

Influence of Discipleship on Youth Participation in Church Activities within Mainline Protestant Churches in Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between discipleship and youth participation among youth in the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK), Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), and Methodist Church in Kenya (MCK). Despite the strong presence of Protestant Christianity in Kenya, youth engagement in Nairobi's mainline Protestant churches remains a concern, yet limited evidence exists on the link between discipleship and youth participation. The study implemented a convergent mixed-methods design guided by Transformational Leadership Theory and Social Learning Theory. The study population included 4,500 youth from nine different youth groups. A final sample of 341 youths was selected through multistage sampling, using purposive and random sampling. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and ordinal logistic regression, while thematic analysis examined the qualitative data. Discipleship had a mean score of 3.52 on a five-point Likert scale. A significant relationship was observed between discipleship and youth participation ($\chi^2 = 12.54$, $p = 0.002$). Ordinal logistic regression analysis indicated that increased levels of discipleship were significantly associated with increased odds of youth participation, with odds ratios ranging from 2.25 to 7.52. Qualitative findings indicated that mentorship and follow-ups were aspects of discipleship associated with youth participation. The study found a positive relationship between increased discipleship and youth participation. It recommends that churches strengthen their mentorship programmes, follow up with youth, and train their leaders to engage with youth through mentoring.

Keywords: Discipleship, mentorship, Nairobi, Protestant churches, youth participation

INTRODUCTION

Participation of youth in the church has gained much attention in research for several reasons. Although young people continue to identify as Christians, their levels of participation in organised Christian activities are increasingly intermittent (Powell et al., 2016). Indeed, research suggests that among young people, participation in public religious practices, such as attendance at religious services, may decline more substantially than private aspects of religion, such as prayer and the personal importance of faith (Pew Research Center, 2020). Therefore, the issue of interest is not whether they still believe, but rather whether they participate in worship, Bible study, and other fellowship, leadership, and church activities that promote their involvement. This raises the question of what encourages young people to participate actively in the church. The concept of discipleship offers a solution. Discipleship refers to the teaching of the Christian faith, under the guidance of church leaders and older members, and the encouragement of young people to involve themselves in various church activities. The nature and extent of such relationships and activities may well define the participation of young people in the church. African studies' findings indicate that such factors as the methods of young people's involvement, inclusive or exclusive leadership, social and economic pressures, urbanisation, changing working conditions, and generational divides were associated with the engagement of youth in church activities (Abalogu & Nwokedi, 2024; Amankwa & Awuku-Gyampoh, 2022). In addition, young people's trust in leadership and their opportunities for leadership development were positively associated with their participation in existing areas of church ministries.

In Kenya, the question of youth participation is particularly relevant in Nairobi, where mainstream Protestant churches such as the Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist churches have established youth departments, programmes and other structures intended to support young people. Despite the existence of such organisations, some studies have reported the occurrence of irregular congregations, ministries, youth programmes, and other church events (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021; Gathuma, 2020). According to Kahenya (2017), there were youths who felt that the current churches were not effective

in catering for their needs, while the Central Intelligence Agency (2021) analysed the disengagement of the youths owing to changes in society and culture. On the other hand, Muriithi (2018) analysed the engagement of the youths in the churches through the programs, while Gathuma (2020) analysed the engagement of the same youths in church leadership. Lastly, Ragira et al. (2023) analysed the retention and sustainability of the youths in the church. The implications of the above analysis include the observation that having youth programs and organisational structure alone does not automatically translate into engagement.

Existing Kenyan studies have therefore addressed several important aspects of youth engagement, but they approached the issue from a variety of perspectives. Central Intelligence Agency (2021) undertook a study concerning youth participation and non-participation in church in new social and cultural settings. Gathuma (2020) directed his efforts toward the youth leadership role in church. Muriithi (2018) carried out research regarding church-based programs in relation to youth participation. Ragira et al. (2023) took up youth retention and sustained church membership. What receives less attention in these studies is the role of discipleship itself. In particular, they do not adequately show how practices such as mentorship, personal follow-up, Bible study, fellowship, spiritual guidance and opportunities for leadership development are related to youth participation. The evidence is also limited on how these aspects of discipleship operate across mainstream Protestant churches in Nairobi, particularly the Anglican Church of Kenya, Presbyterian Church of East Africa and Methodist Church in Kenya.

