

Role of Spiritual Accompaniment in Promoting the Holistic Development of Students in Higher Education in Zimbabwe: A Qualitative Analysis

Christopher Zishiri

and

Guide Marambanyika OP

Abstract

This study is about the holistic development of students in the face of complex behavioural challenges that are emerging in higher education contexts. While acknowledging the feasibility of other approaches, this study analyses the role of spiritual accompaniment (SA) in promoting the holistic development of students. Whereas the study used the lens of the student development theory, multidisciplinary concepts encompassing psychology and religion, were imbued to discern how spiritual accompaniment can be employed as a supportive and transformative practice to influence students' personal growth, well-being, and academic success. The study collected qualitative data from 30 students who were enrolled in 5 universities in 3 Provinces of Zimbabwe. Their captivating experiences in higher education illuminated the challenges they faced and the utility of spiritual accompaniment in mitigating some of the problems and promoting the students' holistic development. The findings shed light on the intricate and subjective role of spiritual accompaniment in fostering the holistic development of students in the context of higher education in Zimbabwe. The study contributes to the existing literature on student development and provides insights for educators, counsellors, and policymakers among other stakeholders.

Keywords: higher education, spiritual accompaniment, student, holistic development

1.0 Introduction

Students who are enrolled in colleges and universities are increasingly confronted by diverse and complex developmental issues than ever before in the history of higher education in Africa, including Zimbabwe. The rapid growth of higher education in Africa

brings students from diverse backgrounds and ages to create higher education communities in which every student is consciously or unconsciously preoccupied by the question of what kind of person they want to become, first, during their years in higher education and second after they complete their studies. Given that higher education institutions enrol students from different cultures, faiths and others who identify in other diverse ways, the challenges they face are complex and multi-layered. The influence of technological advancements, when abused, add to the challenges. Given the complex higher education environment and the increasing challenges arising from it, the human development theories that are commonly used to predict, explain and control behaviour to promote developmental outcomes among students, need to be complemented by other approaches. This has prompted this study to enquire about the role of Spiritual Accompaniment (SA) in promoting the holistic development of students in higher education. The paper provides a background that triggered the conduct of this study, a brief outline of the guiding theory, a summary of the reviewed literature, the methodology used in this study and a discussion of the key findings.

1.1 Background of the study

Educational psychology, anchored on the nature-nurture controversy, provides the traditional perspectives that explain the development of students. Whereas it is now widely accepted in the field of educational psychology that both nature and nurture play significant roles in shaping individuals, the complex developmental challenges faced by students in higher education institutions require a broader understanding that goes beyond the nature-nurture dichotomy. Following the massification of higher education, student populations in colleges and universities have diverse backgrounds, cultures, and faiths, each with their own unique identities and experiences. This diversity brings forth additional dimensions that influence students' development and well-being. For instance, some students grapple with issues related to drug and substance abuse, promiscuity and homosexuality among numerous other behavioural problems. These complex and multifaceted challenges necessitate a more comprehensive approach to understanding and supporting students' holistic development.

Sommers-Flanagan (2015) perceived that if Freud was a pessimist and Adler and Jung were optimists, humanistic psychologists were super-optimists. From a perspective in psychology, humanists have a deep belief in people's ability to develop into positive, creative, flexible, and altruistic creatures when they are not constrained by challenges that arise from their interaction with others (McLeod, 2018; Ismail & Tekke, 2015; Rogers, 1969; Maslow, 1956). This humanistic perspective is based on an unwavering belief that each human being has a natural tendency for personal growth. Carl Rogers explained this positive tendency and elaborated that;

We can say that there is in every organism, at whatever level, an underlying flow of movement toward constructive fulfilment of its inherent possibilities. human beings, too, there is a natural tendency toward a more complex and complete development. The term that has most often been used for this is the 'actualizing tendency,' and it is present in all living organisms." (Rogers, 1980, pp.117-118).

