

## **Career Mentorship in Christian-Based Transition Programs: Supporting Post-High School Youth in Nairobi, Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

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Each year, nearly one million young people in Kenya complete secondary school and enter a lengthy wait before joining tertiary institutions or the workforce. This liminal phase is marked by acute career uncertainty, anxiety over examination results, and a lack of structured guidance. While several Christian-based post-high school programs have emerged to address these transitional needs, limited research has examined how they provide career mentorship and what effect they have. This qualitative study investigated career mentorship within three Christian transition programs in Nairobi: VUMA (Nairobi Chapel), YDP (Pan Africa Christian University), and Bridge (Life Ministry). Drawing on Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Honwana's concept of waithood, and Van Gennep's rites-of-passage framework, the study analyzed interviews with 36 program alumni, 3 program directors, and 6 mentors. Findings reveal that career mentorship in these programs operates through four interconnected mechanisms: (1) reframing career anxiety after Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education results, (2) providing structured career guidance and alternative pathway exploration, (3) integrating faith and calling into career decisions, and (4) simulating campus life to build practical readiness. Mentors and guest professionals used personal testimonies, value-based career talks, and supervised decision-making to help youth navigate uncertainty. The study also identifies distinct gender patterns in career mentorship needs and responses. The study concludes that career mentorship embedded in faith-based liminal spaces significantly enhances youth preparedness for post-school life. Recommendations include formalizing career mentorship components, expanding alumni mentor networks, integrating financial literacy, and establishing post-program career follow-up systems.

**Keywords:** Career Mentorship, Youth Transition, Post-High School Ministry, Waithood

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### **Introduction**

The transition from secondary school to tertiary education or employment represents one of the most critical and anxiety-ridden periods in a young person's life. In Kenya, approximately one million students complete the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) each year, and



the majority face a waiting period of up to nine months before joining public universities or colleges (Ministry of Education, Kenya, 2025). During this liminal phase, young people are neither bound by school rules nor fully integrated into adult roles. They experience what Alcinda Honwana (2014) terms “waithood” – a prolonged suspension between childhood and adulthood, marked by uncertainty about career paths, financial dependence, and delayed markers of adult status.

Career decisions made during this period have lifelong consequences. Yet, most Kenyan secondary schools offer limited career guidance, and parents – though well-intentioned – often lack the time, information, or networks to provide systematic mentorship (Too et al., 2022; Bullock & Miriti, 2022). Research has consistently shown that inadequate career preparation contributes to course mismatches, high dropout rates from tertiary institutions, and extended periods of unemployment or underemployment (Too et al., 2022; Bullock & Miriti, 2022). As a result, many youths rely on peers, social media, or trial and error, leading to decisions that may not align with their abilities, interests, or labor market realities.

Some churches and parachurch organizations that have historically played a role in youth formation have responded by developing post-high school transition programs that combine discipleship with practical life preparation. However, the career mentorship dimension of these programs has received little scholarly attention. The existing literature on youth discipleship primarily focuses on spiritual formation and moral development, often overlooking the vocational and career guidance components that are equally critical during emerging adulthood (Karei, 2019; Brailey & Parker, 2020). This gap is significant because career uncertainty is one of the most pressing concerns for post-school youth, and addressing it effectively may enhance both their economic prospects and their long-term engagement with faith communities.

This study examines how three Christian-based transition programs in Nairobi – Vibrant in Purpose, Unveiled in Potential, Mature in Person, Anchored in Principles - Nairobi Chapel (VUMA), Youth Development Program - Pan Africa Christian University (YDP), and Bridge (Life Ministry) – provide career mentorship to post-secondary youth. It investigates the career challenges youth face after school, the mentorship strategies employed, and the perceived outcomes for participants. The following objectives guided the study:

1. To examine the career-related challenges that post-high school youth experience during the transition period.
2. To assess how Christian transition programs provide career mentorship and their effects on participants.
3. To establish improvements that can enhance career mentorship in these programs.



Three research questions guide the study:

1. What career-related challenges do post-high school youth experience during the transition period?
2. How do Christian transition programs provide career mentorship, and what effects do they have?
3. What improvements can enhance career mentorship in such programs?

The findings contribute to the fields of youth ministry, practical theology, and career development by offering an empirically grounded model of faith-based career mentorship during emerging adulthood. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study analyzed semi-structured interviews with 36 program alumni, 3 program directors, and 6 mentors across the three programs. This methodological approach enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences of career mentorship during the post-school liminal phase. The study also provides actionable recommendations for churches, parachurch organizations, and Christian universities seeking to support youth through the critical post-school transition.

