

ROLE OF DISCIPLESHIP IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF CHRISTIAN YOUTHS: A CASE STUDY OF FOURSQUARE GOSPEL CHURCH, VICTORIA GARDEN CITY DISTRICT, AJAH, LAGOS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of discipleship in the spiritual formation of Christian youths, with specific focus on Foursquare Gospel Church, Victoria Garden City District, Ajah, Lagos State. Although discipleship remains central to Christian teaching and practice, its influence on the spiritual development of contemporary youths has not received sufficient scholarly attention, particularly within Nigerian Pentecostal churches. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A total of 51 respondents, comprising pastors, deacons/elders, church workers, and members, participated in the study. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The findings showed that discipleship significantly contributes to youth spiritual formation. Specifically, 90% of respondents indicated that they had personally experienced spiritual growth through discipleship, while 93% affirmed that discipleship plays a crucial role in shaping Christian character and spiritual maturity. Also, 94% agreed that discipleship provides practical guidance for moral and ethical challenges, and 93% acknowledged its relevance to holistic development, including spiritual, emotional, and social growth. However, the study identified challenges such as cultural influences, technology distractions, busy lifestyles, inadequate mentorship, and resistance to accountability. Opportunities for strengthening youth discipleship included relational mentoring, relevant biblical teaching, digital discipleship platforms, and youth leadership development. The study concluded that intentional and structured discipleship practices are essential for nurturing mature Christian youths. However, the findings are limited by the study's descriptive design and reliance on frequency counts and percentages without inferential statistical analysis. The study recommended comprehensive discipleship programs, mentor training, digital engagement, stronger fellowship structures, and youth leadership empowerment.

Keywords: Discipleship, spiritual formation, Christian youths, Foursquare Gospel Church, Lagos State

Introduction

Over the last two decades, spiritual formation has drawn considerable interest and attention within Christian circles, becoming a widely used phrase at conferences and a popular title in numerous publications (Barton, 2010). In response to the increasing demand for instruction in this field, spiritual formation institutions have been established, reaffirming the importance of spiritual development to the Body of Christ, especially for ecclesial leaders. However, as spiritual formation becomes more common, there is a greater need for clarification on what spiritual development actually entails (Mulholland, 2016).

Christian spiritual development and Christian discipleship are often used interchangeably, sharing the same goal: to follow Jesus purposefully and become more like Him (Willard, 2006). New Testament theologian Robert Mulholland frames this integration, stating, “Spiritual formation is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others” (Mulholland, 2016, p. 15). Christian spirituality is the holistic relating of one’s entire life to God as Father, through Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Spirit’s indwelling presence. It is characterized as the quest for a fulfilled and authentic Christian existence (Foster, 1998).

In Nigeria, Pentecostal churches like the Foursquare Gospel Church have placed strong emphasis on discipleship as a means of nurturing believers, particularly the youth. However, despite decades of church growth, many Christian youths remain vulnerable to secular influences, moral relativism, and spiritual apathy (Abolarin, 2019). The Victoria Garden City District of the Foursquare Gospel Church, located in Ajah, Lagos State, provides a unique context to investigate this phenomenon. Established in 2001, this district has grown from a handful of families to over 300 worshippers, with a vibrant youth population (Foursquare Gospel Church VGC, 2020). Yet, the effectiveness of its discipleship programs in fostering genuine spiritual formation among youths has not been systematically evaluated.

The term “disciple” originates from the Greek word *mathetēs*, referring to an individual who willingly accepts, obeys, and shares the message of Jesus Christ (Brand, 2003). In the Synoptic Gospels alone, *mathetēs* appears 141 times, emphasizing the centrality of discipleship in New Testament teachings. Discipleship is the transformative journey of spiritual growth aimed at becoming more Christ-like, involving reading the Bible, prayer, and adherence to biblical teachings while remaining responsive to the Holy Spirit (Shirley, 2008).

Spiritual formation, according to Ruth Haley Barton, is “the process of Christ being formed in us for the glory of God, for the abundance of our own lives, and for the sake of others” (Barton, 2010, p. 23). Similarly, Mark Maddix defines spiritual formation as “the whole person in relationship with God, within the community of believers, growing in Christlikeness, reflected in a Spirit-directed disciplined lifestyle, and demonstrated in redemptive action in our world” (Maddix, 2012, p. 9). These definitions highlight both the process and the expected outcome of discipleship.