In the context of higher education students, Carl Rogers' quote highlights the underlying flow towards fulfilling their inherent potential and natural inclination for personal growth and development, motivated by their innate drive to reach their full potential through their studies. In this regard, Rogers' quote points us to the idea that students have the capacity to grow, learn, and develop in various aspects of their lives and that their development can be further cultivated through exposing them to conducive educational experiences. It implies that students should be provided with an environment that nurtures and supports their natural inclination towards growth, allowing them to explore their interests, talents, and passions.

While humanists including Carl Rogers, remind us that higher education students, like all individuals, have an underlying drive towards constructive fulfilment of their inherent possibilities, they are confronted with numerous challenges that characterise the 21st century higher education environments. Higher education students are increasingly facing numerous challenges requiring robust approaches to inculcate desirable behaviours that produce positive educational outcomes. This study notes that the impact of Spiritual Accompaniment (SA) or simply spirituality on the students' development matrix has been generally overlooked, leaving it unrepresented in their developmental agenda in particular and in educational psychology in general. This omission snubs everyday evidence that spirituality holds significant sway on the

development of personality. Spirituality arbitrates between a person's self-actualising tendency and his/her pathological predispositions. These extreme developmental aspects may hinder or promote the holistic development of students. This paper demonstrates that SA is a supportive instrument for making students more human, more sincere and genuine with their inner-selves, more coherent with their deep identity and more fraternal with other students within the walls of their institution as well as the generality of other beings in society. Hence, its incorporation into educational psychology and application in higher education cannot be overstated.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

The Student Development Theory was used in this study as the guiding theoretical framework. This theory was developed by Chickering and Reisser in 1993, who outlined seven vectors of student development, including developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. This theory is a human development model that explains how students who are enrolled in higher education develop, taking into account their physical, biological, physiological, psychological, social and environmental factors that constitute their development (Evans, Forney, Guido & Patton, 2019). The theory suggests that students go through various stages of development throughout their higher education journey, and each vector represents a dimension of growth and transformation. Using this theory, this study demonstrates how spiritual accompaniment influences and promotes the holistic development of students, encompassing these vectors of growth as they navigate their academic, personal, and spiritual journeys.

2.1 Literature Review

Despite abundant evidence indicating the prevalence of students who are grappling with issues that can be addressed through spiritual conversations and guidance, referred to in this study as spiritual accompaniment. This practice is to a large extent, avoided in higher education primarily because it is erroneously deemed to be outside

the scope of higher education (Triana, Gloria & Castellanos, 2020). For this reason, spiritual accompaniment is rarely practiced in higher education contexts. Although the concepts of 'spirituality' and 'spiritual accompaniment' are closely linked and oftentimes used as synonyms, these concepts do not mean the same. According to Waggoner (2016), spirituality refers to an individual's personal and subjective experience of seeking meaning, purpose, and connection with something beyond themselves. Recent studies have also shown that spirituality encompasses beliefs, values, practices, and experiences that are deeply meaningful and significant to an individual's sense of identity, purpose, and well-being (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2021; Fuertes & Dugan, 2021). On the other hand, spiritual accompaniment refers to a supportive relationship, often within a religious or spiritual context, that provides companionship and guidance to another individual on their spiritual journey (Cadge et al., 2020; Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2011). Spiritual accompaniment can be viewed as a means through which individuals can deepen and explore their spirituality. It involves offering a safe space for reflection, exploration, and growth and may include practices such as listening, mentoring, counselling, prayer or meditation. While spirituality is a broader concept that encompasses an individual's inner experiences and beliefs, spiritual accompaniment is a specific form of support provided to individuals as they navigate their spiritual path.

Studies conducted in America by Astin et al. (2011), explored the role of colleges in enhancing students' inner lives, including their spiritual development. Their qualitative study collected data from college students from diverse backgrounds, using interviews, to determine the role of spiritual accompaniment on students' holistic development. The study found that the colleges that practiced spiritual accompaniment, significantly contributed to their students' sense of purpose, personal growth, and well-being. The key finding from this study highlights the positive influence of spiritual accompaniment on the holistic development of students in higher education. Another qualitative study by Parks and Hermes (2019), explored the role of spirituality and religiosity in college students' holistic development. Through in-depth interviews with undergraduate students, their study examined how spiritual practices, including spiritual accompaniment, influenced students' personal growth, values, and well-being. The study noted that spiritual accompaniment was supporting students'

holistic development by providing them with opportunities for self-reflection, meaning-making, and connection to a larger purpose.