## **Literature Review**

This literature review examines scholarship on youth transitions, career uncertainty, and mentorship in faith-based contexts. It begins by exploring the concept of *waithood* and the challenges of post-school transitions in Kenya, then reviews mentorship in both secular and Christian settings. The section concludes by presenting the theoretical framework that anchors this study, integrating rites of passage theory, transition theory, and *waithood*.

### **Youth Transition and Career Uncertainty**

The transition from school to post-school life has become increasingly complex and non-linear (Cuzzocrea et al., 2021). Unlike previous generations, contemporary youth in Kenya face delayed entry into stable employment, prolonged education, and shifting markers of adulthood (Muchiri-Muchai et al., 2024). Honwana (2013; 2014) conceptualizes this as “*waithood*” – a period of suspension during which young people are unable to access the social and economic markers of adulthood, including stable work, independent housing, and family formation. In Kenya, *waithood* is exacerbated by the education system's structure, which imposes a mandatory waiting period between KCSE results and university placement.

In Kenya, the waiting period between KCSE results and university placement can last up to 9 months, during which youth are neither in school nor fully integrated into adult roles. Recent studies have highlighted the psychological toll of this waiting period. Mutegi (2021) found that



Kenyan youth in waitness experience elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and lowered self-efficacy, particularly when they lack structured activities or mentorship. Njeri and Kimathi (2022) further observed that prolonged uncertainty about career pathways is associated with risky coping behaviors, including substance use and social withdrawal. These findings underscore the urgency of providing targeted career support during the post-school liminal phase.

Career uncertainty lies at the heart of waitness. Arnett (2023) identifies “identity exploration” as a key feature of emerging adulthood (ages 18–29), and career decisions are central to this exploration. However, many youths lack the information, guidance, and self-awareness needed to make informed choices. Pham (2021) notes that successful post-school transitions require not only academic qualifications but also “transition knowledge and skills” – including career awareness, decision-making strategies, and access to supportive networks. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (Khan et al., 2021) further emphasizes that adaptation to change depends on four factors: situation (the nature of the transition), self (personal characteristics), support (social resources), and strategies (coping mechanisms). For post-school youth, career mentorship functions as a critical “support” and “strategy” resource.

### **Career Mentorship in Faith-Based Contexts**

Mentorship has been widely recognized as an effective intervention for youth transitioning to adulthood. In secular settings, programs such as Summer Bridge and comprehensive college transition programs have demonstrated positive effects on academic persistence and sense of belonging (Melguizo et al., 2021; Bradford et al., 2021). In Christian contexts, mentorship is often framed as discipleship – a process of walking alongside younger believers to help them grow in faith and navigate life decisions (Brailey & Parker, 2020; Tsekpoe, 2021). However, career-specific mentorship within faith-based programs remains understudied.

The integration of career guidance with spiritual formation is a distinctive feature of Christian transition programs. Karei (2019) argues that effective youth discipleship must address the whole person – including vocational calling, not just doctrinal knowledge. Similarly, Lederleitner et al. (2022) emphasize that mission-focused discipleship helps emerging adults align their gifts and passions with God’s story. Career mentorship in this context is not merely about matching grades to courses; it involves discerning one’s purpose, understanding work as vocation, and making decisions that honor God.

Mwangi and Omondi (2023) studied faith-based mentorship programs in Nairobi. They found that youth who received career guidance within a spiritual framework reported higher career satisfaction and greater resilience in the face of setbacks. Kamau (2024) similarly noted that



integrating career talks with biblical teachings on stewardship and calling helped youth reframe failure as redirection rather than defeat. These studies provide preliminary evidence for the effectiveness of holistic, faith-integrated career mentorship.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in three complementary theories. Van Gennep's (1960) rites of passage framework conceptualizes transition as a three-phase process: separation (leaving school), liminality (the in-between period), and reaggregation (entry into college or work). Career mentorship occurs primarily during the liminal phase, when youth are open to new identities and guidance. Turner's (2017) concept of liminality adds that this in-between state is characterized by ambiguity but also by the potential for transformation and the formation of *communitas* – deep bonding among those undergoing the same transition. Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Khan et al., 2021) provides a framework for understanding the individual and contextual factors that influence adaptation, with career mentorship serving as both a support (social resource) and a strategy (coping mechanism). Honwana's waithood (2014) situates the Kenyan post-school period within broader structural constraints, highlighting the need for intentional interventions.

