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The role of African Pentecostal churches in promoting education: A case study of The Living Gospel World Mission

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Background: The Living Gospel World Mission Church is a Pentecostal church based in Tshilivho, South Africa. The church was founded in May 1997 by Maswole Petrius Ragimana and his wife. Still, today it has over 50 branches in South Africa alone, not to mention over 130 in the entire sub-Saharan region. Apart from its spiritual functions, the church is very important in community education and development.

Objectives: This study examines how the Living Gospel World Mission Church implements educational programmes to facilitate the holistic formation and socio-cultural development of human beings and the community. It focuses on the impact of the church's educational programmes on church leaders, teachers and community members and how these initiatives contribute to broader societal advancement. The research further examines the role of African Pentecostal churches in promoting human development.

Methods: The desktop research method was used, which involves literature, church publications, policies and academic publications on The Living Gospel World Mission Church. Data were analysed thematically to identify key patterns and insights on education and human development.

Results: The findings indicate that the church's programmes advance academic, spiritual and social development while fostering ethical leadership and community engagement.

Conclusion: The Living Gospel World Mission Church has made a significant contribution to social change with faith-based education and human development.

Contribution: The study contributes to existing knowledge by examining the Pentecostal church's potential to advance education and human development in Africa.

Keywords: education; human development; the Living Gospel World Mission Church; Pentecostal church; Africa.

Introduction

The role education has played as an agent of social change has been recognised across societies, especially in African societies, where access to quality educational opportunities remains elusive and often insufficient (Anim 2020:196). Education is always placed as a central engine of economic growth, social mobility and human development. Yet in many situations worldwide, including in Africa, structural impediments, such as poverty, poor infrastructure and the inequitable distribution of resources, continue to limit educational progress. In response to the above-stated constraints, religious institutions have been seen as increasingly crucial partners in addressing developmental challenges. Pentecostal churches have increasingly responded to these socioeconomic challenges, which has significantly promoted spiritual formation and addressed developmental challenges in society, such as social, moral and community development initiatives (White 2020:467).

The article's structure is as follows. The first part presents an introduction to the study, including the research problem and objectives. Section two offers a survey of the African Pentecostal church and its involvement in education and development. Section three outlines the methodology used. The following sections examine the educational efforts of the Living Gospel World Mission Church and the broader role of Pentecostals as promoters of human development. The article concludes with a synthesis of the main findings and recommendations for further research and practical application.

In response to these constraints, Pentecostal churches have gone beyond traditional religious functions, with programmes that address wider social imperatives such as education, skills development and community empowerment. These churches often use their powerful social networks and active involvement in community affairs as the infrastructural basis for their efforts to improve the welfare of their congregations and broader communities in which they live (White 2020:467). The existing literature about African Pentecostalism and development research has mostly dedicated its efforts to studying theological orientation, spiritual practices, church growth and economic transformation (Freeman 2015: 118). Research has demonstrated that Pentecostal churches support development work, yet researchers have not investigated how specific Pentecostal institutions implement their educational programmes to foster complete human development within African community settings.

The research on Pentecostalism together with its relationship to sustainable development in Africa has received extensive study (Golo & Novieto 2022:74; Öhlmann, Frost & Gräb 2020:12), but actual studies showing how Pentecostal churches educate their members and support complete human development in their communities have not received sufficient research. The current study investigates educational functions together with developmental functions, which the Living Gospel World Mission Church performs in South Africa. The existing research recognises that faith-based organisations and Pentecostal churches participate in community development and educational transformation (Anim 2020:197; Musoni 2013:78; Mwale 2022:140). The current research lacks sufficient comparative studies which examine how Pentecostal churches implement their educational programmes in various African communities while assessing their impact on sustainable human development. The available literature examines Pentecostalism and development as a general topic, but dedicated research on how educational programmes operate at churches and community sites remains limited. The study requires localised research which investigates how particular Pentecostal churches support educational development, character development and economic empowerment in their particular community settings.