The gap addressed by this study was therefore the limited empirical evidence on the relationship between discipleship and youth participation in mainstream Protestant churches in Nairobi. The study examined whether the ways in which young people are mentored, followed up, taught, guided and involved in church life are related to their participation in worship, Bible study, fellowship, leadership and evangelistic activities. It focused on youth in the Anglican Church of Kenya, Presbyterian Church of East Africa and Methodist Church in Kenya. By examining discipleship

as a specific aspect of church life rather than treating it as part of general youth programming, the study sought to provide evidence on its relationship with sustained youth participation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The study was guided by Transformational Leadership Theory and Social Learning Theory. These theories were considered relevant because discipleship takes place through relationships between church leaders, mentors and young people, as well as through the behaviours that young people observe and learn within the church. The two theories therefore offered different but related ways of understanding the relationship between discipleship and youth participation. Transformational Leadership Theory was developed by Burns (1978) and later developed further by Bass and Steidlmeier (1999). The theory explains how leaders motivate followers, provide direction and build commitment around shared goals. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) identify four dimensions of transformational leadership: inspirational motivation, individualised consideration, intellectual stimulation and idealised role. These dimensions are relevant to the church setting because church leaders do more than organise activities. They also guide young people, provide personal support, communicate Christian values and encourage them to take an active part in church life.

Research on discipleship used Transformational Leadership Theory to relate to the leadership component of discipleship. Youth discipleship is participative because it includes the presence and learning, coaching, counselling, empowering, and exhorting roles of church leaders and other knowledgeable members guiding youth regarding their personal faith commitment and participation within the life of the church. When this interaction takes place within a setting in which youth feel highly attended to, consistently nurtured, and continuously empowered by trusted church leaders, there may be a direct relationship to the leaders' participation with them in the church, and the research used the theory to understand the process of youth involvement as well as discipleship. The theory, however, places considerable emphasis on leaders and their relationships with followers. It says less about what

happens when young people interact with mentors, peers and other members of the church community. This is important in the present study because discipleship is not confined to the relationship between a young person and a church leader. Young people also learn from the people around them and from the activities in which they take part. This aspect is better captured by Social Learning Theory.

Social Learning Theory, propounded by Bandura (1977), asserts that people learn through observation, interaction, and responding to the consequences of the actions of others. Therefore, learning can take place even when there is no specific instruction. One individual can observe the actions of other people, determine their meaning, and imitate them. According to Rotter (2021) and Firmansyah and Saepuloh (2022), social learning has been proven relevant to group and social behaviours. When applied to the church, peers tend to learn the patterns of participation of those around them, including leaders and mentors. For instance, a young person may observe others attending services, engaging in bible studies and fellowships, taking up leadership roles, and sharing the gospel regularly. Therefore, when such an individual is mentored, followed up, and engaged positively, they are likely to be influenced to join and participate actively in the activities that they had been observing. This is the reason that explains the increased involvement of youth in the practices of discipleship through mentoring, modelling, follow-up, and interaction. It is a combination of these two theories that is used to understand the various aspects of discipleship as proposed by the study.

While Transformational Leadership Theory expounds on the importance of leadership in influencing youths, Social Learning Theory complements it by explaining how the youths are influenced through observation and interaction with the leaders, mentors, and peers. Therefore, a combination of these theories was used to argue that effective discipleship, which consists of mentoring and supportive relationships led by credible church leaders, is likely to increase the participation of youths in evangelism and meritorious activities of the church.

Empirical Review

Studies in relation to discipleship and youth participation from church perspectives have investigated practices such as bible study, small groups, mentoring, spiritual instruction, leadership training and opportunities to serve. The studies differ with regard to viewing discipleship as a programme or a dynamic process of teaching, guiding, mentoring and Christian formation and measuring levels of youth participation in terms of attendance, retention, involvement in church programmes and leadership. The differences are pertinent given their impact on the understanding of the connection between discipleship and youth participation. The findings are consistent with Powell et al. (2017), who found that churches effective in involving and retaining young people were characterised by intentional practices such as empowering young people, fostering warm relationships, and prioritising their involvement in the wider life of the congregation. Similarly, the present study found progressively higher levels of youth participation as the reported emphasis on discipleship increased.

Studies providing evidence on youth engagement and church-based formation are more direct in their approach. Powell et al. (2016), in a United States church context, found positive associations between leadership training, direct interaction between leaders and young people, modelling of spiritual practices and youth participation. Powell et al. (2016) found similarly that structured engagement was associated with youth participation and retention. Such findings indicate that engagement of young people may be related more to the quality of guidance and interaction than availability of youth programmes. They are, however, not directly applicable to Kenyan mainline Protestant churches, as the studies were conducted outside Kenya and focused on forms of engagement not necessarily corresponding to discipleship. They do not therefore establish fully whether discipleship itself is associated with youth participation.

