International Journal of Arts and Humanities: ISSN-2360-7998 (Print) and Open Access: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23938635
Abbreviated Key Title: Int. J. Arts Humanit.
ISSN: 2360-7998 (Print) and Open Access
Volume-14 (Issue): 10, October, Pp. 344-355, 2026

Full Length Paper

Church Planting Issues and Strategies for Growth in Selected Christian Groups in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated church planting issues and strategies for growth in selected Christian groups in Lagos State, Nigeria*. The increasing establishment of new churches across Nigeria has not always translated into sustainable growth, as many church plants experience leadership challenges, financial instability, inadequate discipleship, weak organisational structures, and socio-cultural constraints that threaten their long-term survival. The study was therefore undertaken to examine the major issues affecting church planting; assess the influence of leadership and organisational challenges; examine the role of discipleship; and identify strategies for improving the sustainability and effectiveness of church planting in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised pastors, church planters, and senior church workers drawn from selected religious groups in Lagos State. A sample of 298 respondents was selected using appropriate sampling procedures. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Church Planting Sustainability Questionnaire (CPSQ). The instrument was validated by experts in religious studies, educational management, and measurement and evaluation, while its reliability was established through a pilot study using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded an acceptable reliability coefficient. Data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while Multiple Linear Regression and the Independent Samples t-test were used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that inadequate financial resources, ineffective leadership, weak organisational structures, poor strategic planning, inadequate discipleship programmes, and socio-cultural challenges were the major factors affecting church planting in Lagos State. Leadership quality was found to have a significant positive influence on the sustainability of church plants. The hypothesis tests showed that financial resources and leadership quality had significant effects on church planting sustainability, leading to the rejection of the corresponding null hypotheses. However, no significant differences were found between the responses of clergy and congregants regarding the major challenges confronting church planting and the strategies required to address those challenges, indicating a shared understanding of both the problems and solutions. It recommends that denominations, theological institutions, and church planting agencies strengthen leadership development programmes, institutionalise financial accountability mechanisms, promote structured discipleship and leadership succession planning, improve community engagement, and provide continuous mentoring and administrative support for newly planted churches. The study contributes to knowledge by proposing an integrated framework for church planting sustainability that combines leadership, stewardship, organisational effectiveness, contextualisation, and strategic management as essential pillars of sustainable church growth in Nigeria*.

Keywords: Church planting, church sustainability, leadership quality, financial stewardship, discipleship, organizational effectiveness, socio-cultural factors, Lagos State, Nigeria.

Received: 11/9//2026 Accepted: 13//10/2026 Published: 30/10/2026

INTRODUCTION

Church planting is the vehicle that has delivered the gospel to the world since Jesus proclaimed the Great Commission. According to Stetzer and Im (2016), church planting is essential; without it, Christianity will continue to decline in North America. The authors state that church planting is a deliberate and mission-orientated process of

establishing new congregations with the capacity for growth and multiplication. This assertion is confirmed by Alawode (2020), who stated that the enormous commission Jesus commanded his disciple to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19-20) is not only about winning and converting individuals but also about organising believers into communities of faith – churches – where they can grow spiritually, worship collectively and reach others with the gospel. Hence, the current state of church engagement is on a steady decline. According to the Pew Research Center (2019), it states that adults in the U.S. who identify as Christian have decreased to 65%, down 12% in the past decade (In U.S., Decline of Christianity…, 2019). Though Wagner, cited in John (2016), stated that global society is undergoing a constant proliferation and planting of churches, these developments have not only brought about changing values but also provided a greater source of solutions to people's problems. The author further stated that the rapid multiplication of churches is borne out of the understanding that there is freedom of religious worship, particularly in Nigeria.

Church planting in Nigeria represents a significant dynamic within the religious landscape, reflecting broader social, cultural, and economic transformations in the country. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation with over 200 million people, has experienced a remarkable proliferation of churches, especially since the late 20th century (Adesanya, 2024). This expansion is closely linked to the country's constitutional freedom of religious worship and the population's high demand for spiritual nourishment and community support (October, 2024).