Addressing this gap, the present research focuses on the role of the African Pentecostal church in promoting education and human development, particularly through the Living Gospel World Mission Church in South Africa. The current study investigates how African Pentecostal churches develop their educational programmes to create social change through their religious beliefs, educational values and operational educational methods (Ogunjobi & Olulowo 2024:12). The educational programmes and community development efforts of Pentecostal churches function as essential educational resources for community development, yet research has not established their actual impact on local human development and socio-cultural changes.

The Living Gospel World Mission Church serves as a case study to demonstrate how its educational programmes and community development work implement Pentecostal principles to support complete human development throughout its church and local community.

Moreover, the investigation assesses the contribution of the Pentecostal congregations (especially Living Gospel World Mission Church) to local education advancement and human development (Golo & Novieto 2022:78). It also scrutinises the utilisation of the formal and informal educational systems by these churches to sensitise holistic human development in their communities (Anim 2020:198).

To achieve the aims, the present study addresses the following research question: *How do formal and informal educational programmes in African Pentecostal churches, such as the Living Gospel World Mission Church, help to foster processes of social transformation at local and societal scales?*

Consequently, the research focuses on the educational programmes of Living Gospel World Mission Church, highlighting its educational developmental contributions to the community for holistic human formation. Particularly, its emphasis on the way in which educational programmes in the Church tend to integrate spiritual formation with moral and intellectual growth to become holistic human development (Golo & Novieto 2022:83; White 2020:472). By analysing these dynamics, the research enhances knowledge of the relationship between Pentecostalism, education and social development in the African context.

Overview of the African Pentecostal churches

African Pentecostal churches play a dual role which involves their religious activities and their impact on social and economic progress throughout the continent of Africa. The spread of Pentecostalism through civil society channels brings sustainable development benefits because it supports educational initiatives, poverty alleviation efforts and community development programmes (Golo & Novieto 2022:74; White 2020:462). The churches that are engaged in development work are more likely to be part of the international conversations on how religious organisations contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include quality education, the reduction in inequalities and community well-being.

Pentecostalism has become one of the fastest-developing religious movements in Africa because it practices spiritual miracles, healing, prosperity theology and energetic worship activities (Gathogo 2022:121; Gifford 2024:597). But nowadays, its spiritual aspect is not the only one that is emphasised; its socioeconomic relevance is also being recognised more and more. Paul F. Gifford's book makes a strong argument that African Pentecostalism is embedded in intricate socio-political contexts where churches can adopt quasi-developmental functions in a fragile state and economic imbalance.

In several African countries, Pentecostal churches have taken on a role beyond evangelism to educational activities, vocational training, entrepreneurship training and programmes of community development (Anderson 2013:74). These initiatives help to build human capital directly by providing skills for social mobility and economic participation. Likewise, David Freeman highlights that Pentecostal movements in sub-Saharan Africa frequently operate as parallel welfare and development organisations to, or in place of, the state's service provision.

Moreover, the Pentecostal churches foster a holistic concept of development that includes spiritual, moral, social and economic well-being. This holistic approach is reflected in their dedication to teaching ethical values and discipline practices and their commitment to developing civic responsibility as essential skills for creating lasting community change. In this sense, Pentecostal churches play a role in the development of 'human flourishing', which is not only material, but also moral and relational, as defined by development scholars.

Additionally, Pentecostal churches are involved in poverty alleviation, health outreach and social mobilisation programmes that are in line with the development agendas of the world (Orogun & Pillay 2023:10). These instances reflect how they play their part as grassroots development actors and are especially significant in rural and marginalised communities where services by the state are limited. The presence of African Pentecostal churches is thus increasingly acknowledged in the field of sustainable development processes on the continent as one of the non-state actors.

Research methods and design

The research used desktop research methods to investigate the educational and developmental impact of African Pentecostal churches at the Living Gospel World Mission Church in South Africa. The study demonstrates that African Pentecostal churches advance both educational systems and complete human development through their formal and informal educational programmes. The selected methodology enables researchers to perform a critical assessment of existing scholarly works and institutional publications while they search for relevant evidence which will support their research claim.