In Europe, studies have also shown similar results. A study by Ziebertz and Riegel (2016) employed a mixed-methods approach that included surveys and interviews with university students, to determine the relationship between spirituality, education, and society. The study revealed a positive influence of spiritual accompaniment on students' personal growth, well-being and ethical values. Their study recommended the integration of spiritual accompaniment into higher education practices to support students in their holistic development. Elsdon and Mitchell (2019) conducted a narrative review of the literature on spiritual care in the context of European higher education. They reviewed various studies and resources related to spiritual accompaniment and its role in supporting student's growth and development. Their review acknowledged the significance of spiritual accompaniment as a means of promoting students' well-being, resilience, and sense of purpose in higher education. The review further established the importance of providing spaces for students' spiritual needs within the higher education context, because of the positive impact it plays on their overall development.

Wong and Mak (2019) conducted a study in Hong Kong to examine the role of spirituality in promoting the well-being of university students. Their study employed surveys and interviews to establish the relationship between spirituality, well-being, and various aspects of students' lives in the university settings. The study revealed that spiritual accompaniment, including practices such as meditation and mindfulness, positively influenced students' psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and resilience. This study by Wong and Mak (2019) aligns with the results of a study conducted in Vietnam by Truong and Huynh (2018). Truong and Huynh's study employed interviews and focus groups to investigate students' experiences with spiritual accompaniment and its effects on their personal growth, values, and well-being. The study found that spiritual accompaniment provided a supportive environment for students to explore their spirituality, nurture their values, and develop a sense of purpose.

The studies conducted in Hong Kong and Vietnam provide valuable insights into how spiritual accompaniment practices, such as meditation, mindfulness, and supportive

environments, can positively influence students' well-being, personal growth, values, and sense of purpose. However, the same findings cannot be applied wholesomely in the context of students in higher education in Zimbabwe due to issues of contextual validity. However, the present study builds upon these prior findings and provides further insights into how spiritual accompaniment supports the holistic development of students in the specific context of higher education in Zimbabwe.

In the African context, few studies focusing on issues of spirituality and student development were conducted. One such study was conducted by Ntshangase (2018), to investigate the role of spirituality in student development using South African higher education institutions. The study revealed that spirituality provided students with a sense of belonging, emotional support, and personal growth. The study further noted that spirituality also played a role in helping students navigate challenges and cultivate resilience. While not a specific study on spiritual accompaniment in higher education, Mbiti's (2018) book provides valuable insights into African religions and their philosophical underpinnings. The book explores the spiritual beliefs, practices, and values that shape the lives of individuals in Africa. Understanding the cultural and spiritual context of Africa is crucial in examining the role of spiritual accompaniment in promoting students' holistic development in higher education within the African context. Chivore and Chivore (2018) conducted a study in Zimbabwe that investigated the role of spirituality in enhancing students' academic performance. Their study used mixed methods to examine the relationship between spiritual practices and students' academic outcomes. The study revealed that students who actively engaged in spiritual practices demonstrated better academic performance, higher motivation and increased resilience among other positive developmental outcomes.

Several knowledge gaps were identified in the reviewed literature, which provide a justification for conducting this current study. The first gap relates to the limited contextual validity. Most of the reviewed studies were conducted in various higher education contexts including in the United States, Europe, Hong Kong, Vietnam and South Africa. While findings from these studies shed light on the transformative impact of spirituality and spiritual accompaniment on students' inner lives, sense of purpose, personal growth, values, and well-being, they cannot be directly applied to the specific context of higher education in Zimbabwe. This study addressed this gap by focusing on the role of spiritual accompaniment in the holistic development, specifically within

the higher education context in Zimbabwe. The second knowledge gap concerns the vital issue of cultural relevance. The majority of the reviewed literature focuses on studies conducted in Western and Asian contexts, whose cultures differ significantly from those of Zimbabwe. For this reason, there was a need to understand the role of spiritual accompaniment within the African context, taking into account cultural, social, and spiritual beliefs that shape the lives of students in African higher education. This study addressed this gap by focusing on the role of spiritual accompaniment on student development in the context of higher education in Zimbabwe, taking into account the country's unique cultural realities. This study addressed the identified gaps and contributed to the existing body of literature by providing a more contextually relevant understanding of the role of spiritual accompaniment in promoting students' holistic development within the unique higher education context of Zimbabwe.