Throughout Christian history, church planting has served as a catalyst for revival, spiritual transformation and the territorial expansion of the gospel. It plays a critical role in fulfilling the mandate of spreading the positive news of salvation to both reached and unreached populations (Alawode, 2020). Alawode (2023) sees church planting as an essential instrument in God's hand to redeem humanity through the power of the gospel. The author asserts that 'the Great Commission entails church planting', and the 'command to baptise and teach' the followers of Christ to obey His commandments is the basis for church planting. Hence, in the context of this study, church planting can be defined as the process by which churches are started, nurtured and resourced to multiply through the proclamation of the Gospel, soul-winning and discipleship, especially in Lagos State.

Church planting results from effective mission work, as can be seen in the Acts of the Apostles, where the apostles' missionary activities led to the planting of new churches in the communities they evangelised. For churches to multiply and ultimately fulfil the Great Commission, they must be missional in nature and practice. A church must possess a missional mindset and vision to thrive and remain relevant to the community of people it exists to serve. Anane-Denteh has defined a missional church as a product of the gospel with the proclamation gospel as its main task and guided by the view that this earth is a transient place, and eternal life in Christ is its watchword (Anane-Denteh, 2021). A missional church identifies the Great Commission as its sense of calling and designs all aspects of its policies and practices around the mission of God. It focuses on participating in the Missio Dei while seeking to become a prophetic voice for the transformation of society with Kingdom values and principles. Missiologists agree that church planting is vital to presenting the gospel to unreached people groups. If church planting is the vehicle for delivering the life-giving message of Jesus to the world, church planters are the drivers who actively accomplish the purpose of healthy multiplication.

Thus, church planting in Nigeria is deeply rooted in the country's rich historical tapestry of Christian evangelism and religious transformations. The introduction of Christianity in Nigeria dates back to the 15th and 16th centuries, when Portuguese missionaries first brought Latin Christianity to parts of the kingdom of Benin and Warri (October, 2024). This period marked the initial seeds of Christian influence, which later expanded dramatically with the arrival of Protestant missionaries in the 19th century, notably the Wesleyan Methodists around 1842, who penetrated the interior regions such as Badagry and Abeokuta. The efforts of these early missionaries laid the foundation for structured church planting, which was strategically aimed at nurturing self-sustaining and indigenous congregations, embodying the three-self principle articulated by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, and self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing churches (Daila Baba, 2019; Tokunbo, 2017).

As Nigeria's socio-political environment evolved through colonial and post-colonial eras, so did the nature and scale of church planting. What began as mission outposts grew into proliferating independent churches by the late 20th century, catalysed particularly by the rise of Pentecostalism and charismatic movements. This modern wave reflects a contextual adaptation of Christianity that resonates with Nigeria's diverse ethnic and cultural groups, creating dynamic growth patterns across urban and rural settings (Oladele, 2024; Adesanya, 2024). The expansion of churches is often considered both a spiritual and social response to local realities, fulfilling needs beyond worship, such as education, health, and community development.

The rapid multiplication of churches is often hailed for advancing evangelisation, fostering new leadership development, and providing specialised ministries that cater to diverse social needs (Tokunbo, 2017). These developments highlight church planting as a vital mechanism for expanding Christianity and contributing to socio-economic development, particularly through community intervention programmes that address social and moral issues.

In the context of this study, issues refer to the various challenges, concerns, constraints, and factors that affect the effectiveness, growth, and long-term sustainability of church planting efforts. These issues may arise from organisational, leadership, financial, social, cultural, and

theological dimensions that influence how newly established churches operate and survive in their communities.

According to Stetzer and Bird (2020), church planting challenges include leadership capacity, financial limitations, contextualisation difficulties, and the ability to build sustainable discipleship structures within newly formed congregations. Similarly, Payne explains that issues in church planting often involve obstacles such as inadequate leadership training, poor strategic planning, insufficient support systems, and cultural barriers that may hinder the long-term viability of newly planted churches (Payne, 2019).