Research in African settings provides further evidence on the factors associated with youth involvement in church activities. Njoroge (2019), in a study of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa in Kajiado Presbytery, identified mentorship, follow-up, mobilization, youth programmes, and church

leadership as important factors in youth participation. Similarly, Maitai et al. (2022), in their study of the Methodist Church in Kenya, Nyambene Synod, examined the extent of youth involvement in church-initiated programmes and highlighted continuing challenges in sustaining young people's involvement in church life. These studies provide valuable evidence from the Kenyan church context but do not examine discipleship as a distinct multidimensional construct comprising mentorship, personal follow-up, Bible study, spiritual guidance, fellowship, and leadership development. It is therefore difficult to establish from these studies how the individual dimensions of discipleship are associated with youth participation. Furthermore, limited evidence exists on the relationship between these discipleship practices and youth participation across mainline Protestant churches in Nairobi.

Mentorship and personal interactions are another important aspect of the discussion. Powell et al. (2016) associated direct interaction between church leaders and young people and leaders modelling spiritual practices with youth participation and retention. Powell and Clark (2011), while theological rather than empirical in nature, emphasised sustained discipleship, worship, service and community in Christian formation. The approaches highlight the aspect of relationships within which young people engage, and the possibility that a formalised youth programme may exist without regular personal interaction, mentorship and follow-up occurring outside a structured discipleship programme. Distinguishing such practices from general youth programming is useful in establishing their relationship with participation.

Leadership development also emerges as an important aspect. Powell et al. (2016) correlated training of youth and their engagement in church work with participation, whereas Powell et al. (2016) associated leadership training with youth engagement and retention. Hickman (2020) took on leadership and discipleship training in their fifty-question, 161-participant study with consideration for training, accountability, and leadership development. The study brings data regarding leadership development in discipleship, but does not discuss youth participation in detail. Leadership development should not, however, be taken as necessarily indicating increased

participation, as young people may be provided with leadership positions without a systematic discipleship process taking place, and discipleship may include leadership development alongside mentoring, Bible study, fellowship and spiritual guidance.

The studies have methodological limitations which affect interpretation and conclusions. Much of the research is cross-sectional in nature, measuring discipleship and youth participation at one point in time. Such designs allow for establishing association but not direction, and it is therefore possible that young people who participate regularly are more likely to participate in discipleship, and that discipleship is associated with greater regularity in participation. The measurements used are equally varied, with discipleship operationalised in terms of mentoring, training, small groups, spiritual formation and programme participation, and participation measured in terms of attendance, retention, programme involvement or leadership. It is therefore difficult to compare the studies and establish a general measure of discipleship and youth participation. A further limitation is the extent to which the research is conducted outside Kenya. A considerable proportion of the evidence comes from the United States, where church structures and the social realities of young people differ from those in Kenya. Although Maitai et al. (2022) and Njoroge (2019) provide evidence on youth involvement and participation within Kenyan church contexts, few studies have specifically examined youth participation across mainline Protestant churches in Nairobi. Furthermore, studies focusing on young people who are already involved in church programmes may provide limited insight into the experiences of youth whose participation is irregular or sporadic. This highlights the need for further research examining the factors associated with varying levels of youth participation.

In general, studies demonstrate convergence in terms of establishing leader intervention, training and

mentoring as contributing towards active youth participation, with the importance of relationships and leadership development being highlighted in certain studies. Powell et al. (2016) determine the impact of leader intervention, modelling, and training on youth involvement, whereas Maitai et al. (2022) and Njoroge (2019) establish the role of church training in youth involvement in Africa. Powell and Clark (2011) advocate for continuously developing Christian formation, whereas Hickman (2020) encourages training, accountability, and leadership. The difference in the arguments is evident because of the dissimilarity in the definitions of discipleship and youth participation emphasised by each author. For example, while one focuses on the maintenance of students' retention, the other considers their involvement. Powell et al. (2016) provide a theological understanding of the concept of discipleship without offering empirical evidence on the connection between the term and youth participation.