3.0 Methodology

This qualitative study adopted a phenomenological research philosophy, an interpretive phenomenological approach and a multiple case study research design to analyse the role of spiritual accompaniment in promoting the holistic development of higher education students. Using the lens of phenomenology, this study managed to explore students' subjective experiences and their lived realities during their tenure in higher education. As elaborated by several scholars (Zahavi, 2021; van Manen & van Manen, 2021; Halling, 2021; Dangal & Joshi, 2020), phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of a studied phenomenon and help the researcher to understand how it is experienced by those who are affected by it. Thus, through phenomenological principles, this study delved into the students' experiences of spiritual accompaniment and its impact on their holistic development. The study employed an interpretive phenomenological approach as articulated by Cuthbertson, Robb and Blair (2020), to interpret and understand the participating students' experiences and realities in the context of higher education. The study used in-depth interviews and focus groups to collect data from students who have engaged in spiritual accompaniment in higher education settings. Through these interviews, participants shared their personal narratives, reflections, and perceptions regarding how spiritual accompaniment influenced their holistic development. Thematic analysis, involving identifying recurring themes within the data as explained by various scholars (Flick, 2022; Dangal & Joshi, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2019), was used to provide rich and detailed insights into the

role of spiritual accompaniment in promoting the holistic development of students in higher education. Member checking, peer review, triangulation of data collection methods and use of multiple sources of data, were employed to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the study results.

4.0 Discussion of Findings

The landscape of higher education has become increasingly diverse, complex, and fast-paced, presenting students with both opportunities and challenges. As elaborated by Triana et al. (2020), the evolution of higher education, brought with it a myriad of challenges that are faced by students, significantly impacting their developmental trajectories. This study has found that students in universities and colleges in Zimbabwe were not immune to this problem. Acknowledging the utility of spirituality as an approach to addressing some of the emerging challenges affecting the development of students in higher education, many higher education institutions in Zimbabwe provide the services of the chaplaincy to their students.

This study found that at Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), the university Chaplaincy is manned by a religious leader who offers general spiritual support and guidance to staff and students. The chaplaincy department upholds the spiritual values of various faiths, promoting freedom of worship at the university. The chaplaincy coordinates the various student groups that wish to fellowship at the University's campuses. In addition to its coordination function, the chaplaincy department at GZU hosts interdenominational services that are held on Sundays at Mashava and the Main campus, ensuring that the services of the chaplaincy are open to the entire University. The Midlands State University (MSU) has a department of chaplaincy just like GZU. Their department provided pastoral services by ministering to the spiritual needs of the entire MSU community including students. Similarly, the Women's University in Africa's (WUA) chaplaincy department offered a number of religious and spiritual matters, including planning and coordinating on and off-campus spiritual and religious programmes that foster the development of co-curricular programs that assist students in the integration of Christian faith with their respective academic disciplines. Some of the services offered by WUA's Department of Chaplaincy include assisting students with welfare issues, prayers, consolation, counseling during times of grief and guidance on issues related to their spiritual, moral and personal development.

University of Zimbabwe's (UZ) chaplain office provides pastoral care and serves as a spiritual resource to the entire UZ community. Among the key functions are the provision of free counselling for staff and students who need it, including those who are feeling low, depressed, suicidal and those who are extremely burdened with life among other stressful events. Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University (ZEGU), also offers robust chaplaincy services, as articulated in its mission statement which reads;

The Chaplaincy serves to minister effectively to the spiritual and social needs of the university community by accompanying individual staff members and their families and students in their faith journeys towards spiritual maturity and fulfilment of their God-ordained purpose, through its unique role of providing bible based spiritual guidance, counselling, offering prayers, the teaching of the word of God, and other pastoral care systems to the ZEGU community.