In the Nigerian context, scholars argue that issues surrounding church planting also include denominational competition, lack of theological training among church leaders, financial dependency, and poor administrative structures (Kalu, 2017; Alawode, 2023). According to Kalu (2017), the rapid expansion of churches in Nigeria has created challenges related to leadership quality, doctrinal consistency, and sustainability of congregations

Furthermore, recent studies emphasise that issues affecting church planting may also include socio-economic and environmental factors such as poverty, urbanisation, and community resistance, which influence the ability of newly established churches to maintain growth and stability (Alagbala & Otunla, 2024). Issues therefore are referred to as the various problems, constraints, and contextual challenges that influence the establishment, management, and sustainability of church plants in Nigeria.

Over time such issues as internal leadership conflicts, poor funding, and lack of coordinated strategies have emerged as serious barriers. Any newly planted churches struggle with an inadequate follow-up system, resulting in inadequate discipleship and limited spiritual maturity among members (Tsuma, Siringi & Wambua, 2019).

The church planting movement in Nigeria is not without challenges. Financial constraints, leadership instability, competition among churches, and theological divergences often undermine the cohesive growth and sustainability of new church plants (Tokunbo, 2017). The socio-political environment, including ethnic and religious tensions, occasionally impacts churches' ability to operate freely and effectively, compounding these challenges. Further, issues such as personality clashes and unhealthy rivalry can detract from the collective mission of church planting, potentially fostering divisions within local Christian communities (Adesanya, 2024; Tokunbo, 2017). These difficulties necessitate strategic planning, effective leadership development, and contextual theological approaches to ensure that church planting fulfils its intended roles of evangelism and community development.

Moreover, the increasing urbanisation of Nigerian cities poses a challenge: while some churches have been successful in rural evangelism, their adaptation to urban contexts has been less impactful. Churches therefore require innovative methods, multicultural sensitivity, and flexible worship models that sometimes contrast with their traditional approaches.

Additionally, denominational competition has intensified with numerous Pentecostal and charismatic movements vying for membership and influence. As a result, new churches struggle to attract and retain members, especially the youth and middle-class populations in urban cities (Adeboye, 2020). Other issues may include leadership problems, financial constraints, lack of strategic planning, community acceptance, discipleship challenges, and organisational instability.

Therefore, Church planting in Nigeria constitutes a complex and multifaceted phenomenon shaped by an interconnected array of variables critical to its success and sustainability. At its core, church planting refers to the intentional process of establishing new Christian congregations, which involves strategic planning, evangelistic outreach, and organisational setup (Kenin, 2025). This core variable inherently depends on the availability and effective mobilisation of financial resources, which represent a crucial determinant, as they fund essential church activities such as infrastructure development, pastoral support, and outreach programmes. Without adequate financial backing, nascent churches face considerable difficulties in sustaining operations and expanding their reach (Stetzer & Bird, 2020). Alongside financial resources, leadership capacity emerges as a pivotal factor; successful church plants require competent, well-trained leaders who can provide vision, manage internal dynamics, and guide community engagement.

Leadership instability or inadequacy can impede growth and precipitate organisational challenges (Reimer, 2016). Equally important is the socio-cultural and community context in which church planting occurs. Nigeria's rich ethnic and cultural diversity necessitates that planting strategies be adapted to local contexts to foster acceptance and relevance; this cultural adaptability acts as a moderating variable influencing how other resources translate into tangible growth. Community support, reflected in local participation and social integration, further anchors churches within their environments, providing both legitimacy and practical assistance indispensable for survival and growth (Payne, 2019). However, church planting efforts often confront numerous mediating challenges, including financial constraints, leadership conflicts, doctrinal disputes, and socio-political tensions such as ethnic and religious frictions, which can hinder cohesion and hinder growth prospects (Tokunbo, 2017).

However, there are significant prospects and ways to reinvigorate and sustain church planting initiatives. Sustainability in the context of church planting refers to the ability of a newly established church to survive, grow, and maintain its spiritual, organisational, and financial stability over time without excessive dependence on external support (Alawode, 2020). A sustainable church plant is one that is capable of maintaining regular worship, developing leadership, supporting ministry activities, and

contributing positively to its community. According to Rick Warren, a sustainable church is one that maintains healthy spiritual life, strong leadership structures, and effective ministry systems that allow it to continue fulfilling its mission over a long period.