The youth demographic, defined by Nigeria’s Revised National Youth Policy (2019) as individuals aged 15 to 29 years, represents a critical transitional phase between childhood and adulthood (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019). This period is characterized by identity exploration, role experimentation, and vulnerability to diverse social pressures. In Lagos State, where urbanization, technology, and economic challenges intersect, Christian youths face unique obstacles that demand intentional discipleship strategies. Thus, this study sought to investigate the role of discipleship in the spiritual formation of Christian youths within the Foursquare Gospel Church, Victoria Garden City District, with a view to providing evidence-based recommendations for enhancing discipleship practices.

Statement of the Problem

There is an inadequate understanding and implementation of discipleship within many Christian communities, leading to stagnant spiritual growth despite prolonged church attendance (Hull, 2010). This concern is particularly evident among Christian youths, who are increasingly exposed to social, cultural, and technological influences that challenge their faith, values, and spiritual development. Within the Nigerian context, many young church members actively participate in church programmes and activities, yet some still demonstrate shallow spiritual roots, moral compromise, weak commitment to Christian values, and limited personal spiritual discipline (Akanni, 2018). In Foursquare Gospel Church, Victoria Garden City District, Ajah, Lagos State, the growing youth population presents both an opportunity and a pastoral concern. Although the church conducts weekly Bible studies, Sunday school classes, and occasional youth retreats, preliminary observation suggests that there is no systematic and intentional discipleship programme designed to mentor youths individually or in small groups over an extended period. As a result, some youths appear to lack deep biblical knowledge, consistent prayer discipline, spiritual accountability, and the ability to defend their faith against contrary worldviews. This gap becomes more visible when some youths drift away from active faith commitment after leaving home, entering higher education, or encountering new social environments. This situation suggests a disconnect between general church instruction and actual spiritual formation. Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is the apparent deficiency in structured discipleship practices for youths and the extent to which existing church initiatives contribute to their spiritual growth, moral development, and commitment to Christian living. The study, therefore, sought to assess the existing gaps in discipleship practices and evaluate the effectiveness of current initiatives in addressing these shortcomings.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the role of discipleship in the spiritual formation of Christian youths in Foursquare Gospel Church, Victoria Garden City District, Ajah, Lagos State. The specific objectives were to:

- i. examines the role of discipleship in the spiritual formation of Christian youths;
- ii. identify effective discipleship practices that contribute to spiritual growth among Christian youths;
- iii. assess the impact of discipleship on the moral and ethical lifestyles of Christian youths; and
- iv. provide practical recommendations for improving discipleship programmes in churches and youth ministries.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What is the role of discipleship in the spiritual formation of Christian youths?
- ii. What discipleship practices effectively contribute to spiritual growth among Christian youths?
- iii. How does discipleship influence the moral and ethical lifestyles of Christian youths?
- iv. What practical recommendations can be made to improve discipleship programmes for Christian youths in churches and youth ministries?

Literature Review

Concept of Discipleship

The term “disciple” derives from the Greek *mathētēs*, meaning a learner or follower who not only acquires knowledge but also applies it in practice (Shirley, 2008). In the New Testament, discipleship involves a deliberate, relational journey where a more mature believer guides a newer believer toward Christlikeness. According to Bill Hull, discipleship is “God’s means of achieving His eternal purpose... that they may be conformed to the image of His only

Son, Jesus Christ” (Hull, 1988, p. 31). This process includes intellectual enrichment, spiritual development, and active participation in Christian endeavors.

Discipleship is not merely a transient endeavor but a lifelong commitment to mirror the essence of the divine teacher. It has been described as “God’s family training scheme,” drawing parallels to an heir undergoing tutelage to claim their inheritance (Fims, 1978). The methodical nature of discipleship includes a predetermined curriculum and behavioral objectives aimed at bridging the gap between the disciple and the Lord.

Models and Approaches to Discipleship

Early Church Development: Wilhoit and Howard (2014) presented a historical timeline showing that desert elders in the 3rd and 4th centuries established comprehensive training systems for disciples. Benedict of Nursia (6th century) encouraged monasteries to become schools for full-time work for the Lord. Martin Luther shaped personal devotion through prayer and meditation, while John Wesley started small groups for accountability (Wilhoit & Howard, 2014).

