

# Authentic Leadership, Personal Characteristics, and Church Growth in Embu County, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

Authentic leaders adapt their leadership styles to resonate authentically with their followers, emphasizing the importance of genuine relationships. At the intersection of authentic leadership is the role of personal characteristics, which is often pertinent in the church where leaders must navigate diverse congregational dynamics. This research aimed to establish whether personal characteristics moderates the perceived effects of authentic leadership on church growth in Embu County, Kenya. The denominations included Deliverance Churches, Restoration End Time Churches, Triumph Churches, Full Gospel Church of Kenya, Winners Chapel, and Great Gospel Visioners. The research was anchored on authentic leadership theory. Correlational research design was utilized. A total of 35 Pentecostal churches in Embu County were selected. A purposive sample of 387 respondents participated in the study. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using moderated regression technique. Results demonstrated that authentic leadership significantly influenced church growth ( $R^2=.740$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Only the main effect of age on church growth was statistically significant ( $B = -0.032$ ,  $p = .019$ ). However, none of the personal characteristics significantly moderated the effect of authentic leadership on church growth. The absence of a moderating effect from personal characteristics suggests that authentic leadership transcends demographic differences. The study affirms the relevance of authentic leadership theory by demonstrating its significant influence on church growth, regardless of personal uniqueness. The findings suggest that authentic leadership, with its focus on genuine relationships and empowerment, remains a key driver of organizational success, transcending demographic variables in the context of church growth in Kenya.

**Keywords:** Authenticity, Authentic Leadership, Church Growth, Personal Characteristics

## INTRODUCTION

Authentic leadership is a leadership style defined by transparency, accountability, and high ethical standards, with leaders who maintain integrity in their actions (Gardner et al., 2020). The concept of authenticity has deep philosophical roots, originating in Greek philosophy with the phrase "know thyself" (Plato) (Massi, 2023). This foundational idea has evolved through centuries, as seen in Shakespeare's "to thine own self be true" (Stiers et al., 2021). These expressions underscore the importance of self-awareness and integrity in leadership, suggesting that leaders must deeply understand their identity, motivations, and values to effectively guide others (Inayyah & Simanjuntak, 2022). Authenticity involves acknowledging both strengths and weaknesses, enabling leaders to approach challenges with honesty and self-reflection. Over time, scholars have expanded this concept into a comprehensive leadership philosophy, providing a platform to explore various leadership orientations and their impacts on organizations and communities (Novitasari et al., 2020). This progression reflects the enduring relevance of authenticity in addressing contemporary leadership challenges.

Authentic leaders are characterized by their deep self-awareness and understanding of their behavior's impact on others. Farid et al. (2020) highlight that these leaders possess a strong awareness of their contexts, allowing them to adapt their leadership strategies effectively. Traits such as confidence, resilience, optimism, and moral integrity are hallmarks of authentic leaders, enabling them to build trust and inspire their followers (Wahidi, 2020). This leadership style fosters authenticity in followers through positive modeling and relational

transparency, creating a sense of purpose and self-determination within teams (Gigol, 2020). By embracing their inner struggles and acknowledging their vulnerabilities, authentic leaders create environments that prioritize honesty, collaboration, and shared values. Such environments are instrumental in enhancing organizational well-being and work engagement, Leal et al. (2021), who found positive relationships between authentic leadership and subordinate satisfaction, commitment, and performance.

The philosophical underpinnings of authentic leadership are closely tied to virtues such as prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, as outlined by Gentry and Freshman (2020). These virtues manifest in leadership behaviors such as balanced processing, self-awareness, relational transparency, and internalized moral perspectives. Authentic leaders meet the expectations of fairness, morality, and social responsibility held by their stakeholders, thereby fostering trust and respect among followers (Obuba, 2023; Wahidi, 2020). This trust is further reinforced through relational transparency, which involves honest and straightforward interactions that inspire confidence and commitment among followers (Novitasari et al., 2020). Kamau (2022) observes that authentic leaders adapt their leadership styles to resonate authentically with their followers, emphasizing the importance of genuine relationships and the ability to empower others. This adaptability is particularly significant in diverse organizational contexts, where personal characteristics such as age, gender, education, and income may influence how authenticity is perceived and enacted.

The role of personal characteristics at the intersection of authentic leadership is especially pertinent in church settings, where leaders must navigate diverse congregational dynamics. In this context, biblical perspectives provide insights into authentic leadership, emphasizing moral integrity, humility, and relational transparency. For example, Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, advises leaders to prioritize humility and selflessness, counting others as more significant than themselves (Philippians 2:3-11). Similarly, in his guidance to Timothy, Paul underscores the importance of exemplary conduct in speech, love, faith, and purity (1 Timothy 4:12). To the Ephesians, he emphasizes leading with patience, love, and unity to maintain spiritual cohesion (Ephesians 4:1-2). These Biblical principles resonate with modern leadership virtues, such as relational transparency and internalized moral perspectives, which are crucial for fostering trust and collaboration (Gentry & Freshman, 2020; Novitasari et al., 2020).