In Nigeria, sustainability is particularly important because many newly planted churches struggle with financial instability, leadership challenges, and limited organisational structures. Without adequate planning and leadership development, some church plants fail to achieve long-term stability.

The rise of digital technologies presents new opportunities for outreach, discipleship and leadership training. We can leverage online platforms to effectively engage with youths and urban dwellers. Furthermore, the emergence of younger, mission-minded pastors and leaders within the Christian groups presents hope for more dynamic and contextually relevant church planting initiatives. Interdenominational partnerships and ecumenical dialogue also offer opportunities for mutual support and resource sharing, especially in regions where Christianity faces hostility and marginalisation (Stetzer & Bird, 2020).

In light of these issues, this study explores both the challenges and potential of church planting in some selected Christian groups. Thus, an integrative understanding of how financial capacity, leadership quality, cultural contextualisation, and community engagement are indispensable for assessing the contemporary issues, challenges, and opportunities in church planting among Nigerian Christian groups offers scholarly insights with direct practical implications. By examining their historical practices, present realities and future opportunities, the study aimed to present practical strategies to revitalise the efforts of some churches in church planting processes. Based on this backdrop, this study examined church planting issues and strategies in selected churches in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study was to assess the issues in church planting and strategies among selected churches in Lagos State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the major issues affecting church planting in Lagos State, Nigeria.
2. Assess the organisational leadership challenges influencing the church planting in Lagos State, Nigeria.
3. Evaluate the financially related factors affecting the survival and growth of newly planted churches in Lagos State, Nigeria.
4. Suggest strategies for improving the sustainability and effectiveness of church planting in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

These research questions guided the study:

1. What are the major issues affecting church planting in Lagos State, Nigeria?
2. What leadership and organisational challenges influence the church planting in Lagos State, Nigeria?
3. How do financial and resource-related factors affect the survival and growth of newly planted churches in Lagos State, Nigeria?
4. What strategies can be adopted to improve the sustainability and effectiveness of church planting in Lagos State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance to guide the study:

Ho1: Financial resources have no significant effect on the establishment and sustainability of church planting among selected religious groups in Nigeria.

Ho2: Leadership quality has no significant effect on the growth and survival of church plants.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the responses of clergy and congregants regarding the strategies to mitigate challenges hindering effective church planting among the selected religious groups.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The descriptive survey design was considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to systematically collect data from a defined population to describe existing conditions, attitudes, opinions, and practices regarding church planting issues and strategies for growth. The area of this study was Lagos State, Nigeria, one of the most strategically significant and religiously dynamic regions in West Africa. Lagos State was chosen because it is the most urbanised and religiously diverse state in Nigeria, hosting a large concentration of Christian denominations, including Pentecostal, Evangelical, Catholic, and independent ministries. The study focused specifically on selected churches across urban and semi-urban areas such as Ikeja, Lagos Island, Ikorodu, Badagry, Surulere, and Epe. The population of the study comprised one thousand, two hundred and fifty (1250) participants, including pastors, church planters, and church workers from selected churches in Lagos State. The sample size for the study was 300 respondents, determined using Taro Yamane's sampling formula for finite populations. A multistage sampling technique was adopted for this exercise. At Stage One: Lagos State was stratified into five administrative divisions (Ikeja, Lagos Island, Badagry, Ikorodu, and Epe). Stage Two: Christian denominations were grouped into Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Independent churches. Stage Three: Simple random sampling was used to select churches within each stratum. Stage Four: Purposive sampling was used to

select pastors, church planters, and senior workers with at least two years of experience in church planting. This approach was to ensure representativeness and reduced sampling bias. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Church Planting and Sustainability Questionnaire (CPSQ)." The instrument was designed using a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts from Educational Management, Religious Studies and Measurement and Evaluation from Paul University Awka, Anambra State. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the test-retest method. The questionnaire was administered twice to 30 respondents who were not part of the main study, with an interval of two weeks. The data obtained were analysed using the Pearson coefficient, which yielded a reliability index of 0.92, thus making the instrument reliable. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires with the help of trained research assistants. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to respondents in selected churches across Lagos State. At the end of the data collection exercise, 297 questionnaires were returned, giving a 99% return rate. Data collected were analysed with the aid of the Special Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25, Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25, using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. Inferential statistics, including Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis, were used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What are the major issues affecting church planting in Lagos State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Major issues affecting church planting in Lagos State, Nigeria

