

## THE INFLUENCE OF HUMILITY ON THE GROWTH OF SELECTED PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES IN KENYA

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose of the study:** The purpose of the study was to empirically assess the influence of humility on the growth of selected Pentecostal churches in Kenya.

**Short introduction of problem statement:** One of the significant challenges facing Pentecostal churches in Kenya is the recurring leadership disputes, which often lead to church divisions, membership decline, and diminished institutional trust. A lack of humility among leaders tends to intensify these conflicts, hindering reconciliation efforts and contributing to the fragmentation of congregations. Examining the influence of humility on leadership effectiveness and church growth offers critical insights that can help address ongoing challenges and promote sustainable growth of the Pentecostal movement in Kenya.

**Methodology:** A cross-sectional research design anchored on positivist research paradigm was used. The target population comprised 378 bishops, 1793 reverends, and 5462 pastors, totaling to 7,626 clergymen. From this, a stratified sample of 380 clergymen was selected out of whom 321 questionnaires were successfully administered. Both descriptive analysis and inferential statistics were undertaken in SPSS.

**Results of the study:** Humility explained 13.4% of the variance in church growth, with one-unit increase in humility corresponding to an estimated 0.392 unit rise in church growth.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that humility is a key church growth driver.

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**Recommendation:** The study recommends that bishops being at the helm of church leadership, should develop and enforce guidelines that emphasize humility through formal training programs and leadership development initiatives. Moreover, it is recommended that pastors embody these principles in their everyday practice.

**Keywords:** *Servant Leadership, Humility, Church Growth, Pentecostal Movement, Kenya*

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## INTRODUCTION

Humility is a crucial aspect of team leadership. This is demonstrated in scholarly outputs that highlight that when leaders perceive themselves as less important, it positively influences their team's ability to achieve intended outcomes (Rego et al., 2016). Similarly, humble leadership fosters collaboration, enhances task performance, and facilitates the attainment of shared objectives, while also driving innovation that leads to transformative change (Lei et al., 2022). Furthermore, findings by Yang et al. (2022) suggest that both humility and integrity among leaders play a fundamental role in motivating employees to fulfill their responsibilities. Since leadership is a pivotal factor in the growth of churches, it is anticipated that church leaders should exhibit humility alongside integrity to drive organizational success (Tamunomiebi et al., 2018).

Humility encompasses a disposition that prevents excessive self-focus while recognizing the contributions of others and acknowledging both strengths and limitations (Nielsen & Marrone, 2018). Leaders who embody humility demonstrate an honest assessment of themselves and the realities within their environment (Brailer, 2020). Since the early 2000s, researchers have increasingly examined the role of humility in organizational contexts (Nielsen & Marrone, 2018). In contemporary organizational structures characterized by flatter hierarchies and collaborative networks, humility fosters interdependence by encouraging individuals to appreciate their unique contributions to the broader mission (Wu, 2022). The ability to engage diverse stakeholders within and beyond organizational boundaries further underscores humility's importance as a leadership virtue (Nielsen & Marrone, 2018).

Additionally, Trinth (2019) established that humility enhances adaptability among professionals as they gain more expertise. Research further suggests that honesty and humility serve as distinct predictors of job performance, significantly impacting the effectiveness of teams (Rego et al., 2018). Leaders who embody humility positively influence their followers by fostering ethical behavior and strengthening emotional well-being (Darren

et al., 2021; Naseer et al., 2020). Moreover, humility plays a vital role in cultivating trust between leaders and their followers, which is essential for cohesive leadership and organizational success (Yang et al., 2019).

In Kenya, Pentecostal churches have experienced significant expansion over the past few decades, fueled by their emphasis on charismatic worship, spiritual gifts, and evangelism (Gathogo, 2022). These churches attract large congregations, especially among the youth and urban populations, due to their dynamic preaching styles and promise of personal transformation. However, despite this numerical increase, many Pentecostal churches struggle with sustainability and long-term growth (Nkansah-Obrempong & Pam, 2021). Some churches experience stagnation or decline due to leadership conflicts, financial mismanagement, and doctrinal disagreements (Ng'etich, 2023). Unlike mainstream denominations with structured governance systems, Pentecostal churches often operate under independent leadership, which, while fostering autonomy, can also lead to instability (Chewachong, 2024). This pattern of growth and decline raises concerns about leadership effectiveness and the internal challenges that hinder their ability to thrive (Muriithi et al., 2022). This background provides the mural that incentivized the investigation of the role of humility on Pentecostal church growth with Kenya in context.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