Apostle Paul's view of leadership underscore the importance of taking into account personal characteristics in the subject of authentic leadership, especially in the church. A church, in this context, refers to a group of Christians gathering in a common place, united by shared beliefs and usually identified by a denominational name (Grenz & Olson, 2020). Personal characteristics such as age or educational background may influence followers' perceptions of authentic leadership attributes, shaping their responses to leadership initiatives. Examining the influence of personal characteristics offers a vital dimension to understanding how authenticity is perceived and enacted in leadership. Given the inconsistency in empirical evidence across studies (Aderibigbe et al., 2020; De Matos et al., 2022; Omotayo et al., 2020), the continued investigation of personal factors within the equation of authentic leadership and church growth is necessary to clarify their significance in different contexts. Church growth is typically defined measured by the numerical increase in the congregation, particularly through the conversion of new members (Everton, 2024).

By focusing on these personal factors within the context of church leadership in Embu County, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the unique dynamics of authentic leadership, and its potential to address contemporary challenges in fostering church growth. Pentecostal church dynamics in Kenya in general and Embu County in particular, reflect a vibrant and transformative religious movement, yet one that also faces significant challenges (Njiru & Warue, 2019). The Pentecostal movement gained momentum in Kenya the mid-20th century, influenced by global Pentecostal revivals and local evangelists who integrated charismatic expressions like prophecy, healing, and speaking in tongues with the community's spiritual expectations (Mugambi, 2020). While Pentecostal churches have grown rapidly, driven by youth participation and charismatic leadership, they also grapple with issues such as leadership disputes, doctrinal conflicts, and financial constraints (Mbogori & Matena, 2019). Many churches struggle to balance modern influences with traditional cultural values, leading to tensions within congregations (Gathogo, 2021). Additionally, the reliance on prosperity gospel teachings in some settings has drawn criticism for overshadowing foundational spiritual principles. Social challenges, including unemployment, poverty, and addiction, further strain these churches as they try to provide both spiritual and material support (Njiru & Warue, 2019).

Pentecostal churches have a distinct demographic profile, with women constituting a substantial portion of church memberships, often outnumbering men in attendance and participation (Kwayu & Kessy, 2018). Age demographics also play a crucial role, with younger populations being particularly attracted to the vibrant worship styles and community engagement typical of Pentecostal churches (Parsitau & Mwaura, 2020). Therefore, the objective of the study was to explore the role of personal (demographic) characteristics in the relationship between authentic leadership and church growth in Embu County, Kenya. The study sought to answer the question, do personal characteristics moderate the effect of authentic leadership on church growth?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Review

The theoretical anchorage of this study is authentic leadership theory, which originated in the 1960s. The theory has gained prominence in recent years due to growing concerns about unethical practices in organizations and the rise of positive psychology. This framework is particularly well-suited for exploring the moderating role of personal characteristics in the relationship between authentic leadership and church growth, as it emphasizes leaders' honesty, ethical decision-making, and the creation of positive organizational environments through the lenses of the led (Avolio & Gardner, 2020). Authentic leadership is defined by behaviors that promote trust, ethical responsibility, and open communication with followers (Walumbwa et al., 2020). Leaders who practice authenticity cultivate organizational cultures centered on transparency, integrity, and social responsibility, aligning their leadership practices with the values of their followers (Shaw, 2023). These characteristics make the theory especially relevant in contexts requiring ethical stewardship, such as church leadership, where trust and spiritual alignment are paramount (Basu & Green, 2020).

Authentic leadership framework has been increasingly acknowledged as fundamental to understanding positive leadership and addressing complex organizational challenges (Nikolić et al., 2022). Authentic leadership emphasizes a leader's genuineness, moral reasoning, and resilience, providing a strong foundation for fostering trust and navigating adversity. The theory identifies three critical factors in developing authentic leaders: positive psychological capabilities, moral reasoning, and significant life experiences. These factors collectively enable leaders to consider diverse perspectives, make ethical decisions, and maintain integrity in their leadership (Shaw, 2023; Walumbwa et al., 2020). Resilience, in particular, equips leaders to overcome challenges, while balanced cognitive processing supports objective and ethical decision-making. These traits are essential in church contexts, where leaders must address both organizational and spiritual needs while fostering growth and cohesion within their congregations (Avolio & Gardner, 2020).