The Living Gospel World Mission Church was chosen as a case study because it has established itself as a permanent organisation in the Limpopo province while showing proof of its work in both educational and community development projects. The study functions as a case study because it enables researchers to analyse how Pentecostal groups participate in educational programmes and human development work through their historical framework. Desktop research, which researchers refer to as secondary research, requires investigators to gather existing academic literature, which includes books, peer-reviewed articles, theses, church documents and policy reports (Wahid et al. 2025:430). The study creates its theoretical framework and collects its empirical evidence through published sources, while it refrains from gathering primary data and uses source triangulation to maintain research integrity (Burgos Gajardo, Taneja & van Koningsveld 2022:5).

The researchers conducted their data collection from real academic databases and library resources by using the search terms 'African Pentecostal churches', 'Living Gospel World Mission Church', 'education and human development' and 'faith-based community initiatives' (Aisyah 2025:116). The researchers used thematic synthesis as their data analysis method, which allowed them to discover recurring patterns that linked educational theological foundations with church-based learning programmes, community development activities, skills training and socio-economic development (Braun & Clarke 2022:5; Kiger & Varpio 2020:847). The researchers used these themes to show how Pentecostal educational practices lead to greater progress in human development.

The study uses desktop research as its research method because it enables a complete examination of existing research, which shows how Pentecostal educational programmes affect human development. The method therefore supports the central argument by systematically drawing together published findings to demonstrate the role of Pentecostal churches in education and human development across African contexts (Wahid et al. 2025:433).

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Results

An overview of the church's educational initiatives and endeavours

According to this perspective, the role of the Church in the community is to instil values among the people, supported by ecclesiastical institutions, community members and educators. Under this perspective, Gwathmey et al. (2024:214) state that the role of education in the Church is not just to impart knowledge to the individual being educated, but to promote the holistic development of the individual being educated. Among church leaders, pastors, priests and teachers consider education a practical tool for inspiring convictions and helping people understand the philosophies and principles underlying their religions. In this respect, Schmidt (2017:148) argues that both clergy and educators share the view that education should develop virtuous, moral and socially responsible people. Further, leaders of the Church consider Church-owned educational centres powerful devices that align children's attitudes and worldviews with the Church's teachings (García-Magariño 2024:92).

Members who possess educational, professional and theological qualifications work together to support church-operated educational programmes, which provide academic and moral development for students. Shilubane (2022:57) finds that educated persons are not only responsible for promoting intellectual development, but also for spiritual and ethical development. The dual responsibility exists because traditional African teaching methods cannot function in situations that rely on oral and experiential learning methods to share knowledge, which includes teaching values and structured educational content that matches current school systems (Kinya 2023:104). As active partners with church leaders, members of the educated community help ensure that the curriculum and learning environment reflect both quality academic standards and the community's moral and religious principles (Maguire & Miller 2024:133).

Moreover, the participation of the wider members of the community, parents, learners and citizens is indispensable for the continuance of the educational mission of the Church. Maguire and Miller (2024:137) defend the importance of community participation, which helps to view education in Pentecostal institutions as not an individualistic endeavour but a collective one that develops character, discipline and civic responsibility. By participating in governance of their schools and mentoring and supporting students, members of the community build a culture of development that addresses all forms of competence: Intellectual, moral and spiritual. This is a collaborative approach that ensures what the Church does around education will be relevant, sustainable and able to meet the intellectual and ethical needs.

Cunningham (2022:195) concludes that Church-linked schools and educational programmes, by fostering a sense of cohesiveness, transform the intergenerational network and empower individuals to create cultural philanthropic institutions. Residents also contribute to the school's programmes through their voluntary involvement, making contributions that raise funds for the education of the Church and ensure quality access for all members of the community (Westrom 2023:118).

Golo and Novieto (2022:81) stress that human growth and education take precedence at all levels in the Living Gospel World Mission Church, which encourages positive educational pursuits and the acceptance of traditional African practices in place of forced norms. This can be done through the management of its institutional, cultural and moral goods, the credibility and commitment of experts and its dedication to serving as a global teaching instrument. It is the Church that opens innovative possibilities in education, allowing individuals to develop their capacities to fulfil their maximum potential, contributing to the positive development of our society. In addition to the institutional framework, the leaders of the Church, educators and members of the community work together to develop aspirations and goals centred on fostering education as the catalyst for the growth of individuals and collective society (Nwaham, Nwachukwu & Okokoyo 2024:142).