The primary gap, therefore, is not the absence of research on youth participation but the lack of empirical examination of discipleship as a distinct construct. Few studies combine mentoring, follow-up, Bible study, spiritual guidance, fellowship and leadership development when examining youth participation. There is also a lack of evidence on whether the various dimensions are associated with participation across worship, Bible study, fellowship, leadership and evangelistic activities. This study sought to address this gap by examining the relationship between discipleship and youth participation among young people in selected Anglican Church of Kenya, Presbyterian Church of East Africa, and Methodist Church in Kenya churches in Nairobi.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the association between the focus on discipleship and youth participation in church activities as shown in Figure 1 below:

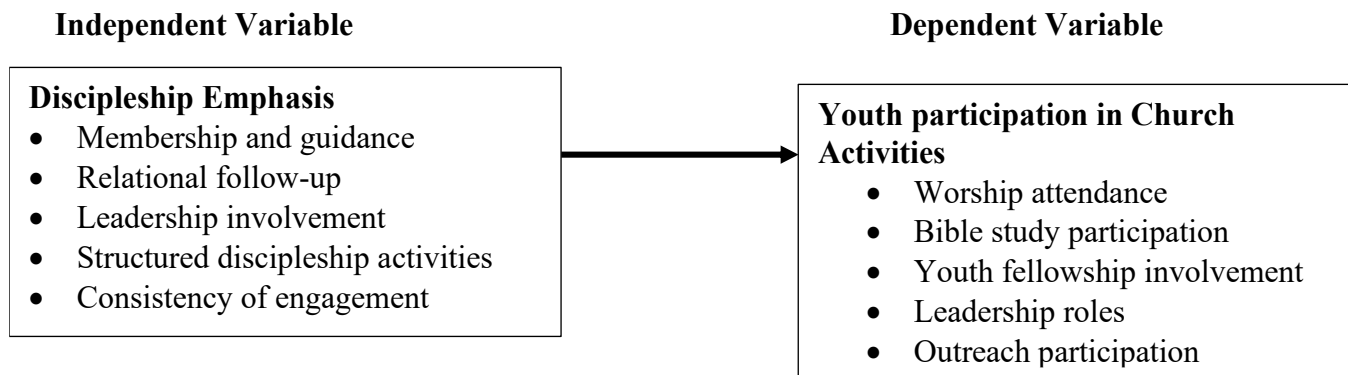


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Own (Author, 2026)

Discipleship forms the independent variable in this study, and it includes mentorship and spiritual guidance provided by church leaders, follow-up as a result of church activities, the role of leadership in the development of the youth, discipleship activities conducted in the church, and consistency of engagement in church activities. Youth participation in church activities is the dependent variable. It is defined by participation in worship services, Bible study sessions, youth fellowship, youth leadership in church, and youth participation in outreach activities. The framework illustrates how the practice of organised discipleship correlates with youth engagement in various church activities.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a convergent mixed-methods design to examine the relationship between leaders' discipleship guidance and youth participation in church activities within mainstream Protestant churches in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The design was chosen because the study required quantitative evidence on patterns and relationships in youth participation alongside qualitative accounts of how youth and church leaders experienced discipleship practices. Structured questionnaires provided the quantitative data, while key informant interviews and focus group discussions captured participants' experiences, perceptions, and views of discipleship and participation. The two strands were conducted concurrently and analysed separately before being brought together at the interpretation stage. Comparisons between the findings from both strands were then done in order to identify similarities and

differences, thus making it possible for the statistical findings to be evaluated together with those experiences shared by participants (Mishra & Alok, 2022).

This study was carried out in Nairobi City County, where the total population was 4,397,073 based on the KNBS 2019 population census (KNBS, 2019). Nairobi was chosen because it had a large and diverse youth population as well as a considerable number of mainstream Protestant denominations with youth ministries. Its socio-economic and cultural diversity brings together students, young professionals, unemployed youth, and young people working in the informal sector, creating different circumstances in which youth engage with church activities. The county therefore provided a suitable setting for examining discipleship guidance and youth participation across different church settings, while its established church structures made it possible to reach youth members, pastors, church leaders, and youth ministry personnel.

The target population comprised youth aged 18–34 years affiliated with mainstream Protestant churches in Nairobi City County. The study focused on members of the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK), Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), and Methodist Church in Kenya (MCK). Membership records from the selected youth groups indicated an estimated population of approximately 4,500 youth members. This population formed the basis for the quantitative component of the study. Church leaders, pastors, and youth ministry personnel were not included in this target population because they did not meet the age and membership

criteria used for the survey. Instead, they participated in the qualitative component because their responsibilities and experience provided information on how discipleship was organised and delivered to youth.