Moral reasoning and critical life experiences further underpin the development of authentic leadership. Moral reasoning involves navigating ethical dilemmas with principled decision-making, enabling leaders to build trust and credibility within their organizations (Shaw, 2023; Avolio & Gardner, 2020). Critical life experiences, such as personal challenges or crises, help leaders develop empathy and a deeper connection with followers. These experiences often lead to more compassionate and relatable leadership, which is particularly valuable in church settings where leaders are called to guide their congregations through both personal and collective challenges (Nikolić et al., 2022; Walumbwa et al., 2020). By integrating these factors, authentic leadership theory provides a robust framework for exploring how personal characteristics, such as age, education, and life experiences, influence the effectiveness of leadership in fostering church growth.

### Conceptual Review

Authentic leadership is a dynamic and evolving process, with conceptual models emphasizing the interplay between leaders' psychological capacities, ethical conduct, and supportive organizational contexts (Shaw, 2023). One key dimension of authentic leadership is trust, which is essential for creating a foundation of mutual respect between leaders and followers (Farid et al., 2020). Leaders who exhibit trustworthiness demonstrate reliability and consistency in their actions, fostering a sense of security and safety among followers (Walumbwa, Avolio, & Zhu, 2020). This trust encourages open communication, collaboration, and a strong commitment to shared goals (Avolio & Gardner, 2020). In church leadership, trust is particularly critical as it enables congregants to align their personal and spiritual lives with the values and mission set forth by their leaders, creating a stronger and more cohesive community (Wang & Wang, 2021).

Another important dimension of authentic leadership is transparency and accountability. Leaders who are transparent openly share their thoughts, decisions, and the rationale behind them, helping followers understand the reasoning behind leadership actions and decisions (Avolio & Gardner, 2020). This openness enhances accountability, as leaders are willing to accept responsibility for their actions and outcomes (Shaw, 2023). In church settings, where ethical conduct and integrity are paramount, these traits contribute to a culture of honesty and mutual respect (Walumbwa et al., 2020). Leaders who model these behaviors set the tone for the entire congregation, encouraging them to adopt similar standards in their personal and spiritual lives (Wang & Wang, 2021). Transparency and accountability also build trust by showing that leaders are not only focused on organizational goals but also on the well-being and development of their followers (Avolio & Gardner, 2020).

Visionary leadership is another key dimension of authentic leadership, particularly in the context of church growth. A visionary leader articulates a clear and compelling vision that guides the church's mission and inspires followers to pursue long-term goals (Huma, Nduku, & Mwalw'a, 2023). This vision not only defines the church's direction but also connects deeply with the spiritual and personal values of its members, ensuring alignment between leadership actions and the congregation's collective purpose (Nikolić, Kvasic, & Grbic, 2022). A visionary leader in the church must be able to inspire others to take ownership of the church's mission and actively participate in its growth (Shaw, 2023). This is essential for fostering both spiritual and numerical growth, as followers are more likely to engage and commit when they understand and believe in the vision put forward by their leaders (Wang & Wang, 2021).

Teamwork is also integral to authentic leadership. Leaders who encourage collaboration and value the input of others create an environment where collective effort is prioritized over individual accomplishment (Avolio & Gardner, 2020). This collaborative approach fosters a sense of shared responsibility and collective achievement, essential in both organizational and church settings (Farid et al., 2020). In churches, where unity is crucial to fulfilling spiritual missions, effective teamwork allows leaders to leverage the diverse skills and strengths of their congregants, creating a supportive and inclusive environment (Shaw, 2023). By promoting teamwork, authentic leaders empower followers to contribute meaningfully to the church's success, while also building stronger relationships within the community (Wang & Wang, 2021).

## Empirical Review

Research on authentic leadership in church contexts demonstrates the relevance of this leadership style in fostering church growth. For instance, Wang and Wang (2021) explored the relationship between authentic leadership and church growth, particularly within Protestant congregations, and found that authentic leadership positively influences church growth by aligning leaders' personal values with the spiritual and organizational objectives of their congregations. Their study highlights the importance of leadership authenticity in creating environments where church members feel motivated and empowered to contribute to the church's mission, thus supporting numerical and spiritual growth. Wang and Wang (2021) also note that personal characteristics such as age, gender, education, and income moderate the relationship between leadership styles and church growth, suggesting that these factors may influence how church members respond to leadership. The present study extended Wang and Wang's (2021) research to the Kenyan context by examining the moderating role of personal characteristics in the relationship between authentic leadership and church growth in Embu County.