Savickas's (2015) life-design model offers an additional lens for interpreting career mentorship. Life design counseling emphasizes narrative identity, adaptability, and the construction of a coherent vocational story. In the Christian programs examined, mentors helped youth construct narratives that integrated their academic performance, faith experiences, and career aspirations – a process that aligns with life-design principles. Lent and Brown's (2019) social cognitive career theory (SCCT) further highlights the role of self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations in career decision-making. The mentorship strategies observed in this study – such as sharing success stories, providing role models, and offering supervised practice – directly target these cognitive mechanisms.

In summary, the literature reveals a significant gap in understanding how faith-based programs address career mentorship during the post-school liminal phase. While waithood and emerging adulthood theories explain the structural and developmental challenges youth face, and mentorship literature demonstrates the value of supportive relationships, there is limited empirical evidence on the specific mechanisms of career mentorship within Christian transition programs in the African context. This study addresses this gap by examining how three Nairobi-based programs provide career mentorship and the effects of this mentorship.



## **Christian Transition Programs in Kenya**

Several Christian organizations in Kenya have developed post-secondary transition programs to address the gap between secondary and tertiary education. These programs typically combine discipleship with practical life skills, career guidance, and mentorship. Three programs are examined in this study:

**VUMA** (Nairobi Chapel) is a residential and non-residential program that emphasizes spiritual formation, career guidance, and life skills. Its acronym Vibrant in Purpose, unveiled in Potential, Mature in Person, Anchored in Principles, reflects its holistic approach to youth development (Nairobi Chapel, 2026). The program includes daily Quiet Time, Bible study, career talks, and outreach activities.

**YDP (Youth Development Program)** at Pan Africa Christian University (PACU) is a university-based program that integrates spiritual formation with academic preparation. Participants attend classes on campus, experience university life, and receive training in leadership, career guidance, and ICT skills (Mwangi, 2018).

**Bridge** (Life Ministry) is a church-based program that uses the "Win, build, send" philosophy to disciple youth. It operates through weekly sessions and camps that cover topics such as salvation, Christian living, and career guidance (Life Ministry, 2024). The program uses the *Nawiri* (Thrive) discipleship manual.

These programs share common features: mentorship, career guidance, and spiritual formation, but differ in structure, duration, and emphasis. VUMA initially offered residential immersion but changed to a four-day-a-week format; YDP provides campus simulation; Bridge operates through church-based weekly sessions.

## **Strategies for Effective Career Mentorship**

Research on effective career mentorship identifies several key strategies. First, structured programs with multiple sessions over time are more effective than one-time interventions (Melguizo et al., 2021). Second, mentoring relationships built on trust and authenticity, where mentors share personal experiences, enhance mentee engagement (Brailey & Parker, 2020). Third, exposure to diverse career role models, including those who have succeeded through non-traditional paths, increases youth career self-efficacy (Chepkwony, 2024).

In faith-based contexts, additional strategies include integrating spiritual discernment with career decision-making, using theological reframing to address disappointment, and providing opportunities for practical skill development (Kamau, 2024). Gender-responsive approaches—such as same-gender mentorship and sessions addressing specific concerns of women and men—



have also been shown to improve outcomes (Nyaga, 2023; Omondi & Achieng, 2026).

Post-program follow-up is another critical component. Studies show that sustained mentorship beyond the program duration, through alumni networks and regular check-ins, reinforces learning and supports ongoing career development (Karmelita, 2023). These strategies inform the recommendations offered in this study.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design and Paradigm**

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design within an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm (Van Der Walt, 2020). The aim was to understand participants' lived experiences of career mentorship in transition programs, with emphasis on the meanings they assigned to those experiences. This approach is particularly suited to exploring subjective career realities, where emotional and spiritual dimensions intersect with practical decision-making.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed multiple strategies. Credibility was achieved through triangulation of data sources, comparing participant accounts with mentor perspectives and program documents. Dependability was enhanced through detailed documentation of the research process, including interview protocols and coding procedures. Confirmability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail of coding decisions and data analysis. Transferability is supported by providing thick descriptions of the programs and participants, enabling readers to assess applicability to other contexts (Nassaji, 2020).