Classic Discipleship: Beagles (2010) explains that classic discipleship emphasizes a mentor-mentee relationship, Bible study, scripture memorization, and personal witnessing. It draws inspiration from solitary reflection, meditation, prayer, fasting, and other time-honored activities.

Purpose-Driven Model: This model focuses on temperaments and psychology, revolving around covenant membership, maturity, ministry, and missions (Beagles, 2010). It integrates insights from psychology into the discipleship process.

Integrative Model: Shirley (2008) describes an integrative model where a disciple is defined as living in Christ, loving one another, and working for the kingdom of God. Practices include evangelism, worship, teaching, ministry, and fellowship.

Concept of Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation is the holistic and ongoing process of developing a mature spiritual identity, involving the integration of faith, values, and beliefs into one’s life (Maddix, 2012). According to Dallas Willard, the progression of an individual’s spiritual growth is inevitable, underscoring the importance of purposeful engagement in this transformative process (Willard, 2006). Willard identifies three interrelated aspects: specific religious practices, the molding of one’s inner life, and the influence of the spiritual dimension on a person.

The term “spiritual” signifies engagement with the non-physical aspect of a person, and synonyms like “transformation,” “development,” and “maturation” capture the dynamic nature of the process (Turner, 2013). Spiritual formation transcends mere behavioral shaping to delve into the profound inner existence.

Relationship Between Discipleship and Spiritual Formation

Discipleship and spiritual formation intersect, with discipleship being a specific avenue within the broader spectrum of spiritual formation (Teo, 2017). The Holy Spirit plays a primary role in shaping the inner life of the disciple. Dallas Willard established what is termed the “Curriculum for Christlikeness,” which goes beyond the mere intake of information and emphasizes that genuine spiritual growth occurs when individuals wholeheartedly believe and internalize the knowledge acquired (Willard, 2006). Discipleship serves as the educational roadmap within the broader context of spiritual formation, encapsulating the essence of Christian growth and maturity.

Biblical Foundations of Discipleship

Old Testament Foundations: The longing of God to commune with Adam and Eve illustrates His desire for a profound relationship (Genesis 1-3). The Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) commands parents to impress God’s words on their children, talk about them daily, and place them in prominent places. Jethro’s counsel to Moses (Exodus 18:13-26) establishes the “Jethro Principle”: teach others, appoint officials, and take on only the most difficult cases

(Stuart, 2006). Moses disciplined Joshua (Numbers 27:15-23), and Elijah disciplined Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21). These examples highlight the importance of intentional, relational transmission of faith.

New Testament Foundations: Jesus' model of discipleship was unique: He initiated the call (Mark 1:16-20), broke social barriers by including women and sinners, and demanded lifelong commitment. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) mandates making disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe Christ's commands. In Acts, Barnabas disciplined Paul (Acts 11:22-26), and Paul disciplined Timothy and Titus. Paul's instruction in 2 Timothy 2:2 states, "The things that you have heard from me... commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (Hughes & Chapell, 2012).

Impact of Discipleship on Christian Youths

Discipleship impacts Christian youths in several areas:

1. **Spiritual Growth:** Youths develop a deeper relationship with God through prayer, Bible study, and meditation (Johnson, 2018).
2. **Character Development:** Virtues such as love, humility, patience, and compassion are cultivated.
3. **Community and Fellowship:** Discipleship fosters a sense of belonging and mutual accountability (Wilhoit & Howard, 2014).
4. **Mission and Purpose:** Youths discover their spiritual gifts and clarity on contributing to God's mission.
5. **Resilience and Faith Foundation:** Grounded faith helps youths navigate life's challenges with resilience.

Review of Empirical Studies

Lang and Bochman (2018) examined the 22-lesson Immersion Experience among adults. Using a mixed-methods design with surveys and in-depth interviews (N=16), the researchers found two main components: feeling valued by God and emotional validation in a trusted community. Four themes emerged: understanding God's delight, realizing personal value, importance of a safe community, and building trust in relationships. The study concluded that structured discipleship experiences significantly impact believers' transformation.

Beagles (2010) investigated discipleship models across several churches in the United States. The study reviewed classic, purpose-driven, and integrative models, finding that the integrative model which combines living in Christ, loving one another, and working for the kingdom produced the most sustainable spiritual growth among participants. The study recommended that churches adopt hybrid models tailored to their cultural context.