Khan et al. (2020) and Khetjenkarn and Agmapisarn (2020) provide important insights into the moderating role of age in organizational outcomes, though they approach it from different perspectives. Khan et al. (2020) examined the impact of age on job stress, turnover intentions, and job satisfaction within a corporate context and found that older employees tend to exhibit higher resilience to workplace stress and have more stable career trajectories. This suggests that age could influence how church leaders approach and manage stress, which could in turn affect the church's growth and stability. Khetjenkarn and Agmapisarn (2020), on the other hand, focused on emotional labor, revealing that older employees often manage emotional demands more effectively, thus reducing burnout through deep acting. This finding is particularly relevant in church settings, where leadership requires emotional labor and a high level of empathy and care for the congregation. As both studies point out, age can serve as a moderating factor, potentially influencing how leaders manage stress and emotions, both of which can impact the effectiveness of authentic leadership in promoting church growth.



The role of gender in organizational dynamics has been examined in two distinct studies by Ali et al. (2020) and Hupkau and Petrongolo (2020). Ali et al. (2020) found significant gender differences in how men and women utilize job crafting strategies, which are aimed at improving teamwork and organizational performance. Women were found to use these strategies more effectively in enhancing communication and collaboration, which is crucial for fostering unity within church leadership teams. On the other hand, Hupkau and Petrongolo (2020) found that gender did not directly impact organizational performance, even during the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. While these studies differ in their conclusions, both underline the need for nuanced approaches to leadership. Ali et al. (2020) advocate for gender-sensitive strategies that recognize the different ways men and women approach organizational tasks, while Hupkau and Petrongolo (2020) suggest that external crises may level the playing field for gender roles in leadership. These findings have implications for the current study, suggesting that gender may moderate the relationship between leadership and church growth in distinct ways, depending on how leadership tasks and roles are structured within the church.

The role of education in enhancing organizational success has been explored by De Matos et al. (2022) and Omotayo et al. (2020), though their findings highlight different perspectives. De Matos et al. (2022) found that while education positively influences organizational performance, its impact was marginal due to broader economic challenges affecting the recovery process. This suggests that in contexts where the broader economic environment poses challenges, education alone may not lead to significant organizational outcomes. In contrast, Omotayo et al. (2020) found that education plays a crucial role in organizational productivity, particularly when recruitment strategies are aligned with individuals' educational qualifications. This suggests that a highly educated leadership team may be better equipped to implement strategic decisions that foster church growth, especially in more stable economic environments. These differing findings suggest that education's impact may vary based on the external environment and the context in which leadership operates, highlighting the need for the current study to consider local factors in Embu County, Kenya.

Tabak et al. (2021) and Charity et al. (2021) align in their emphasis on education as a key factor in enhancing economic mobility and improving family dynamics. Tabak et al. (2021) found that education has a significant role in improving the financial well-being of families, particularly in Turkey, and suggested that families with higher educational attainment tend to experience greater economic stability. Similarly, Charity et al. (2021) demonstrated the impact of education on income and family stability in Nigeria, with a particular focus on how financial security leads to increased community engagement and church participation. These findings are relevant to the current study, which aimed to examine how personal characteristics, including education and income, can moderate the relationship between authentic leadership and church growth. Both studies suggest that education and economic well-being are crucial factors in determining how individuals engage with their communities, which in turn can impact church participation and growth.

While the studies discussed collectively highlight the importance of personal characteristics such as age, gender, education, and income in moderating organizational outcomes, they also emphasize the importance of context in interpreting these findings. Khan et al. (2020) and Aderibigbe et al. (2020) highlight that age affects job outcomes differently across contexts, with older employees in corporate settings experiencing less stress, while younger employees in church leadership may face different stressors and challenges. De Matos et al. (2022) and Omotayo et al. (2020) also show varying impacts of education on organizational outcomes depending on the sector or environment. These findings point to the need for a context-specific approach in the current study, as the role of personal characteristics in moderating the relationship between authentic leadership and church growth may vary in the unique cultural and socioeconomic context of Embu County, Kenya. Similarly, the studies on income and family dynamics by Tabak et al. (2021) and Charity et al. (2021) underscore the importance of understanding regional and cultural differences when examining the impact of income on church growth, suggesting that income's influence may be shaped by local socioeconomic factors.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

Correlational research design was utilized. This is because it effectively examines the relationships between naturally occurring variables, which is particularly useful in real-world settings like churches where variables

such as age, gender, education, and income cannot be manipulated (Creswell, 2021). This design allows for the identification of patterns and strengths of relationships between variables, providing insights into how personal characteristics moderate the relationship between authentic leadership behaviors and organizational outcomes, such as church growth (Babbie, 2020). Unlike experimental designs, which require manipulation and random assignment, correlational research allows for the study of these complex dynamics in a natural setting. While it does not establish causal relationships, it is valuable for uncovering associations that inform future research, especially in contexts where experimental manipulation is not feasible due to ethical or practical constraints (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). By using this design, the study contributes to understanding how personal characteristics influence leadership outcomes, laying the groundwork for more targeted investigations in the future.