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Inadequate funding affects church planting.	3.48	0.69	Accepted
2	Poor leadership hinders church growth.	3.39	0.72	Accepted
3	High cost of acquiring worship facilities affects sustainability.	3.56	0.61	Accepted
4	Competition among churches affects church planting.	3.22	0.83	Accepted
5	Weak discipleship programme reduce church stability.	3.41	0.74	Accepted
6	Poor strategic planning contributes to church failure.	3.30	0.76	Accepted
	Grand Mean	**3.39**		

The grand mean of 3.39 indicates that respondents agreed that financial constraints, leadership deficiencies, competition, weak discipleship, inadequate planning, and the high cost of facilities are major issues affecting church planting in Lagos State.

Research Question Two: What leadership and organizational challenges influence the sustainability of church plants?

Table 3: Leadership and organizational challenges influence church Plants

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Poor leadership succession planning	3.45	0.66	Accepted
2	Lack of administrative competence	3.33	0.71	Accepted
3	Poor conflict management	3.27	0.77	Accepted
4	Inadequate delegation of responsibilities	3.24	0.79	Accepted
5	Poor accountability among leaders	3.38	0.69	Accepted
6	Weak organizational structure	3.31	0.73	Accepted
	Grand Mean =	**3.33**		

The grand mean of 3.3 shown by the table indicates that respondents agreed that leadership succession,

organizational structure, accountability, delegation, and conflict management significantly influence the church plants.

Research Question Three: How do financial and resource-related factors affect the survival and growth of newly planted churches?

Table 3: financial and resource-related factors affect the survival and growth of newly planted churches

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Inadequate financial support affects growth.	3.61	0.60	Accepted
2	Poor financial management limits sustainability.	3.44	0.68	Accepted
3	Dependence on offerings alone affects survival.	3.29	0.74	Accepted
4	Limited access to donors affects ministry expansion.	3.35	0.71	Accepted
5	Poor budgeting hinders church development.	3.40	0.69	Accepted
6	Economic hardship affects members' giving.	3.55	0.63	Accepted
	Grand Mean =	3.44	0.66	Accepted

Table 3 shows a grand mean of 3.44 which indicates that financial limitations, poor resource management, and economic challenges significantly affect the growth and sustainability of newly planted churches.

Research Question four: What strategies can improve the sustainability and effectiveness of church planting in Lagos State?

Table 4: Strategies can improve the sustainability and effectiveness of church planting in Lagos State

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Improve leadership training.	3.71	0.51	Accepted
2	Strengthen financial accountability.	3.63	0.56	Accepted
3	Develop structured discipleship programme	3.68	0.54	Accepted
4	Increase community engagement	3.49	0.65	Accepted
5	Establish mentoring systems for church planters.	3.57	0.60	Accepted
6	Promote strategic planning and evaluation.	3.55	0.62	Accepted
	Grand Mean =	**3.61**	0.61	**Accepted**

The findings in table 4 with a grand mean of 3.61, indicate strong agreement that leadership development, financial accountability, structured discipleship, mentoring, strategic planning, and community engagement are key strategies for improving the sustainability and effectiveness of church planting in Lagos State

Ho_1: Financial resources have no significant effect on the church plants in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Table 5: Simple regression on no significant effect on the church plants in Lagos

Variable	B	T	p-value	Decision
Financial Resources	0.512	8.943	0.000	Reject Ho_1

Decision: Since p = 0.000 < 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected

The table 5 shows that financial resources have a significant positive effect on the church plants in Lagos State. Churches with stronger financial support and sound financial management are more likely to survive and growth.