A major issue affecting Pentecostal churches in Kenya is the frequent leadership wrangles that result in church splits, loss of members, and weakened institutional credibility (Thiga et al., 2021). Many of these disputes stem from personal rivalries, competition for influence, and lack of transparent leadership succession plans (Muthuku et al., 2023). When leaders prioritize personal status over collective mission, it breeds division, mistrust, and eventual decline in church growth. The absence of humility in leadership often exacerbates these conflicts, making reconciliation difficult and causing congregations to fragment. Given these challenges, there is a need to investigate the role of humility in fostering stability and growth within Pentecostal churches. Understanding how humility influences leadership effectiveness and church expansion can provide valuable insights for mitigating these persistent struggles and ensuring sustainable church development in Kenya.

Research on humility in secular organizational settings has been extensive (Brunzel & Ebsen, 2023). However, limited studies have explored its implications in church leadership. Most

existing literature (Chaudhary et al., 2025; Maldonado et al., 2022; Yang & Xu, 2022) focuses on how humility influences general team dynamics, innovation, and employee performance, yet its role in the religious context, particularly in Pentecostal churches, remains underexplored. Conceptually, while humility has been linked to leadership effectiveness (Luo et al., 2022), the specific mechanisms through which it influences church growth require further investigation, hence providing the impetus for the current study.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this study was first to assess the practice of humility among leaders of Pentecostal churches in Kenya, and subsequently, to empirically test the influence of humility on the growth of selected Pentecostal churches in Kenya.

## **RESEARCH HYPOTHEIS**

H<sub>0</sub>: Leader humility has no significant influence on the growth of selected Pentecostal churches in Kenya.

## **THEORITICAL REVIEW/ FRAMEWORK**

The study was undertaken through the lenses of servant leadership theory. Servant leadership is deeply rooted in Christian teachings, particularly in the example of Jesus Christ, who taught that "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26, NIV). Humility is a core tenet of this model, making it relevant to church leadership (Hull, 2023). The theory emphasizes leaders serving their followers rather than exercising authority over them (Maldonado et al., 2022). Humble leaders who prioritize service and the spiritual needs of congregants foster trust, unity, and ultimately, church growth (Bishop, 2022). Churches that are led by humble leaders often experience long-term growth due to their ability to mentor and raise other leaders, encourage discipleship, and cultivate strong spiritual foundations among members (Firestone, 2024).

Self-awareness is another foundational characteristic of a humble leader (Kelemen et al., 2023). It refers to a leader's ability to recognize their strengths, weaknesses, emotions, and motivations, allowing them to lead with authenticity and integrity (Obuba, 2023). A self-aware servant leader acknowledges their dependence on God and the contributions of others, avoiding arrogance and self-centeredness (Quenga, 2022; Sharma, 2024). In the church

sector, self-aware leaders are more likely to foster spiritual growth by aligning their leadership with biblical principles, remaining accountable, and prioritizing the well-being of the congregation over personal ambition (Vettukallel et al., 2024). This self-reflective approach enhances trust, encourages collaboration, and ultimately contributes to church growth by creating an environment of humility, learning, and continuous improvement (Nicholson, 2021).

Servant leadership emphasizes a leader's willingness to engage with and value the perspectives, concerns, and experiences of their followers (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). Openness to others reflects humility by demonstrating a leader's willingness to listen, learn, and adapt based on congregational needs (Ditewig, 2022). In the church context, this trait manifests in leaders who encourage dialogue, accept constructive criticism, and are receptive to guidance from both peers and church members (Williams & Thompson, 2022). This openness strengthens communal bonds, fosters inclusion, and allows the church to be more responsive to spiritual and social challenges, ultimately promoting sustained growth and engagement (Olabode & Joseph, 2024). By prioritizing openness, servant leaders create a culture of shared leadership, where members feel valued and actively participate in the church's mission (Moore, 2024).