### Population and Sampling Design

The study was conducted in Embu County, focusing on church members and leaders from various denominations within Manyatta Sub-County, specifically in Kirimari and Mbeti North Wards, which were selected for their high concentration of Pentecostal and charismatic churches. The denominations included Deliverance Churches, Restoration End Time Churches, Triumph Churches, Full Gospel Churches of Kenya (FGCK) Embu, Winners Chapel, and Great Gospel Visioners (GGV). A total of 35 Pentecostal churches across Embu County were included, chosen for their prominence and active participation in the community. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 387 respondents, ensuring the inclusion of church leaders and active members with direct experience of church leadership and operations. This method allowed for the targeted selection of individuals who were knowledgeable about the church's dynamics, ensuring relevant insights into the relationship between leadership styles and church growth. The sample included a diverse range of respondents in terms of age, gender, and involvement in church activities, with an emphasis on obtaining perspectives from both leadership and congregational levels.

### Data Collection Method

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire, which was designed to gather responses on various aspects of authentic leadership, personal characteristics, and church growth. The questionnaire utilized a 5-point Likert scale, which allowed for the measurement of attitudes and perceptions across a spectrum from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Authentic leadership indicators included trust, transparency and accountability, visionary leadership, and teamwork, while personal characteristics covered age, gender, level of education, and income. Church growth was assessed through indicators such as commitment, funding assistance, social amenities, and administration. However, the use of self-reported data exposed the study to social desirability bias where respondents may provide answers they believe are more socially acceptable rather than their true feelings (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Additionally, recall bias could affect the accuracy of responses, particularly when respondents are asked to recall specific past experiences or behaviors related to church growth or leadership behaviors. To mitigate these limitations, anonymity was assured to respondents, which was intended to reduce social desirability bias by allowing participants to respond honestly without fear of judgment. Second, the questionnaire was designed with clear and concise questions to minimize misunderstandings and improve the reliability of self-reported data. Furthermore, to address the limitations of self-reported data, the study incorporated multiple indicators of church growth and leadership to triangulate responses, reducing the likelihood of bias skewing the overall results (Creswell, 2021).

### Data Analysis Technique

The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Moderated regression analysis was used to test the moderating effect best on the following set of equations:

$$\text{Model 1: } CG = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AL + \epsilon$$

$$\text{Model 2: } CG = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AL + \beta_2 PC + \epsilon$$

$$\text{Model 3: } CG = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AL + \beta_2 PC + \beta_3 AL * PC + \varepsilon$$

Where:

CG = Church Growth

$\beta_0$  = Church Growth intercept

AL = Authentic Leadership

PC = Personal Characteristics

$\beta_1$  = Effect size of Authentic Leadership

$\beta_2$  = Effect size of Personal Characteristics

$\beta_3$  = Effect size of the interaction term

$\varepsilon$  = Error term

Model 1 tests the direct effect of authentic leadership on church growth.

Model 2 tests the main effect of both authentic leadership and personal characteristics on church growth.

Model 3 tests if personal characteristics moderate the relationship between authentic leadership and church growth by including the interaction term.

The null hypothesis, which posits that personal characteristics do not significantly moderate the effect of authentic leadership on church growth, would be rejected if the p-value for the interaction term ( $\beta_3$ ) in Model 3 is less than the chosen significance level (typically 0.05) (Imbens, 2021). If the p-value is less than 0.05, it indicates that the interaction between authentic leadership and personal characteristics significantly contributes to explaining church growth, thus supporting the alternative hypothesis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The demographic profile of respondents reveals key insights into the composition of the study population. The majority of respondents (64.4%) were youthful, aged between 18-39 years, highlighting a predominantly young church demographic. Gender distribution was nearly equal, with 50.2% male and 49.8% female, ensuring balanced representation. In terms of education, most respondents (77.4%) had at least a diploma, reflecting higher educational attainment. Regarding church membership, 40.6% had been members for over 10 years, suggesting significant experience within the church community. Income levels indicated that 74.6% earned below Ksh 50,000, aligning with Kenya's categorization as a low- to middle-income country. A small minority (1.5%) reported having a disability, consistent with national demographics. Lastly, 54.2% of respondents held leadership roles in the church, offering valuable perspectives on authentic leadership and its impact on church growth. To test the hypothesis, stepwise method was used.

$$\text{Model 1: } CG = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AL + \varepsilon$$

Table 1 presents the output of the first model which tests the direct relationship between authentic leadership and church growth.