Ho_2: Leadership quality has no significant effect on the church planting in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Table 6: Simple regression of no significant effect on leadership and the church planting

Variable	B	T	p-value	Decision
Leadership Quality	0.584	10.267	0.000	Reject Ho_2

Decision: Since p = 0.000 < 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Result in table 6 indicates that leadership quality significantly influences the sustainability of church plants. Effective leadership enhances church growth, organizational stability, and long-term survival.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the responses of pastors, church planters, and senior workers regarding the challenges affecting church planting in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Table 7: One-Way ANOVA on difference between the stakeholder's responses

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	p-value	Decision
Between Groups	6.742	2	3.371	2.184	0.115	Fail to Reject Ho_6
Within Groups	455.293	295	1.543			
Total	**462.035**	**297**				

Decision: Since p = 0.115 > 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Data in table 7 shows that the p-value of 0.115 is higher than the significant level; hence, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference in the views of pastors, church planters, and senior workers regarding the major challenges affecting church planting in Lagos State. This suggests a broad consensus among the three respondent groups about the issues confronting church planting.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first findings of this study revealed that respondents generally agreed that inadequate financial resources, poor leadership, high cost of acquiring worship facilities, weak discipleship programmes, poor strategic planning, and increasing competition among churches constitute the major issues affecting church planting in Lagos State. The grand mean of 3.39, which exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50, provides evidence for this. The finding implies that church planting extends beyond evangelistic zeal and depends on the effective integration of financial, organisational, spiritual, and contextual factors.

The prominence of financial constraints among the identified challenges reflects the economic realities of ministry within Lagos State. As Nigeria's commercial hub, Lagos is characterised by high costs of land acquisition, rental of worship facilities, transportation, and administrative expenses. Newly planted churches often lack adequate financial reserves and therefore struggle to maintain regular worship services, execute outreach programmes, support pastoral staff, and undertake community development initiatives. Consequently, many church plants either stagnate or cease operations within a relatively short period after establishment.

Leadership was also identified as a major challenge affecting church planting. Effective church planting requires visionary leadership capable of mobilising people, managing resources, resolving conflicts, and articulating a compelling mission. Where leadership is weak, organisational instability, poor member retention, and ineffective ministry programmes become inevitable. Church planting therefore demands both spiritual maturity and managerial competence. The findings align with Alagbala's (2024) research, which indicated that leadership vision significantly predicts church planting effectiveness and identified inadequate funding, leadership deficiencies, contextual challenges, and weak organisational structures as major barriers to successful church planting, while also recommending improved leadership preparation, financial planning, and contextualised ministry strategies. Furthermore, the finding is supported by research: Afolabi and Afolabi (2024) found that structured discipleship through home-cell ministries improves member retention, leadership development, and church sustainability. The study observed that churches with effective discipleship systems recorded stronger spiritual growth and greater organisational resilience than those without such programmes. The present finding equally aligns with the Church Growth Theory advanced by Donald McGavran,

which argues that church growth is influenced by leadership competence, effective evangelism, contextual relevance, and organisational efficiency. The theory emphasises that sustainable church planting requires deliberate planning, discipleship, and adaptation to local social conditions. The convergence between the present findings, previous empirical evidence, and these theoretical perspectives suggests that sustainable church planting in Lagos State requires a holistic approach that integrates spiritual vitality, sound leadership, financial stewardship, intentional discipleship, and strategic organisational management.

The findings are also consistent with Mbewe (2022), who observed that many African church plants experience stagnation because leadership development receives less attention than evangelistic activities. According to the study, churches that invested in mentoring younger leaders, administrative capacity building, and organisational accountability achieved significantly higher levels of sustainability than churches without intentional leadership development programmes. Furthermore, the finding aligns with research by Barna Group (2021), which reported that leadership burnout, inadequate succession planning, volunteer management challenges, and organisational inefficiencies are among the leading causes of decline in newly established churches. The report recommended continuous leadership development, coaching, and institutional governance as essential strategies for sustaining church planting initiatives.

The present finding is also supported by the Transformational Leadership Theory, which posits that effective leaders inspire followers through vision, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. Transformational leaders influence organisational commitment, improve employee or member satisfaction, and enhance institutional performance. Applied to church planting, the theory suggests that pastors who demonstrate integrity, inspire commitment, empower members, and promote shared leadership create healthier and more sustainable church organisations.