A humble servant leader recognizes and values the contributions, efforts, and talents of others, fostering a culture of encouragement and empowerment (Zheng & Ahmed, 2024). Church leaders who express appreciation inspire commitment and motivation among church members, reinforcing a sense of belonging and purpose (Benedicte et al., 2022). They advocate for recognizing the intrinsic worth of each individual and promoting their growth. Leaders who consistently appreciate their congregation nurture an environment of positivity, reduce hierarchical barriers, and encourage active participation in ministry work (Mulder, 2024). This, in turn, enhances teamwork, discipleship, and the overall expansion of the church by ensuring that members feel respected and integral to the church's mission (Letsoin et al., 2023).

## **EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

Research highlights that leader humility enhances team effectiveness by fostering collective purpose and reducing self-centered leadership (Rego et al., 2018). Defined as self-awareness, self-regulation, and freedom from arrogance (Nielsen & Marrone, 2018), humility plays a

significant role in leadership. While these studies affirm humility's positive impact, they do not explicitly examine its influence on church growth. This study seeks to bridge that gap by investigating humility's effect on the expansion of Pentecostal churches in Kenya. The following discussion reviews related studies at global, regional, and local levels, highlighting gaps addressed by the current research.

Luu (2021) examined leader humility's impact on knowledge sharing in Vietnam's hospitality industry using a quantitative approach. Surveying 674 employees and 87 managers, the study confirmed a strong positive relationship between humility and knowledge-sharing behaviors. However, its focus on the corporate sector limits applicability to church settings. Additionally, it relied solely on quantitative methods, whereas this study employs a mixed-methods design for a more comprehensive understanding. Furthermore, Luu's focus on employees and managers contrasts with the current study's emphasis on church leaders, making its contributions more relevant to Kenya's Pentecostal context.

Emmanuel (2022) explored how humility, based on Philippians 2:5-11, can resolve church conflicts caused by leadership struggles. The exegetical analysis concluded that embodying Christ-like humility fosters unity and recommended that church leaders model this virtue. While aligning with the present study's emphasis on humility, Emmanuel's work focused on conflict resolution rather than church growth. Additionally, its reliance on theological interpretation without empirical validation presents a methodological gap that the current study addresses through a mixed-methods approach.

Luu (2020) further explored humility's role in fostering knowledge sharing in hospital settings, reinforcing its positive impact on teamwork. While supporting earlier findings on humility's organizational benefits, its focus on healthcare presents contextual limitations. Similarly, Emmanuel (2021) analyzed Christ's humility and its role in church unity but concentrated on resolving conflicts rather than growth dynamics. By employing a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach, the current study provides empirical evidence on humility's direct influence on Pentecostal church growth in Kenya.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework for this study (Figure 1) illustrates the relationship between humility and church growth, with humility as the independent variable and church growth as the dependent variable.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