Table 1 Regression of Church Growth on Authentic Leadership

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.860 <sup>a</sup>	.740	.739	.25948		
a. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership						
ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	61.500	1	61.500	913.441	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	21.612	321	.067		
	Total	83.112	322			
a. Dependent Variable: Church Growth						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership						
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.065	.106		10.029	.000
	Authentic Leadership	.775	.026	.860	30.223	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Church Growth						

The first model, which examined authentic leadership as the sole predictor, demonstrated that authentic leadership significantly influenced church growth, with an  $R^2$  value of .740 ( $p < .01$ ) and a standard error of estimate of .259. The ANOVA results for this model were also statistically significant,  $F(1,321) = 913.441$ ,  $p < .01$ , confirming that authentic leadership plays a substantial role in promoting church growth. These findings are consistent with the work of Huma et al. (2023) and Matisi (2020), who highlighted the transformative effects of authentic leadership on organizational performance, emphasizing its capacity to foster both spiritual and numerical growth within church settings. This underscores the critical need for developing authentic leadership practices to build trust, inspire commitment, and enhance engagement among congregations.

Model 2:  $CG = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AL + \beta_2 PC + \varepsilon$

In the second model, personal characteristics were incorporated to assess their main effect on church growth. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Regression of Church Growth on Authentic Leadership and Personal Characteristics

Model Summary <sup>c</sup>										
		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
Model		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1		.860 <sup>a</sup>	.740	.739	.25948	.740	913.441	1	321	.000
2		.863 <sup>b</sup>	.744	.743	.25765	.004	5.577	1	320	.019
a. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership										
b. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership, Age of Respondents										
c. Dependent Variable: Church Growth										
ANOVA <sup>a</sup>										
Model		Sum of Squares		df	Mean Square		F			Sig.
1	Regression	61.500		1	61.500		913.441			.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	21.612		321	.067					
	Total	83.112		322						
2	Regression	61.870		2	30.935		466.021			.000 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	21.242		320	.066					
	Total	83.112		322						
a. Dependent Variable: Church Growth										
b. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership										
c. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership, Age of Respondents										
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>										
		Unstandardized Coefficients			Standardized Coefficients					
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t					Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.065	.106		10.029					.000
	Authentic Leadership	.775	.026	.860	30.223					.000
2	(Constant)	1.110	.107		10.358					.000
	Authentic Leadership	.781	.026	.867	30.520					.000
	Age of Respondents	-.032	.014	-.067	-2.362					.019
a. Dependent Variable: Church Growth										
Excluded Variables <sup>a</sup>										
Model		Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation					Collinearity Statistics Tolerance
1	Age of Respondents	-.067 <sup>b</sup>	-2.362	.019	-.131					.990
	Gender of Respondents	.000 <sup>b</sup>	-.011	.992	-.001					.994
	Level of Education	.027 <sup>b</sup>	.959	.338	.054					.997
	Level of Income	-.003 <sup>b</sup>	-.095	.925	-.005					.971
2	Gender of Respondents	-.002 <sup>c</sup>	-.056	.956	-.003					.994
	Level of Education	.027 <sup>c</sup>	.968	.334	.054					.997
	Level of Income	.024 <sup>c</sup>	.790	.430	.044					.850
a. Dependent Variable: Church Growth										



In the second model, the inclusion of respondent age explained an additional 0.4% of the variance in church growth ( $\Delta R^2 = .004$ ,  $F(1,320) = 5.58$ ,  $p = .019$ ), indicating a small but significant main effect of age. The coefficient analysis showed a statistically significant but slight negative relationship between age and church growth ( $B = -0.032$ ,  $p = .019$ ), with younger respondents being more likely to view church growth positively than older individuals. This finding contrasts with studies by Khan et al. (2020) and Khetjenkarn and Agmapisarn (2020), which highlighted older individuals' ability to manage organizational stress and emotional labor effectively, contributing to positive outcomes. In the church context, younger individuals may bring more enthusiasm, optimism, or adaptability, which could shape their perception of growth in a more favorable light. Therefore, while age has a minor influence, it may not play a dominant role in moderating the relationship between authentic leadership and church growth.

Other personal characteristics such as gender, education, and income did not significantly affect church growth perceptions. Authentic leadership ( $B = .781$ ,  $t = 30.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ) remained a strong positive predictor of church growth, while age ( $B = -0.032$ ,  $t = -2.36$ ,  $p = .019$ ) showed a slight negative association with growth. This suggests that although age had a small negative effect - indicating younger respondents' more favorable perception of growth - gender, education, and income did not significantly influence perceptions of church growth. Authentic leadership, however, continued to be the most substantial factor influencing church growth.