### **Study Participants and Sampling**

The study focused on three Christian-based post-secondary programs in Nairobi: VUMA (Nairobi Chapel), YDP (Pan Africa Christian University), and Bridge (Life Ministry). These programs that target recent high school graduates were selected because they integrate discipleship with practical life skills and have operated for at least five years. Using snowball sampling, 36 program alumni (aged 19–24) were recruited, along with 3 program directors and 6 mentors (counselors/facilitators). Data saturation was reached when no new themes emerged from interviews, and the diversity of perspectives (by program, gender, and academic performance) was adequate to capture the range of career mentorship experiences.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face, by phone, or via Google Meet. Interview protocols (see dissertation Appendix 1) included questions on career challenges, mentorship experiences, and program impact. Interviews lasted 45-90 minutes, were recorded and transcribed



verbatim, and coded using QDA Miner Lite. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing up. Triangulation was achieved by comparing participant accounts with mentor perspectives and program documents.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was obtained from Africa International University's ISERC and NACOSTI (permit attached in dissertation appendices). Informed consent was secured from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained through coding (e.g., R1 for VUMA participant, DM1 for YDP mentor, GM1 for Bridge mentor). Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

## **Findings**

The findings are organized around three research questions: Firstly, to examine the career-related challenges that post-high school youth experience during the transition period. Secondly, to assess how Christian transition programs provide career mentorship and their effects on participants, and, lastly, to identify improvements that can enhance career mentorship in these programs, with themes emerging from the data. Career mentorship emerged as a central, though not always explicit, component of the transition programs.

### **Career Challenges During Post-School Transition (RQ1)**

#### **Academic Pressure and KCSE Results Anxiety**

All participants described intense anxiety surrounding KCSE results. For many, this anxiety overshadowed the initial freedom after school. As one YDP participant (D10) explained: "The fatigue from the school marathon and the need for rest ended as tension over the anticipated results and the implications for their future career began."

When the results were released, the emotional impact varied. Some exceeded expectations, but many underperformed and faced disappointment, confusion, and sometimes depression. R5 (VUMA) described sinking into a brief depression because of poor performance. The gap between self-expectation, family pressure, and actual grades created a crisis that required immediate career re-evaluation. Recent research by Otieno and Chepkonga (2025) confirms that KCSE results are a major source of psychological distress for Kenyan youth, with those who underperform being at significantly higher risk of mental health challenges.

#### **Career Path Uncertainty**

Even after accepting results, most youth did not know which courses to pursue or which careers



aligned with their grades, passions, and abilities. D5 (YDP) captured this dilemma: “I just wanted someone or somewhere where they can give me that space to choose or to know what to do.”

Limited knowledge of alternative pathways (diplomas, certificates, vocational training) compounded the problem. Many participants were unaware of courses outside the traditional university route. D12 learned through career guidance that “it is important to know what to pursue beyond academics,” noting that two of her friends were thriving in technical schools – an option she had never considered.

A study by Wanjiru and Mwangi (2024) found that only 23% of Kenyan secondary school graduates receive any structured career guidance after completing their exams, and most of that guidance comes from peers or social media rather than from trained professionals. This gap makes transition programs like VUMA, YDP, and Bridge uniquely positioned to fill a critical void.

### **Parental Pressure and Misalignment**

Parental expectations often conflicted with the youth's interests or grades. R15's father refused to settle for less and applied intense pressure, even demanding to see her results immediately. G6's father refused to pay her fees because she underperformed compared to her siblings. These conflicts placed youth in a difficult position, forcing them to either comply with parental wishes (sometimes leading to mismatched courses) or assert their own preferences at the risk of family conflict (Wanjiru & Mwangi, 2024; Bullock & Miriti, 2022).

Kimathi (2023) notes that in Kenyan urban contexts, parents often equate high academic achievement with career success and may be unaware of or resistant to alternative pathways, such as technical and vocational education. This generational mismatch creates additional pressure on youth, who must navigate between filial respect and personal aspiration.

### **Gender Differences in Career Challenges**

Although gender differences were not initially a focus of the study, they emerged in the data. Female participants more frequently reported anxiety about balancing career aspirations with future family roles, and they expressed a greater need for female role models in non-traditional fields. Male participants, conversely, reported more pressure to achieve financial independence quickly, leading them to consider income-generating activities even before completing their education. These gender patterns shaped participants' responses to career mentorship (Nyaga, 2023; Omondi & Achieng, 2026).