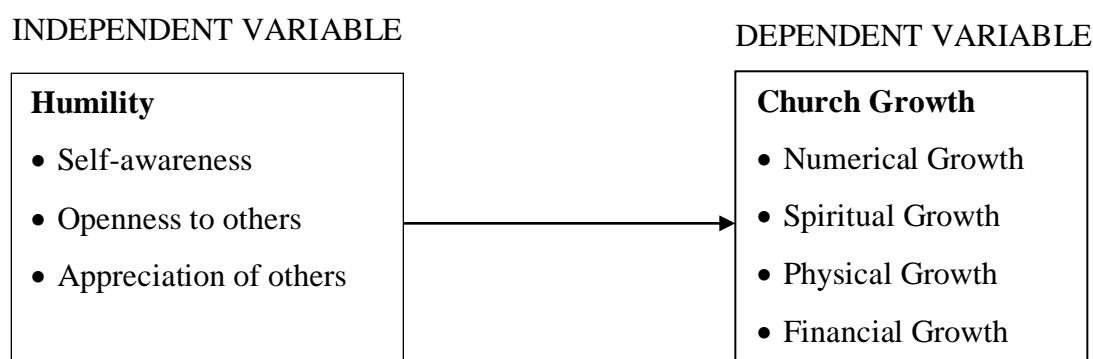


Figure 1 illustrates that humility is characterized by three key indicators: self-awareness (recognizing strengths and weaknesses), openness to others (active listening and inclusivity), and appreciation of others (acknowledging contributions). These aspects create an environment that nurtures growth. Church growth is assessed through four indicators: numerical growth (increasing congregants), spiritual growth (deeper faith and discipleship), physical growth (infrastructural expansion), and financial growth (improved stewardship and stability). This framework posits that humble leadership enhances teamwork, unity, and trust, contributing to both internal and external growth of Pentecostal churches in Kenya.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a positivist research paradigm, which is in keeping with the need to test hypothesis. This paradigm emphasizes that objective reality exists and can be measured through observable phenomena and empirical data (Mbanaso et al., 2023). By relying on structured instruments and standardized procedures, the study ensured that the data collected were reliable and that the findings could be generalized to a broader population of Pentecostal churches in Kenya. A cross-sectional research design was employed to capture data at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of the prevailing conditions within these churches (Asiamah et al., 2021). This design allowed the researchers to assess the current levels of humility among church leaders and examine its association with various dimensions of church growth. It effectively enabled the identification of relationships between variables, aligning with the positivist emphasis on quantifiable evidence.

The study's population comprised church leaders from various levels within Pentecostal churches in five neighboring counties in Kenya. These were: 378 bishops, 1793 reverends, and 5462 pastors, totaling to 7,626 clergymen. From this, a representative sample of 380



clergymen was selected. To ensure comprehensive and representative coverage, the researchers utilized a stratified sampling technique. Such a method minimized selection bias and enhanced the representativeness of the sample, ensuring that diverse leadership perspectives were captured (Iliyasu & Etikan, 2021).

Data were collected using a researcher-developed 5-point Likert scale questionnaire that measured respondents' levels of agreement with statements related to humility and church growth. This instrument facilitated the collection of consistent, quantifiable data that could be analyzed objectively. Instrument reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha in SPSS. The results indicated acceptable reliability for both constructs, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.693 for humility 0.888 for church growth. For data analysis, descriptive statistics were first employed to summarize the characteristics of the collected data, followed by correlation analysis to examine the strength and direction of the relationships between humility and church growth score. Finally, linear regression was used to determine the extent to which humility predicted church growth.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

A total of 321 questionnaires were completely filled. The demographic profile revealed a leadership landscape characterized by a predominantly male and married cohort, where the blend of maturity and vigor was evident in their middle-aged status. Many leaders attained practical, mid-level educational qualifications. Their tenure in the church reflected a deep-rooted commitment and a substantial reservoir of experience, while their roles as pastors highlight their pivotal function in guiding congregational life. Respondents rated humility items on a 5-point scale, where 1 represented "Strongly Disagree," 2 represented "Disagree," 3 represented "No Comment," 4 represented "Agree," and 5 represented "Strongly Agree." Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the humility items, including the mean and standard deviation.



**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Humility Items**

Humility items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Humility is a virtue required in religious sector for effective achievement of desired outcomes.	4.54	.702
Humility has strong effect on the growth of Pentecostal churches.	4.50	.767
Leaders who embrace the value of humility relate well with others.	4.49	.703
Leader humility impacts on the success and effectiveness of a team.	4.38	.622
Our leaders have always shown themselves to be leaders of humility growth.	3.97	1.161
Humility composite score	4.38	.791

The item stating that "Humility is a virtue required in the religious sector for effective achievement of desired outcomes" achieved the highest mean of 4.54 (SD = 0.702), reflecting strong consensus among respondents. Similarly, the assertion "Humility has a strong effect on the growth of Pentecostal churches" recorded a mean of 4.50 (SD = 0.767), while the statement "Leaders who embrace the value of humility relate well with others" garnered a mean of 4.49 (SD = 0.703), both indicating high levels of agreement. The proposition that "Leader humility impacts the success and effectiveness of a team" obtained a mean score of 4.38 (SD = 0.622), further reinforcing the positive view on humility, whereas "Our leaders have always shown themselves to be leaders of humility growth" had a slightly lower mean of 3.97 (SD = 1.161), suggesting only moderate support. Overall, the composite humility score of 4.38 (SD = 0.791) demonstrated a general consensus on the importance of humility for church growth. These findings align with servant leadership literature, notably supporting Nielsen and Marrone's (2018) assertion that humility allows leaders to recognize others' contributions and acknowledge their limitations, and they echo the results and Rego et al. (2018) regarding its positive impact on performance and team.