The role played by the African Pentecostal church

African Pentecostal churches, including the Living Gospel World Mission Church, have diverse dimensions to their mission, and education and human development are integral to that mission. These churches recognise the interconnectedness of the spiritual, the intellectual and the society around them, working towards a more holistic view of human development (Branson & Martinez 2023:27). The Living Gospel World Mission Church shares the belief, as many African Pentecostal churches do, that education must have a spiritual basis. Prior (2018:130) observed that the church's members, especially leaders, believe education is an integral part of developing people's faith and teaching values consistent with the church's view. So when the attitudes, morals or ethical conduct of community members are influenced by spiritual grounding (Prior 2018:139), it is beyond reason.

A brief statement about the church work and involvement of the Living Gospel World Mission Church: Reality shows that educational development is one of the key areas, as it builds and operates schools. These organisations, which include primary and secondary schools, polytechnics and even universities, act as centres where academic success is intertwined with the tenets of the church (Commodore 2018:400).

Nevertheless, according to Setó-Pamies and Papaoikonomou (2016:540), Pentecostal educational programmes deliver their curriculum through Bible teaching and character development, leadership skills instruction, practical life training and community service programmes. The integrated content of this programme provides students with academic knowledge and practical skills while developing their capacity to engage in ethical and community development activities. The approval of a partnership is yet another specific role within the Living Gospel World Mission Church, known worldwide. This is the reason why the church undertakes partnerships with other government units, local communities and non-governmental organisations to ensure that challenges such as the availability of high-quality education, facilities provision and personnel training, among others, are addressed. Most importantly, this makes the church's work more effective and, again, extends beyond the members, helping to build society from various points of view (Pherali & Lewis 2019:730; Setó-Pamies & Papaoikonomou 2016:540).

The Living Gospel World Mission Church also considers skills training as a pathway towards self-enabling livelihoods. Their initiatives included overcoming environmental obstacles and promoting the independence of community members through vocational education and entrepreneurship programmes and job placement

initiatives (Lumpkin & Bacq 2019:400). The programmes establish community development through their training programmes, which provide people with essential skills needed for employment, self-sufficient living and active participation in the local economy. Vocational education enables participants to acquire technical competencies relevant to their socioeconomic context, while entrepreneurship programmes foster innovation, small business development and income-generating opportunities. The job placement initiatives help their beneficiaries through their programme because they link trained individuals with job openings, which decreases unemployment rates and improves household income. The programmes tackle present economic issues while they build enduring community development and sustainable community development. Routine implementation and the expanding scope of these programmes have therefore attracted considerable scholarly attention from Roche et al. (2019:580), who note that the thrust behind these schemes echoes the mission of the church, under which it not only endeavours towards a holistic development of man, but also everyone in his economic life. In addition, Leyva et al. (2017:520) argue that other aspects, such as mission work and community service, play an equal role in stimulating education and human development among the churchgoers. Existing literature on church-community engagement indicates that churches typically establish connections with community members through their involvement in educational programmes and their dedicated work to address community needs through their actual community engagement activities and their efforts to tackle specific problems which have been identified. The study results show that these methods serve as essential components for faith-based organisations which work to develop their communities and their social outreach initiatives. However, the church's devotion to its members outside the formal schooling system is further demonstrated by two activities, literacy campaigns and health education, which also provide education within the church (Mbah 2019:20).