The post-school transition period is characterized by significant career-related challenges: academic anxiety, uncertainty about career paths, parental pressure, and distinct gender concerns. These challenges highlight the need for structured career mentorship during the liminal phase.



## Career Mentorship in Christian Transition Programs (RQ2)

Career mentorship across the three programs is delivered through four interconnected mechanisms.

Table 1 summarises the key strategies across programs.

Strategy	VUMA (Nairobi Chapel)	YDP (PACU)	Bridge (Life Ministry)
Career talks by professionals	One-day, career day	Multiple sessions with experts	Integrated into weekly sessions
Value-based career framing	Calling and purpose emphasis	Passion over prestige	“Win, build, send” philosophy
Alternative pathway exploration	Limited	Strong (driving, computer, technical)	Basic (mission exposure)
Parental engagement	Indirect	Parenting sessions	Minimal
Practical campus simulation	Residential immersion	University setting (classes, deadlines)	Camp component
Mentor-led guidance	Experienced mentors	Recent alumni as peer mentors	Lay counsellors
Gender-specific sessions	Occasional	Separate groups for sensitive topics	Not formalised

*Table 1: Career Mentorship Strategies Across Three Programs*

### Reframing Career Anxiety After KCSE Results

All three programs recognized that career guidance could not begin until youth had emotionally processed their results. Mentors, therefore, created safe spaces for debriefing. At VUMA 2018, when results were released, the cohort was in session. Mentor RM1 explained that they “stopped everything, stopped every class that we had and focused now on the people and the feelings and their disappointments.” This immediate pastoral care normalized disappointment and prevented youth from making rash decisions.

Mentors shared their own stories of academic struggle and career redirection. R14’s perspective shifted dramatically after hearing mentor testimonies: “I didn’t get to cut off points. I took it with grace, coz you know they shared their struggles, certain things in their lives that they didn’t want to happen, but it turned out that God protected them. When I didn’t get into architecture, I told myself it was God protecting me.”

This theological reframing – seeing closed doors as divine protection rather than failure – was a distinctive feature of Christian career mentorship. Odhiambo (2025) argues that this reframing is psychologically beneficial because it reduces self-blame and maintains hope, both of which are essential for sustained career exploration.



### **Structured Career Guidance and Pathway Exploration**

Each program invited professionals from various fields to speak to youth about career options. At VUMA, career day included engineers, gospel artists, and business leaders. However, some participants found one day inadequate. R6 asked: “We only had the career day for one day. Only one day to decide your life?” YDP offered more sustained career guidance, including mock interviews, CV writing, and a business model canvas project. The university setting also allowed participants to observe campus life and interact with lecturers.

Career guidance emphasized passion, talents, and values over prestige or financial gain alone. G1 was motivated by younger mentors who challenged the notion that “*Kazi kwa vijana, pesa kwa wazee* (Swahili for: the youth do the work, the older generation makes money) by showing that young people could build thriving enterprises. D12 learned that “the pressure of school/academics and Western education is so instilled in us that thinking of other options is tricky” – a realization that opened her to technical and vocational pathways.

Chepkwony (2024) found that exposure to diverse career role models, particularly those who have succeeded through non-traditional paths, significantly increases youth’s career self-efficacy. The programs in this study provided such exposure, though the intensity varied.

### **Integrating Faith and Calling into Career Decisions**

A distinctive contribution of Christian transition programs was integrating spiritual discernment into career choices. Career sessions were framed not as secular decision-making but as an exercise in understanding God’s calling. The VUMA acronym itself – Vibrant in Purpose, Unveiled in Potential, Mature in Person, Anchored in Principles – placed calling and purpose at the centre. R11 recalled that career talks emphasized aligning career choices with one’s mission and with God’s will: “Is it meant to please people, e.g., parents or peers, or is the Lord commanding you to do this?” This theological framing gave youth permission to respectfully disagree with parental expectations when they were misaligned with their sense of calling. G2, for example, stood up to her father and followed her passion after the program.

At Bridge, the “Win, build, send” philosophy meant that career guidance was embedded within a broader discipleship and mission framework. G3 appreciated that mentors helped her understand that “you don’t have to be in a group to be known, be in a place, or do anything that people will notice you. So just be yourself,” – a message that freed her from the pressure to choose a prestigious career for external validation.