The lack of a significant impact of gender on church growth aligns with Hupkau and Petrongolo's (2020) findings that gender did not significantly affect organizational outcomes in corporate environments. In the church setting, gender may not significantly influence perceptions, likely due to the spiritual and inclusive nature of church leadership. Therefore, gender does not serve as a moderator in the relationship between authentic leadership and church growth, suggesting that leadership effectiveness is experienced similarly across genders within the church.

Similarly, educational attainment did not significantly affect church growth, which contrasts with studies like Omotayo et al. (2020), where education was linked to organizational success in corporate settings. In the church context, however, factors such as spiritual, relational, and communal dynamics may outweigh formal education in shaping perceptions of growth. Consequently, the results indicate that educational attainment does not moderate the relationship between authentic leadership and church growth, emphasizing the importance of spiritual engagement and relational dynamics over academic qualifications.

Income also did not emerge as a significant factor in explaining church growth. This finding is consistent with Charity et al. (2021), who noted that while income can enhance family stability and community engagement, its direct impact on organizational outcomes is often minimal. However, this contrasts with Dhingra and Pingali (2021), who highlighted the role of financial stability in promoting community participation. In the church context, spiritual commitment and relational bonds seem to outweigh economic factors in shaping members' perceptions of growth. Thus, income does not moderate the relationship between authentic leadership and church growth, reflecting the church's emphasis on inclusivity and shared spiritual values rather than financial status.

Model 3:  $CG = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AL + \beta_2 PC + \beta_3 AL * PC + \varepsilon$

The third model incorporated the interaction between authentic leadership and respondents' age as a personal characteristic in relation to church growth. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 3. As the table reveals, the third model did not significantly enhance the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .000$ ,  $p > .05$ , indicating that age did not substantially moderate the relationship. In other words, the combination of authentic leadership and age did not provide additional explanatory power for church growth. Thus, while age has a minor impact on its own, it does not significantly alter the effect of authentic leadership on church growth. This finding contrasts with studies by Ali et al. (2020) and Khan et al. (2020), which found that personal characteristics like age and gender influence organizational outcomes. The results suggest that although demographic factors may influence individual experiences, they have a limited effect on how authentic leadership drives overall church growth.

Table 3 Moderated Regression Analysis of the Effect of Personal Characteristics

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change F	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.860 <sup>a</sup>	.740	.739	.25948	.740	913.441	1	321	.000
2	.863 <sup>b</sup>	.744	.743	.25765	.004	5.577	1	320	.019
3	.863 <sup>c</sup>	.745	.742	.25790	.000	.370	1	319	.544
a. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership									
b. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership, Age of Respondents									
c. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership, Age of Respondents, Interaction Term									
ANOVA <sup>a</sup>									
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F				Sig.
1	Regression	61.500	1	61.500	913.441				.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	21.612	321	.067					
	Total	83.112	322						
2	Regression	61.870	2	30.935	466.021				.000 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	21.242	320	.066					
	Total	83.112	322						
3	Regression	61.895	3	20.632	310.192				.000 <sup>d</sup>
	Residual	21.217	319	.067					
	Total	83.112	322						
a. Dependent Variable: Church Growth									
b. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership									
c. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership, Age of Respondents									
d. Predictors: (Constant), Authentic Leadership, Age of Respondents, Interaction Term									
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>									
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t				Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.065	.106		10.029				.000
	Authentic Leadership	.775	.026	.860	30.223				.000
2	(Constant)	1.110	.107		10.358				.000
	Authentic Leadership	.781	.026	.867	30.520				.000
	Age of Respondents	-.032	.014	-.067	-2.362				.019
3	(Constant)	.987	.229		4.309				.000
	Authentic Leadership	.811	.056	.900	14.565				.000
	Age of Respondents	.031	.105	.065	.296				.768
	Interaction Term	-.015	.025	-.140	-.608				.544
a. Dependent Variable: Church Growth									

