

Spiritual Role of Chaplaincy in Character Transformation of Students in Schools Sponsored by the Methodist Church in Miathene Synod, Kenya

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Abstract

Everyday life can be challenging and stressful for even the most resilient children as they face developmental challenges that even affect their character. The number of social problems affecting the younger generation is increasing. Numerous young people benefit from the friendship, guidance, and excellent role models that school chaplains offer. Students are taught moral principles by the chaplaincy department. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to evaluate the extent to which the spiritual role of chaplaincy influences character transformation of students of MCK-sponsored schools in the Miathene Synod. The theories underpinning the study were phenomenological theory and social learning theory. The study adopted an explanatory research design and employed purposive sampling to collect primary data from respondents. Plans for interviews and questionnaires were used to gather data for this investigation. The target population was 52 respondents, comprising principals, chaplains, deputy principals, class teachers, and guidance and counseling teachers from three secondary schools in the Miathene synod. A pilot study was carried out at the neighboring Nyambene synod to determine the validity and reliability of the research tool. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. For qualitative data, thematic analysis was used, and findings were presented using narratives. Regression coefficients indicated that the spiritual role of chaplaincy ($\beta=0.329$, $p=0.007$) had a positive and significant effect on students' character transformation in church-sponsored secondary schools. The study concluded that chaplaincy programs should conduct readings from religious texts or other materials that promote positive values and character traits. The establishment of an effective chaplaincy framework requires clearly defined roles and responsibilities, professional training for chaplains, and adequate funding and resources. Additionally, organizing community events can strengthen unity and enhance the overall impact of chaplaincy services.

Keywords: *Spiritual role, chaplaincy, character transformation*

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1. Introduction

Everyday life can be challenging and stressful for even the toughest of kids. The number of social problems affecting the younger generation is increasing. Children encounter a variety of issues at school every day, including rivalry, bullying, social exclusion, racism, adolescent pregnancies, family difficulties, sibling rivalry, low academic performance, harassment, peer pressure, and substance abuse (Chapman & West-Burnham, 2010). To enhance economic growth, the education system should ensure that learners leave school equipped with academic, technical, spiritual, and survival skills that will make them good citizens and productive members of society (Wagner, 2010).

Lapan, Whitcomb, and Aleman (2012) stated that apart from having an outstanding teaching curriculum and very qualified teachers, it is equally important to guide the students on the development of personal and social skills, help them in decision-making, guide them on available career options, and guide them on how to make plans that will help them in future career decisions. This can be done by establishing a comprehensive chaplaincy department with a guidance and counseling program to support students across all facets of their careers, education, spirituality, and social lives (Wagner, 2010). Through the services offered by the department, student behavior is modeled so that they can make calculated decisions on various issues, and, academically, students are seen to maintain good performance. The program is also meant to reduce school dropout rates and aggression among students, even over small matters that could be resolved amicably. The program also improves students' mental and physical health (Whiston & Quinby, 2009).

For thousands of young people, school chaplains play an essential role as friends, mentors, and good role models (Dare, 2011). For students, employees, and parents who may have a religious or spiritual component to their lives, chaplaincy offers support. Pastors refrain from implying that one religion, denomination, or belief is better or superior when they personally represent and model their religious or belief perspective. - Adhering to a different denomination, religion, or philosophy. Nwakuna (2011) asserts that for an adolescent to develop and realize their full potential beyond elementary school, each stage of self-development needs to receive attention. Religious and spiritual aspects shouldn't be overlooked or disregarded. As a result, the school pastor has a special pastoral responsibility.

In Africa, the inclusion of chaplains in schools and their role remain new concepts in education systems; this was welcomed by the majority of countries, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (2001). In order to support students' professional, academic, and personal growth, significant progress has been achieved in developing administrative structures to provide pastoral care in educational institutions. Therefore, the formulation of the clerical ministry and its role has enabled African countries to face various challenges in the current era of complex technological and scientific growth (Dabone, Graham & Fabea, 2015).

Mungai (2013) argues that delinquency among students in secondary schools has increased due to the transfer of parental responsibilities to surrogate parents, which can be understood as teachers and domestic workers. This relaxed attitude stems from the busyness of many parents, who are mostly focused on work and often ignore the child's emotional needs, which is likely to have a serious impact on the child. Arudo (2008) goes on to accuse parents of failing to set a positive example for their children due to the growth in domestic violence, divorce, and

separation suits, all of which have a negative impact on kids' emotional stability. This situation poses the risk that a generation will grow up without a clear understanding of social values due to a weak family structure.