A Pearson correlation was performed to examine the relationship between humility composite score and church growth composite index. Table 2 shows the output.

**Table 2: Correlation between Humility and Church Growth**

		1	2
1. Church Growth composite index	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.367**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	321	321
2. Humility composite score	Pearson Correlation	.367**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	321	321

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis revealed a moderate, statistically significant positive correlation between humility and church growth ( $r = .367$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that higher levels of humility were associated with greater church expansion among selected Pentecostal churches in Kenya. This result aligned with Rego et al. (2018), who found that leader humility positively impacted team effectiveness, thereby suggesting a similar beneficial effect on church growth. Additionally, Nielsen and Marrone (2018) had emphasized that key traits of humility, such as self-awareness and self-control, are critical for effective leadership, which in turn likely fosters growth in church settings. A simple linear regression was conducted to examine the explanatory power of humility on church growth in Pentecostal churches in Kenya. Table 3 presents the output.

**Table 3 Regression of Church Growth on Humility**

Model Summary							
Model		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1		.367 <sup>a</sup>	.134	.132	.54446		
a. Predictors: (Constant), Humility							
ANOVA <sup>a</sup>							
Model		Sum of Squares		Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14.629		1	14.629	49.347	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	94.269		320	.296		
	Total	108.897		321			
a. Dependent Variable: Church Growth							
b. Predictors: (Constant), Humility							
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>							
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	2.385	.246			9.687	.000
	Humility	.392	.056	.367		7.025	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Church Growth

The regression analysis showed that humility significantly predicts church growth,  $F(1,318)=49.35$ ,  $p<.01$ , explaining 13.4% of the variance in church growth ( $R^2=.134$ ). The

standardized beta coefficient for humility was  $\beta=.367$ ,  $t(318)=7.03$ ,  $p<.01$ , indicating a moderate positive influence of humility on church growth. The unstandardized regression equation for predicting church growth is:  $\text{Church Growth}=2.385+0.392(\text{Humility})$ . This indicates that a one-unit increase in humility corresponded to an estimated 0.392 unit rise in church growth, assuming all other factors remained constant. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This outcome is in agreement with Luu (2021), who demonstrated that leader humility positively influences organizational behavior – a dynamic likely applicable to church settings.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The study concludes that humility emerged as a key driver of church growth, significantly contributing to positive growth outcomes. Leaders who exhibit humility create an environment where team members and congregants feel heard, valued, and empowered to contribute. This leadership style fosters openness, adaptability, and collaboration, which are essential for addressing challenges and driving innovation within the church. The study underscores the importance of humility as a leadership trait that enhances engagement, adaptability, and the long-term growth of the church. This has significant theoretical implications by reinforcing the centrality of humility within servant leadership theory and extending its application to church growth contexts. The positive relationship between humility and church growth supports the theory's assertion that humble leadership, characterized by self-awareness, openness to others, and appreciation of others, is instrumental in fostering unity, trust, and sustainable development. These results not only validate the core tenets of servant leadership – where leaders prioritize service over authority – but also suggest that the cultivation of humility may be pivotal in driving both spiritual and organizational growth in Pentecostal churches. Consequently, the study deepens theoretical understanding by empirically affirming that humility is a key mechanism through which servant leadership operates in religious settings.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends that bishops, who are at the helm of church leadership and serve as key policy makers, should develop and enforce guidelines that institutionalize servant leadership principles, particularly emphasizing humility through formal training programs and leadership development initiatives. Pastors should embody these principles in their

everyday practice by modeling self-awareness, openness to feedback, and genuine appreciation for the congregation's contributions, thereby setting a tone of unity and accountability. Additionally, church members should be proactive in providing constructive feedback and engaging in initiatives that promote servant leadership, ultimately fostering a conducive environment that supports sustained spiritual and organizational growth.

Although the conceptual model used in this study provided valuable initial insights, it does not acknowledge the multifaceted nature of church growth drivers. Thus, its simplicity potentially limits the understanding of the complex dynamics at play. Future studies should therefore consider broadening the model by incorporating additional mediating factors, such as trust and innovation, as well as possible moderating variables like contextual influences and leadership tenure to provide a more robust sense-making of the gamut of factors at play in the equation of church growth.

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