The Living Gospel World Mission Church provides substantial educational support through its educational programmes, skills development initiatives and community empowerment projects. According to Branson and Martinez (2023:100), the church's goals may be hampered by financial constraints, infrastructural limitations and cultural dynamics. While these projects, on the one hand, illustrate the benefits of the Living Gospel World Mission Church's provision of edification and human resource mobilisation (Adedibu 2020:140), they also come with a few challenges. The goals of organisations of this nature face restrictions which arise from funding shortages, inadequate infrastructure and changing cultural trends (Branson & Martinez 2023:100). The Living Gospel World Mission Church operates its community programmes through two main methods which involve community members working together with local resources and building partnerships while maintaining support from its congregation. The church uses these adaptive strategies to sustain its educational and developmental programmes, which operate in an environment with socioeconomic restrictions. However, arguing against this assertion, Adedibu (2020:140) stated that church management's challenges are indeed a welcome challenge because they provide the basis upon which one can find ways of working with others, thus ensuring the eventual accomplishment of the mission of making people whole. The Living Gospel World Mission Church serves as a major educational and human resource development organisation which operates within the sphere of African Pentecostal churches. The church advances its educational and developmental programmes through community involvement, skills development programmes, partnership-building and mobilisation of congregational support, despite facing challenges such as limited funding, inadequate infrastructure and changing cultural trends. Through these strategies, the church maintains its dedication to social and human development within its community. While the community is working through the challenges of spiritual teachings, educational programmes, partnerships (LaDuca et al. 2020:80) and problem-solving within the missions of the church, these are the things that will benefit individuals and communities (Asamoah & Agyapong 2024:25).

Role of African Pentecostal churches in the promotion of education and human development

So, African Pentecostal churches are an important agent in promoting human development and education, as they offer a holistic paradigm that encompasses spiritual, moral, social and economic aspects. The Living Gospel World Mission Church develops educational programmes and community programmes which assist people in their spiritual growth and personal development. The church provides intellectual development opportunities through its Bible study programmes, educational support programmes and vocational training initiatives, which help community members acquire essential practical skills and knowledge. The church uses biblical teaching, discipleship programmes, youth mentorship and ethical value promotion, which includes responsibility, integrity and service to others as methods to develop moral character. The church uses community outreach and counselling services and their outreach efforts to solve social and economic problems which affect their local community. The church uses its programmes to help people develop their spiritual identity while they grow intellectually and morally and socially, which leads to positive changes in society (Ogbe 2021:62; White 2020:468).

The Living Gospel World Mission Church conducts community work through its youth mentorship programmes, vocational training, educational support, literacy programmes and church-led community projects. The church supports youth development by encouraging young people to take part in skills development activities and entrepreneurial programmes, which help them

achieve self-sufficiency in underprivileged communities. The church collaborates with parents, educators and community members to teach young people about moral values, educational responsibilities and social duties. The initiatives create an integrated human development solution which combines spiritual training with essential life skills to develop moral leaders and responsible citizens and financially independent people in rural areas (Golo & Novieto 2022:78; Shilubane 2022:78). Unlike those growing connections in neighbourhoods, the outreach of African Pentecostal churches includes not only just education and skills acquisition, but also moral and ethical development, civic service and social responsibility congruent with the pneuma-diakonical dimension of African Pentecostalism linking spirituality revitalisation with proactive social engagement (White 2020:472). The Living Gospel World Mission Church works together with both governmental bodies and non-governmental organisations to implement community development projects that provide educational assistance to help solve the community's economic difficulties. The partnerships involve organisations that operate outreach programmes while providing resources for educational programmes and skills development and participating in welfare activities which empower young people. The church uses partnership agreements to obtain more resources, which help it implement programmes better while overcoming obstacles related to funding problems, building restrictions and implementing faith-based educational values. The church's educational and developmental activities reach more people through these collaborative efforts, which make its programmes more effective (Boorse & Jablonski 2024:9).

Pentecostal churches as religious developments

The results indicate that African Pentecostalism significantly aids education and human development. The Living Gospel World Mission Church operates as a driving force that transforms spiritual beliefs and socio-economic development through its programmes, which teach people to develop their faith and life skills. The church provides Bible-based discipleship and youth mentorship programmes, which help youth develop their moral character, while its informal training and skills development programmes work to enhance job prospects and support business ownership. The church provides support for outreach programmes, which include helping vulnerable families and delivering educational assistance to students. The church uses its three programmes to help its community members achieve spiritual development and social advancement for social transformation. In many African contexts, public education systems are burdened by inadequate resources, limited infrastructure and socioeconomic inequalities that often hinder the realisation of quality education. Faith-based organisations help fill these gaps through collaborative educational and developmental initiatives. Pentecostal churches are increasingly community-based entities in which spiritual ministry becomes part of social life. As regards religion and well-being in Africa, religion and denominations are generally known to be among the partners in social well-being and community change (Golo & Novieto 2022:75).