According to statistics, 400,000 high school students in Kenya become drug addicts as a result of their lack of education, 16,000 of whom are females, and the remaining pupils are boys (Mabeya et al., 2010). Another dataset from the Kenyan Demographic Survey from 2004 states that 29% of school-aged girls in Kisumu and Suba sub-districts became pregnant while still in high school in 2010. This supports Odhiambo's (2011) research, which found that many girls in the area experience early sexual contact, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV infections, unwanted pregnancies, and illegal abortions. All of these areas are located in the Siaya District. According to the research, poverty and a lack of puberty education are the main causes of social issues among pupils.

1.1 Problem Statement

In church-sponsored secondary schools, where chaplains carry out their duties through pastoral work, church worship, and spiritual guidance and counseling, students are well-molded and exhibit good discipline. Here, chaplaincy departments instill moral values in the students. Ruteere (2016) asserts that to institutionalize spirituality in secondary schools, a strong relationship between the government and religious authorities is required, as spirituality is essential for pupils to develop excellent moral character.

In the Miathene cluster developed by MCK-sponsored schools, despite the existence of a chaplaincy department, the moral decay among students continued to increase. Several cases have been reported involving abortions, cases of drug and substance abuse, and adolescent pregnancies. In 2019, six girls dropped out of school for early pregnancies, and 16 boys were suspended from school for use of drugs, especially bhang (NACADA, 2019). These cases had severe negative effects on the students by having their studies interrupted for almost a year, with some undergoing rehabilitation, and some never got back to school after all. Character transformation in MCK-sponsored schools faces challenges from factors like inadequate resources, teacher quality, and external influences, hindering the development of strong moral character. A lack of time and staff capacity for character development, alongside external pressures for academic success, also present obstacles. Furthermore, the influence of media and peers can sometimes undermine the values schools are trying to instill.

This unwarranted situation raises the question of why, despite the presence of chaplains in these schools, the expected change in pupils' behavior has not occurred. This also suggests that if this is not addressed early, institutions are likely to produce undisciplined citizens who may cause trouble in communities and the nation as a whole. This unjustified situation, therefore, raises the question of why, despite the presence of chaplains in the schools, there is no intentional change in student behavior.

1.2 Objective of the Study

To evaluate the extent to which the spiritual role of chaplaincy influences the character transformation of students of MCK-sponsored schools in the Miathene Synod.

1.3 Research Questions

To what extent does the spiritual role of chaplaincy influence the character transformation of students of MCK-sponsored schools in the Miathene Synod?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The theories underpinning the study were Rudolf Otto's Phenomenological Theory and social learning theory.

2.1.1 Phenomenological Theory

Theologian and comparatist Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) introduced the concept of the "numinous" in his book *The Idea of the Sacred: An Inquiry into the Nonrational Factor in the Idea of the Sacred*. In 1923, the author published *The Divine and Its Transformation into a Rational Compound*. According to the concept of the sacred, one of the most crucial purposes of discourse on religious experience is to evoke ethereal emotions in the religiously sensitive. This theory of religious experience is predicated on hypotheses regarding the connection between religious language and experience, which calls for justification and assessment.

In connection with this study, one important role of chaplaincy is to steward students in spiritual matters. Rudolf Otto's theory supports the role of discourse on religious experience in arousing numinous feelings in audiences sensitive to religion, in this case, students. The theory, therefore, underpins the spiritual role of chaplaincy in this study, which is expected to enhance students' character transformation in church-sponsored secondary schools.

2.1.2 Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory of Albert Bandura (1977), which emphasizes learning in social settings, is the foundation of this study. He thought that ideas like imitation, modeling, and observation by observation are all things that individuals can learn from one another. Bandura noted that a number of beneficial effects on self-esteem, attitudes, and locus of control must be taken into account to understand the causes of individual maladaptive behavior and to assist pupils who misbehave in changing their behavior while figuring out how to meet their needs. Bandura highlights the value of "significance" in children's lives while discussing how moral development occurs in young people. These are important parents who influence the development of children's character by setting an example. Through observation, modeling, and imitation, children develop social traits.