From the estimated population of 4,500 youth members, the quantitative sample was calculated using Yamane's (1967) formula at a 5 per cent level of precision, giving a sample of 367 respondents. A multistage sampling procedure was then applied. ACK, PCEA, and MCK were purposively selected because of their established presence and active youth ministries in Nairobi City County. Nine youth groups within the selected denominations formed the sampling units, and the sample was distributed across the groups in proportion to their membership. Within each group, eligible youth respondents were selected through simple random sampling. The calculated sample was 367, while 341 usable questionnaires were available for the final quantitative analysis.

The qualitative participants were selected purposively because the study required people who had direct experience of youth discipleship and church programmes. For the qualitative phase, an illustrative sample comprised 12 key informants, including four pastors, four youth ministry coordinators, and four church leaders drawn from the three selected denominations. Four focus group discussions were also conducted with youth members, with eight participants in each group, giving 32 FGD participants. The qualitative component therefore comprised 44 participants. Key informants were selected on the basis of their leadership responsibilities and involvement in youth ministry, whereas FGD participants were selected from eligible youth members to obtain their views and experiences of discipleship guidance and participation. The qualitative sampling was conducted separately from the survey sampling so that the two components could provide complementary evidence.

Data were obtained through a structured questionnaire, a key informant interview guide, and a focus group discussion guide. The questionnaire covered demographic characteristics, participation in church activities, discipleship and mentorship practices, Bible reading, leadership training, guidance,

motivation, and involvement in church programmes. The interviews explored how church leaders and youth ministry personnel understood and practised discipleship and how they perceived youth participation. The focus group discussions gave youth members an opportunity to describe their experiences of discipleship, mentorship, leadership engagement, and participation in church activities. Using these three instruments allowed the study to obtain individual responses from the survey, institutional perspectives from key informants, and shared experiences from youth participants.

The instruments were assessed for content, construct, criterion-related, and face validity. The questionnaire items were developed in accordance with the research objectives and the concepts under investigation. The instruments were subsequently reviewed by academic supervisors, church leaders, and youth ministry directors. The face validity of the instruments was assessed using pre-tests on people who were not part of the research population, while the construct validity was enhanced through associating the questionnaire items with the indicators of discipleship and youth involvement. Instrument reliability was established through a pilot test involving 20 respondents from Protestant churches in Kajiado County, who were excluded from the final study sample. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.937 for discipleship, 0.885 for mentorship, 0.864 for group development, and 0.794 for empowerment, all exceeding the 0.70 threshold and indicating satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951).

The quantitative data analysis began with coding and entry of the data into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Respondent characteristics and youth participation patterns were summarised using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Pearson's correlation and chi-square procedures were used to assess relationships and associations among the variables, respectively. Hierarchical multiple regression was subsequently performed to determine the extent to which the explanatory variables statistically contributed to youth participation. Qualitative information obtained through interviews and focus group discussions was transcribed and systematically coded before being analysed thematically. The thematic analysis focused

on issues of mentorship, leadership experiences, relational belonging, spiritual development, and youth participation. At the interpretation stage, quantitative and qualitative results were brought together and examined for both similarities and differences. The integrated findings enabled the statistical results to be understood in relation to the experiences described by the participants.

The research process followed established ethical standards. The study secured ethical approval from the relevant Institutional Research Ethics Committee, and research authorisation from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). The researchers obtained informed consent from all respondents before administering or commencing focus group discussions. Participants were informed of the study objectives, their right to decline participation or withdraw at any stage, and the measures taken to safeguard their privacy. Personal names and other identifying details were treated as confidential and were excluded from the reported findings. Electronic records were maintained in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher and authorised personnel, while physical records were stored securely. The researcher took measures to ensure a comfortable and safe environment during the interviews and focus group discussions. Sensitive topics were avoided where

appropriate, and participants' religious and cultural perspectives were treated with respect.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings, analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the study on the influence of discipleship on youth participation in church activities within mainstream Protestant churches in Nairobi, Kenya. The findings were analysed using descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis, ANOVA, and qualitative thematic interpretation. Integrating quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a comprehensive understanding of how discipleship influences youth participation in church settings.

A total of 367 questionnaires were distributed to respondents across the selected mainstream Protestant churches in Nairobi City County. Of these, 341 questionnaires were properly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 93.19 per cent. This response rate was considered highly satisfactory and adequate for statistical analysis and interpretation. The high response rate reflected strong cooperation between the researcher and participants and enhanced the credibility and reliability of the study findings.