Holistic educational philosophy in African Pentecostalism

The Living Gospel World Mission Church establishes its educational philosophy through its complete understanding of human development, which defines education as a process that develops intellectual capacity, spiritual growth, moral character and social skills. The educational system defines discipleship through its combination of academic training, ethical development and community service. The Living Gospel World Mission Church follows African Pentecostal theology, which connects spiritual renewal with social transformation according to White (2020:468), but it focuses on formal educational methods as its core discipleship practice.

Unlike some Pentecostal churches that primarily focus on spiritual empowerment and personal prosperity, the Living Gospel World Mission Church integrates formal and informal educational initiatives, including mentorship, skills development and academic support, as a core expression of its ministry. In this sense, education is not treated as a peripheral activity but as an intentional strategy for community development and social mobility.

The research results demonstrate their value to Pentecostal educational practice because it establishes better connections between religious training and sustainable educational progress. The church operates a transformation model which combines spiritual development with educational and mentoring programmes and community development activities, as reported by Adedibu (2020:142).

Church leadership and educational aspiration promotion

The Living Gospel World Mission Church establishes its educational philosophy through its complete understanding of human development, which defines education as a process that develops intellectual capacity, spiritual growth, moral character and social skills. The educational system defines discipleship through its combination of academic training, ethical development and community service. The Living Gospel World Mission Church follows African Pentecostal theology, which connects spiritual renewal with social transformation according to White (2020:468) but they focus on formal educational methods as their core discipleship practice.

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Pastors and ministry leaders guide people in their spiritual needs while they lead their church members to seek formal education, develop their skills and build their personal competencies as ways to enhance their empowerment and practice responsible Christian living. The leadership method described here matches the perspective of Branson and Martinez (2023:54) who demonstrate that church leaders can use their authority to drive social development through educational programmes, leadership training and civic duty initiatives.

In this case study, however, a distinctive feature emerges in the way leadership is directly involved in the institutionalisation of education-related initiatives within the church structure. Unlike some Pentecostal contexts where encouragement of education remains largely informal or rhetorical, the Living Gospel World Mission Church integrates leadership-driven mobilisation with structured programmes such as mentorship initiatives, study support networks and community-based educational activities. The church, which operates through a participatory educational system, remains dedicated to developing educational programmes by including parents, teachers and local residents in its work. The system establishes a cooperative environment that enhances the ownership of initiatives and their suitability to local needs.

The projects that aim to develop spiritual formation also support healthcare services and agricultural initiatives, which include urban farming and educational outreach activities. Through its educational programmes, the church establishes a unified approach to faith-based development, which implements education as a component of its complete socioeconomic empowerment system. The Pentecostal movement shows progress because it now includes educational development as a fundamental element for church-based community improvement projects, which help people work together according to African communal traditions (LaDuca et al. 2020:75).

Skills development programmes and economic empowerment programmes

The Living Gospel World Mission Church uses skills development and economic empowerment programmes to support its overall human development mission. The programmes of this organisation operate beyond their spiritual training mission to deliver real-world solutions which will help congregants who live in areas with high unemployment and poverty such as Tshilivho and its nearby rural areas.

The church conducts practical programmes through its study, including basic entrepreneurship, informal vocational workshops and small-scale business mentoring sessions. The church provides training to its congregants, which enables them to learn small-scale agriculture and informal trading, while another group receives business start-up and micro-enterprise management training. In addition, literacy and financial management sessions are occasionally integrated into church outreach activities to strengthen participants' ability to manage resources effectively.