The priest serves as one of the pupils' coaching role models in the educational setting. The ultimate goal of education is the holistic development of the student. The growth of pupils' bodies and minds is what education is about. Respecting others' ideas, acting appropriately toward others, demonstrating care and concern, and listening carefully to others are all examples of leadership behaviors that priests should be able to demonstrate their own values of honesty, humility, and integrity. This will be helpful for students as they develop virtue. Additionally, it is advised that USTADZ offer top-notch services and raise student morale by providing career counseling, character development, and spiritual growth support. This helps shape kids' morals so they are expected to live lives of high moral character, self-confidence, and appreciation for the society in which they live. This is the basic concept of character transformation. The social learning theory, therefore, underpins the independent variable, the spiritual role of chaplaincy, and links it to the dependent variable, student character transformation.

2.2 Empirical Review

Numerous studies reveal that school chaplains have shortcomings in their roles, which pose challenges to achieving their objectives. A study by Pickford (2019) at a boarding school for females in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, serves as an illustration. The study demonstrates that there is no well-organized program that enables chaplains to perform their jobs effectively. Pickford further notes that the local church pastor, who also serves as the school chaplain, shows up for school services only once a week. This limits the time priests have to interact with pupils, reducing the effectiveness of their spiritual counseling and mentoring. Priests have also been accused of relying on prayer books during services written in an antiquated language that highlights church traditions and customs rather than addressing problems affecting pupils. Pickford's research also reveals that most secondary schools remain unaccustomed to using contemporary technologies such as multimedia, data projectors, and PowerPoint presentations for dynamic instruction. Church services end up being boring and long, which makes them irrelevant to students' lives.

Again, Otieno and Offulla (2009) came to the same conclusion after interviewing high school students in the western Kenyan city of Kisumu. They found that drug and alcohol addiction are common among adolescents in the area. The researchers discovered that 57.9% of the students polled used alcohol, 34.7% misused cigarettes, 18.3% misused cannabis, 23.1% misused khat, and 5.2% misused cocaine and/or inhalants. They also discovered that boys were, by 36.9% and 27.3%, respectively, more affected than girls. According to the report, the main causes of drug consumption among high school kids are peer pressure from friends and family members or a desire to experience the rush that comes from using drugs. In support of this assertion, Odhiambo et al. (2011) blame fashion-related advertising for encouraging middle and high school students in Uganda to smoke cigarettes and use other drugs.

As a result, Brayant (2008) makes a significant connection between students' continuous spiritual issues and their low self-esteem and deteriorating physical health. Students may try to conceal their anxiety symptoms out of concern that they will be ostracized; this is evident in their behavior. This practice can destroy them in the long run. Unfortunately, the suffering caused by the struggle can be exacerbated by a school environment that refuses to acknowledge their struggle. As a result, the educational system must establish a solid pastoral structure that supports self-expression and encourages others to express their opinions without restriction.

3. Methodology

The study adopted an explanatory research design and employed purposive sampling to collect primary data from respondents. Interviews and questionnaires were used to gather data for this investigation. The target population was 52 respondents, comprising principals, chaplains, deputy principals, class teachers, and guidance and counseling teachers from three secondary schools in the Miathene synod. A pilot study was conducted at the neighboring Nyambene synod to assess the validity and reliability of the research tool. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. For qualitative data, thematic analysis was used, and findings were presented using narratives.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive Statistics for both the dependent and the independent variables were presented.

4.1.1 Spiritual Role of Chaplaincy

Descriptive results for the spiritual role of chaplaincy are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive results for Spiritual Role of Chaplaincy

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std. dev
The chaplaincy conducts readings in the school that encourage good character	11 (25%)	1 (2.3%)	6 (13.6%)	14 (31.8%)	12 (27.3%)	3.34	1.54
The chaplaincy gives spiritual guidance in the school	3 (6.8%)	5 (11.4%)	2 (4.5%)	19 (43.2%)	15 (34.1%)	3.86	1.21
There are routine spiritual programs to enhance students' character	3 (6.8%)	5 (11.4%)	3 (6.8%)	15 (34.1%)	18 (40.9%)	3.91	1.25
Participative prayers are done daily in the schools	21 (47.7%)	9 (20.5%)	0.00%	5 (11.4%)	9 (20.5%)	2.36	1.64
The chaplain is committed to providing inclusive pastoral care to all members of the school community at all times.	4 (9.1%)	6 (13.6%)	5 (11.4%)	13 (29.5%)	16 (36.4%)	3.70	1.34
In order to help students develop their spirituality, the chaplain is there for them 24/7 to listen, reflect back, and encourage them to grow in their faith.	5 (11.4%)	2 (4.5%)	2 (4.5%)	16 (36.4%)	19(43.2%))	3.95	1.31