Alvarado (2017) examined discipleship strategies in Christian and Missionary Alliance churches. Using a survey of 120 church leaders, the study found that churches with formal, multi-level discipleship pathways (from new believer to mentor) reported 40% higher retention rates among young adults compared to churches without such pathways. The study emphasized the need for intentionality and measurability in discipleship.

Brewer (2019) conducted a case study of a discipleship camp model for youth. The research involved pre- and post-camp surveys of 75 participants. Results showed significant increases in biblical literacy ($p < .001$), prayer frequency ($p < .01$), and willingness to share faith ($p < .05$). The study concluded that immersive, relational discipleship experiences are highly effective for youth spiritual formation.

Johnson (2018) explored the local church's role in spiritual growth and discipleship using a mixed-methods approach with 200 adults. The study identified four key "D's" of spiritual growth: Desire (motivation), Discovery (knowledge), Development (practice), and Deployment (service). Findings indicated that disciples who progressed through all four stages exhibited the highest levels of spiritual maturity and church involvement.

Osmer (2008) conducted a longitudinal study on the relationship between intergenerational discipleship and youth faith retention. Following 150 youths over five years, the study found that youths who had at least one non-parental adult mentor from the church were 65% more likely to remain active in church after high school. The study highlighted the irreplaceable role of older adults in youth discipleship.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Dallas Willard's Curriculum for Christlikeness Theory (Willard, 2006). Willard posits that genuine spiritual growth occurs when individuals move from mere intellectual knowledge to a deepened and active faith. The theory identifies three interrelated aspects of spiritual development: specific religious practices (prayer, Bible study, fasting), the molding of one's inner life (character and virtues), and the influence of the spiritual dimension on a person (transformation by the Holy Spirit). This theory is relevant because it provides a comprehensive model for understanding how discipleship activities lead to holistic spiritual formation. It also aligns with the biblical mandate of the Great Commission and explains the findings from the empirical review.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the study to collect data on the existing state of discipleship practices and their perceived influence on the spiritual formation of Christian youths without manipulating any variable. The approach also allowed the study to describe discipleship as it is practised within the natural church setting of Foursquare Gospel Church, Victoria Garden City District, Ajah, Lagos State. The population of the study comprised members of Foursquare Gospel Church, Victoria Garden City District, Ajah, Lagos State, including pastors, deacons/elders, church workers, youths, and lay members. The church has an estimated population of over 300 worshippers. However, the sample for the study consisted of 51 respondents who were selected through purposive sampling. The use of purposive sampling was based on the need to include only respondents who had been actively involved in the church's discipleship-related activities for at least one year and were therefore considered capable of providing relevant information for the study.

Although a larger sample size would have improved the representativeness of the study, the sample of 51 respondents was used because the study focused specifically on church members with direct experience of discipleship activities within the selected district. Using Taro Yamane's formula at a 5% margin of error for a population of 300 would produce a sample size of approximately 171 respondents. Therefore, the use of 51 respondents represents a limitation of the study. As a result, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting the views of the selected respondents rather than being generalized to the entire church population or wider Pentecostal youth population in Nigeria. The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Role of Discipleship in Spiritual Formation Questionnaire (RDSFQ)." The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A obtained demographic information such as gender, age, marital status, position in church, and educational qualification. Section B contained 13 items structured on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The items were designed to elicit respondents' views on the role of discipleship, effective discipleship practices, the influence of discipleship on moral and ethical lifestyles, and possible ways of strengthening discipleship among Christian youths.

The instrument was face-validated by the research supervisor and two experts in pastoral studies to determine the clarity, relevance, and suitability of the items. However, no reliability coefficient, such as Cronbach's alpha, was computed for the 13-item Likert-scale instrument. This is also acknowledged as a methodological limitation, since reliability testing would have helped to establish the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. No