What distinguishes the Living Gospel World Mission Church from many other Pentecostal congregations is not merely the provision of empowerment activities, but the structured linkage between spiritual discipleship and economic capacity-building (Ogbe 2019:62). Rather than treating economic empowerment as a separate outreach function, the church integrates it into its discipleship and community development framework, thereby framing economic self-reliance as part of Christian responsibility and stewardship.

Furthermore, the church adopts a collaborative approach by engaging local stakeholders, including small business owners and community volunteers, in supporting training initiatives and mentorship. The church supports rural economic growth through its faith-based community work, which includes developing practical skills training programmes. Pentecostal churches now perform community development work which goes beyond their standard religious duties (Shilubane 2022:18).

Moral and ethical development as a component of education formation

The Living Gospel World Mission Church believes educational programmes and empowerment initiatives function as essential components that lead to complete human development because spiritual growth needs to be developed together with social and economic progress. The African Pentecostal tradition sees faith communities as organisations that create spiritual renewal while they perform practical work to benefit society, according to White (2020:472). The church uses educational programmes and empowerment initiatives as essential components that support its missions of discipleship and community development work.

The church-based transformation model, which exists in African Pentecostalism, connects educational programmes, skills development and mentorship activities to their mission of helping people achieve empowerment and social advancement (Adedibu 2020:140). The Pentecostal church system operates as a religious institution that provides educational and economic development programmes to its congregation members.

Rural South African communities show the same pattern established by churches, which extend their functions beyond worship through their educational programmes and skills development initiatives, and through community development programmes that work to fight unemployment and poverty. The church functions as a central force in rural development through its social transformation work from its initiatives, which create measurable social change (Shilubane 2022:18).

Educational programmes and holistic community development

The Living Gospel World Mission Church maintains its educational and skills development programmes through adaptive community-based methods, even though it faces financial and infrastructural limitations. The church addresses its funding limitations by using its internal resources, which include member donations and church facilities used for training purposes to implement a grassroots development approach in rural areas (Shilubane 2022:14). The church addresses its formal expertise shortages by recruiting teachers, professionals and experienced congregants who provide their mentorship and training services according to Pentecostal principles that support active community development (White 2020:469).

The church combines educational programmes with spiritual development when it conducts educational activities because these programmes need to teach students moral values through their academic studies. The complete Pentecostal development system demonstrates its mission through its process of spiritual development, which leads to community empowerment and actual mission execution (Adedibu 2020:141). The church operates an educational system that uses its existing resources to create sustainable programmes that establish community connections while achieving lasting results through its educational work.

Problems impacting the educational efforts of the church

The Living Gospel World Mission Church establishes community partnerships to maintain its educational and developmental programmes. The church works together with local teachers and experts, community residents and small business owners to create mentorship programmes, skills training and educational programmes that help fight poverty and unemployment in rural areas. The church-based community engagement activities show how rural churches in South Africa develop their social support systems according to Shilubane (2022:18).

A distinctive feature of the church's approach is its emphasis on participatory collaboration and shared responsibility rather than dependence on external funding structures. The community achieves ownership and social unity through this method of collective participation, which serves as a fundamental requirement for their sustainable development according to LaDuca et al. (2020:75). According to Boorse and Jablonski (2024:9), the research demonstrates that faith-based organisations and community groups must establish partnerships because these partnerships enable communities to attain both sustainable development and community empowerment objectives.

Partnerships in faith-based development

Such challenges motivate many Pentecostal churches to forge partnerships with state institutions, community actors and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) towards enhancing developmental impact. These collaborative placements (between faith-based organisations and other actors) are said to be important mechanisms in promoting sustainable development and thus empowering communities, as Boorse and Jablonski (2024:9) argue.

Discussion

Implications for the religion and development of Africa

Consequently, African Pentecostal churches are playing significant roles in education and human development. The Living Gospel World Mission Church demonstrates empowerment through its community-based programmes, which combine spiritual training with social and educational development. The church conducts its ministry beyond worship services and spiritual activities by providing educational support and mentorship programmes, which help local residents develop their moral character and achieve socio-economic success. Church leaders, together with experienced members of the congregation, work to motivate young people to pursue formal education while taking part in mentorship programmes that help them develop academic discipline and personal discipline.