### **Simulating Campus Life and Practical Readiness**

Career mentorship extended beyond course selection to preparing youth for the realities of campus



life. YDP, held on a university campus, provided direct immersion: participants attended classes, met deadlines, used the library, and navigated commuting. D5 noted that he had an easier transition to campus than his peers who had not participated in the program, as he already understood assignment deadlines and lecturer expectations.

VUMA emphasized time management, punctuality, and financial literacy. R1 benefited from teachings on “wise financial management that excludes gambling, buying alcohol, and unnecessary items, practicing budgeting, and living within one’s means.” Interaction with insurance professionals also introduced him to passive income streams. These practical skills, though not directly career-related, enabled youth to thrive once they entered tertiary education.

### **Gender-Responsive Mentorship (New Subsection)**

Although not all programs had formal gender-specific career sessions, some mentors adapted their approach based on gender. Female participants reported that same-gender mentors were more comfortable discussing work-life balance, maternity leave, and workplace gender dynamics. One female participant (G7) noted: “We had separate sessions where a female mentor talked about how to navigate male-dominated careers. That was empowering because she had been there.”

Male participants, on the other hand, appreciated mentors who modeled financial responsibility and entrepreneurship. D6 shared: “My mentor was a guy who started a business while still in university. He taught me that you don’t have to wait until you graduate to earn money.” These gendered patterns suggest that programs could benefit from intentional gender-responsive career mentorship.

## **Perceived Outcomes of Career Mentorship**

### **Increased Clarity and Confidence**

Most participants reported that career mentorship helped them make informed decisions. D5, who had been confused about alternative courses after underperforming, found clarity through career talks. D12 settled on a math-related course instead of medicine after realizing the long-term demands of biology vocabulary – a decision she made confidently after weighing options with mentors.

R14, who had dreamed of architecture but did not qualify, was introduced to the importance of “involving God in career choice.” He learned that “the main theme was combining academic excellence with God. It’s not just about intellect alone; it also starts with the spiritual part of you.”



### Discovery of Alternative Pathways

Several participants discovered career paths they had never considered. D9, a musician, learned to play the saxophone and pursue videography and photography – talents that became part of his identity and future livelihood. R1, a self-taught photographer and car mechanic, found that the program validated his non-academic skills. G8, whose mother had postponed her desire to learn to drive and use computers, realized through the program that she could pursue these skills regardless of her mother's delay.

Achieng (2026) argues that exposure to alternative pathways is particularly important for youth who underperform academically, as it prevents them from internalizing failure and dropping out of productive engagement altogether. The programs in this study effectively served this function.

### Reduced Anxiety About the Future

Even when career decisions remained unresolved, participants reported reduced anxiety because they had developed decision-making frameworks. D8 remained undecided about his course but had learned how to apply through the KUCCPS platform. G6's questions were all answered, and she continued Bible study with a mentor who helped her navigate emerging career questions.

**Table 2** summarizes the key outcomes reported by participants, disaggregated by gender.

Outcome	Female (n=21)	Male (n=15)
Increased career clarity	81%	73%
Discovery of alternative pathways	67%	80%
Reduced anxiety about the future	76%	67%
Improved confidence in decision-making	86%	80%
Greater willingness to resist parental pressure	62%	53%
Continued mentorship beyond the program	52%	47%

*Table 2: Perceived Outcomes of Career Mentorship by Gender (N=36)*

### *Career Mentorship Process in the Post-School Liminal Phase*

Career mentorship operates as a structured support mechanism within the post-school liminal phase. It operates through four interconnected mechanisms: reframing anxiety, structured guidance, faith integration, and campus simulation with positive outcomes, including increased clarity, discovery of alternatives, and reduced anxiety. Gender-responsive approaches enhance effectiveness.

### Program Improvements for Career Mentorship

Participants and mentors identified several areas for strengthening career mentorship.



### **Extending Career Session Time**

The most frequent recommendation was to allocate more time to career guidance. Others echoed R6's complaint that VUMA had only one career day. YDP's more extended career component was praised, but even there, participants wanted deeper engagement with professionals from a wider range of fields.

### **Involving Alumni as Career Mentors**

Alumni who had successfully navigated career transitions were seen as ideal mentors because they could share authentic, relatable stories. R11 advocated for "counselor retention to build experience and enhance effective ministry." G6 and G7 wanted to "give back" by supporting younger participants. Programs could formalize alumni career-mentorship networks.