hypotheses were formulated for the study because the research was descriptive in nature. The study was guided by research questions rather than hypotheses, and the focus was on describing respondents' perceptions of discipleship and spiritual formation rather than testing relationships or differences among variables. Data were collected by personally administering copies of the questionnaire to respondents during Sunday services and youth fellowship meetings. All 51 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved, representing a 100% return rate. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequency counts and simple percentages, and the results were presented in tables. This method of analysis was appropriate for summarizing respondents' views and drawing conclusions based on the descriptive objectives of the study. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, their participation was voluntary, and confidentiality of their responses was assured. The study also ensured that the information obtained was used strictly for academic purposes.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 51 respondents participated in the study. Table 1 shows that 27 (52%) were male and 24 (48%) were female, indicating a balanced gender representation. Age distribution: 20 (38%) were aged 18-25 years, 15 (29%) aged 26-35 years, 8 (15%) aged 36-50 years, and 8 (17%) above 50 years. Marital status: 29 (56%) were single, 19 (37%) married, 2 (6%) divorced, and 1 (2%) engaged. Positions in the church: 8 (15%) were pastors, 9 (17%) deacons/elders, 20 (38%) workers, and 14 (29%) members. Educational qualifications: 4 (8%) primary, 5 (9%) SSCE/WAEC, 14 (27%) NCE/OND, 19 (37%) HND/BSc, and 9 (19%) Masters. These demographics indicate that the sample comprised mature, educated individuals capable of providing informed responses.

Table 1: Personal Experience of Discipleship Impact on Spiritual Growth

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	25	48%
Agree	21	42%
Disagree	3	6%
Strongly Disagree	2	4%
Total	51	100%

Interpretation: 48% strongly agreed and 42% agreed, meaning 90% of respondents personally experienced significant spiritual growth due to discipleship. Only 6% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed, indicating a very high level of positive impact.

Table 2: Discipleship Plays a Significant Role in Spiritual Formation

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	30	58%
Agree	18	35%
Disagree	2	4%
Strongly Disagree	2	4%
Total	51	100%

Interpretation: A combined 93% acknowledged the crucial role of discipleship in spiritual formation. The low percentage of disagreement (8%) further supports discipleship as a cornerstone of youth spiritual growth.

Table 3: Discipleship Provides Practical Guidance for Moral/Ethical Challenges

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	27	52%
Agree	21	42%
Disagree	2	4%

Strongly Disagree	1	2%
Total	51	100%

Interpretation: 94% of respondents agreed that discipleship offers valuable guidance for handling moral and ethical challenges, demonstrating the practical relevance of discipleship in everyday life.

Table 4: Discipleship Contributes to Holistic Development (Spiritually, Emotionally, Socially)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	29	56%
Agree	18	37%
Disagree	3	6%
Strongly Disagree	1	2%
Total	51	100%

Interpretation: 93% of respondents affirmed that discipleship contributes to their holistic development, supporting the view that discipleship positively impacts multiple dimensions of life.

Challenges and Opportunities

Respondents identified challenges to discipleship as:

- i. Cultural influences clashing with biblical principles
- ii. Technology distractions (social media, online entertainment, gaming)
- iii. Busy lifestyles (academic and social commitments)
- iv. Lack of mature mentorship
- v. Resistance to accountability

Opportunities identified included:

- i. Relational discipleship through small groups
- ii. Relevant teaching and resources tailored to youths
- iii. Digital discipleship (online Bible studies, virtual mentorship)
- iv. Leadership development and empowerment
- v. Cultivating a culture of discipleship integrated into all church life

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that discipleship plays a strongly positive role in the spiritual formation of Christian youths at Foursquare Gospel Church, Victoria Garden City District, Ajah, Lagos State. The finding that 90% of respondents reported personal spiritual growth through discipleship supports the view that intentional spiritual practices contribute meaningfully to Christian transformation. This agrees with Willard's (2006) argument that spiritual formation is not accidental but occurs through disciplined participation in practices that shape the believer's inner life, character, and relationship with God. It also aligns with Lang and Bochman (2018), who observed that structured discipleship experiences can help participants develop spiritually within a supportive and caring faith community.

The 93% agreement that discipleship is crucial to spiritual formation further reinforces the biblical and theological foundation of discipleship. This finding is consistent with Deuteronomy 6:4–9, where the transmission of faith is presented as an intentional and continuous process within the believing community. Green (2016) similarly emphasizes that spiritual instruction must move beyond occasional teaching to a repeated and embodied pattern of faith formation. In this regard, discipleship is shown not merely as a church activity but as a sustained process through which Christian youths are guided into deeper knowledge of God, stronger commitment to biblical values, and greater maturity in Christian living.

The finding that 94% of respondents agreed that discipleship provides practical guidance for moral and ethical challenges is particularly significant within the Nigerian urban context, where youths are exposed to competing pressures such as materialism, peer influence,

sexual immorality, corruption, and secular worldviews. This result supports Shirley's (2008) position that discipleship equips believers to apply their faith to real-life situations rather than separating spirituality from everyday conduct. It also reflects the pattern of Titus 2:1–8, where older believers are instructed to guide younger believers in self-control, purity, sound conduct, and good works (Towner, 2006). Therefore, discipleship contributes not only to personal devotion but also to moral stability and ethical decision-making among Christian youths.