The church provides platforms that enable teachers, skilled congregation members and professional members to provide guidance, tutoring and skills-sharing programmes. Youth programmes together with discipleship meetings serve to resolve moral and social challenges that young people face, which include substance abuse, unemployment, peer pressure and family and community ethical responsibilities. The case study shows that the church supports community development through its small-scale empowerment programmes, which include entrepreneurship programmes, skills development meetings and community assistance projects that aim to enhance rural living conditions. The church uses its religious networks to support both spiritual activities and social development work.

The Living Gospel World Mission Church makes a major contribution through its educational programmes, moral development activities and community development initiatives, which it implements through its complete ministerial approach. The church applies discipleship together with community service activities to address the educational needs and economic development requirements of its local community. This development shows how African Pentecostal churches have progressed into their current role as driving forces for societal change and human progress. The research shows how Pentecostal churches in rural African areas function as community-based institutions that promote educational growth, moral development and public welfare through the Living Gospel World Mission Church case study.

Recommendations

Using the results of this study as a guide, some recommendations are offered to identify and maximise the roles African Pentecostal churches may play in education and

human development. Drawing the implications of the study, Pentecostal churches must continue their work to broaden and formalise education initiatives by collaborating with government agencies, non-governmental organisations and academic institutions. Such cooperation can make resources more readily available to pupils, raise the quality of educational programmes offered and enable church-based activities to fit into formal education systems. Vocational training, literacy programmes and entrepreneurship initiatives can be integrated with existing community development programmes to enhance their sustainability and impact (Boorse & Jablonski 2024:9; Golo & Novieto 2022:80).

To enhance the educational and developmental capacity of pastors, educators and community leaders to run educational programmes among their members, the Church leadership should invest in pastoral leadership development. Such training in pedagogical abilities, community engagement and programme management can help church leaders draw on resources to fashion suitable interventions and monitor outcomes to achieve improved results (Branson & Martinez 2023:54; LaDuca et al. 2020:75). Develop a monitoring and evaluation mechanism and process for human development interventions. Systematic assessments of programme effectiveness can help provide evidence for ongoing improvement and demonstrate the impact of church-based initiatives in support of advocacy efforts for continued funding or partnerships (Adedibu 2020:145). Finally, for the greatest impact on the community, it is essential that churches continue to facilitate healthy human development, integrating spiritual, moral, social and economic dimensions. It cannot be neglected; this could culminate in the omnicompetent and ethical formation of these citizens through stronger education and skills acquisition in all spheres of human endeavours, enlightening a being to function autonomously within the purview of self-sufficiency, social accountability and involvement in local and national development processes (Ogbe 2019:62; White 2020:472). This will position African Pentecostal churches as more effective instruments of transformation in education and human development on the continent through taking a strategic, community-orientated (informed by evidence) delivery modality.

Conclusion

The study showed that Living Gospel World Mission Church helps to advance education and human development in South Africa. The findings showed that the church provides more than spiritual ministry because it offers educational assistance, moral training, skills development programmes, mentorship and community development initiatives. This study shows that African Pentecostal traditions connect their spiritual development with their social advancements and their community development progress (White 2020:469). The case study demonstrated that the church supports complete human growth through its educational programmes, youth mentoring, vocational education, business development and local community initiatives that build better social and economic outcomes. Church leaders, educators, parents and community members all take part in these programmes, which foster shared responsibility for sustainable community development (Branson & Martinez 2023:54). The church manages to maintain its educational and developmental programmes because it receives support from partnerships and volunteers who help according to their availability, while local community members take part in its programmes. The adaptive strategies of faith-based organisations show their increasing ability to address local development issues and help rural African communities achieve empowerment, according to Shilubane (2022:18, 20). The study shows that African Pentecostal churches, which include the Living Gospel World Mission Church, serve as worship centres that provide essential educational resources and social development programmes to support complete human development in African communities.

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CRediT authorship contribution

Ntsieni Mawedzha: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft and Writing – review & editing. Lufuluvhi M. Mudimeli: Supervision. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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