The respondents, 26 (59.1%), agreed with the statement that chaplaincy conducts readings in the school that encourage good character (mean = 3.34, std. dev. = 1.54). This implies that chaplains conduct readings that help students develop good character. The participants (24; 77.3%) agreed that the chaplaincy provides spiritual guidance in the school (mean = 3.86, std. dev. = 1.21). This means that chaplaincy programs offer spiritual guidance, support, and pastoral care to students and staff, fostering a sense of community and well-being, regardless of religious background. Further, 23 participants (75.0%) agreed that there are routine spiritual programs to enhance students' character (mean=3.91, std dev=1.25). This implies that chaplaincy enhances students' character.

In addition, 30 respondents (68.2%) disagreed that participative prayers are held daily in schools (mean=2.36, std.dev=1.64). This shows that prayers are not carried out daily in all schools. Further, 23 (65.9%) of respondents agreed that the chaplain always provides pastoral care to the school community without discrimination against any member (mean=3.70, std. dev.=1.34). This implies that Chaplains are expected to serve all members of the school community, regardless of their religious beliefs or background. In addition, 35 (79.6%) agreed that the chaplain always listens, hears, reflects, and encourages students' faith growth, which enables them to grow spiritually (mean=3.95, std.dev=1.31). A school chaplain's role involves actively listening to students, reflecting on their needs, and encouraging their spiritual growth, ultimately fostering a deeper connection to faith and spirituality.

In the interview guide, respondents were asked to indicate which chaplaincy services they offered at their school. The major roles mentioned by the chaplains included: providing guidance; conducting religious ceremonies; leading regular worship services; facilitating seminars and workshops; coordinating religious activities; and focusing on pastoral and spiritual support for students and staff. The following were some of the responses;

Chaplain 1: *'Chaplains conducting prayer and worship services and dedications in school events and ceremonies'*

In the interview guide, respondents were asked to indicate the effectiveness of their spiritual role in student character transformation. From the responses, the chaplains' spiritual role helps in shaping the students' character. The school chaplain plays a vital spiritual role in fostering student character transformation by providing pastoral care, promoting spiritual and moral development, and creating a supportive environment where students can explore their faith and values, ultimately contributing to their holistic well-being. The following were some of the responses;

Chaplain 2: *'Chaplain's spiritual role is effective in enhancing students' discipline'*

The study findings aligned with Wambugu (2019), who indicated that chaplaincy is a crucial element that can be used to effectively increase students' spiritual and moral awareness, enabling them to become salt and light for the world.

4.1.2 Student Character Transformation

Descriptive results for student character transformation were presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive results for Student Character Transformation

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither A/G	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	std. dev
The pupils are cooperative, respectful of school authority, and eager to follow directions.	2 (4.5%)	3 (6.8%)	7 (15.9%)	18 (40.9%)	14 (31.8%)	3.89	1.08
The class is well-organized, and each student does their assigned work according to the timetable.	5 (11.4%)	3 (6.8%)	6 (13.6%)	16 (36.4%)	14 (31.8%)	3.70	1.30
Staff and students can rest easy knowing that students will face consequences for their misbehavior.	4 (9.1%)	2 (4.5%)	1 (2.3%)	20 (45.5%)	17 (38.6%)	4.00	1.20
The expulsion of several students from the school was not due to any major misconduct, including aggressive or criminal activity.	5 (11.4%)	3 (6.8%)	0.00%	21 (47.7%)	15 (34.1%)	3.86	1.29
There is no bullying of new students since the students are aware of the punitive measures for such consequences, which are implemented against anyone who violates them	4 (9.1%)	2 (4.5%)	2 (4.5%)	22 (50%)	14 (31.8%)	3.91	1.18
Students are knowledgeable on spiritual affairs and actively participate in spiritual activities and programs such as prayers, fellowship, and bible study.	25 (56.8%)	7 (15.9%)	1 (2.3%)	3 (6.8%)	8 (18.2%)	2.14	1.59
Students' academic performance has greatly improved.	15 (34.1%)	11 (25%)	3 (6.8%)	8 (18.2%)	7 (15.9%)	2.57	1.52

Results showed that 33 (72.7%) of participants agreed that students willingly obey orders, respect school authority, and demonstrate teamwork (mean=3.89, std.dev=1.08). This implies that students who exhibit willingness to obey orders, respect for school authority, and strong teamwork skills are crucial to a positive and productive learning environment. Further, 30 (68.2%) agreed that students know what to do at what time and follow the schedules provided in the timetable (mean=3.70, std dev=1.30). Students benefit from a clear timetable because it clarifies their schedule, promotes organization, and enhances time management, leading to a more balanced lifestyle.