Table 1: Response Rate

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Distributed questionnaires	367	100
Returned questionnaires	341	93.19
Unreturned questionnaires	26	6.81

Source: Own (Author, 2026)

Table 2 shows that males accounted for 54.0 per cent (n = 184) of the respondents, compared with 46.0 per cent (n = 157) females. The distribution therefore represented both male and female respondents. The study targeted youth aged 18–34 years, and the final demographic analysis was aligned with this eligibility

criterion. Respondents were drawn from the three selected mainstream Protestant denominations. PCEA accounted for 39.9 per cent (n = 136) of the respondents, ACK for 32.2 per cent (n = 110), and the Methodist Church in Kenya for 27.9 per cent (n = 95).

Table 2: Demographic Details

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	184	54
	Female	157	46
Age	18–25 years	105	30.8
	26–35 years	136	39.9
	36–45 years	97	28.4
	Above 46 years	3	0.9
Church Affiliation	PCEA	136	39.9
	ACK	110	32.2
	Methodist Church in Kenya	95	27.9

Source: Own (Author, 2026)

Youth participation in church activities was measured using Likert-scale items addressing attendance, ministry involvement, engagement in youth groups, and participation in organised church programmes. Respondents recorded each item on a five-point scale. The items were combined to form a Youth Participation Index by calculating the mean score across the participation items. Higher scores represented greater participation, while lower scores represented lower participation. The resulting index was subsequently used to classify respondents into low, moderate, and high levels of participation for the inferential analysis.

The study assessed the level of emphasis placed on discipleship within the selected churches. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which discipleship was emphasised in their respective churches. The findings in Table 3 show that 47.8 per cent ($n = 163$) of the respondents rated the emphasis on discipleship as high, while 33.7 per cent ($n = 115$) rated it as moderate. A further 17.0 per cent ($n = 58$) rated it as low, while 1.5 per cent ($n = 5$) rated it as very low. No respondent rated the level of discipleship emphasis as very high. The mean score was 3.52 ($SD = 0.824$), indicating that respondents generally perceived discipleship emphasis to be between moderate and high.

Table 3: Perceived Level of Discipleship Emphasis

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very High	0	0
High	163	47.8
Moderate	115	33.7
Low	58	17
Very Low	5	1.5
Total	341	100

Source: Own (Author, 2026)

The findings indicate that discipleship received considerable attention in the selected churches, although the reported level of emphasis varied across respondents. The qualitative findings provided further context for this variation. Participants described differences in the regularity of discipleship sessions, follow-up practices, leadership commitment,

mentoring relationships, and opportunities for practical involvement. These accounts suggest that the presence of discipleship activities did not necessarily imply uniform implementation across the selected churches.

The relationship between discipleship emphasis and youth participation was first examined using cross-tabulation and the chi-square test. Table 4 presents

the distribution of participation levels across the reported categories of discipleship emphasis.

Table 4: Association Between Discipleship Emphasis and Youth Participation in Church Activities

Responses / Variables	Levels of Participation			Total
	Low, n (%)	Medium, n (%)	High, n (%)	
Very High	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
High	41 (25.2%)	38 (23.3%)	84 (51.4%)	163 (100.0%)
Moderate	44 (38.3%)	37 (32.2%)	34 (29.6%)	115 (100.0%)
Low	28 (48.3%)	19 (32.8%)	11 (19.0%)	58 (100.0%)
Very Low	4 (80.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (100.0%)

Source: Own (Author, 2026)

The cross-tabulation shows a clear pattern in the distribution of participation levels. Among respondents who reported high discipleship emphasis, 51.4 per cent were classified as having high participation, compared with 29.6 per cent among those reporting moderate discipleship emphasis and 19.0 per cent among those reporting low discipleship emphasis. Among the five respondents who reported very low discipleship emphasis, 80.0 per cent were in the low participation category, and 20.0 per cent were in the moderate category. None were classified as having high participation.

Results of the chi-square analysis showed that discipleship emphasis was significantly associated with youth participation in church activities ($\chi^2 = 12.54$, $p = 0.002$). As the p-value was less than the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis stating that no association existed was rejected. The result indicates that the distribution of youth participation levels differed significantly across the reported levels of discipleship emphasis. The finding establishes an association between the two variables but does not, by itself, demonstrate that discipleship caused changes in youth participation.

The qualitative findings complemented this statistical association by explaining how participants experienced discipleship in their churches. Participants

repeatedly referred to relational mentorship, personal follow-up, a sense of belonging, leadership trust, and opportunities for practical involvement. One youth participant stated:

“When the church takes discipleship seriously and mentors us, we feel guided and remain active in ministry.”