The 5 universities mentioned above provided chaplaincy services to their staff and students. Data revealed that chaplaincy services were offered at all 5 universities that were focused on by this study as mentioned above. However, the participants' perspectives indicate that these services were offered within the historical framework of ecumenical, a concept that entails the promotion of cooperation and unity among Christians. While the ecumenical dialogue, the search for unity and freedom of worship among the students across the 5 universities, was a giant step towards the full spiritual accompaniment practice, this generalised approach was not sufficiently addressing a range of problems faced by students in higher education. With the exception of ZEGU which specifically mentions the word 'accompanying' in its chaplaincy services' mission statement, the other four universities provided the usual general pastoral services as implied in their mission statements and more importantly as revealed by participants drawn from those institutions. According to the participants, SA was not as robust in practice as portrayed in their universities' chaplaincy service statements. The participant indicated that the only thriving spiritual accompaniment in their institutions was found among fellow students, especially those who came from strong Christian backgrounds.

Four major themes emerged from the study data and these are discussed in the paragraphs that follow, highlighting the key findings that arose. The names used in the discussion are pseudo-names in line with ethical considerations relating to the

anonymisation of data for the protection of the participants' real identities, as elaborated by various scholars (Flick, 2022; Urquhart, 2022; Dangal & Joshi, 2020; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Theme 1: Students' Perceptions of Spiritual Accompaniment

This theme delves into the experiences and perceptions of students who have engaged in spiritual accompaniment in higher education and those who were not engaged in this practice. Data under this theme reveals mixed perceptions regarding the benefits, challenges, and overall impact of spiritual accompaniment on the participants, and how they related it to their personal experiences in higher developmental outcomes. While participants held diverse perceptions regarding the role of spiritual accompaniment, they all acknowledged the importance of attaining holistic development and personal growth beyond academic achievement. Students who were engaged in spiritual accompaniment practices viewed them as a means to explore their inner selves, enabling them to find purpose, meaning, develop a deeper understanding of their values and beliefs, and helping them to navigate the complexities of the multiple challenges they faced in their higher education journeys. For these perceived benefits, participants appreciated spiritual accompaniment for providing them with the tools and support system they needed to thrive academically and personally, fostering resilience, self-efficacy and confidence in the face of numerous challenges including economic hardships faced by students in higher education. Tanatswa, one of the participants who was engaged in spiritual accompaniment, stated that;

I never realised how much spiritual accompaniment could impact my psychological well-being until I tried it. I belong to a prayer group here on campus and we pray for divine protection against all forms of adversity we face as students. In our prayer group, we guide and support each other to navigate the challenges we face here at college. This has helped me develop a deeper sense of direction, resilience and acceptance of things that I cannot change. I feel more resilient and motivated to overcome obstacles and succeed in my academic aspirations.

The benefits of spiritual accompaniment as explained by Tanatswa in her verbatim quote above, were echoed by yet another participant Tino, who explained that;

University life is not just about academic success but also about nurturing our psychological, moral, emotional and spiritual selves. Engaging in spiritual activities with others plays a vital role in our holistic development as students. Consistent prayers with my friends have provided me with coping mechanisms and a sense of peace during stressful times. I feel more connected to myself and others, and it has positively influenced my relationships and overall happiness. I can concentrate on my studies despite the numerous challenges I face as a student at this institution.

As highlighted in the two extracts above, some students in the participating universities acknowledged that activities related to spirituality were positively influencing their overall well-being and development. These students were involved in several modes of spiritual accompaniment including prayer groups, interdenominational prayers and fellowship in church congregations within the proximity of their campuses. However, the study noted that the student's understanding of the ministry of chaplaincy is very limited and shallow. There was a lot of misconception among university students, with regards to the services that the chaplaincy department can provide in relation to spiritual accompaniment. For example, some students perceived a chaplain from a Catholic background as a minister who caters only to the spiritual needs of those practicing Catholicism. Such perceptions were evidently witnessed in spiritual practices such as masses where only Catholic students attended masses while non-Catholics excluded themselves intentionally. By so doing, non-Catholic students tended to overlook the theology that the kingdom of God does not exclude but rather caters for everyone despite the student's varied backgrounds and religious affiliations. These perceptions were evident across universities. The trend was that only students who shared the same religious affiliations with the university chaplain were actively seeking and receiving adequate spiritual accompaniment while the rest lacked access to such services despite the evident behavioral benefits exhibited by those who were being accompanied.