The lack of significant impact from personal characteristics like gender, education, and income on church growth in Embu County highlights the unique spiritual and communal dynamics of local churches. In this context, spiritual engagement and authentic leadership outweigh factors like formal education or financial status. Gender, for example, does not significantly influence growth perceptions, as church leadership is seen as inclusive and spiritually driven. Similarly, education and income seem less important compared to the relational and faith-based aspects that shape church growth. The slightly negative association between age and growth perceptions suggests younger members, with their enthusiasm and optimism, may view growth more positively. This finding emphasizes that, within this cultural context, church growth is driven more by spiritual and communal factors than by personal characteristics. These findings largely align with the literature on Pentecostal church dynamics in Kenya, particularly regarding the central role of youth participation and charismatic leadership in driving church growth (Njiru & Warue, 2019; Mugambi, 2020). The study's finding that younger respondents are more likely to perceive church growth positively reflects the vibrant and youthful nature of Pentecostal communities, which are characterized by dynamic worship and community engagement (Kwayu & Kessy, 2018). However, the study contrasts with Mbogori and Matena (2019) in its lack of significant influence from personal characteristics such as gender, education, and income on perceptions of church growth, suggesting that spiritual engagement and authentic leadership take precedence over these factors in the context of Embu County. This may be due to the unique communal and spiritual focus of Pentecostal churches in the region, where relational bonds and faith-based dynamics often outweigh socio-economic or educational distinctions.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Authentic leadership was found to be a strong positive predictor of church growth in this study, supporting the findings of Huma et al. (2023) and Matisi (2020), which emphasize its ability to foster trust, commitment, and

engagement. However, when examining personal characteristics, only age revealed a small but significant negative correlation with church growth, with younger respondents showing more positive perceptions of growth than older respondents. This contrasts with studies by Khan et al. (2020) and Khetjenkarn and Agmapisarn (2020), which highlighted the ability of older individuals to effectively manage organizational stress and emotional labor. These discrepancies suggest that younger individuals' enthusiasm and adaptability may influence their perceptions of growth more favorably in church settings.

Other personal characteristics, such as gender, education, and income, were found to have no significant effect, and the interaction between authentic leadership and age did not enhance the explanatory power of authentic leadership. This contradicts the findings of Ali et al. (2020) and Khan et al. (2020), who found that demographic factors affect organizational outcomes. The results imply that while personal characteristics may shape individual experiences, they have limited influence on the relationship between authentic leadership and church growth. Thus, authentic leadership remains the most powerful driver of church growth, reinforcing its relevance as a theoretical framework for leadership within the church sector.

The absence of a moderating effect from personal characteristics suggests that authentic leadership transcends demographic factors, emphasizing its cross-cutting relevance in promoting church growth. Although younger individuals may have more positive views on growth, this does not diminish the overall importance of nurturing authentic leadership practices in church environments. Thus, this study has contributed to knowledge by highlighting the significant role of authentic leadership in fostering church growth, particularly in the context of Pentecostal churches, Kenya. It has affirmed the relevance of authentic leadership theory by demonstrating its significant influence on church growth, regardless of personal characteristics like age, gender, education, or income. The findings suggest that authentic leadership, with its focus on genuine relationships and empowerment, remains a key driver of organizational success, transcending demographic variables in the context of church growth in Embu County, Kenya.

The lack of significant impact from personal characteristics in this study may also be attributed to the unique nature of church environments, particularly in Embu County. In these settings, spiritual and communal values may outweigh individual socio-economic or educational factors, creating a more egalitarian atmosphere where shared faith, relational dynamics, and authentic leadership take precedence over personal demographic attributes. This suggests that the church, as a community, operates on principles that transcend the usual social stratifications seen in other sectors, where personal characteristics often play a more influential role in shaping organizational outcomes. Additionally, Pentecostal churches, especially in a rural county like Embu, emphasize inclusivity and spiritual commitment, which may reduce the salience of factors like income or education. This aligns with a more holistic view of leadership that focuses on the relational and transformational qualities of leaders rather than their followers' individual characteristics. Consequently, the study proposes a new theoretical perspective that authentic leadership within the church context is a universal force, capable of driving growth irrespective of demographic backgrounds. This insight could reshape how leadership is perceived in faith-based settings, encouraging a focus on leader behavior and relational dynamics over follower demographics.

Accordingly, it is recommended that the clergy and church administrators should prioritize cultivating and practicing authentic leadership to drive church growth. This involves fostering trust, commitment, and genuine engagement with congregants, as these are critical aspects of authentic leadership shown to influence growth positively. Training programs and workshops tailored to enhance self-awareness, relational transparency, and ethical conduct among church leaders can help strengthen authentic leadership qualities.

Further research should explore the contextual factors influencing the relationship between authentic leadership and church growth, particularly within different church environments. It would be valuable to examine how cultural, social, and theological dynamics within various denominations or regions impact the effectiveness of authentic leadership. Research could also investigate how church environments with varying levels of resource availability, leadership styles, and congregational engagement may yield different results in terms of growth. Comparative studies across rural and urban settings, or between churches of different sizes, could provide deeper insights into how leadership and personal characteristics interact with church growth in diverse contexts. Additionally, exploring the role of external factors such as socio-economic challenges or local community needs could offer a more nuanced understanding of church growth dynamics.

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