The account illustrates how discipleship was experienced through personal guidance and mentoring, providing contextual meaning to the quantitative finding that higher discipleship emphasis was associated with higher participation. The qualitative evidence therefore complemented rather than independently validated the statistical result.

The relationship between discipleship emphasis and youth participation was further examined using ordinal logistic regression. Youth participation was specified as an ordered dependent variable with three categories: low, moderate, and high participation. Discipleship emphasis was entered as the explanatory variable, with very low discipleship emphasis used as the reference category. The model estimated the odds of being in a higher participation category associated with the reported level of discipleship emphasis. The proportional odds assumption was assessed before interpreting the regression coefficients. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Ordinal Logistic Regression Results for Influence of Discipleship Emphasis on Youth Participation in Church Activities

Category/Variable	Reference Category	β	Std. Error	Wald χ^2	p-value	Odds Ratio	95% CI (OR)
Low	Very Low	0.812	0.402	4.08	0.043	2.25	1.02 – 4.96
Moderate	Very Low	1.256	0.378	11.03	0.001	3.51	1.67 – 7.37
High	Very Low	2.018	0.401	25.29	<0.001	7.52	3.43 – 16.49
Threshold							
Low/Medium	—	-0.942	0.221	—	—	—	—
Medium/High	—	1.115	0.245	—	—	—	—

Model fit: Log Likelihood = -401.27, McFadden Pseudo R^2 = 0.103, N = 341

Source: Own (Author, 2026)

The regression results revealed that there was an increasing positive relationship between the stated level of emphasis on discipleship and the likelihood of greater youth participation. Compared to respondents in the very low category, those who indicated low emphasis were 2.25 times as likely to be in higher categories (OR = 2.25, 95% CI: 1.02–4.96, p = 0.043) and 3.51 times as likely for those who gave a moderate response (OR = 3.51, 95% CI: 1.67–7.37, p = 0.001). For the high level of emphasis, the odds were 7.52 times with 95 per cent (CI: 3.43–16.49; OR = 7.52, p < 0.001). Since the odds ratio increased with each level of emphasis, this demonstrated a positive association between the degree of discipleship and the likelihood of greater youth participation. Consequently, the strongest statistical association was found amongst respondents who reported high emphasis. The goodness-of-fit test was also performed using McFadden Pseudo R^2 . The value of 0.103 suggested that the model provided some improvement over the intercept model. However, the regression results should be interpreted with caution since the study design did not allow establishing temporality and a causal relationship between the two variables.

The qualitative results echoed the findings of the regression analysis. The regression coefficients, which were positive and statistically significant, illustrated the themes that emerged from the analysis. The themes revolved around relational mentorship, consistent follow-up, trust-building, youth involvement, and leadership membership. The themes demonstrated the contextual mechanisms for the

association between the level of discipleship and increased youth participation. One of the participants said:

“If their mentees or protégé know that somebody actually cares to call and check up on them to help with the ministry and the church activities then I think that young people will feel like they are to be present.” (R099, Field Data, 2025)

This account complements the regression result by illustrating the role of personal follow-up and care in participants' experiences of discipleship. Another participant stated:

“If a church makes it a point to minister in discipleship, then I believe that many of these drifting youths that we see in so many of our churches will remain more involved in their own churches in church work.” (R021, Field Data, 2025)

The qualitative findings were also consistent with the results of the cross-tabulation test. A higher percentage of respondents who expressed a stronger emphasis on discipleship fell into the category of highly involved individuals. The qualitative results elaborated on the quantitative results by providing more in-depth insights into the extent to which aspects of discipleship, such as mentoring and availability, were perceived as facilitating factors for increased involvement. The qualitative results did not reveal any conflicting information. In general, the findings were consistent with the overall positive statistical relationship identified in the quantitative results. However, it is important to make clear that the

absence of contradictory qualitative data does not confirm cause-and-effect relationships. The qualitative evidence reflected participants' perceptions and experiences, while the quantitative results identified statistical patterns within the study sample.

Thus, taken together, the qualitative and quantitative results demonstrated that the emphasis on discipleship was associated with higher levels of youth involvement in the studied mainstream Protestant churches in Nairobi City County. The quantitative findings identified the correlation, while the qualitative results showed how participants experienced the relationship. The qualitative analysis identified several themes, including the relational dimensions of discipleship, particularly mentoring and follow-up, as well as the significance of perceived accessibility and trust in church leadership. Additionally, the qualitative findings revealed the value of the sense of belonging and involvement in ministry activities as factors that contributed to the level of involvement among the respondents. As such, the congruence between the qualitative and quantitative results highlighted the role of discipleship in youth involvement in the churches, although the study's findings cannot establish a direct causal relationship.