The 93% agreement on holistic development shows that discipleship affects more than biblical knowledge alone. It contributes to the spiritual, emotional, social, and moral development of young believers. This finding agrees with Maddix's (2012) understanding of spiritual formation as a process that involves the whole person in relationship with God, the church, and the wider community. Through discipleship, youths are helped to build spiritual discipline, develop Christian identity, cultivate emotional resilience, and experience accountability within the body of Christ. This suggests that effective discipleship must be relational, practical, and community-based rather than limited to classroom-style teaching.

The challenges identified in the study, including cultural influences, technological distractions, busy lifestyles, inadequate mentorship, and resistance to accountability, are consistent with contemporary literature on youth development and spiritual formation. Henze (2015) explains that youth is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood in which young people experiment with roles, identities, and social expectations; this makes them particularly vulnerable to competing influences when clear guidance and mentorship are absent. In the same way, Osmer (2008) emphasizes the importance of adult guidance in helping young people remain connected to faith communities. Within the present study, inadequate mentorship appears to weaken the continuity between general church teaching and personal spiritual growth.

However, the challenges also point to important opportunities for strengthening discipleship in the church. Digital discipleship, relational mentoring, relevant biblical teaching, peer accountability groups, and youth leadership development can help make discipleship more responsive to the realities of contemporary Christian youths. While technology may distract youths from spiritual discipline, it can also be used positively through online Bible study groups, devotional platforms, follow-up messages, digital mentoring, and faith-based media content. Therefore, the church should not only warn against digital distractions but also intentionally occupy digital spaces with sound discipleship resources.

The findings indicate that discipleship remains essential for nurturing mature Christian youths. The evidence from respondents suggests that discipleship supports spiritual growth, strengthens moral conduct, promotes holistic development, and provides a framework for accountability and Christian identity. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of discipleship depends on intentional structure, trained mentors, consistent follow-up, and contextual relevance. The study therefore affirms that churches seeking to retain and develop spiritually mature youths must move beyond occasional programmes and adopt systematic discipleship models that combine biblical teaching, mentoring, accountability, community, and leadership development.

One notable divergence from some secular literature is that while technology is often seen as a threat, respondents also recognized it as an opportunity. This suggests a nuanced approach: rather than banning technology, the church should use it as a tool for online Bible studies, apps, and virtual mentorship, as recommended by Alvarado (2017). Overall, the findings indicate that the Foursquare Gospel Church VGC's discipleship programs are effective but can be improved by addressing the identified challenges. The high levels of agreement across multiple items validate the importance of discipleship and call for its continued prioritization.

Conclusion

This research embarked on a comprehensive exploration of the pivotal role that discipleship plays in shaping the spiritual growth and development of Christian youths within the Foursquare Gospel Church, Victoria Garden City District Ajah, Lagos State. The study confirmed that discipleship is not an optional church activity but a biblical mandate essential for spiritual formation. The overwhelming majority of respondents affirmed that discipleship leads to personal spiritual growth, provides practical moral guidance, and contributes to holistic development. However, challenges such as cultural pressures, technology distractions, busy schedules, and a shortage of mentors must be addressed. The study concludes that intentional, relational, and contextually adapted discipleship practices are critical for nurturing mature Christian youths who can withstand secular influences and actively contribute to the church and society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the researcher recommends the following:

- i. Church leadership should create programs tailored to the needs and interests of youths, incorporating one-on-one mentorship, small group sessions, and church-wide initiatives to provide diverse avenues for spiritual growth.
- ii. Provide regular training sessions, workshops, and resources to develop the skills and knowledge of mentors, enabling them to guide youths effectively.
- iii. Develop online resources such as Bible study materials, interactive apps, and virtual mentorship programs to engage technology-adept youths and supplement traditional methods.
- iv. Promote inclusivity, support, and genuine relationships through youth participation in church activities, small groups, and fellowship events.
- v. Identify and nurture potential youth leaders by offering leadership training, opportunities for service, and roles within the church, empowering them to take ownership of their faith.
- vi. Collect feedback from youths and mentors, evaluate the effectiveness of current initiatives, and make necessary adjustments to meet evolving needs.

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