In addition, 37 people (72.7% of the total) agreed that staff and students are safe because pupils are disciplined (mean=3.89, std. dev.=1.08). Also, 36 people (81.8% of the total) agreed that there has been no major misconduct involving criminal or violent behavior among students that has led to their expulsion from school (mean=3.86, std. dev.=1.29). This suggests that the majority of school-aged children exhibit a high level of self-control. In addition, 36 students (72.7% of the total) agreed that no new students are being bullied because existing students know the penalties for bullying and how to avoid them (mean=3.91, std.dev=1.18).

In addition, 33 (72.7%) of the participants disagreed that students are knowledgeable about spiritual affairs and actively participate in spiritual activities and programs such as prayers, fellowship, and bible study (mean=2.14, std. dev. = 1.59). This implies that bullying has occurred in most schools. Further, 33 (59.1%) disagreed that students' academic performance has greatly improved (mean = 3.91, std. dev. = 1.18). This suggests that the academic performance of most secondary schools has been declining.

From the interview guide, the chaplaincy was further asked to indicate what should be done to improve the role of chaplaincy in student character transformation. From their responses, schools should enhance chaplaincy's role in student character transformation by redefining chaplaincy functions, providing adequate funding for chaplaincy activities, and fostering a collaborative environment where chaplains can effectively guide students' faith journeys and address their spiritual needs. The following were some of the responses;

Chaplain 2: *'Schools should redefine chaplaincy functions, provide adequate funding for chaplaincy activities, and foster a collaborative environment.'*

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the association between the independent variable, spiritual role of chaplaincy, and the dependent variable (student character transformation). This was presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis

		Character transformation	Spiritual role
Character transformation	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Spiritual role	Pearson Correlation	.717**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	

The results were clear that the spiritual role of chaplaincy had a positive and noteworthy association with student character transformation ($r=0.717$, $p=0.000$). This indicates a moderately strong correlation between the spiritual role of chaplaincy and student character transformation.

4.3 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to establish the influence of the spiritual role of chaplaincy on student character transformation.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-1.632	0.615		-2.652	0.012
Spiritual role	0.320	0.112	0.329	2.855	0.007

Regression coefficients indicated that the spiritual role of chaplaincy had a positive and significant effect on students' character transformation in church-sponsored secondary schools ($\beta=0.329$, $p=0.007$). This meant that for every unit invested in the spiritual role of chaplaincy, there would be an improvement in students' character transformation in church-sponsored secondary schools. This relates to Social Learning Theory, which suggests that by modeling positive behaviors and providing guidance, chaplains can help students learn and adopt moral and spiritual values, thereby fostering improved character development.

5. Conclusion

The study found that the spiritual role of chaplaincy was positively and significantly associated with student character transformation in church-sponsored secondary schools. The study concluded that chaplaincy programs conduct readings from religious texts or other materials that promote positive values and character traits. In addition, chaplains offer a variety of services to support the emotional and spiritual needs of the school community, including counseling, listening, and guidance. Chaplains also play a significant role in shaping the learner's paradigm and religious dimensions and in the rehabilitation of learners facing disciplinary matters.

6. Recommendation

Both students and schools would benefit from a clearer understanding of the chaplaincy's functions if the chaplain's role were redefined. Sufficient funding is essential for chaplaincy services to carry out all of their functions. This will allow the chaplain to accomplish all that is required of them. For chaplaincy to be effective, schools must provide adequate resources (both time and space) for its programs. If they are to fulfill their pastoral vocation responsibly and effectively, chaplains should be highly qualified professionals. It is important for schools to have access to chaplaincy services, such as hiring a chaplain, so that kids can be properly guided and nurtured, and for the chaplain to step up their pastoral care duties in schools.

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