DISCUSSION

The findings from descriptive analysis, bivariate analysis, and multivariate analysis yield a similar result depicting a clear relationship between discipleship and youth attendance at church services. The intensity of discipleship is mainly moderate to high among different congregations, and this is variable across different churches. High intensity of discipleship correlates with high youth attendance, while low discipleship intensity correlates with low youth attendance. The ordered regression analyses support the existence of a step-wise increase in youth participation as discipleship intensity increases, suggesting a structured and directed relationship. Qualitative findings corroborate these patterns with strong, consistent references to mentoring, follow-up, relational belonging, and trust in leadership as the keys to persistent church participation by youth.

Understanding the results through transformational leadership theory shows discipleship functioning through leadership that shapes youth interest,

identity, and investment. Congregations characterised by a strong emphasis on discipleship appear to be associated with effective leadership that demonstrates Inspirational Motivation, Individualised Consideration, and Intellectual Stimulation, as reflected in greater youth participation in congregational activities. The stepwise increase represents increased leadership engagement, with leadership actively working with and providing support for the various functions young people serve in the church and relating with them.

These results bring more value for discussion relevant to earlier empirical research on discipleship and youth participation in the church. Increased participation is found among churches where there is an organised form of discipleship through small groups (Powell & Clark, 2011), in the same way as there is a graded outcome found in this case of analysis of discipleship and church participation. Youth who participate in organised activities, have mentors, and can interact with church leaders tend to participate more (Powell et al., 2016), just like in the case analysed, where increased levels of discipleship lead to greater participation. Similarly, studies in Kenyan church contexts have highlighted the importance of church programmes, mentorship, follow-up, leadership, and opportunities for involvement in supporting youth participation (Maitai et al., 2022; Njoroge, 2019). These findings are consistent with the present study, which found that higher levels of discipleship were associated with greater youth participation. Additionally, the strong relational component of mentoring identified in the qualitative findings is consistent with Powell and Clark's (2011) emphasis on supportive relationships in nurturing sustained faith and continued engagement among young people. Consistently across research, organised relational discipleship correlates positively with youth participation, and this current research supports that by further demonstrating the orderly relationship as one progresses across degrees of discipleship intensity. The implication of the findings is that the prioritisation of organised relational discipleship systems is crucial at the leadership level in order to strengthen formalised mentoring and increase consistent youth participation in church activities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This study investigated the relationship between discipleship emphasis and youth participation in mainstream Protestant churches in Nairobi, Kenya. A significant pattern emerged. Youth mentorship, relational follow-up, leaders' involvement, discipleship programming and consistent engagement seemed to stand out as the stronger dimensions correlated with higher youth participation. Other low aspects still remained as features for some congregations, but distinct participation variances were witnessed at locations where discipleship practices had strengthened.

As expected, with higher emphasis on discipleship, the levels of engagement of youth in worship services, bible studies, fellowship groups, leadership, and outreach were higher at high-emphasis churches. The study contributes to what we know by indicating that youth participation is not simply based on mere program presence or availability, but on how strongly and actively young people are integrated into a web of support and ongoing activities as guided through leadership, whether through role-playing, mentorship, attentiveness, involvement or instruction. Leading the younger generation to active church life was facilitated through the behaviour of those who hold church offices and leadership roles in churches, by exhibiting leadership by showing guidance, active involvement and personal engagement of youth in church activities, thereby resulting in increased youth

participation. As the discipleship dimensions increase, so does youth participation, thereby creating a stepwise-ordered path of increased levels of the dimensions and subsequent level increases in participation across all the aspects analysed.

The results, however, are based on youth and church member data, which represent perceptions rather than direct measurement. This study is cross-sectional in nature and thus can't account for the directionality of the relationship over time. Also, this study can only be generalised to mainstream Protestant churches and can't be readily generalised to other Protestant churches (in other countries) where structure and practices could be different. Further studies can explore over a period of time through longitudinal study design and focus on digital culture, parents' influence, finances, mental health, and gender, as well as the construction of African identity in the young person through the process of discipleship over time; the impact of the similar approach in the rural African environment and among African Pentecostal churches.

Recommendation: This study thus recommends that churches should strengthen their discipleship programs by making them regular and coordinated and ensuring that they are clearly linked to youth participation in church activities. This is because irregular sessions and poor follow-through were seen to have a weaker link to participation.

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