supported by a mean score of 3.47. Addressing practical community needs was cited as a growth contributor by 57.43%, with a mean score of 3.59, suggesting that community engagement plays a critical role in numerical growth.

Table 4: Factors Influencing Church Growth and Health

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Moderately Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
The quality of our church's leadership is a key factor in our overall growth and health	1.43%	7.14%	15.71%	45.71%	30.00%	3.96	0.94
Our church's ability to adapt to changing societal trends and needs has contributed to our growth and vitality	2.86%	5.71%	25.71%	44.29%	21.43%	3.76	0.95
Our church's engagement with the local community through social outreach and service initiatives has positively impacted our growth	2.86%	8.57%	21.43%	35.71%	31.43%	3.84	1.06
The integration of faith and daily life in our church's teaching and programming has been essential for our members' spiritual growth	1.43%	4.29%	14.29%	40.00%	40.00%	4.13	0.92
The availability of small group ministries and personalized discipleship opportunities has been a key factor in the health and vitality of our church	1.43%	4.29%	17.14%	47.14%	30.00%	4.00	0.88
Mean of Means						3.92	0.95

The quality of church leadership was widely recognized as a key growth factor, with 75.71% of respondents agreeing and a mean score of 3.96, highlighting its critical role in church vitality. Adapting to societal changes was also seen as important, with 66.00% agreeing that this adaptability has positively influenced growth, reflected in a mean score of 3.76. Engagement with the local community through outreach initiatives was supported by 67.14% of respondents, with a mean score of 3.84, indicating that social service efforts contribute to church growth. Integration of faith into daily life was seen as essential by 80.00% of respondents, resulting in the highest mean score of 4.13. Lastly, the availability of small group ministries and personalized discipleship opportunities was agreed upon by 77.14% of respondents, with a mean score of 4.00, showing a strong consensus on the importance of these factors in maintaining church health.

Correlation Analysis

Table 5: Correlation Coefficients

		Sizes of Churches and Their Effectiveness	Assessing Discipleship Programs	Assessing the Rate of Numerical Growth	Impact on Society
Sizes of Churches and Their Effectiveness	Pearson Correlation	1	.659**	.495**	.627**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	70	70	70	70
Assessing Discipleship Programs	Pearson Correlation	.659**	1	.554**	.683**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	70	70	70	70
Assessing the Rate of Numerical Growth	Pearson Correlation	.495**	.554**	1	.456**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	70	70	70	70
Impact on Society	Pearson Correlation	.627**	.683**	.456**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	70	70	70	70

The correlation analysis reveals a strong relationship between church size, effectiveness, and their impact on church growth and health ($r = 0.627$, $p = 0.000$). This supports prior research, such as Vecchiarelli (2018) and the Barna Group (2015), which emphasized that larger churches, due to their resources, are often more effective in implementing outreach and discipleship programs. An even stronger correlation was observed between discipleship programs and church growth and health ($r = 0.683$, $p = 0.000$), aligning with studies by Barna (2019), Wilkins (2010), and Putman and Harrington (2013) on the critical role discipleship plays in spiritual growth and community engagement. A relatively weaker correlation was noted between numerical growth and church health ($r = 0.456$, $p = 0.000$), reinforcing findings by Atkins (2018) and Pew Research Center (2015) that numerical growth is influenced by various factors and is not a standalone measure of church vitality.

Regression Analysis

Table 6: Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.724a	0.524	0.503	0.48593

The regression analysis, as shown in Table 6, demonstrates that the model explains approximately 52.4% of the variance in the impact of churches on society in Embakasi Sub-County. This indicates that church size, effectiveness, discipleship programs, and numerical growth moderately account for the societal influence of churches, with other factors not included in the model explaining the remaining 47.6% of the variability.

Table 7: ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	17.179	3	5.726	24.252	.000b
Residual	15.584	66	0.236		
Total	32.763	69			

The ANOVA results, with an F statistic of 24.252 and significance level of $p = 0.000$, confirm that the model is statistically significant and fits the data well. This establishes that the independent variables together provide a reliable explanation of how churches impact society.

Table 8: Regression Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.119	0.34		3.29	0.002
Sizes of Churches and Their Effectiveness	0.270	0.104	0.3	2.599	0.012
Assessing Discipleship Programs	0.433	0.115	0.455	3.776	0.000
Assessing the Rate of Numerical Growth	0.048	0.09	0.055	0.531	0.597

The regression coefficients in Table 8 show that discipleship programs have the most significant influence on societal impact ($\beta = 0.455$, $p = 0.000$). This finding is consistent with prior research by Barna (2019), Wilkins (2010), and Putman and Harrington (2013), all of which highlight the importance of structured discipleship programs in fostering spiritual growth and community involvement. Church size and effectiveness also positively influence societal impact ($\beta = 0.3$, $p = 0.012$), as supported by Vecchiarelli (2018) and the Barna Group (2015). However, numerical growth ($\beta = 0.055$, $p = 0.597$) has a minimal effect, aligning with findings by Atkins (2018) and Pew Research Center (2015) that numerical growth alone is not a strong indicator of societal influence. These results emphasize that qualitative aspects such as discipleship and leadership should be prioritized over merely increasing membership numbers to maximize the positive societal impact of churches in Embakasi Sub-County.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study on the impact of churches in Embakasi Sub-County revealed that churches with well-developed discipleship programs and effective outreach initiatives have a more significant societal impact. The findings highlighted that while numerical growth is important, the focus should be on qualitative growth, particularly in strengthening discipleship and leadership. The study recommends that churches prioritize improving their discipleship programs, investing in leadership development, and expanding community outreach initiatives. Additionally, future research should explore the roles of women in church leadership, the long-term effects of church programs on community development, and the differences between rural and urban church impacts. These insights aim to guide churches in enhancing their influence and engagement within their communities.

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