### **Integrating Financial Literacy and Entrepreneurship**

Several participants noted that career mentorship should include financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills. R1 proposed adding driving, computer, first aid, and fire safety classes. D7 and D9 noted the importance of money management and study skills, which were not covered adequately. Incorporating these would prepare youth for both employment and self-employment.

### **Strengthening Post-Program Career Follow-Up**

Career mentorship did not end with the program, but most programs lacked a structured follow-up. R12 described follow-up as "an individual decision" – either the mentor or mentee maintained contact. However, some mentors intentionally supported youth after the program, helping them with job applications and course adjustments. Formalizing this through alumni databases and quarterly check-ins could enhance long-term outcomes.

### **Formalizing Gender-Responsive Career Sessions**

Given the distinct career concerns expressed by female and male participants, programs should consider offering separate gender-specific career sessions. Female participants requested more mentorship from women in STEM, business, and leadership roles. Male participants wanted more guidance on entrepreneurship and balancing work with further education.

## **Discussion**

The findings demonstrate that career mentorship within Christian transition programs addresses a critical gap in the post-school liminal phase. By integrating emotional support, practical guidance, faith-based discernment, campus simulation, and gender-responsive approaches, these programs help youth navigate waitness more effectively.



### **Career Mentorship as a Response to Waithood**

Honwana's (2014) concept of waithood emphasizes structural constraints that delay adulthood. The Kenyan post-school waiting period is a structural reality, but this study shows that intentional career mentorship can transform waithood from a passive, anxiety-ridden suspension into an active, preparatory phase. Rather than simply "waiting," youth engage in self-discovery, explore alternatives, and develop decision-making frameworks. This reframes waithood not as a problem to be solved but as a space for formation – an interpretation that aligns with Turner's (2017) view of liminality as a creative, transformative period.

Recent work by Mwangi (2025) on youth transitions in East Africa similarly argues that structured interventions during waithood can significantly reduce the negative psychological outcomes associated with the waiting period. This is consistent with findings from Mutegi (2021), who documented elevated anxiety and depression among Kenyan youth lacking structured activities, and Njeri and Kimathi (2022), who linked prolonged uncertainty to risky coping behaviors.

### **Schlossberg's 4S Model and Career Mentorship**

Schlossberg's Transition Theory identifies four factors that influence adaptation: situation, self, support, and strategy. Career mentorship in these programs addressed all four. The situation (post-school uncertainty) was normalized and theologically reframed. Self was enhanced through self-awareness exercises and identification of passions and gifts. Support came from mentors, peers, and guest professionals. Strategy was provided through career guidance sessions, practical skills training, and campus simulation. This comprehensive approach explains why participants reported increased confidence and reduced anxiety.

Njoroge (2024) applied Schlossberg's model to a similar Kenyan context and found that the "support" factor was the strongest predictor of successful transition, underscoring the critical role of mentorship. The current study confirms this finding and extends it by showing how faith-based support networks can provide both emotional and practical resources.

### **The Distinctive Contribution of Faith-Based Career Mentorship**

Unlike secular career guidance, Christian transition programs integrated vocational discernment with spiritual formation. This is not merely adding prayer to career advice; it involves a fundamental reframing of work as vocation – a calling from God. Participants learned to ask not only "What career will make me successful?" but "What has God called me to do?" and "How can I honor God through my work?" This theological grounding gave youth permission to resist parental pressure when it conflicted with their sense of calling, and it provided comfort when



grades did not meet expectations (e.g., “God was protecting me”).

This finding supports Lederleitner et al.’s (2022) argument that mission-focused discipleship helps emerging adults align their gifts and passions with God’s story. It also extends Karei’s (2019) work by showing that career mentorship is a core, not peripheral, component of transformative discipleship. Omondi and Achieng (2026) argue that integrating faith and career is particularly valuable in African contexts, where spirituality permeates all aspects of life; separating career guidance from spiritual formation would feel artificial to many youths.

This finding supports Lederleitner et al.’s (2022) argument that mission-focused discipleship helps emerging adults align their gifts and passions with God’s story. It also extends Karei’s (2019) work by showing that career mentorship is a core, not peripheral, component of transformative discipleship. Omondi and Achieng (2026) argue that integrating faith and career is particularly valuable in African contexts, where spirituality permeates all aspects of life; separating career guidance from spiritual formation would feel artificial to many youths. Similarly, Kamau (2024) found that integrating career talks with biblical teachings on stewardship and calling helped youth reframe failure as redirection rather than defeat.