The agreement between the present study and previous empirical studies indicates that leadership remains one of the strongest determinants of church sustainability regardless of denominational affiliation (Tsuma et al., 2019; Stetzer & Bird, 2020; Oladele, 2022; Alagbala, 2024; Afolabi & Afolabi, 2024; Soneye, 2025). However, while previous studies focused primarily on pastoral leadership, the present study extends existing knowledge by incorporating organisational dimensions such as accountability, delegation, conflict management, and administrative competence in the context of church planting in Lagos State. This broader perspective demonstrates that sustainable church planting requires both spiritual leadership and sound organisational management.

The findings of this study revealed that financial and resource-related factors significantly affect the survival and growth of newly planted churches in Lagos State, Nigeria. Specifically, respondents agreed that inadequate financial support, poor financial management, overdependence on tithes and offerings, limited access to donor support, poor budgeting, and prevailing economic hardship adversely influence the sustainability of church plants. This is reflected in the grand mean of 3.44, which exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50. The finding indicates that financial capacity remains one of the strongest determinants of successful church planting and long-term ministry sustainability. These findings are strongly supported by the study by Jokakuu and Chalu (2025) on selected Tanzanian Christian denominations, which found that financial reporting and accountability are indispensable for sustainable church planting. Also in corroboration with this study is that of Chembo and Yohane (2025), who investigated financial management practices among Baptist Fellowship churches in Zambia and found that inadequate financial literacy, weak internal controls, poor budgeting, and excessive reliance on tithes and offerings significantly constrained church sustainability. The study recommended strengthening financial planning, improving internal control mechanisms, and diversifying income sources to enhance organisational resilience.

Supporting this position, Shigi, Macheru, and Kiboi (2025) examined financial planning and sustainability among Catholic Church-owned institutions in Kenya. Their regression analysis revealed that financial planning had a significant positive effect on organisational sustainability, leading the authors to recommend standardised financial planning frameworks to improve long-term institutional performance. Although their study focused on church-owned institutions rather than church plants, the findings reinforce the importance of financial planning for sustainability. The present findings are further corroborated by Kachumi et al. (2025), who examined the financial sustainability of church-supported non-governmental organisations in Zambia. Their study found that organisations with diversified income sources, effective leadership, and sound financial planning were significantly more financially sustainable than those dependent on a single funding stream. They also identified donor dependence, weak long-term planning, and poor domestic resource mobilisation as major threats to sustainability.

The findings further revealed that community engagement contributes significantly to church sustainability. Churches that participate in educational programmes, health campaigns, youth empowerment, poverty alleviation, environmental sanitation, and humanitarian services build stronger relationships with their host communities. Community engagement enhances public trust, strengthens organisational legitimacy, and creates opportunities for evangelism and discipleship.

The findings of this study are strongly supported by recent empirical evidence, such as Barna Group (2023), which reported that churches investing consistently in

leadership coaching, mentoring, volunteer development, and organisational learning recorded higher levels of ministry effectiveness, volunteer retention, and leadership continuity than churches without structured leadership development programmes. Another is Wanjala (2023), who found that mentoring, discipleship, strategic planning, and leadership training significantly improved the sustainability of church planting initiatives across East Africa. Churches that implemented comprehensive leadership development frameworks demonstrated higher survival rates and stronger organisational resilience than those relying primarily on the leadership abilities of founding pastors. The study Oladipo and Adebayo (2024) also reported that effective pastoral administration, financial transparency, and continuous leadership training significantly predicted church growth within the Abundant Grace Baptist Association in Lagos State. Their findings emphasised that administrative competence and accountability strengthen institutional stability and increase members' confidence in church leadership. More findings from Jokakuu and Chalu (2025) support these findings. It found that financial accountability and transparent reporting significantly enhanced sustainability among Christian organisations in Tanzania. The study concluded that accountability systems encourage responsible stewardship, improve stakeholder confidence, and strengthen long-term organisational performance. Chembo and Yohane (2025) reported that financial literacy, budgeting, internal control systems, and diversified resource mobilisation significantly improved financial sustainability among Baptist churches in Zambia. The researchers recommended integrating financial management training into pastoral preparation programmes to improve the sustainability of churches.