Theme 2: Nurturing Spiritual Well-being of Students in Higher Education

This theme was built on data relating to the role of spiritual accompaniment in fostering spiritual well-being among university students. Data under this theme highlight ways in which spiritual accompaniment provides a supportive and nurturing space for

students to explore their spirituality, develop a sense of meaning and purpose, and cultivate a deeper connection with themselves and the world around them. This holistic effect provided a sound basis for academic achievement among university students, most of whom belong to the adolescence and young adulthood age range that are characterised by numerous developmental challenges that require proper mentoring of the whole person. This study noted that adding adolescence and young adulthood developmental challenges on top of the pressures of university life, exacerbated by a challenging economic environment, created a situation that required spiritual accompaniment to help the students to cope. As elaborated by various scholars (Fuertes & Dugan, 2021; Parks & Hermes, 2019; Astin et al., 2011), spiritual accompaniment provides students with tools and practices to explore their inner selves, leading to greater self-awareness and a fulfilling life. This study argues that this self-exploration can help university students gain clarity about their values, beliefs, and purpose, fostering personal growth and a stronger foundation for the development of a sense of identity leading to positive academic performance.

We further argue that spiritual accompaniment is a broad concept that covers many aspects of higher education institutions. Several techniques such as mental health awareness activities, confessions, recollection days, scripture union, spiritual talks, masses and sermons, can be utilised as tools for spiritual accompaniment. These tools can complement each other and if utilised properly they can enhance the spiritual development of students. However, many institutions of higher learning tend to focus more on common issues that do not deepen the spirituality of their learners. For example, the issue of drug and substance abuse has become so popular among students in higher education, such that it takes precedence over their spiritual development, a problem that negatively affects their overall academic outcomes. Our finding confirms several past research findings. Linda (2015) noted the need for formal education on spiritual care in nursing, highlighting the importance of support and the establishment of a conducive learning environment. Wang et al. (2023) and Kiessling (2010) both underscored the influence of peer and mentoring relationships, as well as the role of institutional agents in shaping students' spiritual beliefs and development. Rykkje et al. (2022) and Gilder (2011) also found that the integration of spiritual development in higher education settings was a vital component in the holistic development of students. Thus, our findings from data under this theme augment the

above cited earlier findings that concur that spiritual accompaniment, when provided in a supportive and structured manner, can significantly contribute to students' holistic development in higher education.

Theme 3: Integration of Spiritual Accompaniment and Academic Development in the Context of Higher Education

Data under this third theme relates to the intersection between spiritual accompaniment and academic development. Analysis of data under this theme illuminated the intricacies of how spiritual accompaniment was enhancing the students' academic experiences in higher education institutions. The analysis also revealed the complex ways in which spiritual accompaniment was supporting students in integrating their spiritual beliefs, values, and ethical perspectives into their academic pursuits. Furthermore, analysis of data under this theme also sheds light on how spiritual accompaniment can contribute to students' critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and engagement with their academic disciplines.

The study found that the relationship between spiritual accompaniment and academic development was like that of fish and water. This finding suggests that there should be a formidable balance between spiritual life and academic life. However, we observed that institutions of higher learning were more focused on the students' academic aspects while overlooking their spiritual side. This was creating an imbalance between the two. This was so despite the evidence showing that students who were exposed to spiritual accompaniment were balancing academic demands with other dimensions of their university life because they believed in the existence of a higher power, whom they believed could steer them to achieve their academic goals despite the challenges they encountered during their studies. For instance, the study found that students who understood the relevance of morality that derives from their interface with spiritual accompaniment were not exposed to the jaws of drug abuse and other immoral practices. Their overall personalities were nourished and regulated spiritually, making them resilient in the face of numerous adversities they encountered during their time as university students.