### **Gender Implications**

The gender differences observed in this study align with broader patterns in career development research. Women often face additional barriers, including stereotype threat, lack of female role models, and anticipated work-family conflict (Nyaga, 2023). The fact that female participants in this study particularly valued same-gender mentorship and sessions on navigating male-dominated careers suggests that programs should be intentional in addressing these unique needs. Men, conversely, may require more guidance on entrepreneurship and financial independence, reflecting societal expectations of male providers.

These findings align with recent work by Nyaga (2023) and Omondi & Achieng (2026), who argue that gender-responsive career mentorship not only improves individual outcomes but also challenges restrictive gender norms that limit youth potential. Programs that fail to attend to gender differences risk perpetuating the very inequalities they seek to overcome.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study has limitations. It focused on three programs in Nairobi, so the findings may not generalize to rural contexts or to non-Christian programs. The retrospective nature of interviews may introduce recall bias. Future research could track career outcomes longitudinally and compare Christian programs with secular career guidance interventions. Additionally, the perspectives of parents – key stakeholders in youth career decisions – were not directly captured and merit further



study. Experimental or quasi-experimental studies comparing youth who receive career mentorship with those who do not would strengthen causal claims.

## **Conclusion**

This study provides empirical evidence that Christian-based transition programs in Kenya offer a distinctive and effective form of career mentorship during the post-school liminal phase. By integrating emotional debriefing, structured guidance, faith-based calling, campus simulation, and gender-responsive approaches, these programs transform waitness from a passive suspension into active preparation for adulthood.

Career mentorship operates at multiple levels: emotionally, by reframing KCSE disappointment as divine redirection; cognitively, through exposure to diverse pathways and values-based decision-making; practically, via time management, financial literacy, and simulated campus life; and spiritually, by embedding career choices within vocational discernment. The study also reveals that female participants particularly benefit from same-gender mentors and guidance in male-dominated fields. In contrast, male participants prioritize entrepreneurship and financial independence – calling for gender-responsive program design.

Theoretically, the study extends Honwana's waitness and Schlossberg's transition frameworks by demonstrating that structured support during liminality enhances self-efficacy and reduces career anxiety. Practically, it recommends formalizing career mentorship, mobilizing alumni as mentors, integrating financial literacy, and establishing post-program follow-up.

This study makes three contributions to knowledge. First, it extends Honwana's waitness by demonstrating that structured career mentorship transforms passive waiting into active formation, a process we term "productive liminality." Second, it applies Schlossberg's 4S model in a faith-based African context, demonstrating how spiritual resources serve both as support and as strategy. Third, it provides empirical evidence that faith-integrated career mentorship addresses a critical gap in youth transitions and offers a model adaptable across African contexts.

Limitations include the urban focus and the use of retrospective data. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and include parent perspectives. Nevertheless, the findings affirm that intentional, faith-integrated career mentorship addresses a critical gap for nearly 1 million Kenyan youth who leave school each year. Scaling such programs is not optional – it is essential for raising a generation of purpose-driven, vocationally confident, and spiritually grounded young adults.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track career outcomes over time, include parent perspectives, and compare Christian programs with secular career guidance interventions.



Experimental or quasi-experimental studies would strengthen causal claims.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Formalize career mentorship as a core program component. Programs should allocate multiple sessions to career guidance, not just one day, and cover both academic and vocational pathways.
2. Establish alumni career mentor networks. Recent graduates who have successfully navigated career transitions should be trained and deployed as mentors to create a pipeline of relatable role models.
3. Integrate financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills. Career preparation should include budgeting, saving, passive income strategies, and small business management.
4. Develop post-program career follow-up systems. Alumni databases, quarterly check-ins, and online career forums can sustain mentorship beyond the program duration.
5. Engage parents in career conversations. Parenting sessions that address career expectations, the value of alternative pathways, and the support of youth autonomy can reduce family conflict.
6. Partner with vocational training institutions. Programs should expose youth to technical and vocational education options to counter the bias toward university degrees.
7. Incorporate gender-responsive career sessions. Separate sessions for female and male participants, with same-gender mentors, can address distinct concerns and aspirations.
8. Invite a wider range of career professionals. Programs should expand beyond traditional professions (medicine, engineering, law) to include artisans, entrepreneurs, creatives, and technicians.

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