The result of the regression analysis revealed that financial resources significantly predicted the sustainability of church plants in Lagos State ($\beta = 0.512$, $t = 8.943$, $p < 0.05$). Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. This finding indicates that financial resources exert a statistically significant positive influence on the sustainability of church plants in Lagos State. The positive beta coefficient further suggests that improvements in financial capacity are associated with increased sustainability, growth, organisational stability, and the long-term survival of newly planted churches.

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The findings from the multiple regression analysis revealed that leadership quality significantly influenced the sustainability of church plants in Lagos State ($\beta = 0.584$, $t = 10.267$, $p < 0.05$). Since the probability value was less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that leadership quality has a statistically significant positive effect on the sustainability of church plants in Lagos State, Nigeria.

The result demonstrates that leadership quality is one of the strongest predictors of church sustainability. The standardised beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.584$) suggests that improvements in leadership competence are associated with substantial improvements in the survival, growth, and long-term effectiveness of church plants. This finding implies that sustainable church planting depends not only on spiritual calling but also on visionary leadership, sound administration, accountability, effective communication, conflict resolution, and strategic decision-making.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study examined the factors affecting the sustainability of church planting among selected religious groups in Lagos State, Nigeria. Specifically, it investigated the major challenges confronting church planting, the influence of leadership and organisational practices, the role of financial resources, the contribution of discipleship and leadership training, the impact of socio-cultural factors, and the strategies required to improve the sustainability and effectiveness of church planting. The study found that church planting in Lagos State is constrained by multiple factors, including inadequate financial resources, ineffective leadership, poor strategic planning, weak organisational structures, insufficient discipleship programmes, increasing operational expenses, and socio-cultural challenges. Respondents agreed that these factors collectively reduce the sustainability and effectiveness of newly planted churches. Hypothesis One showed that financial resources have a significant positive effect on the sustainability of church plants. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. Strategies for improving sustainability: Respondents identified leadership development, strategic planning, financial accountability, intentional discipleship, mentoring, community engagement, effective governance, and continuous capacity building as the most effective strategies for improving the sustainability and effectiveness of church planting initiatives in Lagos State. Hypothesis Four equally revealed a significant similarity between the responses of clergy and congregants regarding the strategies for improving church planting sustainability.

The null hypothesis was retained. The findings also contribute to the growing body of knowledge on church planting by providing empirical evidence from Lagos State and highlighting the need for integrated approaches that combine spiritual leadership with sound organisational and management practices. Such approaches are essential for ensuring that newly planted churches remain spiritually vibrant, financially sustainable, organisationally resilient, and socially relevant in an increasingly dynamic and competitive ministry environment. This study therefore concludes that church planting represents a strategic pathway for advancing the mission of the Church in Nigeria. Denominations, theological institutions, church planting agencies, and policymakers should therefore prioritise leadership development, financial accountability, discipleship, organisational effectiveness, and contextual mission as essential pillars for establishing resilient, mission-driven, and sustainable churches capable of meeting the spiritual and social needs of contemporary society.

Recommendations

This study proposes the following recommendations based on its findings and conclusions: 1. Church denominations and church planting agencies should establish continuous leadership development programmes for pastors, church planters, and ministry leaders. Such programmes should focus on transformational leadership, strategic planning, church administration, conflict resolution, communication, mentoring, and ethical leadership to enhance the competence required for sustainable church planting.

2. Every newly planted church should develop a formal leadership succession plan from its early stages. Potential leaders should be identified, mentored, and equipped through structured leadership development programmes to the continuity of ministry and organisational stability beyond the tenures of ministry and organisational stability beyond the tenure of founding pastors.

3. Churches should establish sound financial management systems that promote accountability, transparency, and prudent stewardship. This should include annual budgeting, proper accounting records, periodic internal and external audits, financial reporting to members, and strict compliance with approved financial procedures. Transparent financial management will strengthen members' confidence and improve the long-term sustainability of church plants.

4. Rather than depending solely on tithes and offerings, church leaders should explore sustainable and ethically appropriate sources of income such as income-generating projects, endowment funds, voluntary partnerships, mission support programmes, grants from faith-based organisations where appropriate, and structured fundraising initiatives.

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