Theme 4: Influence of Spiritual Accompaniment on Students' Development

This theme focused on how spiritual accompaniment was influencing the holistic development of students in higher education institutions. Data under this theme

showed that spiritual accompaniment was enhancing the students' personal growth and self-reflection. This enabled them to explore their values, beliefs, and purpose. It was apparent that spiritual accompaniment was playing a critical role towards the holistic development of students who interfaced with it. This was based on the rationale that spiritual accompaniment enabled the concerned students to engage in self-reflection, ensuring that they aligned their moral decisions with the educational goals they came to pursue in their respective universities. The study observed that through spiritual accompaniment, students were stimulated to become critical and more focused in undertaking their studies. The study further observed that students who were not spiritually accompanied were at high risk of peer pressure and other negative mechanisms that arise from a lack of self-reflection, self-consciousness and a deep-seated sense of purpose.

5.0 Implications

The influence of spiritual accompaniment on the holistic development of students is profound. These two aspects are inextricably connected, they work hand in hand and the overall development of students suffers in the absence of spiritual accompaniment. Therefore, the findings of this study hold profound implications for the improvement of the practice of student affairs by institutions of higher education. Firstly, this study points to the need for universities to strengthen their chaplaincy departments to levels that are proportionate to the spiritual accompaniment of their student body. It highlights the vital role that spiritual accompaniment plays in student affairs, a practice that encompasses the management and provision of various services, programs, and resources that contribute to the holistic development of university students. The study demonstrated that spiritual accompaniment is a powerful tool that can be used to support students to overcome challenges and thrive during their university journey. The implication hinges on this study's finding that the challenges students face during their university life extend beyond academics, hence, the need for institutions to provide a comprehensive support system including spiritual accompaniment, in order to address the students' holistic development. As noted by this study, the transformative effects of spiritual accompaniment on students' self-awareness, resilience, and overall well-being, have the potential to equip them with a wealth of experiences, rooted in the inner core of a fulfilling university life, an aspect which can drive holistic development.

On the other hand, the negative implications associated with the provision of comprehensive spiritual accompaniment services cannot be overlooked. The first challenge pertains to abuse of power by personnel in the chaplaincy departments. This may occur when personnel providing spiritual accompaniment take advantage of the trust reposed on them by students seeking their services. For instance, a student seeking spiritual accompaniment with regards to challenges relating to relationship affairs, may end up being a victim in the process. The need to maintain professionalism by personnel offering these services cannot be overemphasised.

While the positive impact of spiritual accompaniment on the holistic development of students was clearly illuminated through findings of this study, this vital tool can be subject to abuse by some students who may hold the motive of manipulating a good system, to cover up for their immoral behaviours. Therefore, there is need to ensure that spiritual accompaniers maintain the highest standard of professionalism to ensure that their practice is not defiled by acts of misconduct.

Lastly, incompetence can pose another challenge especially among those providing such services. For instance, some personnel in the chaplaincy department may not be competent to handle certain issues because of inadequate training or lack of specialised training. Universities can address this challenge by ensuring that their chaplaincy departments are composed of experts from different behavioural fields of practice.

6.0 Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the study findings;

The Government should acknowledge the importance of spiritual accompaniment in the holistic development of university students and allocate resources and support to universities to strengthen their chaplaincy departments.

Universities should establish guidelines and standards for spiritual accompaniment services to ensure professionalism and prevent abuses and strengthen their chaplaincy departments to adequately support the spiritual accompaniment needs of the student body that promote their holistic development.

Universities should ensure that personnel in their chaplaincy department receive appropriate training and have expertise in handling diverse issues faced by students and be capacitated to identify cases for referral.

University chaplaincy departments should develop clear and proper structures that sustain the needs of students while maintaining the highest standards of professionalism to prevent abuse of power and misconduct.

Chaplaincy departments should collaborate with experts from different behavioural fields to ensure the chaplaincy department can effectively handle a wide range of student challenges.

University students should seek spiritual accompaniment services with genuine intentions aimed at promoting their holistic development during their university journey.

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